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WEIGHTY CONCERNS

India's police want access to Aadhaar data even as its constitutional validity remains unclear

Police forces across India have been trying to use Aadhaar for solving criminal cases and identifying dead bodies.

by *Abhishek Dey*

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Via Twitter

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Abhishek Dey



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At the annual conference of the country's fingerprint bureaus in Hyderabad last week, Ish Kumar, director of the National Crime Records Bureau, pitched for giving police limited access to the Aadhaar database for solving cases and identifying dead bodies. It would especially help the police identify first-time offenders who, Kumar said, are found to be involved in 80%-85% of criminal cases every year. It would also make it easier to identify around 40,000 bodies that turn up at mortuaries across the country every year, he added. The reason for Kumar's pitch

is obvious: the database of Aadhaar, the 12-digit unique identity number that the Indian state wants every citizen to have, contains the biometric information, including fingerprints, of nearly a billion Indians.

The proposal was immediately opposed by activists and cyber security experts on the grounds that it would endanger privacy and data protection. Moreover, they said, it is not a feasible idea to use Aadhaar to identify bodies.

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“Partial access to Aadhaar database is easier said than done,” said Kislay Chaudhary, a cyber security consultant to several government agencies.

“Technically, it could be a big challenge, almost unfeasible in terms of what details connected with Aadhaar to give access to. On this date, Aadhaar is linked with not just government schemes but also bank accounts and phone numbers. And different cases may demand different details.”

The Unique Identification Authority of India, which maintains the database, also **shot down** the proposal, saying the law does not allow it. Section 29 of the Aadhaar Act restricts the authority from sharing biometric information with any agency, no matter what the reason. The authority further claimed that it has not shared Aadhaar data with any security agency. The clarification came a day after Minister of State for Home Affairs Ahir **assured** Kumar that the government would mull over the proposal.

Kumar did not respond to phone calls from *Scroll.in* or messages asking for details of the proposal.

For ease of investigation

Police forces across India have been trying to use Aadhaar for what are known as “smart and predictive policing” ventures. The Telangana police went further than most earlier this year, launching a project to **geo-tag** repeat offenders. According to **reports**, they went door to door with a list of “known criminals” and recorded their biometric and demographic details, thereby creating an Aadhaar-like database of their own. The exercise drew flak from activists and security experts, who raised concerns about privacy and surveillance.

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However, senior officials in the Bureau of Police Research and Development, which assisted with and partially funded the project, claimed that it is not “directly linked” to the Aadhaar database.

In Delhi, the police have been trying to use Aadhaar primarily for a different purpose: to identify the abysmally high number of **unidentified bodies** in the city.

They have been negotiating with the UIDAI for over two years about connecting their Crime and Criminal Tracking System for identifying bodies to the Aadhaar database, a senior official said.

The police's spokesperson Dependra Pathak could not be contacted for comment despite repeated attempts.

According to the Zonal Integrated Police Network System, which records real-time data on dead bodies across much of northern India, 1,691 unidentified dead bodies were found in Delhi between January 1 and June 25 this year, an average of around 10 bodies a day, which roughly accounts for about 10% of all unidentified dead bodies found in India every day.

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Most of the unidentified bodies are housed in the largest of the city's 11 mortuaries at Sabzi Mandi in North Delhi. Senior police officials said the mortuaries are inadequate for the number of bodies that turn up. They are pushing for using Aadhaar to identify them, they added, to ease the space crunch.

Chaudhary said the police should not be given access to the Aadhaar database. But if they must use it for identifying bodies, he added, "make it a one-way process". "For example," he explained, "let the police send biometric details to the UIDAI through some sort of an application protocol interface and seek help on a case by case basis."

Deepa Verma, director of the Delhi government's forensic science laboratory in Rohini, said using Aadhaar to identify bodies was not even feasible. Since most

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SECUNumber of obese teens in India has nearly doubled in five years, says health minister
considered Kumar's proposal more seriously before rejecting it. Interestingly, at the
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