

Questions and answers about BlackBerry objections

August 13 2010, By PETER SVENSSON , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- Some questions and answers about foreign countries planning to ban the use of BlackBerry's messaging and Web services:

Q: Which countries are involved?

A: India, [Saudi Arabia](#) and the United Arab Emirates have threatened to shut down some [BlackBerry](#) services in their respective countries. Lebanon and Indonesia have said they're considering similar moves, but have no firm plans.

Q: Which services would be affected?

A. In general, the countries are targeting BlackBerry's corporate e-mail service and the proprietary chat service, known as BlackBerry Messenger Service. Phone calls, text messaging and BlackBerry's consumer service, which is not encrypted, would not be affected.

Q: Why are they going after BlackBerry?

A: In short, the corporate version of the BlackBerry system is too hard to eavesdrop on. The e-mails and messages are encrypted while in transit, and even [Research In Motion](#) Ltd., the Canadian company that makes the BlackBerry, doesn't have the keys to decrypt them. The system is designed to keep corporate and government secrets safe, but the countries are concerned that it could provide cover for illegal activity.

Q: What is encryption?

A: Encryption is the process of "locking" a message so that only the intended recipient can read it, using a digital "key." It's widely used on the Internet. Without it, online banking and shopping would not be possible, nor any other sensitive communications.

Q: What can RIM do?

A: Not much. It has built much of its reputation in the corporate world on rock-solid security. To give a government wholesale access to e-mails on BlackBerry's corporate service, it would have to dismantle its whole system in the country and rebuild it in an insecure fashion. BlackBerrys would have to be modified to not encrypt messages. RIM's customers would move to other systems that still offer secure e-mail.

There have been suggestions that some countries, such as the Emirates, would be partly mollified if RIM places a server within their borders, meaning e-mails between local BlackBerrys would not have to leave the country while in transit. That could assuage any fears that other countries can spy on locals' e-mail, even though doing so would be difficult if not impossible. Still, having a server in their own country wouldn't make it any easier for their law enforcement to read the e-mails.

Q: Aren't BlackBerry e-mails accessible to governments anyway?

A: Possibly, but not in a fast, easy way. The e-mails exist in decrypted form on corporate servers, but those may be overseas, and it takes time to get access to them through a legal process with warrants. RIM stresses that governments can satisfy national security and law enforcement needs without compromising commercial security requirements.

Q: What options to do locals and travelers have if BlackBerry services

are shut down?

A: If they need secure communications, there are plenty of options, pointing to the futility of banning BlackBerry services. Business travelers can use their laptops to get secure corporate e-mails, or they can carry other smart phones, such as iPhones and those running Windows Mobile. Others can use encrypted Gmail connections, or standalone e-mail encryption programs.

However, Indian Internet service providers say the government is set to go after Skype SA and Gmail operator Google Inc. next, for access to their encrypted services. That would amount to large-scale attempt to undermine secure communications on the Internet.

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