

'POLLUTING' UIDAI ECOSYSTEM

34,000 Aadhaar Agencies Blacklisted by Govt Since 2010

Ravi Shankar Prasad tells Rajya Sabha operators were 'polluting' the UIDAI ecosystem

Our Political Bureau

New Delhi: The government on Monday revealed that it has blacklisted about 34,000 operators for "polluting" the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) ecosystem since 2010 to ensure the robustness, safety and security of Aadhaar.

The government has blacklisted approximately 1,000 operators since December last year itself. IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad told Rajya Sabha during a discussion on implementation and implications of Aadhaar.

"Aadhaar is safe. Aadhaar is secure," he said, allaying apprehensions of opposition members over its misuse that could violate individuals' privacy.

Prasad also cleared the air on Aadhaar data being used for surveillance purposes by security agencies. "There is no linking (of Aadhaar) with NATGRID." The minister emphasised that such a move would be violation of Section 29, which bars use of biometric information of Aadhaar for any purpose other than authentication.

He also dismissed suggestions that Aadhaar data collected before the legislation was approved in 2016 was "poorly verified."

The IT minister also rejected the charge of Congress' Jairam Ramesh that rapid strides in implementation of Aadhaar violated Supreme Court orders. "When the Supreme Court passed those orders (in 2015), there was no Aadhaar legislation. Now Parliament has legislated a law. This is the law and there is no stay by the Supreme Court. When the Parliament enacts a law, that law holds the field unless court stays it."

"An interim order is only an interim arrangement," said Prasad, underlining that the 2015 orders by the Supreme Court were 'interim' in nature for want of a legislation.

Opposition members, however, cautioned the government against the possibility of large scale "exclusion" of eligible beneficiaries of the government's welfare programmes due to various challenges in the implementation of Aadhaar in remote areas of the country.

"What sterilisation was to the Emergency, Aadhaar seeding is becoming to your government," said Ramesh, suggesting that the



Narendra Modi government's rush in pushing the Aadhaar card was leading to massive exclusions of the poor from welfare entitlements.

Speaking for the BJP, Vinay Sahasrabuddhe took a dig at the Congress for unnecessarily spreading fears when the government was succeeding in leveraging Aadhaar in a big way.

"They (the Congress) are indulging in politics of paranoia. It doesn't help. There could be glitches in implementation, but to throw the baby out with the bath water shouldn't be our approach," said Sahasrabuddhe.

While crediting the previous UPA government for the Aadhaar initiative, the IT minister cautioned the Congress against trying to project the use of Aadhaar as a "curse" now when it has gone out of power.

"His (Narendra Modi's) direction was to understand in detail about how to use it for the country. He has got a statesman-like vision; that's why he came up with the Aadhaar legislation," said Prasad, responding to the Opposition's dig that Modi was critical of Aadhaar during his 2014 Lok Sabha election campaign.

Prasad asserted that Aadhaar will only curb leakages in welfare delivery programmes and assured that the government is committed to ensure no eligible beneficiary is denied the welfare entitlements.