Leak of Aadhaar data

Why in news?

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A reporter of The Tribune newspaper exposed breach in Aadhaar database.

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What were the findings?

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- The report had exposed that it got access through an "agent" to Aadhaar details of any individual submitted to the UIDAI.
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- The details included name, address, postal code (PIN), photo, phone number and email.
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- The report had also claimed that it took just Rs 500 and 10 minutes for the newspaper to get access to the above.
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How has UIDAI responded?

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- The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has filed an FIR against the journalist.
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- It has filed a criminal complaint naming the journalist of The Tribune and others.
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- It justified that criminal proceedings have been initiated for the act of unauthorised access.
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- Accordingly, FIR has been registered for violations of the sections of Aadhaar Act, 2016, the IT Act and under the IPC.
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- UIDAI has responded that it was “duty bound” to place all facts before the police.
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- So, names mentioned in the FIR are just details of the incident and does not necessarily mean they are culprits.
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- UIDAI has also firmly denied that it was trying to gag the media or the whistle-blowers.
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Why is the claim overstated?

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- It is important to stress that the encrypted Aadhaar biometric database has not been compromised.
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- The UIDAI is correct in stating that mere information such as phone numbers and addresses cannot be misused without biometric data.
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- Moreover these details are already available to telemarketers and others from other databases.
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- The suggestion that the entire Aadhaar project has been compromised is therefore overstated and false.
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What is the significance?

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- **Public interest** - Undercover investigations or sting operations occupy a complex and problematical ethical space in journalism.
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- But it is impossible to fault The Tribune's recent unveiling of database breach.
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- UIDAI's criminal complaint is thus criticised for suppressing a journalist whose investigation reports was of great public interest.
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- **Data protection** - The issue has drawn attention to the existence of an organised racket to facilitate unauthorised access to data.

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- The UIDAI expose has again highlighted the long felt need for a robust data protection law.
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- **Freedom** - Accusing The Tribune and the reporter would constitute a direct attack on free public-spirited journalism.
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- It would also dissuade attempts to hold public authorities and institutions accountable for shortcomings and promises.
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What should be done?

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- It is obligatory for those who collect information to see that it is secure and not used for purposes other than that meant for.
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- This applies to both the government and private players such as a mobile company.
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- India does not have a legal definition of what constitutes personal information.
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- It also lacks a robust and comprehensive data protection law.
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- Having accorded privacy the status of fundamental right, it is logical to bring in place the above two legal specifications.
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Source: The Hindu

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