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UIDAI tightens norms for Aadhaar linking

Following the Airtel India-Aadhaar subsidy fiasco, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has tightened norms for mapping Aadhaar number to a different bank account.

- According to the latest rules, 'explicitly informed consent' from customers is now a must.
- The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) will disable the override feature that is being misused by many banks while seeding Aadhaar to accounts, without the informed consent of residents.
- As a result, subsidy from the government is being credited to new accounts without their knowledge.

Background

When an Aadhaar holder visits the telecom service provider for verifying his mobile number, the telecom firm is opening the customer's payment bank account and puts that bank account on the NPCI's Aadhaar Payment Bridge, overriding the existing bank account.

- The mapping is done without the informed consent of the Aadhaar holder.
- Residents, particularly those in rural and remote areas, are being put to inconvenience as they are clueless about receipt of subsidy and unable to withdraw the subsidy amount credited in payment bank accounts as payment banks are not having branches or cash outpoints in these areas.

Ensure access for disabled in higher education: SC

Higher educational institutions, both government ones and those which take government aid, should ensure a level-playing field for disabled persons or face action for discrimination, the Supreme Court warned.

Reminding the government that the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act provides for not less than 5% reservation in seats during admissions and this law has not so far been complied with, the court cautioned that appropriate legal action would be initiated against defaulting educational institutions.

It was delivering a judgment on an 11-year-old PIL plea filed by the Disabled Rights Group.

- The court directed the University Grants Commission to constitute a committee to come up with possible guidelines for facilitating access for students with disabilities in universities and colleges.
- Court also wanted the panel to consider an in-house body in each institution for taking care of the day-to-day needs of differently abled persons.

Centre examining effects of e-cigarettes, says Health Minister

The government is examining the legal implications and health effects of e-cigarettes, Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda told the Rajya Sabha.

Mr. Nadda said the Health Ministry had constituted three groups to study the various aspects of e-cigarettes.

- One was to study the legal implications of this e-nicotine drug induce system, another group was to look into the health effects and the last one was to study advocacy.
- All three sub-groups have given their reports. The Ministry is working on them.

e-smoking, is referred to the practice of inhaling capsules of nicotine in a vapourised form after they were heated.

“This is actually an electronic nicotine delivery system. It has a nicotine capsule, which has no tobacco but nicotine that gives excitement as it hits the brain. Some countries have regulated e-smoking, while others have banned it,” the Minister said.

CAG picks flaws in Centre’s accounting

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has highlighted several flaws in the Union government’s accounting procedures for the financial year 2015-16, which could have led to an understatement of the fiscal deficit and revenue deficit for that year.

- The CAG Audit Report on the government’s compliance of the rules and targets set by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act 2003 also highlighted the fact that
 - the government had deferred payments amounting to more than Rs 1.87 lakh crore in 2015-16, which would have also had an impact on its fiscal and revenue deficits for that year.
- As a result of deficiency in estimating the expenditure on grants for creation of capital assets, the provision included in the Budget at a Glance for grants for creation of capital assets was underestimated by Rs 18,827 crore, which has also impacted the correct estimation of effective revenue deficit,” the CAG said.
- Further, the report added that due to the misclassification of revenue expenditure as capital expenditure and vice versa, the revenue deficit was understated by Rs1,583crore during financial year 2015-16.
- In addition to this, Rs 20,911 crore collected under levies and cesses were not transferred to the relevant funds, which led to an “understatement of revenue/fiscal deficit by an equivalent amount” during 2015-16.

The report also found that, at the end of 2015-16, subsidy claims of Rs1,62,530 crore relating to fertiliser, food, and petroleum were pending, and that the devolution of taxes to the States was short by Rs 24,942 crore that year, which had a bearing on the computation of the deficit ratios for that year.

- “Though the accounts of the government are prepared on cash basis, yet the deferment of liabilities to subsequent year cyclically has a bearing on computation of fiscal indicators,” the CAG noted.

The CAG also noted that there were several issues with the transparency of the government's account statements.

- It added that variations were noticed in the deficit figures depicted in the Budget at a Glance and the Annual Financial Statements of the Union government, and that similar variations were noticed in the disclosure of actual expenditure on grants for the creation of capital assets, and in the liability position of the government.

The CAG pointed out that the government had failed to meet the FRBM targets for 2015-16 on both the fiscal deficit and the revenue deficit, and that it had subsequently changed the targets and deadlines without making the relevant changes in the Act itself.

"During 2015-16, in respect of all the three deficit indicators, viz. effective revenue deficit, revenue deficit and fiscal deficit, the annual reduction targets were not in accordance with the provisions of the FRBM Act/Rules," the report said.

Amendments to Companies Act passed; to ease compliance

A bill to amend the companies law to strengthen corporate governance standards, initiate strict action against defaulting companies, and help improve the ease of doing business in the country, was passed by Parliament.

- Minister of State for Corporate Affairs P.P. Chaudhary said the amendment would ensure better corporate governance and improve the ease of doing business.
- The Bill provides for more than 40 amendments to the Companies Act, 2013, which was passed during the previous UPA regime.
- The latest legislation would help in simplifying procedures, make compliance easy, and take stringent action against defaulting companies

Centre planning strategy to boost services exports'

The government is formulating a new strategy to boost services exports by identifying new markets such as Latin America as well as services, including healthcare and financial services, which have tremendous potential in terms of exports and job creation, according to Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu.

- Addressing the Services Conclave, organised by CII, Mr. Prabhu said with manufacturing becoming increasingly automated, services would contribute more to employment generation.
- He said the Ministry, along with the EXIM Bank, was working on a strategy to define each market along with the kind of products that could be exported.

INTERNATIONAL

China slams U.S. strategy as 'Cold War mentality'

China and Russia decried President Donald Trump's first national security strategy — which pilloried both nations as challengers to U.S. power — as a “Cold War mentality” with an “imperialist character”.

The two global powerhouses hit back hours after the Trump administration unveiled its approach to the world with biting language framing Beijing and Moscow as global competitors.

- “China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity,” the document says.
- The report's tough tone contrasts sharply with Mr. Trump's friendlier face-to-face encounters with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

STATE TELANGANA

Annual conference to celebrate Telugu language: CM

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao announced an annual fete henceforth to celebrate Telugu language in the context of Telangana culture.

Every year during December, a two-day ‘Telangana Telugu MahaSabhalu’ (Telangana Telugu Conference) would be organised on a grand scale, he announced amid applause during the concluding session of the Fifth World Telugu Conference.