

# UIDAI stalls Airtel and its online bank's e-KYC service

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Aadhaar body UIDAI on Saturday prohibited Bharti Airtel and the Airtel Payments Bank from conducting e-verification (e-KYC) for existing and new customers, the unprecedented measure coming after allegations that the telecom major had surreptitiously on-boarded customers to its bank while carrying out their Aadhaar verification.

The move will mean that any new customer that comes to Airtel, or its payments bank, will not be able to have a fast-track and paperless biometric authentication through Aadhaar. Rather, they will have to submit a hard copy of their Aadhaar, or other permissible identity documents, and these will need to be verified through the long-drawn physical processes.

Also, the mandatory Aadhaar verification of mobile customers – which needs to be completed by March 31 – will now need to be carried out through the physical pro-

**UIDAI's order comes after some customers alleged that the company had opened their accounts in Airtel Payments Bank without their consent**

cess for Airtel's customers.

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), in an interim order, "suspended e-KYC licence key of Bharti Airtel and Airtel Payment Bank Ltd with immediate effect", sources said.

When contacted, an Airtel spokesperson said: "We can confirm that we have received an interim order from the UIDAI regarding temporary suspension of Aadhaar linked e-KYC services till their satisfaction on certain processes relating to Airtel payment banks onboarding of customers. We are engaging with the authority and are hopeful of an early resolution."

UIDAI had earlier issued a show-cause notice to Airtel after prima-facie finding violations by the telecom compa-

ny's ground-staff who were carrying out the Aadhaar linkage process. The issue of unauthorised linkages had come to the fore when the government's social-sector subsidy — linked to LPG cooking gas — landed in the Airtel Payments bank accounts of many customers. The customers cried foul and said that they had not even signed up for Airtel Payments Bank account.

The subsidy amount that has been transferred in this manner was initially believed to be over Rs 40 crore and the accounts linked without permission are estimated to be over 20 lakh. However, there is no independent verification of the same.

Suspending the 'e-KYC licence key', UIDAI ordered PricewaterhouseCoopers to conduct an audit of Bharti Airtel and Airtel Payments Bank to ascertain if their systems and processes are in compliance with the Aadhaar Act. UIDAI may consider revocation of suspension or decide further necessary action upon receipt of the report.