NEW ENCRYPTION NORMS

Security key in 1.38 mn telecom biometric units: UIDAI chief

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Nearly 1.38 million (mn) biometric devices in use by the telecom sector for Aadhaar authentication have been made compliant with Unique Identification Authority of India's (UIDAI) new encryption norms, according to Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Ajay Bhushan Pandey.

The move is aimed at adding a new device-level security layer at a time when Aadhaar-based e-KYC is being used by the telecom industry for fresh connections and re-verification of existing mobile subscribers. "In the sector, about 13.8 lakh (1.38 mn) fingerprint devices have been upgraded as registered devices with the new encryption key. Telecom industry is now fully compliant," the CEO said.

Overall, about 1.5 mn devices have been "upgraded", meaning that these devices, that were being used in the field for biometric authentication, have a new layer of encryption. All new biometric devices, as it is, have the latest encryption norms in place, Pandey added. "In all, about 15 lakh (1.5 mn) devices have been upgraded out of 20 lakh (two mn) such units in circulation in various sectors... many banks are also in the process of upgrading their biometric units," he said.

Lauding telecom companies for completing the "massive" task of rolling out the new security feature in existing fingerprint devices, Pandey said

The move is aimed at adding a new device-level security layer

the encryption key would ensure the captured biometrics couldn't be misused.

"This is like a third lock. One lock is in form of encryption at the time of biometric capture, then it gets further encrypted at level of the telecom operator, and then we have our own encryption," he said.

Aadhaar-based e-KYC is essential for subscribers going for new SIMs. Further, in early 2017, the government asked mobile operators to reverify all the existing prepaid and postpaid customers, with the 12-digit unique identity number and biometric details.

The exercise is scheduled to be completed by early 2018. UIDAI's next priority would be to ensure compliance of new encryption norms in other user agencies like banks and various government offices, he said. "We will soon take stock of those who have not complied and ask them to explain why it has not been done yet", he said.

UIDAI is the nodal body for rolling out Aadhaar, the 12-digit unique identification number that identifies residents based on their biometrics.