GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF SCHOOL EDUCATION & LITERACY

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION No.1173
TO BE ANSWERED ON 11.02.2021

Facial recognition for digital documents

1173 Shri Mallikarjun Kharge:

Will the Minister of Education be pleased to state:

(a) whether CBSE has introduced a method of facial recognition for accessing digital documents from its website;

(b) if so, whether Government has thought about the enormous privacy concerns associated with collecting and storing biometric facial data of so many students;

(c) despite enormous concerns over the efficacy of facial recognition technology the world over, the reasons due to which Government is moving ahead with this step without ensuring proper digital infrastructure development;

(d) the details of encryption technique currently being used by the website for CBSE; and

(e) the details of the entities having access to the personal data stored by the website?

ANSWER
MINISTER OF EDUCATION
(SHRI RAMESH POKHRIYAL 'NISHANK')

(a) to (c): Yes Sir, The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is using facial recognition for doing one to one face matching as one of the authentication mechanisms in multifactor authentication for providing digital mark sheets to students. Face matching is performed with already available photographs on CBSE admit card already stored in repository. Upon successful match the certificate is emailed to the student. There is no collection or storage of biometric facial data; the issues of privacy concerns are addressed. The use of application is based on consent of the individual. The face matching technique ensures that no one else except the student himself/herself gets access to his/her certificate and thus also ensures the privacy of student data.

The Digi Locker accounts of all the students appearing in Board Exam are being opened in advance for providing digital academic documents such as Marksheet, Pass Certificate, etc. It can be accessed by the credentials being sent on registered mobile number of the student or by giving Aadhaar details. However, foreign students and students without Aadhaar number cannot open Digi Locker account to access their digital documents/certificates. For such students, “Face Matching” as another option has been introduced to download their digital academic documents.

The system that uses facial matching technology is created as one of the emergency responses in COVID situation to provide digital certificates primarily to foreign students for their college admissions. The facial authentication is added as a second factor authentication in the same system for foreign students where mobile OTP based authentication cannot be performed on foreign mobile numbers.

(d) and (e): The CBSE has informed that no facial image data is stored in the database as the system uses it for matching in transient manner. Therefore, facial image data is not accessible. For the other result data already available, the access of the system is provided to CBSE and National e-Governance Division under Ministry of Electronics and IT, Government of India. The website uses a secure HTTPS protocol over TLS1.2 and is hosted in the National Data Center which is ISO 27001 Security Certified.

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