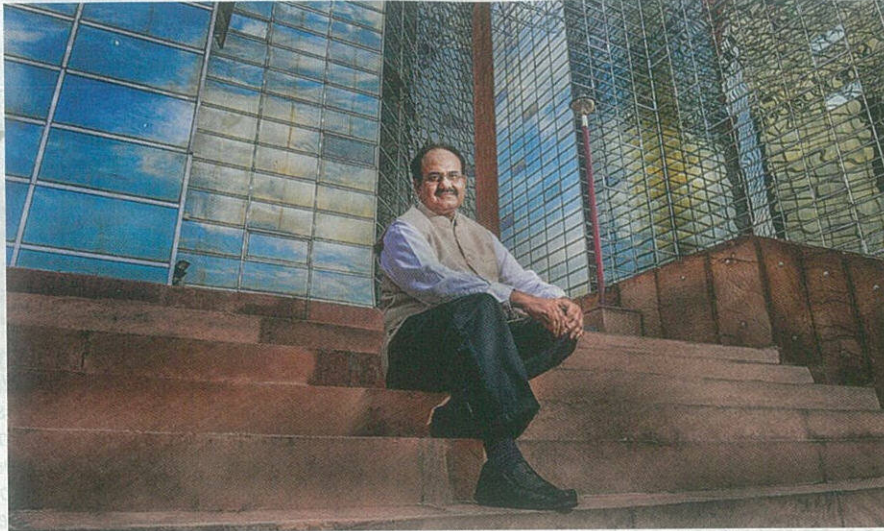


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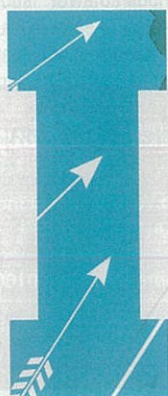


BY AJAY BHUSHAN PANDEY

CEO, Unique Identification Authority of India

## ‘Critics Make You a Better Performer’

We must learn to take criticism positively as it signifies people’s concern and it is our responsibility to allay their fears.



**I have always believed** that you should make yourself better in whatever work you do. When I got associated with the Aadhaar project in 2010 with nearly 26 years of administrative services experience behind me, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) had not issued the first Aadhaar. Today, we have issued more than 1.19 billion Aadhaar numbers. The seven years’ journey, which was not at all smooth, made me learn a lot.

The biggest lesson, perhaps, is that criticism is extremely important for advancement if it is taken as a constructive feedback. There is an old saying, *nindak neere rakheeye*, which means keep the critics near. But I have interpreted it as keep criticism near you, meaning thereby, be sensitive to criticism. And use it as a tool for constant improvement and steady updation to achieve our objectives. It also made me learn that come what may, I shall not lose my cool and shall always focus on the goal, using criticism for the betterment.

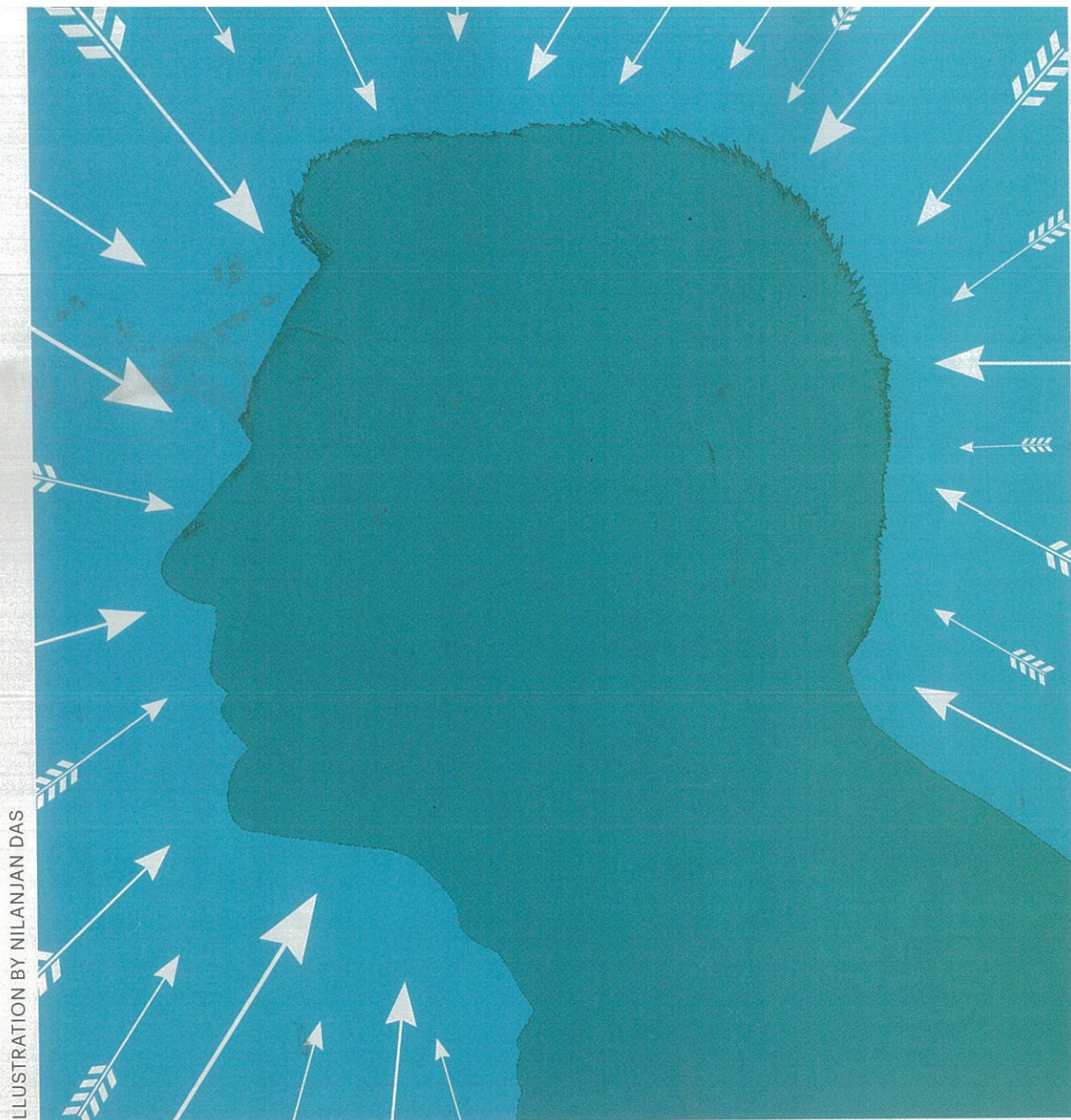


ILLUSTRATION BY NILANJAN DAS

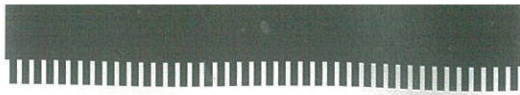
**When you are handling the world's largest project, which covers almost one-sixth of the world's population, you need to reach out to people and convince them that their biometrics are in safe hands, all their data is secure and will not be misused**

The second lesson I have learnt is that one should never pronounce to be 100 per cent perfect. You can never be perfect in an ever-growing technology era. In Aadhaar, we are dealing with various technologies. Here the basic principle is you keep updating yourself to new developments and adapt them for better use towards your end goals.

I was working with the Department of IT in Maharashtra when I was asked to join UIDAI to look after the Aadhaar work in the Western region comprising five states and union territories. The need for Aadhaar was very clear. One-sixth of the world's population has

been living in India, and a large section of them did not have any identity. We all know that a credible identity is one of the biggest instruments of empowerment, development and delivery. We needed a unique identity for our people, and Aadhaar offered a solution.

As we progressed with Aadhaar enrolment, authentication and its applications, a lot of issues and challenges came up. Some were real; some of them were hypothetical and imaginary. Some needed immediate solutions; some required long-term elucidations. Concerns were expressed regarding various issues, including privacy, data security, data sharing,



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exclusion, misuses and so on. These concerns and criticism needed to be addressed.

**A**lso, when you take major policy decisions, you cannot wait forever to get a very accurate figure to arrive at an ideal solution. First of all, it is very difficult to get that because whatever you decide, there will always be questions. So, you need to arrive at an optimum solution and take it forward and make adjustments as you go along. That is what governance is all about. Otherwise, there will be no end to the analyses, and it will lead to a kind of paralysis – policy paralysis. Ultimately, governance will suffer. Therefore, the decision we took was to go ahead and keep improving.

We also required legal backing that finally came in the form of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016, which defines the use of this identity and also protects it against any such misuse that has been feared by some critics. I was actively involved in the drafting of the law. We consulted and held discussions with various ministries, departments, experts, and people inside and outside the government. When you are handling the world's largest project, which covers almost one-sixth of the world's population, you need to reach out to people and convince them that their

biometrics are in safe hands, all their data is secure and will not be misused. You have to convince people that Aadhaar has helped reduce subsidy misuse. It is their money which is saved and put to better use in their larger interest. But how to do it when you are working on a technology that is continuously evolving? It has been a major challenge, and we have been in the continuous process of reaching out to people with openness. It has made me learn yet another lesson that creating something good is not enough. Its potentials and prospective usage need to be disseminated among people to make them utilise it for their full benefit and as per their requirements.

**T**oday, we have the Aadhaar Act that has given Aadhaar a purpose. The Act is based on the premise that privacy is a fundamental right. You have legislative protection to safeguard your biometrics against misuse, preserve your privacy and protect your data. Any violation or misuse of biometrics is a serious criminal offence. The privacy protection provisions given by the Act are among the best compared to those in any other contemporary law. Overall, the lesson that I have learnt is to take criticism very positively. I see criticism as people's concern. If people are concerned, it is our responsibility to allay their fears. It is the only way we can improve our systems. **BT**