

FROM THE EDITOR

# No invasion of our privacy, please

It's been a while now since we have been talking about Aadhaar. Wikipedia defines Aadhaar as a 12-digit unique identity number issued to all Indian residents based on their biometric and demographic data. How hard we have had to toil to get our Aadhaar card! We know that too well, don't we? There are so many stories, it would take a book recounting.

Aadhaar has been spoken about so much in recent times that *Oxford Dictionaries* chose Aadhaar as the Hindi word of 2017. Supreme Court judge D.Y. Chandrachud said he would better want to be known as a "nationalist judge" rather than an "Aadhaar judge" (the judge was irked when a senior lawyer, while making submissions on behalf of one of the petitioners against Aadhaar, used the term "Aadhaar judges").

Aadhaar has been the subject of several rulings by the Supreme Court of India. One of the early orders stated that "no person should suffer for not getting Aadhaar". The question arose whether Aadhaar was voluntary or mandatory. The apex court said that the government could not deny a service to a resident who did not possess Aadhaar, as it was voluntary and not mandatory.

Then arose more pertinent questions – will the Aadhaar card affect the privacy of an individual, will it intrude into our lives, compromise our privacy? Sakuntala Narasimhan's lead piece in this issue addresses these questions (of not just Aadhaar) – about harassment and our privacy being lost so easily to all and sundry. These questions are especially important in today's context when

freedom and expression seem to matter so much more than ever before.

The Unique Identity Authority of India (UIDAI) stresses that Aadhaar is an identification tool, not a profiling one. However, the confusion in the common person's mind continues. To compound matters, there have been reports in the media about how not having an Aadhaar card can affect your life. A pregnant woman in Jaunpur District in Uttar Pradesh, for instance, was forced to deliver a baby at the gate of a medical centre after she was allegedly turned away by doctors for not having a bank account or Aadhaar card, a report stated. A *Times of India* report said many people living in various old age homes across Uttar Pradesh had been denied pension benefits in the absence of Aadhaar cards.

The latest step taken by UIDAI to increase Aadhaar security is to introduce face recognition. The measure, which is likely to be implemented by July this year, will be used in 'fusion' with existing modes such as fingerprints, iris recognition and one-time password (OTP) used for authentication. Will this be enough to quell fears of the ordinary citizen? We are all happy to comply with rules and requirements as long as our privacy is not compromised in any manner. Is there a way the government can guarantee that? *The Economic Times* says the privacy debate will be settled once and for all and that 2018 is likely to be "Aadhaar's breakout year", whatever that means. Well, we can only wait and hope that all ends well.

There is some focus on education in this issue. Veteran editor and

journalist S. Muthiah turns the spotlight on several problems that bedevil education in India. He says the majority of students from state syllabus schools are found unemployable by organisations around the country. If we are to turn out employable college graduates, we have to produce better high school graduates, he says. This means that the graduates have to be focused not only on Maths and the Sciences (and Accountancy, if from the Commerce stream) but must be all-round students as knowledgeable in the Humanities as they are presumed to be in Maths, Physics and Chemistry/Biology. Also, English language for teachers as well as students must be an area of strong focus, whatever be the medium of instruction in the school.

I received an article from a schoolteacher conveying the message that there is so much more to life than competition and success in an examination. How true! Wish more parents and teachers thought like her. What do students think about school education?

An essay competition was held in Chennai to get students to indicate their views on the present state of school education in Tamil Nadu and provide suggestions for improvement. An article here that lists out the observations made by students makes for interesting reading.

Here's wishing all of you a Very Happy New Year!

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