

SC ruling makes Aadhaar stronger. It's a win for India

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In the history of independent India, rarely has any single initiative of a government generated as much heated debate as Aadhaar. Critics alleged Aadhaar was unconstitutional as, according to them, it infringed on individual liberty, privacy, personal autonomy, freedom of choice, etc. While a section of critics perceived Aadhaar as a tool of denial and exclusion, some of them raised questions on the efficacy of Aadhaar technology.

While the debate engulfed practically every section of the society, it also brought a number of issues like privacy, data protection and digital security on the national agenda. The debate reminded us, on one hand, of the Luddite movement in Europe in the 19th century when mechanisation was opposed due to fears of job loss. On the other, it set the pace of New India, which is eager to transform into a data-rich digital society.

After six years of protracted litigation and 38 days

of marathon hearing, the Supreme Court has finally delivered a historic judgment in which it has held Aadhaar to be constitutional, albeit with some safeguards.

The Supreme Court has held that the architecture of Aadhaar does not create a surveillance state. It has further gone on to say that the Aadhaar Act meets the concept of limited government, good governance and constitutional trust. This is a victory of Indians, particularly the marginalised and underprivileged section of society.



BY INVITATION

The judgment will help Aadhaar, which has emerged as the world's first and largest public-owned biometric technology platform, to empower 132 crore people with biometric-based unique identity. It will also provide nationwide infrastructure to establish their identity online from anywhere and at any time, and enable them to receive their entitlements and exercise their rights. It is a matter of pride for every Indian that

we have been able to create such a mammoth and sophisticated identity platform in-house, on our own strength.

Aadhaar will make it possible for the government to design special welfare programmes. For example, use of Aadhaar in Ayushman Bharat ensures benefits are not siphoned away by non-deserving beneficiaries and the insurance premium and expenses stay within affordable limits.

The safeguards and restrictions imposed by the Supreme Court on Aadhaar usage by private entities without backing of a law are welcome and will go a long way in strengthening Aadhaar. A responsibility has also been cast on agencies involved in implementation of programmes to ensure no deserving beneficiary — whether senior citizens, people engaged in manual labour or belonging to underprivileged sections — is denied of any benefit or service for lack of Aadhaar or due to technical glitches.

The verdict on Aadhaar is a win for India and puts the country on the path of digital leadership of the world.

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