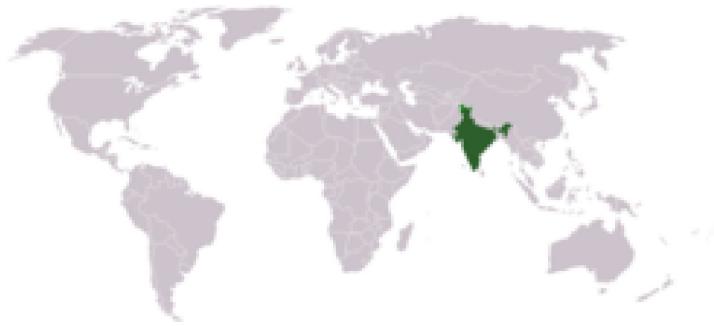


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Unique project for a billion people in India !

By **Raju Rao**

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A project covering a billion people! The Unique ID project announced by the Government of India promises to be just that. An ambitious venture, it is a follow up of an existing project MNIC or Multipurpose National Identity Card - and started by the previous BJP led government. After the recent election the Congress led government has given a renewed impetus to it by appointing Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani who will step down from the board of Infosys Technologies, of which he is co-chairman, on July 9 to take over as chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI).



Nandan Nilekani

Nilekani wrote a book last year, *Imagining India: Ideas for the New Century*. The book made a convincing case for using technology to tackle India's developmental problems. A citizens' ID project was one of his pet subjects in the book. In his new job, he will have the rank of a cabinet minister, giving him significant autonomy within the government.

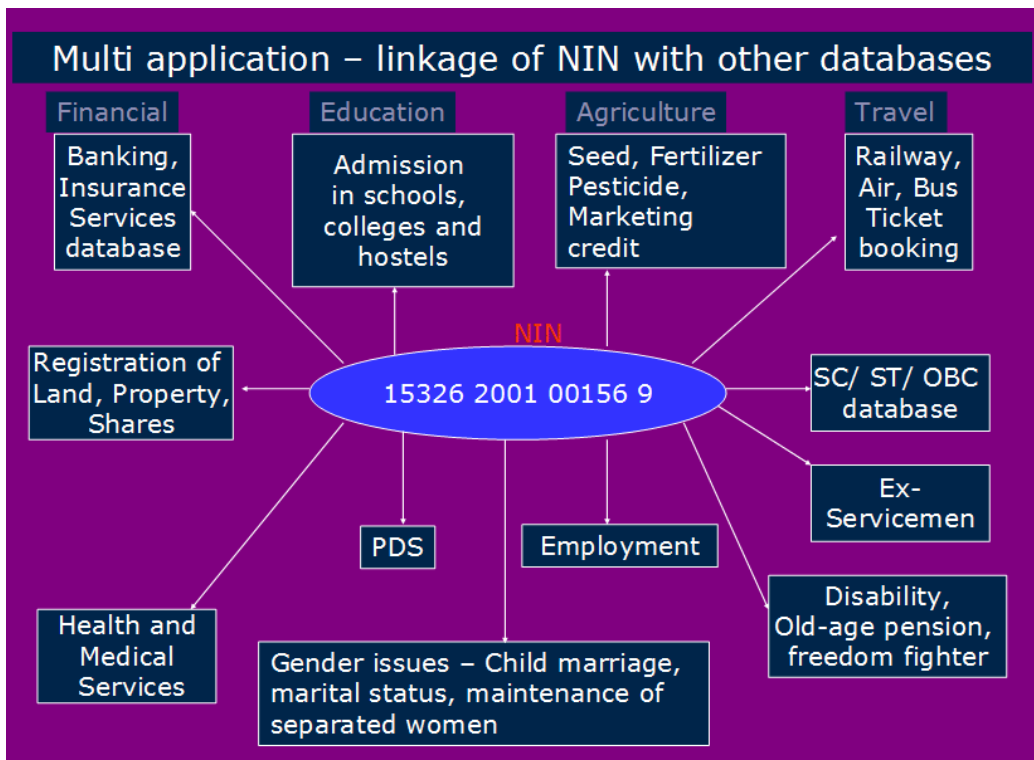
The UIDAI provides a permanent ID card with a unique number, photograph and biometric data to every citizen of the country. It will also lay down plans and policies to implement the Unique Identity (UID) card scheme, and own and operate the UID database as well.



At left: a prototype of the card devised by the MNIC project.

The early motive behind the project was to strengthen national security by checking illegal immigration. The project acquired urgency after last year's Mumbai attack. But now the scope of the project has gone beyond national security.

The cards will serve as a means to access a variety of government-related activities. For instance, the UID numbers and the database will be linked to agencies such as the Election Commission of India and the Income Tax Department, which deal with the general public and issue special number cards such as voters photo identity cards in the case of ECI and PAN Cards in the case of IT Departments.



Government proposal for linking databases through the UID

In addition, it will be used for providing services under government schemes such as the public distribution system, and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for families living below the poverty line. It will also be used for delivering financial and other assistance to the needy.

The identity card has a 16 KB microprocessor chip. It has been secured against tampering and cloning. The card has been designed according to the specifications laid out in ISO/IEC 7816 and Smart Card Operating System for Transport Applications (SCOSTA).

The project has been in the making for over six years. Last year under a pilot project the government issued 1.2 million identity cards in 13 districts of 12 states and one Union Territory. The first set of cards is expected to be issued in 12-18 months. It may take three years for the project to complete. Varying estimates are being quoted for the cost of the entire project.

The project comes with all the technological and management challenges as it requires immense coordination between central and state governments and within them among various departments.

Most of the major Indian IT companies like Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Wipro and Infosys are tipped to bid for this project.

For project management professionals this is an interesting case-study because its size and complexity and raises some questions !

- **What is the likely cost of the project ?** - varying estimates are being mentioned at this time and it will be a few months before a clear idea is evolved in relation to the scope of work .- Probably one of the first jobs to be taken up by the new Chairman of UIDAI
- **How will one establish and justify the costs involved in relation to benefits ?**
- **Will the government take the help of professional standards and methodology or it will go the adhoc way as many other government projects ?**
- **What type of standards , processes and tools will be used by the government to make this initiative successful ?** e.g will they use modern concepts in **Program management , Earned Value management** ...this question is relevant considering the fact that the government is yet to make use of these processes in a significant way .
- **How will it the UIDAI handle issues of privacy and misuse ?**

- **How will Nandan Nilekani (who comes from the private sector) manage the bureaucracy of the government ?...** with the politicians and the vested interests ? This will be interesting to watch since in many earlier cases well known and established professionals from non government and political arena have failed and have been forced to return to their earlier professions .

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Mr. Rao is also principal consultant for Xtraplus Solutions, a PM consulting and training company based in Chennai. Mr. Rao has a B.Tech degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Madras, India; a Diploma in Management from the University of Bombay; an Advanced PM certificate from Stanford University; and a certificate from IIM Calcutta. Mr. Rao has over 30 years' experience in engineering, process and project management and has been an active member of PMI for several years. He is currently a member of PMI's OPM3 2008 Update project, and was a team member for development of several recent PMI standards. A founding member and vice president for the PMI Chennai Chapter, Raju is also a member of the PMI Pharmaceutical SIG, member and Chair of the Advisory Committee for the South India chapter of AACE International, and founder of the Indian Project Management Forum. Raju Rao lives in Chennai, India and can be contacted at rao.raju@gmail.com. Additional information about Mr. Rao can be found at <http://www.pmforum.org/pm%20forum%20team/index.htm#5>.