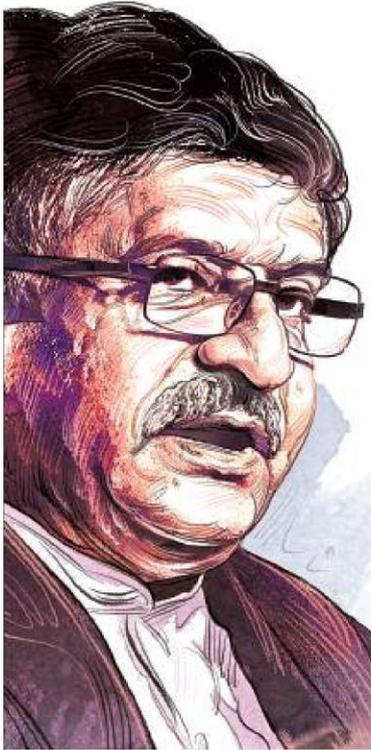


No Aadhaar to Tampering Allegations, Says RS Prasad



ARINDAM

Law and IT minister vouches for system's security, says unique ID has benefited poor

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New Delhi: Union law and information technology minister Ravi Shankar Prasad lashed out at the critics of Aadhaar, arguing that it had benefited the poor while vouching for the strength of its security mechanisms following last week's report that demographic details of those enrolled in the system were available for ₹500.

Prasad cited three key sources of opposition to Aadhaar.

"First, there are those who are

chronically opposed to the (Narendra) Modi government," he told ET in an interview. "Second, those whose shops stand closed (putting an end to criminal activity). Third, from money launderers to the patrons of terrorist networks, there are anti-social elements who seriously apprehend

their activities being traced immediately due to Aadhaar."

Prasad said it was baffling that "those who started Aadhaar have now become its biggest opponents", referring to the previous United Progressive Alliance government, which had implemented the system.

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RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD

There is a campaign against Aadhaar... There is not a billionth chance that Aadhaar can be tampered with

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"There is a campaign against Aadhaar," he said. There is "not a billionth chance that Aadhaar can be tampered with... (I) am sure of my system".

Prasad said there is a "regular audit of the security apparatus" and "the core biometrics — fingerprint and iris — are completely safe, secure, foolproof and one of the best in the entire world. We should be proud of India's innovation".

In the wake of The Tribune's January 4 report, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) said it has tightened access and will implement a virtual ID process for Aadhaar authentication, among other measures.

The ID is used to ensure that benefits go to those they are meant for and is being opposed by those who exploit the poor for political ends, according to the minister.

"Aadhaar is biggest instrument for empowerment of the poor. Those doing the politics of the poor alone can have some

problem," Prasad said. "In a scenario where some form of identity verification has become so common, I wonder then why this hullabaloo when the disadvantaged, the needy are happy with it."

The attacks on Aadhaar have been sparked by its triumphs, he said.

"What surprises me is that the opposition is stemming from those segments who are most open to sharing their identity through passport, driving licence, voting identity card, credit card etc.," he said. "The highly suspicious circumstances surrounding the campaign also raises serious doubts as to whether there is a systematic campaign against it because of its extraordinary success."

He said the government's arguments in favour of Aadhaar before the Supreme Court constitutional bench are on firm ground. The next hearing on the challenge to the ID is likely to be held on January 17.

Prasad declined to enter the controversy regarding the first information

report (FIR) filed with the police by UIDAI after The Tribune story. The authority was subjected to a torrent of criticism after reports that the complaint had also been made against the reporter. UIDAI denied this and said the FIR had only mentioned the reporter as the details of the breach needed to be provided in the document.

The minister reiterated the government's support for freedom of expression but also suggested the reporter could help the police in its work.

"Our government's commitment to press freedom is complete and total but it is also our obligation to ensure the sanctity and security of Aadhaar," the minister said. "The journalist can cooperate with the police to nab the real culprits."

The minister said he had issued instructions to UIDAI and the FIR, as of now, is not registered against any particular individual. "The FIR only spells out the details of the facts," he said. The minister said any "constructive suggestion" will be welcomed by UIDAI.