NEWS JUICE

Intelligent Compilation from The Hindu, Indian Express & others along with News Background

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What is News Juice?

BY PREPMATE
1. Questioning the safety of Aadhaar

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Polity & Governance

Two days after issuing an advisory asking people to refrain from sharing photocopies of their Aadhaar Card, the Unique Identification Development Authority of India (UIDAI) opted to withdraw the notification. It stated that the action was to avert any possibility of ‘misinterpretation’ of the (withdrawn) press release, asking people to exercise “normal prudence” in using/sharing their Aadhaar numbers.

What did the UIDAI advisory say?
The withdrawn notice had suggested holders use a masked Aadhaar card instead of the conventional photocopy, adding that the document must not be downloaded from a cybercafé or public computer and if done for some reason, must be permanently deleted from the system. ‘Masked Aadhaar’ veils the first eight digits of the twelve-digit ID with ‘XXXX’ characters. The notice informed that only entities possessing a ‘User Licence’ are permitted to seek Aadhaar for authentication purposes. Private entities like hotels or film halls cannot collect or keep copies of the identification document.

In July 2018, Telecom Regulatory of India’s Chairman R.S. Sharma tweeted his Aadhaar number challenging users to “cause him any harm”. In response, users dug up his mobile number, PAN number, photographs, residential address and date of birth. It could not be ascertained if the PAN number was actually correct. UIDAI dismissed assertions of any data leak, arguing that most of the data was publicly available. It did however caution users from publicly sharing their Aadhaar numbers.

What does the law say?
The Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 makes it clear that Aadhaar authentication is necessary for availing subsidies, benefits and services that are financed from the Consolidated Fund of India. In the absence of Aadhaar, the individual is to be offered an alternate and viable means of identification to ensure she/he is not deprived of the same.

Separately, Aadhaar has been described as a preferred KYC (Know Your Customer) document but not mandatory for opening bank accounts, acquiring a new SIM or school admissions.

The requesting entity would have to obtain the consent of the individual before collecting his/her identity and ensure that the information is only used for authentication purposes on the Central Identities Data Repository (CIDR). This centralised database contains all Aadhaar numbers and holder’s corresponding demographic and biometric information. UIDAI responds to authentication queries with a ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. In some cases, basic KYC details (as name, address, photograph etc) accompany the verification answer ‘Yes’. The regulator does not receive or collect the holder’s bank, investment or insurance details. Additionally, the Aadhaar Act forbids sharing Core Biometric Information (such as fingerprint, iris scan, among other biometric attributes) for any purpose other than Aadhaar number generation and authentication.

The Act makes it clear that confidentiality needs to be maintained and the authenticated information cannot be used for anything other than the specified purpose. More importantly, no Aadhaar number (or enclosed personal information) collected from the holder can be published, displayed or posted publicly. Identity information or authentication records would only be liable to be produced pursuant to an order of the High Court or Supreme Court, or by someone of the Secretary rank or above in the interest of national security.

Is identity theft via Aadhaar possible?
As per the National Payment Corporation of India’s (NCPI) data, ₹6.48 crore worth of financial frauds through 8,739 transactions involving 2,391 unique users took place in FY 2021-22.

Since the inception of the UID project, institutions and organisations have endowed greater focus on linking their databases with Aadhaar numbers, including for bank accounts especially in light of the compulsory
linkage for direct benefit transfer schemes. The NPCI's Aadhaar Payments Bridge (APB) and the Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS) facilitate direct benefit transfer (DBT) and allow individuals to use Aadhaar for payments. This requires bank accounts to be linked to Aadhaar. In 2017, researchers at the Centre for Internet and Society (CIS) acquired information of various beneficiaries of such social security and employment schemes such as their Aadhaar numbers, bank account details, job card status, mobile number etc. The same year, the UIDAI in response to an RTI stated that more than 200 central and State government websites publicly displayed details of some Aadhaar beneficiaries such as their names and addresses. Both were made possible by the lack of robust encryption. This data could be potentially used to fraudulently link the rightful beneficiary's Aadhaar with a distinct bank account, embezzling the beneficiary by impersonation, made possible by the sizeable identity documents available.

The UIDAI maintains that merely knowing the bank account number would not be enough to withdraw money from the bank, stating that the individual's fingerprint, iris data or OTP to a registered mobile number would be required. CIS states that brokers are known to buy tonnes of Aadhaar documents from mobile shops and other places where the identification document is shared. Additionally, there have been instances where employees of service providers were caught stealing biometric information collected solely for Aadhaar authentication. A far-stretch means for acquiring biometrics would involve collecting fingerprints from varied places that an individual might touch unknowingly in a certain space (such as a railing of a staircase) with iris data being acquired from high-resolution cameras.

As for mobile verification, phone users in India are known to carry two or more phone numbers at one time. There could be a possibility that the number linked to the Aadhaar is not prominently used. Fraudsters could use this as an opportunity to link their phone numbers instead, update it in the bank using the available information (of the individual) and deprive them of benefits or embezzle funds.

What are some of the structural problems that the UIDAI faces?
The Aadhaar Data Vault is where all numbers collected by authentication agencies are centrally stored. Its objective is to provide a dedicated facility for the agencies to access details only on a need-to-know basis. Comptroller and Auditor General of India’s (CAG) latest report stipulated that UIDAI neither specified any encryption algorithm (as of October 2020) to secure the same nor a mechanism to illustrate that the entities were adhering to appropriate procedures. It relied solely on audit reports provided to them by the entities themselves. Further, UIDAI's unstable record with biometric authentication has not helped it with de-duplication efforts, the process that ensures that each Aadhaar Number generated is unique. The CAG's reported stated that apart from the issue of multiple Aadhaars to the same resident, there have been instances of the same biometric data being accorded to multiple residents. As per UIDAI's Tech Centre, nearly 4.75 lakh duplicate Aadhaar numbers were cancelled as of November 2019. The regulator relies on Automated Biometric Identification Systems for taking corrective actions. The CAG concluded it was “not effective enough” in detecting the leakages and plugging them. Biometric authentications can be a cause of worry, especially for disabled and senior citizens with both the iris and fingerprints dilapidating. Though the UIDAI has assured that no one would be deprived of any benefits due to biometric authentication failures, the absence of an efficient technology could serve as poignant premise for frauds to make use of their ‘databases'.

Source: The Hindu

2. Looking at the UN report on the Taliban regime

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

A new report from the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) says that foreign terrorist organisations continue to enjoy safe haven under the new Taliban regime. The report adds that due to financial constraints, and possibly under political pressure not to embarrass the Taliban internationally at this juncture, the terrorist groups are currently in consolidation mode and not likely to launch major attacks outside Afghanistan before 2023.
What is the mandate of the monitoring team and how did it collect data?
The monitoring team assists the UNSC sanctions committee. Its report, circulated among committee members, informs the formulation of UN strategy in Afghanistan. India is currently the chair of the sanctions committee, which comprises all the 15 UNSC members. This report — the 13th overall — is the first since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021. The UN team could not visit Afghanistan for evidence-gathering. This is the first of its reports not informed by official Afghan briefings. Instead, the team relied on consultations with UN member states, international and regional organisations, private sector financial institutions, and the work of bodies such as the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

What does the report say about terrorist organisations that pose a threat to India?
Two India-focussed terrorist groups, Jaish-i-Mohammed (JiM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), are reported to have training camps in Afghanistan. While the JiM “maintains eight training camps in Nangarhar, three of which are directly under Taliban control,” the LeT was “said to maintain three camps in Kunar and Nangarhar”. Both the groups enjoy close links with the Taliban leadership, with the LeT having a history of providing finance and training expertise to Taliban operations.

The report also says that the al-Qaeda in Indian Sub-continent (AQIS) has 180-400 fighters in Afghanistan. “Fighters included nationals from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and Pakistan,” says the report. While AQIS capabilities were “assessed as still weakened from losses as a result of the October 2015 joint United States-Afghan raid in Kandahar’s Shorabak district”, the outfit has also been forced to adopt a “less aggressive posture” due to financial constraints. The report notes that the name change of the AQIS magazine from ‘Nawa-i-Afghan Jihad’ to ‘Nawa-e-Gazwah-e-Hind’ suggests a “refocussing of AQIS from Afghanistan to Kashmir”.

What about internal tensions?
The foremost internal division in the Taliban is between the moderate and hardline blocs. While the moderate bloc) wants working relationships with foreign partners and integration with the international system, the hardliners (consisting of senior Taliban leaders centralised around Hibatullah Akhundzada) have a more ideological stance, with little interest in international relations. Independent of both these blocs is the Haqqani Network which, while more aligned with the hardliners, is inclined towards a pragmatic rather than ideological approach to securing Taliban interests. According to the report, under the command of Hibatullah, various Taliban factions are manoeuvring for advantage, with the Haqqani Network cornering most of the influential posts in the administration.

How are ethnic dynamics in the administration?
The report believes the Kandahari (Durrani) Taliban to be in the ascendancy among the Taliban leadership, with Pashtuns getting precedence over non-Pashtuns. Several key Tajik and Uzbek commanders in the north have been replaced with Pashtuns from the south, and these decisions have come against the backdrop of an “organised campaign by Pashtuns to dislodge ethnic Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek communities from rich agricultural land in the north”.

Internal cohesion within the Taliban was easier to maintain during the insurgency period, when there was a “compelling common cause to expel foreign forces from Afghanistan”, the report notes. But now that they are in power, “the Taliban’s core identity of a Pashtun nationalist cause dominated by southern Taliban has again come to the fore, generating tension and conflict with other ethnic groups.”

What about other terrorist groups?
Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) constitutes the largest component of foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan, with their numbers estimated at 3,000-4,000, and mostly located along the east and south-east Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas. Among all the foreign extremist groups in Afghanistan, it is the TTP that has benefited the most from the Taliban takeover. The report also notes that the Kabul airport attack of August 26 has elevated the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) to be the most prominent Da-esh affiliate in the region. While its activity declined towards the end of 2021, the group has grown in
strength through prison releases and new recruitments. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda continues to enjoy a close relationship with the Taliban, celebrating the latter’s success by “renewing its pledge of allegiance to Hibatullah”. Noting that neither ISIL-K nor the al-Qaeda are “believed to be capable of mounting international attacks before 2023 at the earliest,” the report concludes that their presence, along with the presence of other terrorist groups on Afghan soil, remain a matter of grave concern for neighbouring countries and the wider international community.

Source: The Hindu

3. Israel signs UAE free trade deal, its first in Arab world

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Israel signed a free trade deal with the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday, its first with an Arab country, building on their U.S.-brokered normalisation of diplomatic relations in 2020.

Details

Israel’s Ambassador to the oil-rich UAE, Amir Hayek, tweeted mabruk — congratulations in Arabic — with a photo of Emirati and Israeli officials holding documents at a signing ceremony in Dubai.

The Emirati envoy to Israel, Mohamed Al Khaja, hailed as an “unprecedented achievement” the deal that, according to the Israeli side, scraps customs duties on 96% of all products traded.

“Businesses in both countries will benefit from faster access to markets and lower tariffs as our nations work together to increase trade, create jobs, promote new skills and deepen cooperation,” Mr. Khaja tweeted.

The 2020 deal was part of the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords that also saw Israel establish diplomatic ties with Bahrain and Morocco.

Two-way trade between Israel and the UAE last year totalled some $900 million dollars, according to Israeli figures.

Source: The Hindu

4. What is HIMARS, the missile system the US is sending to Ukraine

Relevant for GS Prelims

United States President Joe Biden said in a guest essay published in The New York Times on Tuesday (May 31) evening that in addition to the “significant amount of weaponry and ammunition” already provided to Ukraine, “I’ve decided that we will provide the Ukrainians with more advanced rocket systems and munitions that will enable them to more precisely strike key targets on the battlefield in Ukraine”.

The Biden administration subsequently said it would send Ukraine a small number of high-tech, medium-range rocket systems, a critical weapon that the Ukrainian leadership has repeatedly asked for. Late on June 1 evening India time, newswire services reported, quoting a senior Pentagon official, that the US would send four HIMAR systems to Ukraine to begin with.

What is the HIMARS missile system?

According to unnamed officials quoted by the AP, the American plan is to send Ukraine the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, or HIMARS, which is mounted on a truck, and can carry a container with six rockets. The HIMARS can launch a medium-range rocket, which is the current plan, but is also capable of firing a longer-range missile, the Army Tactical Missile System, which has a range of about 300 km.
It was expected that Ukrainian forces would use the rockets in the eastern region of Donbas, where they could intercept Russian artillery, as well as hit Russian positions in towns where intense fighting is ongoing, such as Sievierodonetsk. It is important for the Russians to capture this city, which is the last holdout of the Ukrainian government in the Luhansk province of the Donbas, before more Western arms shipments arrive.

But the missiles probably will not be used against targets inside Russia. In his essay in The NYT, President Biden said: “We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders. We do not want to prolong the war just to inflict pain on Russia.”

**HIMARS used against ISIS, Taliban earlier**
The M142 HIMARS, a light multiple rocket launcher, was developed for the US Army in the late 1990s. The system is mounted on a standard Army M1140 truck frame, and carries six rockets or one MGM-140 ATACMS missile. The launcher can be transported by C-130 transport aircraft.

Media reports from 2010 said HIMARS had aided the NATO offensive by targeting Taliban hideouts in Kandahar, Afghanistan, and in 2015, the US Army said they had used HIMARS to fire at least 400 rockets at the Islamic State in Iraq.

The following year, HIMARS fired rockets in support of Syrian fighters battling the Islamic State in Syria. Also in 2016, the US announced the deployment of HIMARS in Turkey near its border with Syria, and near Mosul to take on the Islamic State. In 2018, HIMARS missiles killed at least 50 Taliban in Musa Qala, Afghanistan.

**Source: The Indian Express**

5. The key monkeypox symptoms to watch out for

**Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology**

The Union health ministry Tuesday released guidelines on surveillance, identification and management of monkeypox. So far, 300 suspected or confirmed cases of monkeypox have been detected in non-endemic countries. What are the symptoms of the disease, and what is the treatment?

**What are the key symptoms of monkeypox?**
According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), monkeypox begins with a fever, headache, muscle aches, back ache, and exhaustion. It also causes the lymph nodes to swell (lymphadenopathy), which smallpox does not.

The World Health Organisation underlines that it is important not to confuse monkeypox with chickenpox, measles, bacterial skin infections, scabies, syphilis and medication-associated allergies.

**How long does it take for symptoms to show after infection?**
Monkeypox is usually a self-limiting disease with symptoms lasting from two to four weeks. The incubation period (time from infection to symptoms) for monkeypox is usually 7-14 days but can range from 5-21 days. The Health Ministry notes that the period of communicability is “1-2 days before the rash until all the scabs fall off/get subsided”.

**How does the disease progress?**
The disease goes through four different phases. The first invasion period, which is between 0-5 days, is characterised by fever, headache and lymph node swelling.

The swelling of the lymphnodes is one of the characteristic features of monkeypox and is not observed in similar rash causing diseases like measles and chickenpox.
Patients also show generalized weakness or lack of energy.

Skin eruptions usually show up within two days of fever. The rash is more concentrated on the face as is apparent in 95 per cent cases. In 75 per cent cases, it is found in the palm and sole of the feet. It affects the oral mucous membrane in 70 per cent of the cases. The conjunctiva, cornea of the eye and the genital area can also get affected.

The skin eruption stage can last between 2 and 4 weeks, during which the lesions harden and become painful, fill up first with a clear fluid and then pus, and then develop scabs or crusts.

The Union Ministry of Health says that patients should isolate and watch out for pain in eye or blurring of vision, shortness of breath, and decrease in urine output.

**Monkeypox: What is the treatment?**
There is no proven treatment for monkeypox yet. The WHO recommends supportive treatment depending on the symptoms. Those infected are advised to isolate immediately.

According to the Ministry of Health guidelines on supportive management of monkeypox, skin rashes should be cleaned with simple antiseptic, and covered with light dressing in case of extensive lesions. Oral ulcers should be managed with warm saline gargles.

Doctors say monkeypox is a very well-understood condition that can be managed efficiently with available clinical remedies. “We urge individuals to not panic and most importantly, not confuse monkeypox with another common viral infection,” said Dr Hemlata Arora, Senior Consultant, Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases, Nanavati Hospital.

**Source: The Indian Express**
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