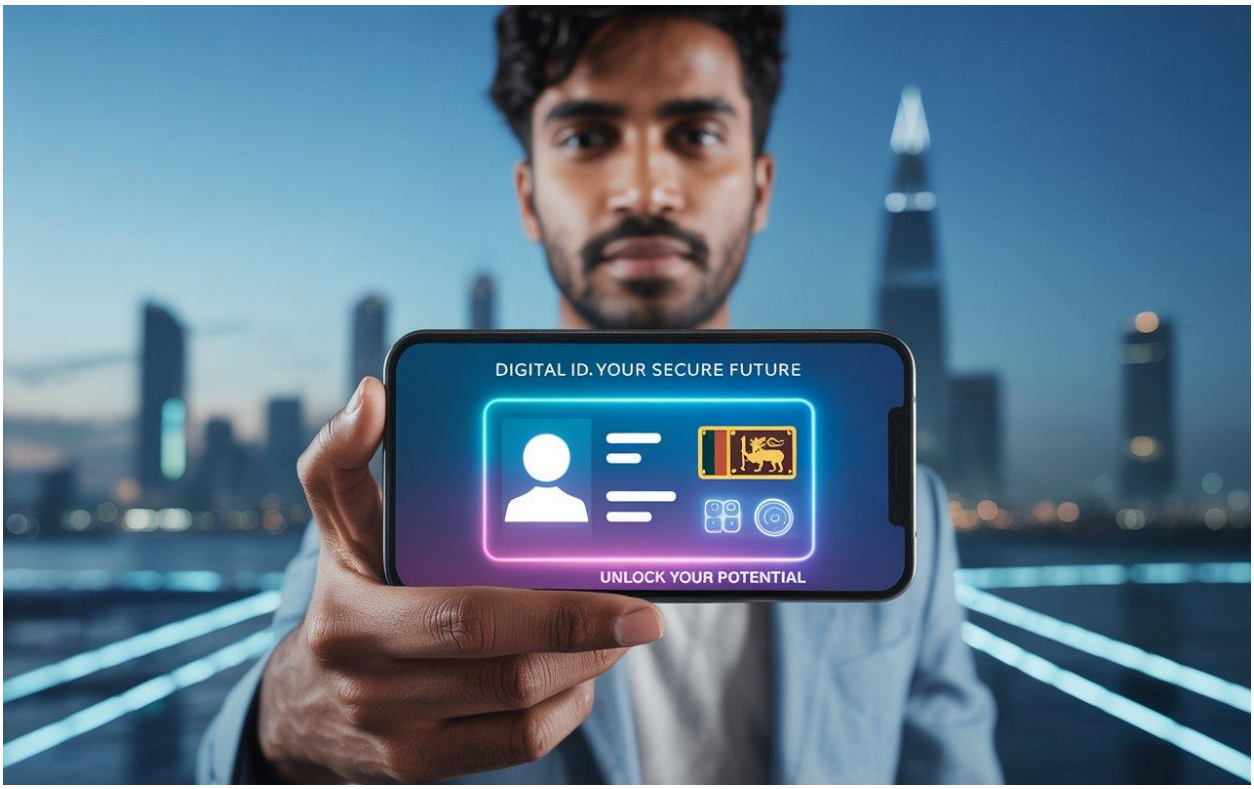
Digital ID Launch by 2026: A Big Step Toward a Modern Sri Lanka

An initiative that promises secure digital identities, minimum cost to Sri Lankan taxpayers, and total data control



In a major push towards digital transformation, the Government of Sri Lanka announced that it will launch its national Digital ID system by April 2026, a move that promises to revolutionize access to public services while ensuring strong data privacy and citizen protection.

The project, implemented under the Ministry of Digital Economy, is funded by a grant of approximately LKR 10.4 billion from the Government of India. “This will minimize the financial burden on the Sri Lankan government,” the Ministry confirmed.

A Shift from Plastic to Digital

The Digital Economy Initiative envisions building an inclusive and robust digital economy by 2030, positioning Sri Lanka as a regional digital hub. A key step toward achieving this goal is the implementation of a secure and reliable digital identity system.

For decades, Sri Lanka's physical National Identity Card (NIC) has served as the foundation for identification and public service access. However, the global pivot toward secure and scalable digital identity solutions has prompted Sri Lanka to adopt a modern digital alternative.

The selected platform is the Modular Open-Source Identity Platform (MOSIP), a globally recognized, open-source digital ID framework already in use in countries such as the Philippines, Morocco, Ethiopia, and Togo. Over 130 million people globally have received MOSIP-based IDs.

Why MOSIP Was Chosen

The Ministry considered three options: a locally developed system, proprietary commercial solutions, and international open-source platforms. MOSIP emerged as the most cost-effective, secure, and sovereign-friendly option.

Building an in-house solution would be time consuming, will be limited to the knowledge available locally – at a time when digital ID expertise and experience is readily available to extract from other countries and products, requiring continuous investment of public money in software development, maintenance, and long-term sustainability.

Proprietary platforms, while mature, came with high costs, limited flexibility, and the risk of vendor lock-in. MOSIP gives Sri Lanka flexibility, avoids vendor lock-in, and ensures the government retains full control of citizen data.

Unlike commercial alternatives, MOSIP's open-source nature means it can be customized, maintained, and audited independently, making it ideal for long-term national use.

Local Ownership, Full Control

A certified Indian system integrator will customize MOSIP for Sri Lanka, while local IT professionals will be trained for full operation, maintenance, and the future development of the system.

Key controls include:

- All data capture will be handled solely by the Department for Registration of Persons
- Biometric or personal data will be collected once the system is fully under local management.
- A full security audit will be conducted by Sri Lanka CERT before the system's activation.

- The system will be deployed in infrastructure that is owned and operated by the Sri Lankan Government.

Citizen Privacy Guaranteed Through Secure Encryption

The Digital ID system is designed with privacy and data security at its core. Biometric data, such as face, fingerprints, and iris scan data, will be stored encrypted using multi-layer encryption both in transit and at rest. This approach ensures that citizen data remains private, secure, and fully inaccessible to unauthorized parties, reinforcing public confidence in the system's integrity.

Reusing e-NIC Investments: A Strategic and Cost-Efficient Shift

The original e-NIC project was scheduled for completion by December 2024. However, delays in its execution, combined with the strategic and financial advantages of adopting a MOSIP-based Digital ID system, led the Government to revise its approach. To reduce long-term costs to taxpayers and enhance system capabilities, it was decided to move forward with an integrated e-NIC/MOSIP solution.

Importantly, the investments made under the e-NIC project will not go to waste. Many of the e-NIC software modules, as well as all biometric devices and infrastructure already deployed across Provincial Councils, District Secretariats, and Divisional Secretariats, will be reused in the rollout of the new Digital ID system. Any software or hardware components that become redundant due to the introduction of equivalent systems provided through the Indian grant—such as the ABIS software—will be repurposed for use in other government projects.

In a further cost-saving measure, expenses already incurred by the Government of Sri Lanka for biometric hardware will be reimbursed under the Indian grant, resulting in significant public savings.

This shift represents not just a technically superior solution but also a fiscally responsible decision, ensuring that prior investments are leveraged while minimizing future expenditure.

A Citizen-Centric Rollout

The Digital ID will be made available through a mobile app called "e-Locker", supporting biometric authentication, QR code verification, and even manual face verification. A printable version will be offered for those who prefer physical documentation.

Importantly, existing NIC cards will remain valid during a 3–5 year transition period, with no need for citizens to immediately replace their IDs after they reregister for Digital ID. Each existing NIC will be digitally mapped to the new system to ensure seamless access to existing services.

Addressing PDU Procurement Concerns

In response to recent concerns regarding the procurement of Power Distribution Units (PDUs) used in biometric data capture stations, the Ministry of Digital Economy clarified that the selection process was based strictly on technical specifications. Industrial-grade PDUs were recommended to ensure power stability, protect sensitive biometric equipment, and prevent potential data loss. Out of eight vendors, three were shortlisted based on technical compliance, and the intention to award was to the lowest technically qualified bidder. All participating vendors were notified and allowed to raise objections, with two formal objections received. To ensure transparency and uphold public trust, the Ministry appointed an independent expert committee to thoroughly review both the technical justifications and the procurement process followed. This reflects the government's commitment to accountability, transparency, and procedural integrity in every stage of the Digital ID rollout.

Clarifying MOSIP vs. Aadhaar

Contrary to public misconceptions, MOSIP is not India's Aadhaar system. While inspired by Aadhaar's model, MOSIP is an international, open-source platform developed by a consortium of global experts in digital identity and cybersecurity.

"There have been no reported data breaches in any MOSIP-based system," the Ministry affirmed.

National Transformation Ahead

Officials emphasize that the Digital ID is more than just a technical tool; it is a cornerstone for inclusive governance and public trust.

The new system aims to simplify access to public and private sector services, enhance transparency and efficiency in government service delivery, and protect citizen privacy through modern encryption and data protocols. Enable the digital economy through secure digital authentication

The Ministry of Digital Economy has called on all stakeholders to approach the initiative with facts, not fear, and to support a project that will serve as the digital foundation for generations to come.