

'We will make aadhaar robust': Ravi Shankar Prasad

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NEW DELHI: The government on Monday made a strong case for further strengthening aadhaar, saying that the biometric identity programme had resulted in savings of Rs 90,000 crore by removing fictitious beneficiaries and ensuring that subsidies reach the targeted audience.

The defence comes at a time when the Supreme Court has reserved its verdict on a number of petitions challenging the Aadhaar Act and the use of the biometric programme for various government and non-government services.

IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, who is also in-charge of the law ministry, said that the aadhaar programme has gained pace under the Modi government and at last count, the country had 121-crore unique ID holders.

Asked whether the veracity of the controversial programme could be under threat if the Supreme Court's judgement went against it, Prasad dismissed the question as "hypothetical".

"The question is hypothetical as the judgement (on the case) is reserved. But, I believe our Aadhaar team's lawyers have argued it with proof, and Aadhaar has already established its benefits for the public," Prasad said.

The minister said that unlike the erstwhile Congress-led UPA regime, the BJP-led NDA government has given legal backing to

aadhaar to lend robustness and credibility to its existence. "Let us see the difference between Narendra Modi Government's Aadhaar and that of Manmohan Singh. The old Aadhaar was Niradhar (without basis) and there was no legislative support to that platform. Today, Aadhaar has a robust parliamentary law," Prasad said.

While 61 crore Aadhaar had been generated up to 2014 (when the Congress lost power at the Centre), the number has nearly doubled to over 121 crore as on June 16, 2018.

Aadhaar has often found itself at the receiving end of privacy and other activists over concerns about possible state monitoring and plans to link the biometric system with various services such as mobile phones, bank accounts, and even insurance. The Supreme Court has said that the linkage should not be made mandatory until its constitutional bench gives a final decision on the matter.

The IT ministry said that nearly 60 crore citizens have linked 87.79 crore bank accounts with Aadhaar. Prasad said that nearly Rs 4 lakh crore has been disbursed as direct benefit transfer to the poor which has led to savings of Rs 90,000 crore by removing fictitious beneficiaries. "We will make Aadhaar robust," the minister said.