Nilekani calls for law to give people control over their own data

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Former UIDAI Chairman Nandan Nilekani has called for a new data protection law to ensure that individuals have access to the data they have shared with companies, foreign or domestic.

"This is a fundamental thing that we need as soon as possible," Nilekani said at the Delhi Economics Conclave 2017 here on Saturday.

He was addressing a session titled 'Data as the Oil of the 21st Century: India's Response'.

Nilekani said it was very important for India to have a strategic position around data. "This is not a technology problem, but a policy problem," he said. His remarks are significant as it comes at a time when India is contemplating enactment of a data protection law.

Stating that India needs a data empowerment law, Nilekani said any company having business operations in India should be obliged to give data back to the users (whose data was collected by such businesses).

Nilekani also clarified that the model proposed by him will not preclude the businesses from using the data.

"We have to build a strategy where we give the data power back to Indian people. The time is now because India is

Nandan Nilekani, former UIDAI Chairman

adopting digital at unprecedented pace", he said. Describing data as the oil of the 21st century, Nilekani said that India was seeing frenetic data growth that the country will become 'data rich from being data poor' in next three years.

He said there was a need to usher in the concept of "inverting the data".

"Instead of the data being owned by the company or the government, can the individual whose data it is, can he or she own their own data. Can we invert the data pyramid so that the data belongs to the individual," Nilekani said.

Nilekani said that the government should, through a new law, give people control over their own data.

Nilekani said the current period was 'an era of platforms'; over the last 15 years the thinking of businesses had been on "how to build platforms".

"The big thing about platforms is that they capture the data, which is a by-product of every interaction or every device and every person with that platform. Platforms are aggregating data and this has created huge business," he said.

Nilekani said that seven or eight companies of the world are becoming massive aggregators of data on their respective platforms. "The more data you have, you create better products, which will attract more users and with more users, you attract the more data you will create and this becomes a virtuous cycle," Nilekani said.