

**INTERVIEW: AJAY BHUSHAN PANDEY**, revenue secretary and CEO, UIDAI

# ‘More and more people are using Aadhaar voluntarily’

*Though the Supreme Court has ruled that Aadhaar can be used mandatorily only for subsidy disbursement and social services schemes while disallowing private agencies to use the unique number, because of a change in the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), more and more people are using Aadhaar voluntarily for things like opening of bank accounts, getting mobile numbers etc, says Ajay Bhushan Pandey, revenue secretary and CEO, UIDAI, in conversation with Kiran Rathee. Edited excerpts:*

**After the Supreme Court judgment, are you witnessing a slowdown in updates and new enrolments as Aadhaar is no longer mandatory?**

No. Aadhaar is still needed for subsidies and income tax returns. Even for services like opening of bank accounts, mutual

funds, etc, a customer can now use Aadhaar voluntarily for which necessary rules in PMLA have just been notified in the official gazette on August 19. People are also using Aadhaar on voluntary basis for obtaining mobile phone connections, passports and a range of services. There are over 124 crore Aadhaar enrolments and due to its convenience, more and more people are using it voluntarily.

**The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) no longer utilises private agencies for Aadhaar enrolment work. Can you share the number of locations where Aadhaar can be made?**

Aadhaar enrolment and update work is being carried out in around 11,000 bank branches and 12,000 post offices and a similar number of government premises. Also, UIDAI is opening

114 Aadhaar Seva Kendras (ASKs) in 53 cities. Four ASKs are operational by now and three more will become operative by next week. Of the four ASKs, one is at Delhi's Akshardham Metro station. The other three are at Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh, Agra in Uttar Pradesh and Hisar in Haryana. The fresh three would be at Delhi's Inderlok Metro station and in Bhopal and Chennai. ASKs would also be operational soon at Patna and Guwahati. Aadhaar enrolment through QR code is also available now. UIDAI has updated and enhanced its websites and portals, making it usable for mobile devices. Now, residents can avail all online Aadhaar services such as downloading, verifying, ordering reprint, updating address, etc using their mobile phone as well.

**There is so much curiosity**



**around Aadhaar data and its safety. There have been some reports on alleged misuse. Recently, in the NRC case, the SC said NRC data should be kept "as secure as Aadhaar data". What's your take?**

We have always maintained that Aadhaar's architecture and data have been very secure and safe. We explained the same to the SC when the case was being heard.

We take necessary safety and security measures very seriously using latest technology and maintain maximum vigil. We have evolved security standards and keep updating them to ensure that data remains safe and secure at all times. We also have to anticipate as to what could be the potential vulnerabilities and take steps in advance. There has not been a single breach from the biometric database. With the amendments in the Aadhaar Act, there is a backing of law as well as safeguard to prevent misuse and protect privacy and security. As far as the NRC is concerned, the Assam government has approached us to understand Aadhaar security standards so that they can apply the same for security of NRC data.

**What are the new security features in the Aadhaar card?**

The Aadhaar card now comes with a QR code. So, it won't be possible to forge the card. With the help of the code, it can be checked and verified instantly in an offline mode too. Even if your Aadhaar card does not have the new QR code, you can download Aadhaar card from our website which will have the new QR code. Download is free and around 4-5 lakh people are downloading it every day. UIDAI has also launched the Order Aadhaar reprint service.

**What's your stand on linking voter ID card with Aadhaar?**

Earlier, we had suggested to the Election Commission to allow voluntary use of Aadhaar for various voter services. Now, it is learnt through media reports that the EC has sent a proposal to the government for making appropriate changes in law. Use of Aadhaar will be beneficial for

voter services; however, Aadhaar is a proof of resident's identity and not citizenship. Certainly, Aadhaar by itself cannot be sufficient for obtaining a new voter ID. The voter registration is a two-step process — first identity is to be verified and then it has to be ascertained whether she is a citizen and entitled to vote. Aadhaar can be very convenient to people for the first step that is identity verification voluntarily. It will eliminate fake and duplicate voters.

**Will Common Service Centres (CSCs) be allowed to do Aadhaar enrolments?**

CSCs and other private agencies are not allowed to enrol new Aadhaar as it involves use of biometrics. After the Supreme Court judgement, since security of biometrics is very critical, so wherever there is a need to take biometrics, we

are taking secured services of banks, post offices and other government agencies. For services which do not involve capture of biometrics, CSCs have been facilitated to offer them.

**Aadhaar-enabled Payment System (AePS) is doing very well. Any comment?**

Yes, you will find that when we started AePS in FY13-14, there were about 28 lakh transactions a year — that was an average of about 2.3 lakh per month. Today, AePS has crossed more than 20 crore transactions per month. This July only, there have been more than 20.6 crore transactions, which is up by 11% from 18.5 crore in June. This shows that rural India is using AePS in a big way to avail banking facilities all over the country. We are moving towards economic digitalisation at a very good pace.