Google says sorry for 'inadvertently' adding UIDAI helpline no. in phones
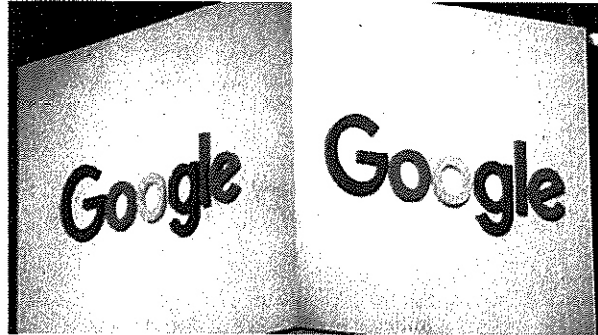
PTI ▓ NEW DELHI

Amid public outrage over Aadhaar helpline number being pre-stored without user consent on certain mobile phones, Google on Friday night apologised for "inadvertently" loading the old UIDAI helpline number and 112 helpline number into the 'setup wizard' of Android phones.

"Our internal review has revealed that in 2014, the then UIDAI helpline number and the 112 distress helpline number were inadvertently coded into the setup wizard of the Android release given to OEMs (Original equipment manufacturers) for use in India and has remained there since.

"Since the numbers get listed on a user's contact list these get transferred accordingly to the contacts on any new device," a Google spokesperson said in a statement.

Google apologised for the same and said the numbers can be manually deleted from the phones. It also promised to fix the same in future editions of its setup wizard.

"We are sorry for any concern that this might have caused, and would like to assure everyone that this is not a situation of an unauthorised access of their Android devices. Users can manually delete the number from their devices," the statement added.

The tech titan said it will "work towards fixing this in an upcoming release of SetUp wizard which will be made available to OEMs over the next few weeks".

Earlier on Friday Aadhaar-issuing authority UIDAI had said it has not asked any phone maker or telecom service provider to include its toll-free number on mobile phones, as it tried to assuage user concerns relating to the invasion of privacy.

Telecom operators' body COAI too said none of its members had pre-loaded any unknown numbers on any mobile phone.

The clarification had come on reports that many Android-operating system run mobile phones listed by default the Aadhaar helpline number 1800-300-1947.

UIDAI said the number 1800-300-1947 appearing in the contact list of Android phones was an "outdated and invalid" helpline number.

Defending itself after drawing flak on social media over the default inclusion of the number in mobile phone contact list, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) had said that, "...The said 18003001947 is not a valid UIDAI toll free number and some vested interests are trying to create unwarranted confusion in the public".

The UIDAI's valid toll free number is 1947, which is functional for more than the last two years, it had said.