NATIONAL

**“Seems to me that there is a fine line between insanity and dedication…I call that line commitment” Jeremy Aldana**

AADHAAR DATA SAFE BEHIND FIVE-FEET THICK WALLS, GOVT. AFFIRMS IN SUPREME COURT

The government has assured the Supreme Court that Aadhaar is not a “fly-by-night effort to score sonic brownie points” and personal data collected from millions of people is safe from breach in storage facilities barricaded behind five-foot thick walls.

Appearing before a Constitution Bench Attorney-General urged the court to spare some time for the UIDAI CEO to conduct a power-point presentation in open court to quell apprehensions. The court remained non-committal.

Instead, Chief Justice Mishra asked the government to quell apprehensions raised by petitioners as to why persons, who prefer anonymity and consider their identity as a treasure, should also be compelled to part with their personal data to access services.

Mr. Venugopal explained that Aadhaar provides “a right to physically exist without lying on the pavement without food.

Mr. Venugopal quoted former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi saying how only 17 out of 100 spent on anti-poverty projects actually reach the poor. The rest is eaten up by middlemen and public servants.

Mr. Venugopal said the **right to a dignified and meaningful life for the poor far outweighed the right to privacy**. To this Justice Chandrachud asked whether the government considers privacy not a fundamental right for the poor.

Justice Ashok Bhushan said both the right to privacy and right to life inhere in the same person and one need not necessarily be sacrificed to gain the other,

At one point Justice Chandrachud said thc government should admit that Aadhaar authentication has a problem of “financial exclusion.”

The government should come upfront and tell us ‘look, there is a problem of financial exclusion’. A pensioner, let us say, who is 89 years of age, you have to ensure that **such people are not deprived of their entitlements.** Their cases cannot be treated as aberrations. Besides**, pension is not a subsidy under the Section 7 of the AadhaarAct. It is a rightful entitlement.”**

Justice Chandrachud said the government cannot deny there is financial exclusion merely because nobody excluded has yet complained to the court.

ASSAM RHINOCEROS DATA MAY HAVE BEEN DOCTORED FOR FUNDS

An organization of whistleblowers in Assam, armed with an RTI reply from the authorities of a national park, has said that rhinoceros census data may be getting doctored for ensuring the flow of foreign funds.

• The assertion has come less than a week before the rhino census in the 430 sq. km. **Kaziranga National Park** begins.

• The last rhino census in the wildlife reserve, a World Heritage Site, was conducted in 2015.

• **Swaraj Asom** an NGO that was one of the petitioners in the Louis Berger bribery case involving consultancies for urban projects in Assam and Goa, said wildlife enumerators have no mechanism in place to ensure that the same rhino is not counted twice or thrice.

• NGO has reasons to doubt the rhino data after receiving a reply to an RTI query from the authorities of Orang National Park (about 80 km northeast of Guwahati). The park has 17 blocks but most of the 100 rhinos counted in 2012 were from two blocks — Satsimalu and Chaila where officials were involved, but wildlife activists and neutral observers virtually did not spot rhinos in the other blocks.

• The duo questioned the rhino data release after the census in Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary last week. “They counted 102 rhinos this time, which is an increase of 35 [animals] after 26 of the 93 counted in 2012 died naturally or due to poaching. Such figures need to be verified by neutral authorities.

• The “doubtful data” point to a plan to have at least 3,000 rhinos as envisaged in the Indian Rhino Vision 2020 initiative so that foreign conservation agencies continue to provide funds, a sizeable part of which goes to green groups working in collusion with forest officials.

• Their demand is that New Delhi should clear the doubts by probing the census methods and ensuring that the exercise is done through GPS and other available technology, so that the same rhino is not counted twice or thrice if it moves from one block to the other.

• Forest officials denied any foul play. Kaziranga National Park is a national park in the Golaghat and Nagaon districts of the state of Assam, India.

• The sanctuary, which hosts two-thirds of the world’s great one-horned rhinoceroses.



FINE JAIL FOR FAILING TO REPORT TB CASES

• A notification by the Union Health Ministry says, Chemists and hospital staff treating tuberculosis (TB) patients, who don’t inform health authorities about them, could face up to two years in jail.

• The notification, made public on March 16, requires chemists and druggists to provide district officials with personal details and information on the medicines taken by TB patients.

• India has the maximum number of TB patients and many of them seek treatment in private hospitals. The notification, according to authorities, seeks to push private hospitals and establishments to do more for containing the spread of TB.

• A 2014 study in The Lancet reported that there were 2.2 million TB patients treated in India’s private sector alone, or about 2-3 times higher than current estimates of the incidence of the disease.

• This could be an underestimated number as the analysis did not account for cases of drug resistant tuberculosis.

• According to a WHO report released in January, India had about 2.79 million new cases of TB in 2016 and the disease killed about 4,35,000 persons.

• Only about 1.3 million of them were known to be receiving treatment under the government’s TB control programme and only about 3, 30,000 of these patients emerged from the private sector.

PLEA TO DE-REGISTER PARTIES OPPOSED

The government has opposed a plea to ban the registration of a political party with the Election Commission if an office-bearer of the party is a convicted person barred from contesting elections.

• The government was responding to a petition filed by advocate in the Supreme Court to empower the Election Commission of India with authority to dc-register or cancel the registration of a political party under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act of 1951 if office-holders of the party are found to be convicted criminals and banned from contesting elections. The petition said the step was necessary to de-criminalize politics.

• Appointment of a post-holder to a political party is a matter of autonomy.

• The government said it may not be apt to prevent the Election Commission from registering a political party “merely because a particular post-holder is not qualified to contest elections.”

• Citing the Supreme Court’s own judgment in 2002. The government argued that “antecedents of a post-holder” is not a ground to dc-register or cancel the registration of a political party under Sec 29A.

• The government said there was no “connectivity and nexus” between debarring convicted politicians from contesting elections and banning them from forming a political party or holding office in a party.

CCEA APPROVED FOR “INTEGRATED SCHEME FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SILK INDUSTRY”

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for Central Sector Scheme “Integrated Scheme for Development of Silk Industry” for the next three years from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

The scheme will be implemented through Central Silk Board (CSB).

The scheme aims to achieve self-sufficiency in silk production by 2022. To achieve this, production of high grade silk in India will reach 20,650 MTs by 2022 from the current level of 11,326 MTs thereby reducing imports to Zero.

The core objective of the scheme is to improve the productivity and quality of silk through R&D intervention.

The focus of R&D intervention is to promote improved cross­breed silk and the import substitute Bivoltine silk so that Bivotine silk production in India enhances to such a level that raw silk imports become nil by 2022 thereby making India self-sufficient in silk.

Use of silkworm by-products (pupa) for poultry feed, sericin for cosmetic applications and product diversification into non-woven fabrics, silk denim, silk knit etc. will be given thrust for added value realization.

Under Seed Sector, Seed Production Units will be equipped and strengthened to bring in quality standards in production network, besides increasing the production capacity to cater to the increased silk production target.

All the beneficiaries under the scheme from silk farmers, seed producers and chawki rearers will be brought on a DBT mode with Aadhaar linkage. A Helpline will be set up for timely redressal of grievances and all outreach programmes.

Brand Promotion of Indian silk will be encouraged through quality certification by Silk Mark not only in the domestic market but in the Export market as well.

The scheme will promote Women Empowerment and livelihood opportunities to SC/ST and other weaker sections of the society. The scheme will help to increase productive employment from 85 lakhs to 1 crore persons by 2020.

INTERNATIONAL

CABINET APPROVED FOR CLOSURE OF INDIA DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION OF OVERSEAS INDIANS

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for closure of India Development Foundation of Overseas Indians (IDF-OI) to enhance synergies in channelizing Diaspora’s contributions to Government of India’s various flagship programmes.

**IDF- OI:**

IDF-OI was set up by Government of India with the approval of Cabinet in 2008 as an autonomous not-for-profit Trust, to facilitate Overseas Indian philanthropy into social and development projects in India.

Later, promotion of Government of India’s Flagship programmes – National Mission for Clean Ganga and Swachh Bharat Mission; and Social and Development projects identified by State Governments – was added to the mandate of IDF-OI.

IDF-OI receives a Grant-in-Aid from the Government of India for meeting its operational expenses and administrative costs for its activities and outreach. Therefore, IDF-OI does not deduct any operational or administrative charges from the contributions it receives from Overseas Indians.

The Trust is exempt from provisions of the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010 of the Ministry of Home Affairs which enables IDF-OI to receive foreign contributions.

IDF-OI is chaired by External Affairs Minister.

As the Foundation received only Rs. 36.80 Lakhs between December 2008 and March 2015 as donation from overseas Indian community, a comprehensive review of IDF-OI was undertaken in 2015.

Although, between April 2015 and March 2018, the Trust received Rs.10.16 crore, most of the contributions received were for either project related to National Mission for Clean Ganga or Swachh Bharat Mission, which are separately administered by their respective Administrative Agencies. Therefore, in order to enhance synergies, improve efficiencies and avoid duplication of work, it was decided that the Trust would be closed.

CABINET APPROVED TCIL TO SET UP US ARM FOR GOOGLE PROJECT

The Cabinet has approved setting up of a US subsidiary of the state-run telecom consultancy company TCIL for providing techno-commercial and logistic support for three Google projects for America.

TCIL is one of the few companies, which have been roped in to execute “Google Fiber”, Google’s “Fiber-to the-Premises Project” in the US for providing high capacity broadband internet and cable television to all the cities.

**TCIL:**

Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd (TCIL) is a leading IS/ISO 9001:2008 and ISO 14001:2004 certified Govt. of India Undertaking incorporated in 1978 under the Administrative control of Department of Telecommunications, Ministry of Communications and Govt. of India.

It is a Miniratna company. It was set up to give consultations in fields of Telecommunications to developing countries around the world.

**\*\*\***