Contact number cannot steal Aadhaar data, says UIDAI

FC Bureau
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THE Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) on Sunday said vested interests misused Google's "inadvertent" act around its old helpline number to create fear and tarnish the image of Aadhaar while emphasising that a number stored in contact list cannot steal data from a mobile phone.

UIDAI said rumour mongers attempted to tarnish the image of Aadhaar for a Google's inadvertent act that led to appearance of its old helpline number 18003001947 in the contact list of several mobile phone users. "UIDAI condemns the vested interests who tried to misuse Google's "inadvertent" act as an opportunity to spread rumours and go around fear-mongering against Aadhaar," the authority said.

Last week, a French security expert who goes under the pseudonym Elliot Alderson and describes himself as the "worst nightmare" of UIDAI, in a tweet had raised alarm on presence of a UIDAI number in contact list of mobile phone users without their consent. His tweet scared many on appearance of UIDAI's old helpline number in their contacts even though they did not add it.

Google on last Friday admitted that the number 1800 300 1947 was added by it 'inadvertently' along with police and fire number 112 in 2014 and has since been continuing through sync mechanism.

UIDAI said it has earlier clarified and emphasised that it has not asked any agency whatsoever to include its helpline number in mobile phones and also added that merely adding a phone number cannot steal data from the phone. "Just by a helpline number in a mobile's contact list the data stored on the mobile phone cannot be stolen. Therefore, there should be no panic to delete the number as no harm will be caused. Rather people may, if they so wish, update it with UIDAI's new helpline number 1947," it said.

Anderson in another tweet had said there was no need to freak out as it was just a contact but alarmed that it could be the tip of "an iceberg".

UIDAI said rumours being spread on social media to delete helpline number are "totally false propaganda and is nothing but scare-mongering against Aadhaar by vested interests trying to exploit Google's act to spread misinformation about Aadhaar by scaring people."

The Aadhaar custodian said it expects Google, a large digital platform provider, will look into the matter, which caused confusion in the minds of people against "India's credible identity system and will exercise due care so that such things are not repeated in future." UIDAI said rumours about Aadhaar database being breached are completely false and baseless and are rejected with all condemnation that it deserves.

"UIDAI assures that Aadhaar data remains fully safe and secure. Therefore, people should stay away from such rumours and malicious campaign by vested interests. They should also not waste their time and time of their near and dear ones by forwarding or circulating such false and baseless rumours on WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, etc," the statement said.

It said Aadhaar has caused tremendous benefits to our country and helped saved more Rs 90,000 crore by preventing leakage and siphoning of benefits and subsidies meant for poor. "It (Aadhaar) has empowered 121 crore people of India with a credible and secure identity, which can be freely used anywhere, anytime and online. People are able to get their rightful entitlement directly into their bank accounts without any middlemen," it said.