

COMMENT

UID Business

THE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN TO issue a Unique Identification Number (UID) to every Indian citizen is in reality a grand ploy to promulgate emergency by the backdoor. It is claimed that this UID Number "scheme shall ensure that various development deliveries reach the poor and needy in time, shall enable better monitoring and help plug leakages". But this claim by Nandan Manohar Nilekani, Chairperson of Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), who enjoys in the rank of Cabinet Minister, is suspect.

Governments that cannot prevent leakage of development deliverables are collecting the data of all the residents of India under an assumption that it will not be leaked. They are misleading the people.

It is becoming clearer that UID Number scheme is a naked declaration of war on civil liberties and natural resources like land.

While Shri Nilekani, whose brain child is UID business, is mutilating the rights of citizens and right to information, PDS, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act etc through his marketing gimmicks about the wonders of UID Number scheme, the fact is that even Mahatma Gandhi opposed a law similar to the enactment of UID Number as a Black Act in South Africa from 1906 to 1914 saying, "...I have never known legislation of this nature being directed against free men in any part of the world. I know that indentured Indians in Natal are subject to a drastic system of passes, but these poor fellows can hardly be classed as free men" and "...giving of finger prints, required by the Ordinance, was quite a novelty in South Africa. With a view to seeing some literature on the subject, I read a volume on finger impressions by Mr Henry, a police officer, from which I gathered that finger prints were required by law only from criminals."

In August 1906 the Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance became law in the Transvaal. Any Indian who did not register by a certain date would no longer be allowed to stay in the Transvaal. This law stated that every Indian man, woman or child older than 8 years must register with a government official called the registrar of Asiatics. This registrar was to also take the fingerprints of the people he registered and issue them with registration certificates, which they had to show to any policeman who asked to see them. Notably, UID scheme too is based on biometric data like finger prints and iris scan.

UIDAI was set-up via a GoI notification as an attached office of the Planning Commission without any discussion or debate in the Parliament or civil society. In the year and a half of its inception, the Authority has signed MoUs with virtually all states and UTs, LIC, Petroleum Ministry and many banks. In July, the Authority circulated the draft NIA Bill (to achieve statutory status); the window for public feedback was two weeks. Despite widespread feedback and calls for making all feedback public, the Authority has not made feedback available. Further in direct contravention to the process of public feedback, the NIA Bill was listed for introduction in the Lok Sabha 2010 monsoon session.

National IDs have been abandoned in the US, Australia and the newly-elected British government. The reasons have predominantly been: costs and privacy. If it is too expensive for the US with a population of 308 million, and the UK with 61 million people, and Australia with 21 million people, it is being asked why India thinks it can prioritise its spending in this direction. In the UK, the Home Secretary explained that they were abandoning the project because it would otherwise be 'intrusive bullying' by the state, and that the government intended to be the 'servant' of the people, and not their 'master'. Is there a lesson in it for India?

For one thing UDI Number Scheme has opened huge business potential for the people like Nilekanis. □□□