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Open API Service in Aarogya Setu

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Why in News

The government has announced a **new feature 'Open API Service'** for its contact tracing app **Aarogya Setu**.

Key Points

- The Open API Service of Aarogya Setu addresses the fear/risk of **Covid-19** infections and will help the people, businesses and the **economy to return to normalcy**.
Here, organizations can take informed decisions regarding the presence of employees in office and the need to explore work from home. Thus, risk of contracting is reduced without much compromising on activities of the entity.
- The Open API Service of Aarogya Setu, can be **availed by organizations and business entities**.
- **Conditions:**
 - Entities who are **registered in India**.
 - Entities with **more than 50 employees**.
- **Benefits to Organizations and Business Entities:**
 - They can use the Open API Service to query the Aarogya Setu Application in real-time.
 - They can get the health status of their employees or any other Aarogya Setu User.
 - The Open API Service enables organizations to check the status of Aarogya Setu and integrate it into its various Work from Home features.
- **Privacy Issue Addressed:**
 - The Open API shall only provide the Aarogya Setu status and name of the Aarogya Setu User (strictly, **with User's consent only**).
 - No other personal data shall be provided through the API.

API

- The term ‘API’ stands for ‘**Application Programming Interface**’.
- An API is an interface that can be used to program software that interacts with an existing application.
- In practice, an API is “a set of functions and procedures” that allow one to access and build upon the data and functionality of an existing application.

Open Source API

- An open source API, also called **public API**, is an application programming interface made publicly available to software developers.
- Open APIs are published on the internet and shared freely, allowing the owner of a network-accessible service to give universal access to consumers.
- These are to support businesses with limited capital to invest in digital applications.
- An overlapping term **web service** is a resource that’s made available over the **internet**. A Web service is a software system designed to support interoperable machine-to-machine interaction over a network.

APIs vs Web Services

- APIs and web services are not mutually exclusive.
- In fact, one is a subset of the other: **every web service is an API** — since it exposes an application’s data and/or functionality — **but not every API is a web service**. This is because the definition of a web service is quite restrictive:
 - **Web services require a network.** While APIs can be online or offline, web services must use a network.
 - **APIs are protocol agnostic.** While APIs can use any protocols or design styles, web services usually use specific protocols.
 - **Web services are not open source generally:** Instead, they tend to offer specific data and/or functionality to specific partners. Thus they are less prone to hacking than API.

Aarogya Setu

- Aarogya Setu was launched in April 2020. It was developed by the **National Informatics Centre** under the **Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology**.
 - The motto of Aarogya Setu is *‘Main Surakshit, Hum Surakshit, Bharat Surakshit’*.
 - Since its launch, Aarogya Setu has continuously innovated and introduced more novel features like:
 - **e-pass integration,**
 - **QR Code scanning,**
 - **Sharing of Health status** with family/known persons, etc.
 - Aarogya Setu has emerged as the most downloaded contact tracing App in the world, with more than 15 crore users.
 - It aids the efforts of frontline health workers and the Government in Covid-19 mitigation and management efforts.
 - The **Aarogya Setu ITIHAS** interface which **uses location data** and Aarogya Setu analytics to predict emerging hotspots **at Sub Pincode** levels has been very effective in helping the health officials and administration to take necessary precautionary steps.
 - More than 30,000 hotspots have been identified at a very granular level of 300 m X 300 m and shared with State Governments and Districts.
- **Concerns:**
 - Government has issued guidelines to the employers to ensure that all their employees install this app.

This violates the right to privacy, which is a fundamental right as held by the Supreme court in **Puttaswamy case 2017**.
 - The data-sharing and knowledge-sharing protocol for the Aarogya Setu is **prone to misuse**, considering that India still **doesn't have data protection laws**.
 - Vulnerable sections like **migrant workers can't afford the smartphone** and the internet.
- In May 2020, the government **opened sourced the code** for its contact tracing app Aarogya Setu's Android and iOS versions.

Open sourcing the code for an app allows developers to take a closer look at how the app functions. They can also find bugs in the system and report the same to the creator.

Source PIB