

Department of Food and Public Distribution clarifies on media reports on death due to starvation.

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In the recent past a few reports have appeared in the media about starvation deaths owing to alleged denial of subsidized foodgrains under NFSA to eligible ration card holders for want of Aadhaar number or for non-authentication at PoS etc.

In the recent case reported from Bareilly District of Uttar Pradesh, the report from State Government indicates that the deceased was an AAY ration card holder and had received foodgrains till the month of October 2017 regularly. The State Government report also indicates that the foodgrains for the month of August and September 2017 had been taken by her husband without Aadhaar based authentication and in the month of October 2017 by herself after Aadhaar authentication.

It needs to be mentioned that there are 5.2 lakh Fair Price Shops (FPSs) in the country covering 80.7 crore persons under NFSA against 23.2 crore ration cards. 2.83 lakh FPSs in 20 States/UTs have PoS devices for electronic capturing of sale transactions at FPSs. Further, States have been making efforts to seed ration cards with Aadhaar number and so far 81% ration cards are reported to be seeded with Aadhaar number of atleast one family member. The seeding of Aadhaar number is aimed at biometric identification of the beneficiaries for the rightful targeting of the foodgrains provided under NFSA. It may be however noted that even in the month of October 2017, 47 % of PoS transactions are reported to be without Aadhaar-based authentication which clearly indicates that State Governments are enforcing the guidelines regarding not denying benefits under NFSA on account of absence of Aadhaar based identification.

Government of India is fully aware of challenges in the transition to the PoS based Aadhaar authentication system in the PDS. It has, therefore, issued clear-cut instructions to ensure that while Aadhaar-based authentication needs to be promoted, no eligible beneficiary under NFSA should be deprived of the entitled quantity of foodgrains for want of Aadhaar number or failure of biometric authentication. Department of Food & Public Distribution had issued notification vide SO No. 371(E) dated 08/02/17 for seeding of Aadhaar number of atleast one family member in ration card database by 30th June 2017. Date for the compliance was further extended till 30th Sept. 2017 and the same was again been extended till 31st December 2017. It has been made clear in para 5 of the said notification dated 8th Feb, 2017 that any member of the eligible household will be entitled to receive entire quantity of subsidized foodgrain or cash transfer of Food Subsidy under NFSA on behalf of the household if he/she fulfils identification requirements, irrespective of whether all members of the household have had Aadhaar number assigned to them. Government of India further issued detailed instruction in October 2017 reiterating the safeguards provided in the notification issued in the month of Feb. 2017. It has also been clarified that in case of failure of biometric authentication due to network/connectivity/ linking issue or due to poor biometric of the beneficiary or any other technical reason, the beneficiary is to be provided subsidized foodgrain or cash transfer of Food Subsidy on the basis of physical production of Aadhaar card along with the ration card by him/her in place of biometric authentication, as provided by Section 7 of Aadhaar Act..

It merits mention in this context that most of the States/UTs have also put in place an elaborate institutional mechanism for monitoring of PDS operations and grievance redressal, as provided under NFSA. Central Government is also in constant dialogues with the States/UTs to address the issues pertaining to smooth and seamless transition to the new system of Aadhaar based authentication in PDS with a view to bring about greater efficiency, transparency and accountability.

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