

India BlackBerry ban averted for 60 more days

August 30 2010, By ERIKA KINETZ , AP Business Writer



In this photo taken on Friday Aug. 27, 2010, a man chats on his mobile as he walks past the hoarding of BlackBerry mobile in Ahmadabad, India. Indian authorities are scheduled to meet Monday evening, Aug. 30, to decide whether to ban some BlackBerry services in India, an official said, one day ahead of a government-imposed deadline for BlackBerry maker Research In Motion Ltd. to give security agencies access to encrypted data or face a ban. (AP Photo/Ajit Solanki)

(AP) -- India withdrew a threat Monday to ban BlackBerry services for at least two more months after the device's maker, Research In Motion Ltd., said it would give security agencies greater access to corporate e-mail and instant messaging.

The Ministry of Home Affairs said in a statement it would review the situation in 60 days after the Department of Telecommunications studies the feasibility of routing [BlackBerry](#) services through a server in India.

India wants greater access to encrypted corporate e-mails and instant messaging, though it remains unclear precisely what concessions Research In Motion agreed to in order to avert the ban.

About 1 million BlackBerry users would have been affected in India.

"RIM have made certain proposals for lawful access by [law enforcement agencies](#) and these would be operationalized immediately. The feasibility of the solutions offered would be assessed thereafter," the ministry said.

Home Secretary G.K. Pillai met officials from the Department of Telecommunications, the Intelligence Bureau and the National Technical Research Organization - a cyber intelligence organization - on Monday to discuss BlackBerry security issues, Home Ministry spokesman Onkar Kedia said.

Research In Motion, a Canadian company, has been reluctant to agree to New Delhi's demands for real-time access to encrypted corporate e-mail, saying previously it is technically impossible to provide.

The decision by Nokia Corp. - Research In Motion's major competitor in India - to install a server in the country to facilitate government monitoring may have weakened RIM's bargaining position. Nokia India Managing Director D. Shivakumar told reporters Monday the company will install a server in India in November to ensure government access to data.

RIM is facing widespread concern over its strong [data encryption](#), which is beloved by corporate customers eager to guard secrets, but troublesome for some governments in the Middle East and Asia that worry it could be used by militants to avoid detection.

The controversy, which reaches across Saudi Arabia, the United Arab

Emirates, Indonesia, Lebanon and India, sent Research In Motion's stock price to a 16-month low Friday.

Striking the right balance between national security and corporate privacy is especially important to Indian outsourcing companies eager to protect client data.

"India is termed an outsourcing hub for the U.S. and Europe so data security is a primary issue. If there is any data leakage, we lose business," said Chetan Samant, a manager at a software association.

He said BlackBerry usage is so widespread in India it would be politically difficult for the government to enact a ban, adding he personally would be sad to part with his BlackBerry. "Once you get used to it, it's an addiction," Samant said.

Indian officials say while they're not eager to ban the BlackBerry, they won't compromise on national security.

Security concerns flared after the terrorist attack on Mumbai in November 2008, which was coordinated using mobile phones, satellite phones and voice-over Internet phone calls.

Fears that the Commonwealth Games - a major sporting event to be held in New Delhi in October - could be a target for attacks have added pressure on the Home Ministry to step up surveillance.

India also faces worsening violence in the disputed region of Kashmir and a rising Maoist insurgency in a mineral-rich swath in the east that the government is eager to control.

[Research In Motion](#) last week sought to broaden the debate over security, saying singling it out for scrutiny was "ineffective and

counterproductive." Its proposal to lead an industrywide forum on security issues received a weak response from Indian telecom groups.

Indian officials have also raised concerns about Skype and Google, though both companies say they've yet to receive formal notice of an inquiry.

Some analysts say BlackBerry's super-encrypted corporate e-mails are unlikely to be used by militants, who prefer more anonymous technologies, like Gmail.

Others, however, caution it would be easy for a militant group to set up a front corporation, which could then establish its own uncrackable BlackBerry corporate e-mail, considered by many to be the gold standard for data security.

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