The New York Times

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**June 26, 2009**

# India Undertakes Ambitious ID Card Plan

**By VIKAS BAJAJ**

MUMBAI, India — One of India's most successful technology entrepreneurs was tapped by the government on Thursday to lead an ambitious project to give every citizen an identification card within three years.

The entrepreneur, Nandan M. Nilekani, a founder and former chief executive of Infosys Technologies, will leave his post as a co-chairman of the board to take on the ID card project. In his new job, he will have the rank of a cabinet minister, giving him significant autonomy within the government. Mr. Nilekani's appointment is a coup for the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, which has made a series of big promises about economic development and reform since it was re-elected in May to a second five-year term. While many Indian executives serve on public advisory boards and committees, few have joined the government and headed such big public projects.

The appointment of someone with no political or a civil service background suggests that the government may be more willing and able than it has been in the past to tap the expertise of the country's successful business sector in executing difficult endeavors, many of which have languished under career politicians and bureaucrats.

Policy makers see a national ID card as critical to improving the delivery of social services, subsidies and other government programs while also strengthening national security. The Indian government and outside observers have shown that the majority of aid earmarked for the poor does not reach them, and it is hard for the government to detect embezzlement and misuse of funds.

If administered properly, experts say a universal ID card could help ensure that most of the billions India and other organizations spend on aid reaches the people for whom it was intended. Today, Indians use a variety of documents to prove their identities, like state-issued driver's licenses, ration cards used for food purchases at government-run stores and a tax identification card that is akin to the American Social Security card.

Many people here have expected Mr. Nilekani, 54, to take on a public service role. Last year, he published a book, "Imagining India: Ideas for the New Century," that dissected a range of political, economic and social issues confronting the country. He has not been involved in the day-to-day operation of Infosys since he stepped down as chief executive two years ago.

Mr. Nilekani will join a government led by the same party, Congress, that carried out most of the socialist policies that he has criticized for stifling the country's growth and democracy in the early decades after India gained independence from the British.

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