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'My Number' system: A worrying glimpse of the future

by Martin King
-- OPINIONS OCT. 01, 2015 - 06:07AM JST (19)

TOKYO — Due to launch in January 2016, the "My Number" system is proposed to aggregate and centralize personal information relating to tax, social security, medical, automobile registration, visa and passports.

The Social Security and new Tax Number System applies to foreigners who have legally resided in Japan for more than three months and have an address in Japan. Recipients will be issued with a 12 digit number that will remain with them until death- akin to a social security number in the U.S. or a national insurance number in the UK.

The system is pitched as being more convenient than the current one with centralization resulting in less necessary paperwork and documentation for certain procedures e.g. claiming benefits or filing taxes (e-Tax). It is also theorized that it will make evacuation and disaster response more efficient; saving time and potentially saving lives.

This aggregation of personal data could potentially be a double-edged sword and begs the question, "what if a security breach lead to this personal information being used nefariously?". To cite the UK's National Insurance Number and the U.S.'s Social Security Number system as long-standing points of reference, both countries have on numerous occasions been on the receiving end of scrutiny as a result of 'misplacing' sensitive data and have become victim to prolonged and systematic fraud, costing tax-payers millions in unlawful benefit claims.

The U.S. has recorded 11.7 million cases of data breaches involving Social Security numbers since 2006. Identity thieves often steal pension or unemployment insurance payments or run up a victim's credit card debt. Victims have lost tens of billions of dollars in the U.S. alone. More approximately, South Korea reportedly suffered the leaking of 40 million numbers, or 80% of the population, through 2014 as their government network was compromised leaving Seoul facing pressure to rebuild the network at a cost of \$650 million.

In aim of prevention, strict accompanying guidelines and laws will be enacted in Japan to safeguard this new store of personal information. Those leaking the numbers that they are tasked with safeguarding will face punishment, including prison terms of up to four years and as such companies will therefore need to guard the records closely. The management of employee data, for example, will present a considerable work-load to human resources departments and necessitate new software (or at the very least cabinets

the "four basic information items") as well as an ID photograph on the front, and the "Individual Number" on the back. Holders may use the card as a form of personal ID to confirm their identity and for many it could conceivably replace the "gaijin card" as the ID card of choice.

This is where things get questionable. Because the card contains all of your personal credentials along with an ID photograph it can be used for a wide range of purposes, e.g signing up to a sports club, getting a mobile phone contract or anywhere else you could conceivably be asked to identify yourself. Now, the other party is prohibited from copying your "Individual Number", but the issue is the actual location of this information- on the back of the card. Conceivably, in a similar manner to credit-card skimming, it would only take 1 second to take a snapshot of the card and the all-important "My Number."

The government hopes that the system will be successful in "streamlining" and automating historically manual procedures but you are not legally required to receive or carry the "Individual Number Card." Undoubtedly the new system is conducive to the Japanese government receiving much-needed tax revenue via keeping closer tabs on its populace, but at this early stage the scope for abuse would appear to be substantial.

Japan Today

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19 Comments (LOGIN TO COMMENT) Order by Time Order by Popularity

Peace Out OCT. 01, 2015 - 08:15AM JST
Putting all your eggs in one basket has always been convenient, fast, and always ended well!

Aly Rustom OCT. 01, 2015 - 08:37AM JST
Another step closer to a totalitarian state.

combread1 OCT. 01, 2015 - 08:57AM JST
This system is essentially making it easier for identity thieves to target one convenient location! I hope the

insurance), automobile registration, visa or passports. Instead, there was a bill passed a couple of weeks ago that will link things to your bank account. However, none of these links are there yet. Starting Jan 2016 the only thing the number links to is your tax and your employment insurance.

KcJapan OCT. 01, 2015 - 09:09AM JST
"what if a security breach lead to this personal information being used nefariously?"
Isn't that the job of the NSA?
Conceivably, in a similar manner to credit-card skimming, it would only take 1 second to take a snapshot of the card and the all-important "My Number."
Actually the 'my number' does not have to appear on the card. Photo skimming is eliminated in chip card design.
The U.S. has recorded 11.7 million cases of data breaches involving Social Security numbers since 2006. Spurious: Again data loss is often the story of the IT idiot who takes records "home for work" and leaves the laptop in his boot. Data loss in the States always has a dummy attached to it.
Worry not? Hardly. The efficiency of unifying identity cards is an essential need for every aspect of secure transactions. 'My number' is secure and beneficial for the user, not just government snoops. You are protected when the unique identifier and confirmation of access creates both personal and institutional security. Ok, maybe, a paper trail is safer?

Meguroman OCT. 01, 2015 - 10:06AM JST
This system will eventually catch tax cheats and the gov't. needs all the revenue it can get. All sorts of people in Japan self-report taxes including doctors, dentists, accountants, farmers, small business owners, etc. It has been incredibly easy for them to under-report their earnings and assets - until this system gradually takes hold. If you are an employee of a company (like most of us), you are taxed at the source and unlike the USA, don't even have to file an income tax form in Japan.
Eventually this system will enable the tax authorities to track your bank accounts, insurance, brokerage accounts, etc. It will become much more difficult to hide income and assets.
Another good point would be that Japan could institute means-based benefits and allowances. Why should everyone get the same childcare allowance, for example?

Scrote OCT. 01, 2015 - 10:54AM JST

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but you are not legally required to receive or carry the "Individual Number Card."  
It will be mandatory to carry it in the future. Abe will say it's necessary to stop terrorism or some similar lies.  
The numbers are bound to be leaked eventually; these things always are.

**moneyyen** OCT. 01, 2015 - 11:34AM JST  
Just another ploy from the government to control our lives more.

**kyushubill** OCT. 01, 2015 - 11:38AM JST  
"I hope the J-Govt have bolstered their IT systems."  
Not to worry their computers still run on XP.

**Wrembreck** OCT. 01, 2015 - 02:37PM JST  
At Citibank My Number will be required every time a customer requests to send cash overseas. Does anybody know if this will be case with all banks?

**smithinJapan** OCT. 01, 2015 - 06:05PM JST  
Knowing the security the Japanese government is capable of safeguarding this is going to be a complete disaster!

**Wrembreck** OCT. 01, 2015 - 06:55PM JST  
I read today that Internet shoppers will have to pay the 8% consumption tax for overseas online purchases. If My Number is required for completing money transfers overseas then I assume it will be required to process payments for online goods in the future.

**ThonTaddeo** OCT. 01, 2015 - 07:53PM JST  
It is also theorized that it will make evacuation and disaster response more efficient; saving time and potentially saving lives.  
Any time disaster response is brought in to an discussion like this one, know that something bad is in the offing. It is designed to bring about an emotional, irrational "well, if it keeps us safe" response that lets the government do as it likes without scrutiny. Governments have been taking advantage of this for decades now.

**GW** OCT. 01, 2015 - 11:02PM JST  
This is going to be a HUGE disaster!  
And if the govt really wants taxes its SIMPLE, audit the 70% of J-companies who for decades running pay NO TAX!  
THATS where the \$\$\$ is!!

**Dan Lewis** OCT. 02, 2015 - 01:17AM JST  
...you are not legally required to receive or carry the "Individual Number Card."  
Great! That's all needed to know!

**Black Sabbath** OCT. 02, 2015 - 01:21AM JST  
No. Thank. You.

**mukashiyokatta** OCT. 02, 2015 - 01:29AM JST  
The hackers are licking their lips in anticipation!

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