

Exporting AADHAR

What is the issue?

 $n\n$

The enthusiasm with which government agencies and businesses have embraced Aadhaar should prompt India's foreign policy planners to deploy it abroad.

 $n\n$

Aadhar in Foreign Policy:

 $n\n$

\n

• Executed properly, Aadhaar could become a central pillar of India's "neighbourhood first" policy, culminating in the creation of a unique digital South Asian identity.

\n

- A single, region-wide platform to authenticate residents of South Asia could integrate its markets, bring communities closer and allow governments to offer a wider range of governance services.
- The demand for identity-driven governance in South Asia is indisputable, and Aadhaar could be Indian foreign policy's biggest asset to promote economic and political convergence in the region.

 $n\n$

What is the need of digital identity in abroad?

 $n\n$

\n

 South Asian governments, long content to gather data through traditional means such as censuses, are struggling to capture dynamic trends in their population.

\n

• Current databases shine no light on urban mobility, data consumption patterns, or quality of life, because these are metrics that need integrated data sets and powerful analytical tools.

\n

• To capture "multi-dimensional" data, India's neighbours have moved towards digital identity schemes.

- The need for unique IDs is also acute because post-conflict societies in South Asia have not fully rehabilitated excluded minorities or former combatants.
- In comparison to politically fraught changes for instance, the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution for the devolution of powers, or federalist reforms in Nepal — digital identity schemes are easier to implement, can strengthen local governments and support the financial inclusion of marginalised sections.

 $n\n$

Whether the neighbours have their own system?

 $n\n$

\n

- Already, South Asian economies are in varying stages of conceiving or implementing their own "national identity" schemes.
- Pakistan has the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), that for two decades has collected biometric information.
- In 2013, NADRA even won an international contract to create Sri Lanka's digital national identity scheme, but that project appears to have stalled.
- Nepal, meanwhile, intends to roll out biometrics-driven "national ID cards" to its citizens soon.
- The Election Commission in Bangladesh began issuing such cards last year.

 $n\n$

Where does India can help?

 $n\n$

\n

- Beyond collecting biometric data, however, South Asian governments have not been able to create digital ID-enabled applications.
- This is what Aadhaar has mastered, making it a very valuable foreign policy export. Its open application programming interface (API) layers — known as

"India Stack" — set Aadhaar apart from other biometric ID programmes.

• India Stack APIs, which include the Unified Payment Interface (UPI) and Aadhaar e-KYC, allow applications to be built atop them (for example, the Bharat Interface for Money or BHIM app) and enable identity-driven transactions.

۱n

• Such platforms will be invaluable to an economy working to integrate its communities.

\n

• In Bangladesh, digital IDs could track loans made by multiple microfinance institutions to the same borrower and help check rural debt.

 $n\n$

What are the Strategic benefits?

 $n\n$

\n

- The digital networks for much of South Asia are likely to be supplied by Chinese companies over the next decade.
- Telecom pipes and towers built by China will carry the Internet to the user, but innovation in Asia's digital economies will happen at the top the "app layer".

\n

- Aadhaar-like platforms catalyse innovation by tailoring Big Data for governments and businesses alike.
- The political and economic leverage India will accrue as a result of enabling such entrepreneurship will surpass fixed investments by China.
- There is another strategic reason for India to export the Aadhaar platform.
- Once a critical mass of Aadhaar-enabled applications has been created, interoperability standards for the digital ecosystem will be determined by the Unique ID programme.
- App developers, handheld manufacturers, and even Internet Service Providers will have to work around Aadhaar's encryption standards and data protection guidelines.
- Such a scenario will be India's best response to concerns that China will pump its infrastructure, and in the words of Foreign Secretary S.

 $n\n$

 $n\n$

Source: The Hindu

\n

