

Aadhaar scheme to be linked to MGNREGS wages

Bid to add social content to UID scheme, otherwise in limbo

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NEW DELHI: With the much talked about Aadhaar scheme apparently in limbo, the Union Government is making a desperate effort to provide it social content. As of now, only 3.5 crore unique identification cards have been issued as against an enrolment of 10 crore people across the country. Matters turned worse when the Reserve Bank of India issued a directive that bank accounts could not be opened on the basis of UID cards. But later it issued a clarification accepting Aadhaar cards as proof of identity and residence. What is bothering the government is that Aadhaar will be judged not by the coverage in terms of numbers but by the impact it creates as a card-bearing benefit. But possession of the Aadhaar card is not mandatory.

Union Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh has taken the initiative to link Aadhaar with payment of wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in the five States where the Ministry has been appointed registrar for issuance of UID cards. To facilitate this, Mr. Ramesh held a meeting with Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) Chairman Nandan Nilekani.

Under a memorandum of understanding the UIDAI signed with the States, the Ministry has been appointed registrar for collection of data in Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Tripura and West Bengal. Other Central Government departments such as Food & Civil Supplies and Information & Technology have been assigned the role in other States. Within its limited jurisdiction, the Ministry is seeking to provide the UID card a social content.

The MGNREGS wages will be paid in these States through Aadhaar-linked bank accounts. The Ministry will hold a meeting of officials on October 23 and 24 to decide whether to start the

project across these five States or, make a beginning by concentrating on a few districts in each of them, and the time frame to implement the scheme. Mr. Ramesh favours a rea-

of the job card holders (38.4) have secured bank accounts. It is pretty bad in Bihar, where only 1.73 lakh MGNREGS

sonable timeline of 12 months to issue UID cards to all job card-holders. But that seems an uphill task as of now, even if linking Aadhaar to MGNREGS wage payment is limited to these five States. For, as against the 3.09 crore job cards issued in these States, only 39 lakh BPL households have been provided with bank accounts. Out of these households with bank accounts, West Bengal accounts for 22.16 lakh, way behind the 1.08 crore job cards issued there. In Assam, too, only about 20 per cent (7.42 lakh)

work-ers have bank ac-counts, though the number of job card holders is 1.16 crore, and in Jharkhand, where only 2.6 lakh out of 39.5 lakh job card holders have bank accounts. Tripura is the only State which has done well, ensuring that four lakh MGNREGS workers out of 5.9 lakh job card holders have bank accounts.