

The Data Breach of All Data Breaches€! So Far

January 4, 2018 - You may think that over the past year there have been some very bad American data breaches. We have to agree. Nearly every single American household has had their personal data compromised within the past 12 months. But all of the American data breaches combined probably don't come close to the one announced in India today. The breach included information on 1.2 billion people. That's nearly the entire population of a country with four times the number of citizens as the United States and it was sold to a reporter for the equivalent of \$8.

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It is known as the Aadhaar program database, and it is the largest national database in the world. Much like an American social security card, the database assigns Indian citizens a 12 digit number. And apparently the Indian government protects those numbers about as well as the Social Security Administration here in the United States.

In point of fact, this breach is probably worse than anything that could happen here right now. That's because not only do the numbers link to information like name, address and birth date, they also link to biometric data. And the government has that biometric data on nearly every Indian citizen.

Once your biometric data is compromised, there is really no telling what a crook can do with it.

This isn't the first breach at Aadhaar, but it is by far the largest. The database project was started in 2009 to give Indian citizens easy access to government services. But it has snowballed into a system that the government is now using for a wide variety of purposes, and companies are also seeking to use it for marketing.

The Tribune in India reports that for the equivalent of \$8 USD, they were able to buy a user name and password to access the entire database. The purchase was made through an instant messaging application.

Interestingly enough, the Indian government is now claiming that there was no breach because the paper didn't actually download the database. That however is not how the Tribune or most other Indian news outlets see the matter. We have to agree.

by Jim Malmberg

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