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KERALA

Aadhaar helps trace kin of unidentified mental patients

Aabha RaveendranKOZHIKODE, OCTOBER 11, 2017 18:58 IST
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Govt Mental Health Centre initiative finds that 32 inmates already had the UIDs

Neither the IT Mission nor the staff of the Government Mental Health Centre, Kuthiravattom, expected this kind of a spin-off for their effort to secure Aadhaar cards for the hospital inmates. For 32 of them, the unique identification numbers (UIDs) turned out to be a means to locating their kin.

“We are elated. This is an unexpected benefit from Aadhaar,” said Mental Health Centre Superintendent N. Rajendran.

It was the District Legal Services Authority that took the initiative to get Aadhaar for the inmates.

It took an entire day for 12 Akshaya service providers to visit each ward of the hospital and get the biometric information of 264 patients who have been there for more than a year. As most of them are anonymous, the name the hospital authorities had assigned for them were used and their address was ‘C/O Superintendent of the hospital’.

To the surprise of the service providers, the data of 32 inmates were rejected by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), the on account of duplication. This happened because their biometric details such as finger prints and retina scans matched with those of a previously made Aadhaar.

Upon the Superintendent’s request, they contacted UIDAI authorities to get the details that have already been recorded.

“Usually, the UIDs are never shared owing to privacy issues,” said IT Mission Kozhikode district coordinator Subini S. Nair.

Special case

“But, this is a special case and we could convince them by explaining that it could be of use to locate the relatives of some of the unidentified patients. That it was a government hospital and that the District Collector was a patron helped,” she said.

In similar cases elsewhere, the UIDAI usually contacted the kin and asked them to contact the person in question. But here, there was a greater chance that the relatives would not want to accept them as they were mentally ill. Hence, the data of the 32 people were handed over to the hospital.

Other States

“The 32 UIDs carry the addresses. Some even carried a telephone number. Around 12 are from other States. It can be of use to the hospital authorities who have been leaving no stone unturned to find the relatives of unidentified patients,” Ms. Nair said.

Details of patients

Meanwhile, the hospital authorities are trying to sort out the details secured to find out how many patients would benefit from the data as the authorities have already traced the details of some of the patients through other means.

“These may be the people who came here after 2010, as Aadhaar enrolment started only in that year,” Dr. Rajendran said.

Savings account

In yet another twist to the tale, the hospital has opened a post office savings account for one of the patients using the Aadhaar.

Usually, it is impossible for a mentally ill person to open a bank account.

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