

Nilekani: Need law to foil data colonisation

Citizens should have the right to demand access to their digital footprint and data from tech giants as well as the government, "Aadhaar man" Nandan Nilekani said on Saturday, reports **Pankaj Doval**.

Speaking at the Delhi Economics Conclave, Nilekani said the concentration of data in the hands of a few tech companies — multinational or domestic — and also the various governments should be checked in order to ensure that privacy is maintained and competition and innovation is not stifled.

He said that there should be a law that ends "data colonisation", adding, "Most of your data is outside, and you have no control over its usage. Privacy is another dimension..." **P 10**

Need a law that ends data colonisation, says Nilekani

'Citizens Should Have Right Over Digital Footprint'

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New Delhi: Citizens should have a right to demand access to and own their digital footprint and data from tech giants as well as the government and there should be a law that ends "data colonisation", Aadhaar man Nandan Nilekani said on Saturday.

Nilekani, speaking at the Delhi Economics Conclave, said that concentration of data in the hands of a few tech companies — multi-national or domestic — and also the various governments should be checked in order to ensure that privacy is maintained and competition and innovation is not stifled.

The onslaught of the internet and growing engage-

ment on smartphones has resulted in a "tsunami of data" as individuals are connected to each other and also to their devices and the cloud.

"The billions of devices, smartphones, and sensors are all creating a digital footprint," Nilekani said, as he gave examples of the growing global engagement on platforms such as Facebook, Google and its Android operating system, Apple's iOS, Amazon, Netflix and Chinese giants such as Baidu and Alibaba.

"They solve problems, but also capture and claim ownership of data... there are 7-8 companies in the world which are becoming massive aggregators of data. This goes against the classic issues of

competition and anti-trust."

He said monopolies have been created and it has become challenging for new companies to enter. "Most of your data is outside, and you have no control over its usage. Privacy is another dimension and so is national security."

On the government's side, he said digital platforms and infrastructure such as Aadhaar, UPI, BHIM, GSTN (GST Network) and Fastag also collect data about individuals and businesses.

Nilekani asked whether individuals and small enterprises should be the owners of the data that they generate, instead of it being "used" by companies or governments. "The individual can use the data to

empower himself. You take your data from various platforms and use that to get benefits for yourself... I should be able to get my data on demand from anyone in a matter of 2-3 seconds." The co-founder of Infosys clarified that his suggestions do not have anything to do with protectionism. "It has to be a part of policy and law, where the data comes back to the user... It also defends privacy as I will have control over my data."

Also, he said that portability of data — that allows an individual to transfer his personal usage details from one platform to any other — should be facilitated. "This will enable competition and innovation. It should be something similar to mobile number portability or account portability... Think of it as data democracy."

The issue assumes even more significance in view of the massive digitalisation happening across the country, both in the private sphere as well as in government affairs.