

## Government wants to ensure that everyone has a smartphone in the next 5 years: Ravi Shankar Prasad

NEW DELHI: The Digital India project that aims to offer a one-stop shop for government services would use the mobile phone as the backbone of its delivery mechanism. The government hopes the Rs 1.13-lakh crore initiative that seeks to transform India into a connected economy to also attract investment in electronics manufacturing, create millions of jobs and support trade.

In an interview with ET, telecom minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to ensure a smartphone in the hands of every citizen by 2019. Currently, nearly 74% of the population has mobile phones, most of which though is in the hands of urban India.

"We want to ensure that all the services can be provided through a mobile handset, especially, health, education, various government services and retail," Prasad said. "We want it (handset) to be used as a tool for empowerment. We will need to incentivise its usage in order to promote the social and the economic objectives of the government."



In order to use the mobile phone to help achieve financial inclusion, the government will need to structure the delivery of financial services in a manner that encourages a villager to go for mobile banking, the minister said. For instance, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, a financial inclusion plan the Prime Minister announced on August 15, can be effectively rolled out through mobile handsets. The programme seeks to give every household in rural India access to bank account, along with a Ru Pay debit card and insurance cover of Rs 1 lakh. At present, nearly 60% of the nation's population doesn't have access to financial services.

Digital India promises to transform India into a connected knowledge economy offering world-class services at the click of a mouse and will be implemented in a phased manner, according to information released by the government last week.

Plans to digitally connect the entire country will be supported by 20- and 40-hour modules on digital literacy in regional languages, which the government plans to run over the next few years. "During a presentation, the PM remarked IT+IT equals IT. This means India Today plus Information Technology (through Digital India) will yield India Tomorrow," said Prasad.

The government feels that open access to "broadband highways" across cities, towns and villages would give a fillip to trade across the country. "The other important benefit we see is surge in e-commerce. If we can bring broadband to the remotest corners of the country it will give rise to trade and warehousing," Prasad said.

Supporting the initiatives will be 6-7 manufacturing clusters for electronic goods which have been approved to be set up in Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh for products such as mobile handsets, microchip and chip-less designs and set-top boxes, he said.

