

Aadhaar unreliable in 'hot, humid' India: rating agency

Amid India's digital infra push, Moody's says the world's largest digital ID programme often denies service to users; it questions reliability of biometric technology, warns of privacy and security risks

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

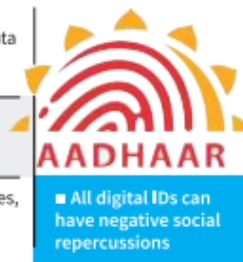
Global rating major Moody's Investors Service has flagged concerns about security and privacy vulnerabilities in centralised identification systems such as India's Aadhaar programme. The unique ID system often results in "service denials", and using biometric technologies in humid conditions is unreliable, it noted.

The Aadhaar system enables access to public and private services, with verification through fingerprint or iris scans and alternatives such as one-time passcodes (OTPs). However, it "faces hurdles, including the burden of establishing authorization and concerns about biometric reliability", Moody's said.

Low rating

Moody's Investors Service has cautioned against centralised digital ID systems such as Aadhaar as they pose security and privacy vulnerabilities. Here are a few warnings from the firm which offers credit ratings, research, and risk analysis:

- A single entity controlling users' ID credentials can dispose of user data for internal or third-party profiling purposes
- Aadhaar system faces hurdles, including the burden of establishing authorisation
- Reliability of biometric technologies, especially for manual labourers, in hot, humid climates is questionable



"The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) administers Aadhaar, aiming to integrate marginalized groups and expand welfare benefits access... The system often results in service denials, and the reliability of biometric technologies, especially for ma-

nual laborers in hot, humid climates, is questionable," it stressed.

The rating agency's remarks assume significance in view of the government's adoption of Aadhaar for routing direct benefit transfers to beneficiaries of official wel-

fare schemes, and in particular, the diktat to mandate Aadhaar-based payments for labourers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

Last month, the government extended its deadline for switching to a Aadhaar-based payment system (ABPS) for MGNREGS beneficiaries for the fifth time, pushing it to December 31 this year.

In a report on "Decentralized finance and digital assets" issued on Saturday, Moody's acknowledged Aadhaar as "the world's largest digital ID program" that assigns unique numbers to over 1.2 billion Indian residents.

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'Aadhaar unreliable in hot, humid India'

The rating agency termed Aadhaar, and a new crypto-based digital identity token called Worldline, as two digital ID systems in the world that stand out due to their scale and extent of innovation. However, Moody's also said that they have "drawn scrutiny, especially concerning privacy and security". Stressing that ID systems like Aadhaar lead to the concentration of sensitive information with specific entities and increase the risks of data breaches, Moody's made a pitch for decentralised ID (DID) systems such as digital wallets, based on blockchain capabilities that give users more control of their private data and can reduce online fraud.

Decentralised systems

"In recent years, the spotlight has shifted toward DID as a strategic response to the security and privacy vulnerabilities posed by centralized ID systems like Aadhaar," the agency noted, citing successful programs in Catalonia, Azerbaijan and Estonia that have used blockchain-based systems to issue digital identities.

"Estonia, known for its fully digitalized public services, has embraced SSI [Self-Sovereign Identity] to grant citizens complete control over their digital identities," it pointed out.

"In a centralized system, a single entity such as a bank, social media platform or government electoral roll controls and manages a user's identifying credentials and their access to online resources. That entity can dispose of the user's identity data – name, address and Social Security number, for example – for internal or third-party profiling purposes," the report averred, stating that such systems offer the least personal data control to users.

'Carnelian beads at Keeladi reaffirm trade links with territories in western India'

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

+ Excavation in Keeladi has yielded two carnelian beads, reaffirming Tamil country's trade links with the western part of India such as Maharashtra and Gujarat.

"We found them inside the urn while exposing it," said R. Sivananandam, Deputy Director of the Department of Archaeology. The urn was discovered at a burial site in Konthagai.

"Last year, we unearthed 74 carnelian beads. Carnelian stones are normally found in Gujarat and Maharashtra, and beads made of it proves the trade link between Tamil



Vital evidence: The two carnelian beads that were found in Konthagai. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

country and the western part of India," he explained.

The beads were traced at a depth of 17.5 cm and 20

cm respectively. One bead was found etched with a wavy pattern and lines. The bead is 1.4 cm long and 2 cm wide.

Defence Board discusses plan for second *Vikrant*-like carrier

The estimated cost of the project is ₹40,000 crore; it could see some modifications and upgrades to the design of *Vikrant*; the proposal is yet to be cleared by DPB; once okayed, it will be sent for final approval by Defence Acquisition Council

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

The Defence Procurement Board (DPB) last week discussed the Navy's proposal for acquiring a second *Vikrant*-like aircraft carrier, according to defence sources. However, the DPB is yet to clear the proposal. Only after that will the proposal be put for final approval by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), headed by the Defence Minister, a source said.

The DPB, which met last Friday, discussed the issue. The discussions are expected to continue in the next meeting, the source said.

The project, estimated to cost around ₹40,000 crore, will see some modifications and upgrades to the design of the country's first Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC) *INS Vikrant*, commissioned in September 2022, and will also be manufactured by Cochin Shipyard Ltd. (CSL), another source stated.

The 262-metre-long, 62-metre-wide *INS Vikrant*, displacing 44,800 tonnes,



Huge vessel: The *INS Vikrant* is powered by four General Electric LM2500 engines which give it a maximum speed of 28 knots and an endurance of 7,500 nautical miles. PTI

is powered by four General Electric LM2500 engines, which give it a maximum speed of 28 knots and an endurance of 7,500 nautical miles. The ship uses an aircraft-operation mode known as Short Take Off But Arrested Recovery (STOBAR) for which it is equipped with a ski-jump for launching aircraft, and a set of three "arrestor wires" for their recovery onboard.

In addition, the Navy al-

so operates the 44,500-tonne carrier *INS Vikramaditya*, which also employs the STOBAR mechanism, procured from Russia under a \$2.3-billion deal and inducted in November 2013.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Aero India airshow in Bengaluru in February, Navy chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar had said that the Navy was finalising plans for a repeat order of a *Vikrant*-sized carrier, In-

digenuous Aircraft Carrier-2 (IAC-2), with some modifications. Given the long timelines, it may be inducted "close to the time *INS Vikramaditya* leaves service effectively becoming its replacement", he said, adding that the Navy would continue to study the need for a larger and more capable carrier.

The Navy, which has for long based its force structure centred on three carriers, had envisaged an

IAC-2 with a displacement of 65,000 tonnes and a Catapult Assisted Take Off But Arrested Recovery (CATOBAR) system for launching aircraft as well as full-electric propulsion.

Higher cost

However, a much bigger carrier with newer technologies would mean much higher cost and build time due to which the Navy has settled for a repeat of a *Vikrant*-sized carrier. The keel of *Vikrant* was laid in 2009. It was launched into water in 2013 and commissioned in 2022. With the experience gained from that, CSL officials had stated that a repeat order can be executed in seven to eight years.

In the past, the Standing Committee on Defence had noted that three aircraft carriers were an "unavoidable requirement" to meet any eventualities and stated that taking into account the long coastline and hostile adversities on both sides of Indian peninsula, an aircraft carrier on both sides of coast was "quintessential" to uphold operational requirements.

Nine new Vande Bharat trains to link religious, tourist sites

After obtaining passenger feedback, new trains have been provided better amenities; PM says popularity of Vande Bharat trains is on the rise

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said it was unfortunate that not much attention was given earlier to modernising the Railways, and said his government was working for its transformation. Mr. Modi made the remarks by videoconferencing before flagging off nine Vande Bharat trains connecting religious and tourist destinations across 11 States.

He said the speed and scale of infrastructure development was matching the aspirations of 140 crore Indians. The popularity of Vande Bharat trains was constantly rising and over 1.11 crore passengers had already travelled on them.

The Prime Minister noted that 25 Vande Bharat trains were running and now nine more had been added. The day was not far when these trains would connect all parts of the country.

"Indian Railways is the most trusted co-passenger of India's poor and middle-class people. The number of people who travel on the railways in one day is more than the population of many countries," he said.

The new Vande Bharat trains flagged off by Mr.



Faster connections: The new Kacheguda-to-Yeshwantpur Vande Bharat Express in Hyderabad on Sunday. G. RAMAKRISHNA

Modi will run between Udaipur-Jaipur; Jamnagar-Ahmedabad; Patna-Howrah; Ranchi-Howrah; Rourkela-Bhubaneswar-Puri; Hyderabad-Bengaluru; Vijayawada-Chennai (via Renigunta); Tirunelveli-Madurai-Chennai; and Kasargod-Thiruvananthapuram.

These trains, equipped with advanced safety features, including Kavach, will be a key step towards providing modern, speedy and comfortable means of travel to common people, professionals, businessmen, student community and tourists, according to an official statement.

The new trains have a host of features incorporated after passenger feedback. The seat recline angle has been raised from 17.31 degrees to 19.37 de-

grees, cushioning optimised and the colour of the seat in the executive class changed from red to blue. The changes also include improved accessibility of mobile charging points under the seats, extended footrest and magazine bags for executive class coach-end seats also.

The new features include provision for securing points for wheel chairs. The new train sets have improved air-tightness for better air conditioning with insulation over panels, better roller-blind fabric with more tear strength with less transparency and smooth touch controls for luggage rack lights. The trains have improved aerosol-based fire detection and suppression system.

How the rising influence of ethnic Indians causes frictions in India-Canada ties

Indian diplomats have the obligation to highlight the damage to bilateral ties when Canadian politicians support separatism in India. These diplomatic activities cannot be construed as interference in Canada's internal affairs

Vivek Katju

On September 19, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated that his government is investigating possible links between the Indian government and the assassination of Khalistan Tiger Force chief Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada. This statement has escalated tensions between India and Canada with trade talks paused and diplomats fired. In this article, dated June 14, 2023, Vivek Katju talks about the tensions between the two nations on account of the ethnic Indian population in Canada.

During a pro-Khalistani parade on June 4 in Brampton, Canada, there was a tableau that depicted a lady clad in a white sari, who was bloodied, with two soldiers training their guns on her. The board behind her read, "Revenge of attack on Shri Darbar Sahib". The side of the float carried the words, "Never forget 1984". Clearly, the tableau figures depicted were that of India's former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her assassins.

The Indian response

In a media conference on June 8, to commemorate nine years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration, the External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, was asked about the Brampton tableau. He chose not to refer directly to the offensive float though he indirectly indicated that it was "egregious". Instead, he focused, as he put it, on the "bigger" issue – the space Canada gives "to separatists, to extremists, to people who advocate violence." He added, "... and I think it's not good for the relationship and I think

it's not good for Canada." Mr. Jaishankar did well to speak out, openly and forcefully, on Canada's hypocritical approaches on human rights issues and its decades long disdain for the territorial integrity of India.

This stated, it is remarkable that Mr. Jaishankar could not get himself around to take the name of Indira Gandhi. The glorification of "revenge" by anyone for the assassination of an Indian Prime Minister is an issue beyond party politics or personal pique for it concerns the dignity of the nation. This is so even if a Prime Minister took actions, like Indira Gandhi did in June 1984, that were controversial and the Congress party's role in the anti-Sikh 1984 riots was condemnable. Ironically, while Mr. Jaishankar did not name Indira Gandhi, the Canadian High Commissioner to India Cameron Mackay did. He tweeted, "I am appalled by reports of an event in Canada that celebrated the assassination of late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi." Indeed, the country's positions would be better and more credibly articulated if the able, popular and powerful politician that Mr. Jaishankar has become does not completely obscure his former avatar of a distinguished diplomat.

Diaspora and foreign policy

The ethnic Indian community, including the Sikhs, plays an important role in Canada's public life. There are currently some ethnic Indians in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's cabinet. At the press conference, Mr. Jaishankar mentioned Canada's indulgence of Khalistani elements (he did not use the word, but that is clearly what he had in mind) and aptly attributed it to 'vote bank' politics. It

is the ethnic Indian, and, in this case, not restricted to a Khalistani-vote bank that had led Mr. Trudeau to comment on the farmers' agitation which was a purely domestic Indian issue. India naturally found Mr. Trudeau's remarks unacceptable.

Mr. Jaishankar's comments on Canadian attitudes to ethnic Indians provide an occasion to consider the Indian political class's approaches towards the diaspora which has gained political, financial and professional success in many countries. It has become a pillar of foreign policy, especially of the present dispensation which has also used Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity with a vast section of the diaspora to impress domestic public opinion. Also, wherever the diaspora is politically important, local politicians want to use Mr. Modi's popularity for their political purposes. The latest illustration of this phenomena was Mr. Modi's diaspora rally during his recent visit to Australia which was attended by Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

Following Mr. Modi's example, other Indian political players will also now play diaspora politics. The Congress's Rahul Gandhi's recent visit to the United States is a case in point. Thus, the tradition that Indian domestic politics will not be taken beyond the shores of India no longer holds.

Another significant issue which Mr. Jaishankar addressed during the media briefing related to the remarks of Jody Thomas, Canada's National Security and Intelligence Adviser. Speaking at a conference organised by the Canada Global Affairs Institute on June 2, Ms.

Thomas said, "When I talk about foreign interference and economic security, I'm now talking of a number of state actors and non-state proxies. This includes Russia, Iran, India." That said, the actor that comes up most on these issues, and it is no surprise to anybody, is China. In response Mr. Jaishankar used the Hindi language phrase, "Uta Chor Kotwal ko daten (The thief scolds the police)". He rightly dismissed Ms. Thomas' comment outright. India cannot be accused of seeking to influence Canadian domestic affairs if its diplomats openly interact with the Indian diaspora there. Indian diplomats have the obligation to point to the diaspora and others the harmful impact on bilateral ties when Canadian politicians support separatism in India. These diplomatic activities cannot be construed as interference in Canada's internal affairs.

Canadian politics

The harsh reality of the current Canadian political situation is that Mr. Trudeau is critically dependent on the New Democratic Party (NDP) for his government's survival and Jagmeet Singh, the NDP leader, is a committed Khalistan sympathiser.

He had asked Mr. Trudeau to intervene in the events in Punjab surrounding radical preacher Amritpal Singh's activities. Coming from a Canadian government ally, this was naturally unacceptable to India.

Bilateral ties are passing through difficult times but cooperation in many areas continues. One eye-catching one is the Cannabis medicine project.

Vivek Katju is a retired Indian Foreign Service officer