

Notion That Aadhaar Will Make India A Surveillance State Is Unfounded: UIDAI CEO

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Ajay Bhushan Pandey, CEO of Unique Identification Authority of India

Responding to Jean Dreze's **criticism** of Aadhaar and the assertion that the unique identification programme will transform India into a surveillance or "Orwellian" state in the *Indian Express*, the chief executive officer of Unique Identification Authority of India Ajay Bhushan Pandey has said the apprehensions are completely unfounded and do not hold water.

In the op-ed, Pandey says Aadhaar has empowered the people and enabled them to derive direct benefits from schemes introduced by the government, thus bringing transparency in governance. He also draws parallels between India's Aadhaar programme and identical systems used by other democracies.

Writing that Aadhaar empowers the people, not the state, Pandey draws attention of the critics to the fact that Aadhaar has yielded savings of about Rs 50,000 crore in the last two years. Besides noting that Aadhaar has been recommended by the Supreme Court to prevent leakages, fakes and duplicates, he states that a World Bank study called 'Digital Dividend 2016' has estimated that Aadhaar can potentially save Rs 72,000 crore every year by plugging leakages.

On the issue of collection of biometrics, Pandey writes that the practice is sanctioned by law in India, and people are required to provide these details for other works such as obtaining a drivers licence and a passport.

According to Pandey, Aadhaar has adopted the principle of privacy by design. The objective, he writes, is achieved through “minimal data, federated databases and optimal ignorance” which makes sure that no agency is able to profile individuals.

On the notion that the state may start connecting the silos of databases through Aadhaar, Pandey suggests that critics read the Aadhaar Act 2016 and accompanying regulations, which list measures relating to informed consent, collection limitation, use and purpose limitation and sharing restrictions. He says he hasn't seen another law in India which accords such importance to privacy.