# Privacy is culture specific, MNCs hit by Aadhaar, says TRAI chief

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QUESTIONING THE anti-Aadhaar campaigns by non-governmental organisations and civil society groups, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's (TRAI) Chairman R S Sharma, who is also the former Director General of Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), said that various multinational companies were being affected by Aadhaar as it was in conflict with their attempts to create their own database of users.

"It's making a mountain out of a molehill. There are motivated campaigns being launched. Various multinationals are getting affected. There are companies, which are creating their own identities. Someone has called it digital colonisation. The fingerprint scanners on smartphones can be easily used for authenticating Aadhaar but they don't allow it. A lot of fraudulent or benami transactions can go down because of Aadhaar,"

# TRAI chief

Sharma told *The Indian Express*. While he refused to elaborate on these multinationals, the remarks are an apparent reference to Silicon Valley giants such as Facebook and Google.

Sharma's remarks come at a time when civil society groups have flagged serious concerns on issues such as privacy and accountability that arise from the Centre's increasing use of Aadhaar. A clutch of petitions filed by those opposing what they call the unchecked use of Aadhaar is currently in the Supreme Court.

Recently, a Bengaluru-based NGO — Centre for Internet & Society (CIS) — released a report suggesting 130 million Aadhaar numbers were leaked on government portals. CIS later updated its report to say that there were no "leaks" or "leakages" but a "public disclosure". The UIDAI served a showcause notice to CIS, asking it to explain its claims.

The TRAI chairman defended UIDAI's decision to send the notice to CIS and said that there were no leakages from Aadhaar, or decryption of of biometric data from the UIDAI server. At the same time, Sharma made a case for having a comprehensive data protection law. "In today's digitally connected world, data protection law is a must. Data security, its protocols, rules, responsibilities, accountabilities, damage, payments, compensations, all these issues must come in that law," he said.

"Aadhaar Act, itself, is very self-contained, which takes into account all data protection and privacy issues," Sharma said, adding that privacy was a cultural concept. "Privacy is a culture specific concept, which they are trying to import here. Except for NGOs, has any individual or poor person complained, or filed a case about privacy?" he asked.

In a recent interview to *The Indian Express*, Minister of Law & Justice and Electronics & Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad had tried to allay fears of any loopholes in the Aadhaar security system and said "this systematic campaign against Aadhaar comes as a surprise for me". He said that the voter ID information was also in public domain, but "I don't see any campaign there".