

The 12-digit conundrum

Richa Mishra

Small Business Ideas

Best Investments for Retirement

Money Saving Tips



Authenticated Though doubts have been raised about the safety of fingerprint data, officials insist that the biometrics are secure **RAMESH SHARMA**

Even as the Centre plans to link as many as 500 schemes to Aadhaar, concerns over data safety are rising. Richa Mishra reports

The developments of last few weeks seem to have made real some of the worst fears about Aadhaar. In February, UIDAI (Unique Identification Authority of India) filed a police complaint alleging attempts of unauthorised authentication and impersonation of data related to Aadhaar. Since then, each and every machinery within the government has been trying to convince otherwise, that Aadhaar database is safe and secure, and that the data is protected both by the best available advanced technology as well as by the stringent legal provisions in the Aadhaar Act.

Not everyone is convinced. Critics say, biometrics only make the citizen transparent to the State, it does not make the State transparent to citizens. “We warned the government six years ago, but they ignored us,” said Sunil Abraham, Executive Director of Bengaluru-based research organisation, Centre for Internet and Society. According to him, the legislation implementing Aadhaar has almost no data protection guarantees for citizens. He also believes that by opting for biometrics instead of smart cards the government is using surveillance technology instead of e-governance technology.

“Biometrics is remote, covert and non-consensual identification technology. It is totally inappropriate for authentication. This has only increased the fragility of Indian cyber security,” he stresses.

However, officials associated with UIDAI dismiss these arguments. Collecting biometrics does not pose any threat to the right to privacy because people have been giving their thumb impression for ages, they say. “The biometrics are encrypted at source and kept safe and secure. Unauthorised sharing and leakage of the data does not happen. Fears related to collection of biometrics are not justified,” an official at the helm of affairs said. He requested anonymity.

“However, as and when we find that some suspicious activity or misuse is happening, we will strike at the very beginning itself. UIDAI has full authentication regulation under the Aadhaar Act that has to be followed. It specifies in what manner authorities can use Aadhaar,” the official pointed out.

On the ground

Even as the debate over data security rages, the *aam aadmi* seem to be little perturbed about the alleged risks involved. For Padmini, who works as a domestic help in East Delhi and is the sole bread earner for her family of four, the Aadhaar card meant access to all government benefits.

“*Koi farak nahi padta, kaun dekhta hai mera card. Mujhko LPG cylinder ka paisa bank mein mil jata hai,*” (It doesn’t matter to me who sees my card. The subsidy for LPG gets transferred to my account) she says. “*Baccho ke school admission mein bhi zaroorat pada,*” (I needed it to get my children’s admission in school), she added. Sukh, a cab driver also uses it to get the LPG subsidy.

While everyone *BusinessLine* talked to were convinced that Aadhaar was not a citizenship card, the more aware ones saw it as a door that gave access to government schemes.

While they had a point, government officials are careful to make it clear that Aadhaar is not mandatory. But the popular perception increasingly points to the opposite view, especially after it emerged that Aadhaar might be made mandatory for children to receive midday meals at schools.

Another senior government official said, "Aadhaar is not mandatory under any welfare scheme of the government and no one is being deprived of a service or benefit for the want of Aadhaar...it's required for availing a service/subsidy/benefit that accrues through the Consolidated Fund of India." He added that those who do not have the 12-digit number would be provided with the facility to enrol by the Requiring Agency. "And till the time Aadhaar is assigned, alternative IDs would be allowed," he said.

If a school which has to get Aadhaar enrolment done for its students puts the Aadhaar numbers of its students on its site and the same is used by someone, you can't blame us, the official argues. Then, who is accountable?

Pushing for Aadhaar, the UIDAI officials cite the example of Kerala's Department of General Education (DGE), which has integrated Aadhaar with the student databases and has thereby optimised the teacher-student ratio and identified the schools with excess teachers. In a single academic year, 3,892 excess teacher posts were identified.

"Due to this exercise, no new posts have been sanctioned for the last two years, resulting in notional savings of ₹540 crore per annum," said a UIDAI official. After student enrolment in the state was linked to Aadhaar since 2012-2013, the head count of pupils have fallen by 5 lakh. Similar trends have been reported in Haryana. Critics have also pointed out the possible security risk in using AadhaarPay, the Android-based app. Merchants can download the app in their phone and install a fingerprint scanner linked to the phone. Customers with Aadhaar numbers can use their fingerprints (like the secret PIN in case of debit cards) to do a transaction. While doubts have been raised about the safety of fingerprint data, officials in the know blame the controversy on the "card lobbies."

"Thirty crore Indians have no mobiles. They find it difficult to handle password, pin or card, this is where AadhaarPay will come handy," the official added. "They don't need a smart phone or feature phone. They don't need a debit card.

"Today more than 112 crore people have the Aadhaar card. Approximately, 52.95 crore people have linked their Aadhaar numbers to their bank accounts. We already have a system of Aadhaar authentication in place," the official added.

Government officials are at pain to point out the larger benefits of Aadhaar, including savings of more than ₹49,000 crore by plugging leakages in government schemes like PDS. Government plans to increase the number of welfare schemes linked to Aadhaar from 36 to over 500. While the intent is good, concerns remain.


(This article was published on March 13, 2017)

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 01. SMALL BUSINESS IDEAS | 07. TOP 10 COLLEGE MAJORS |
| 02. BEST INVESTMENTS FOR RETIREMENT | 08. BEST FREE CHECKING ACCOUNT |
| 03. MONEY SAVING TIPS | 09. BEST TRADE SCHOOLS |
| 04. LIFE INSURANCE FOR SENIORS | 10. LATEST PRESIDENTIAL POLLS |
| 05. BEST REWARDS CREDIT CARDS | 11. LUXURY CARS |
| 06. FEDERAL EDUCATION LOANS | 12. DOWNLOAD MOVIES ONLINE |



Small Business Ideas

Printable version | Mar 16, 2017 1:06:58 PM | <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/specials/india-file/aadhaar-the-12digit-conundrum/article9582271.ece> © The Hindu Business Line



3 Easy Steps:

1. Click "Start Download"
2. Download on our website
3. Test Your Internet Speed

getspeedtester.com 