

INTERVIEW | RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD

# 'Experts say that if automation takes 2 jobs, it creates 10 more'

When the computer came there was opposition. Now it's a major job giver

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*India will not let the threat of cyberattacks, such as the recent 'Wannacry' ransomware, restrict the progress of Digital India, Union Minister for Electronics and IT, Ravi Shankar Prasad said in an interview to The Hindu. He said that the Government was also working on reviewing the IT Act to strengthen it and the claims of massive job losses in the IT software sector were "exaggerated." Edited excerpts:*

**Incidents such as the recent ransomware take a toll on people's trust on digitisation and digital payments. Given Government's focus on Digital India what is your take on this?**

■ First of all, India was the least affected due to this ransomware as we took precautions. CERT-In had issued an advisory in March itself that Microsoft patch should be installed. Therefore, India was not vulnerable. We will not let issues related to cybersecurity slow down the progress of Digital India. To take up the challenges that may come up in this area, we recently created over 100 new posts for security professionals. We will be opening 10 new regional Standardisation Testing and Quality Certification (STQC) centres. We recently launched the Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre and the National Cybersecurity Coordination Centre (NCCC) will also become functional shortly.

**But do you think CERT-In should have more powers? That it must do more than issue advisories and take action against those not following it?**

■ Let us have trust. All the companies and stakeholders are realising the need to

have cybersecurity walls. We have to work as a team... See, India's digital profile is rising and cybersecurity needs to be strengthened. It is a vast area. For a more focused approach we now have a separate CERT for the financial sector, soon we will have a separate CERT for the power sector. If there is some rising sector which needs special focus, I am also open to the idea of a separate CERT for them too.

**India had unveiled a cybersecurity policy in 2013. Will you be taking that forward?**

■ I am open to the idea of improving on that policy. But we are more focused on delivery. Earlier Government's focus was on creating policy without delivery.

**Our IT Act is pretty old. Do you think there is a need to rework the Act? Also, the government had to withdraw its data encryption policy earlier due to public outcry. When is that expected?**

■ We have formed a committee which is looking into it. We are focussed on improving the whole structure of IT Act because of the expanse of Digital India. We are looking into the data encryption policy. The work is on.

**There has been a spurt in**



**We will not let issues related to cybersecurity slow down the progress of Digital India**

**reports on layoffs in the IT sector...**

■ These reports are exaggerated. I completely dispel this whole impression. I have also personally looked into it, spoken to industry leaders and asked for data. We are keeping a tab on the situation. As of now, it is routine performance linked trimming. The IT industry in India today employs 40 lakh people directly and 1.4 crore people indirectly. But I would like to highlight the larger ecosystem of Digital India which is creating more opportunities. We have 2.5 lakh common service centres. In fact, I am looking to expand it further. These centres have earned ₹1,800 crore by enabling digital delivery of services. Of this, they earned ₹600 crore by making 21 crore Aadhaar cards. Each centre employs anywhere between 2 and 10 people. Currently, 10 lakh people work in CSCs. BPOs are coming up in small towns, under the rural BPO scheme. TCS has opened a centre in Patna, they will soon open one in Varanasi.

**BPOs are coming up in Allahabad, Bareilly, Ghazipur, Lucknow, Siliguri.**

**Have all the 48,000 seats envisaged under the scheme been allotted?**

■ About 15,000 have been finalised. The rest are in process. But 15,000 seats have the potential to create employment for 30,000 people.

**But do you see any threat to jobs from automation?**

■ I am told by technology experts if automation takes two jobs, it creates 10 more. When computer had come in the 80s, there was opposition, some from our own party. But, today it's one of the major job givers. There is a need for re-skilling with the advancements in technology. And the government and the industry will work towards this.

**What about the issues of privacy raised about Aadhaar?**

■ We have saved ₹50,000 crore due to direct transfer of benefits... all this is taxpayers' money. We have a proper Aadhaar law where security of data and privacy has been completely safeguarded.

The data on Aadhaar card is minimal. There is no data by which you can be profiled... only in the case of national security, by a committee vetted by Cabinet Secretary, Law Secretary and the IT Secretary, can the data be released for a limited period of two months. National security has to be defined. Therefore, it is a safe law and a secure law.