

# Govt: No poor will be deprived by making Aadhaar mandatory

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**ACCUSING THE CONGRESS** of painting Aadhaar as a curse, the government on Monday asserted that no poor person would be deprived of the subsidy benefits by making the Aadhaar mandatory and that privacy of individuals will be protected.

Minister of IT and Law Ravi Shankar Prasad stated this in the Rajya Sabha while replying to a discussion on Aadhaar against the backdrop of concerns expressed by the opposition over making the biometric-based identification system mandatory for availing of government subsidies.

"I want to make it very clear on behalf of the government that no poor shall be denied his subsidy rights at all. Be very clear about that. Whether it is, a mid day meal or any other benefit, we have said that you come on Aadhaar but no denial will be there," he assured the House.

"The right of privacy of individual must be respected... The question to be considered is, are we invading privacy through the Aadhaar law, the answer is 'No,'" he said.

Observing that at present, over 113 crore residents in India

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have Aadhaar, Prasad said that "Aadhaar is safe, let me say proudly that the data is secure".

He said that in the last six years, the government has cancelled and blacklisted 34,000 operators who tried to pollute the system or tried to make fake Aadhaar cards.

"Since December 2016, we have taken action against 1,000 operators. We have a proper oversight system available which we do at all the authority at our command," he said.

Accusing the Congress of trying to paint Aadhaar as a curse, Prasad outlined several benefits associated with it.

"You need to come on Aadhaar but the benefits will not be denied to you, you can come with alternative identity proof be it ration card, MNREGA Card, driving license or others. But please apply for Aadhaar, that is

the whole essence," he said.

"Fake bank accounts is a known phenomena. We cannot wish away that poor people have lost their savings. So these realities are known," Prasad said.

To back his assertion of Aadhaar data being secure, the law minister reasoned that minimum data is collected by the authorities, and information related to an individual's religion, caste, language, medical history or ethnicity is not profiled.

"Let me outline minimum data is being taken for preparation of Aadhaar card, the authorities are under strict instructions to maintain that secrecy and if they flout they can also suffer three years of imprisonment and prosecution," the minister argued.

Pointing out that national security is important, he said that even in cases of national security, a high-level mechanism has been put in place whereby a designated officer of the home ministry shall for reasons to be recorded in writing certify disclosure of a person's Aadhaar data.

Further, he said that a committee headed by the cabinet secretary will ascertain and confirm that a person's Aadhaar data needs to be disclosed in such cases.