

## **Bohra e-jamaat cards raise privacy concerns, just like India's UID**

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THE CARDS WERE ISSUED NEARLY A DECADE AGO, BUT RECENTLY THE DOCUMENTS WERE UPGRADED AS 'SMART CARDS' WITH THE RADIO-FREQUENCY TECHNOLOGY

India's Aadhaar card project continues to face logistical and legal hurdles, especially over concerns that it could breach privacy rights.

On Wednesday, the Supreme Court declined to change its own order in August that restricted the card's use to only track food and cooking gas subsidies. The apex court said a constitutional bench needs to look at the issue whether the biometric card can be linked to other services.

While the country debates the benefits and risks posed by its Unique Identification number (UID) card project, a small but closely-knit sect largely based in western India, too, is arguing over the possibility that the identity cards issued by their religious establishment could be prying into their private lives.

Every member of the Dawoodi Bohra community has to carry what are known as 'e-jamaat cards'.

The cards were issued nearly a decade ago, but recently the documents were upgraded as 'smart cards' with the incorporation of radio-frequency technology.

The cards are used to record a person's attendance at community events and to ensure that the holder completes all religious sacraments, including the controversial oath of allegiance to their spiritual leader and religious taxes.

The card is also used to gain access to community mosques, mausoleums and graveyards.

The card will also be used to record the declaration by members to attend the compulsory sermons during the coming period of Muharram.

"The card is expensive [it reportedly costs Rs5,000 to get one], but every Bohra is supposed to have the card if he or she want to access community properties or attend functions," said a member of the community.

Last week, a group of community members released findings from an annual "Worldwide Survey for Dawoodi Bohras" that tracks opinion about community issues after the death of their last hereditary head, or Syedna, in January 2014.

Mufaddal Saifuddin, the current leader, is his son, but his uncle, Qutbuddin, half-brother of the last Syedna, has disputed the succession. The dispute is being heard by the Bombay high court.

While the survey said that there was widespread resentment against the order to attend the sermons, the Syedna's office has dismissed the survey and said that the views of a few hundred people cannot represent the views in a million-strong community.

The organisers of the survey, on the other hand, have said that the sample survey was designed to have a low margin of error.

The survey has also raised concerns about the e-jamaat cards.

This is what the survey had to say about the document: To study the impact of such practices of intense scrutiny, data mining and intrusion by Syedna's office, an independent and neutral platform is needed with no ties to its administration.

When this writer contacted the Syedna's office for a comment, officials there declined to comment, saying they were busy with the preparations for the Muharram discourses.

But the community is rife with rumours that the cards can track every aspect of their lives.

A member of the community who spoke to this writer said there was concern that the card was used to track the whereabouts of members.

"Earlier, it was just an identity card; now it has GPS features," said the Dawoodi Bohra who was once an ardent supporter of the community religious leadership.