

# Microsoft eyes Indian startups for cloud services

The company claims it signed up over 2,000 Indian startups in one year

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and Flipkart cofounder Binny Bansal do a cloud deal. Feb. 20, 2017

Credit: Microsoft

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[John Ribeiro](#)

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Microsoft is targeting Indian startups with its cloud services, and has signed up more than 2,000 such customers in the country in the last 12 months, the company's CEO Satya Nadella said Monday at an event for startups in Bangalore.

A large opportunity ahead for the company is the large number of developers who are building their services around a biometric database, consisting of fingerprints and iris scans, which the country has created of over 1 billion of its people.

Under a new program for the digital exchange of information, called India Stack, the government is offering the biometric system, called Aadhaar, as an authentication mechanism for a variety of services offered by the private sector.

Microsoft aims to provide the cloud infrastructure for many of the developers to rapidly build their services, Nadella said.

Strides Software Solutions, for example, is offering Aadhaar authentication for blood donation banks and is using Azure to scale to 65 banks in just six weeks, its founder Dinesh Mutha said.

But Microsoft's play in India may extend to also providing Aadhaar authentication in its products. "I would love for our services, whether it is Office 365 or Dynamics 365, anything that we are doing end user or Windows itself, to be great participants in the India Stack," Nadella said. "I should be able to log in using Aadhaar. I should be able to use any of our applications using the identity system that every Indian uses."

He hosted on stage for a discussion the person originally in charge of the Aadhaar project, Nandan Nilekani.

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Nadella also announced on Monday that one of India's online retail stars Flipkart had adopted Azure as its exclusive public cloud platform. The retailer was previously using its own data centers. He is expected to announce in Mumbai later this week new customer wins among both startups and larger companies. A Microsoft spokeswoman did not comment.

Gartner said this month that the Indian public cloud services market was worth an estimated US\$1.3 billion in 2016, growing to \$1.8 billion this year, and to \$4 billion in 2020.

One important target for Microsoft's cloud services is the Indian government. The company is already offering its cloud services from data centers in the country to meet local data storage requirements of some of its customers.

Startups are using Microsoft's advanced cloud services in areas such as big data, internet of things, advanced analytics and cognitive services, Microsoft said. The companies are also using the company's bot framework to create chat bots and products and services powered by artificial intelligence.

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