

India government warns on BlackBerry

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India warned the makers of the BlackBerry Thursday its messaging services could be shut down if it failed to give security agencies access "in readable format" as a compliance deadline loomed.

The warning came as local media reported a decline in sales of [BlackBerry](#) smartphones amid consumer uncertainty over whether the government would impose a ban on August 31 on messages carried on the handset.

"In case no solution is provided, those services which can not be intercepted and monitored in readable format may be banned by the government," junior minister of state for telecoms Sachin Pilot told parliament.

India's home ministry said earlier this month it would cut off the corporate email and [messaging services](#) unless BlackBerry's Canadian maker [Research in Motion](#) (RIM) gave security agencies access by August 31.

India, the world's fastest-growing cellular market, is a crucial marketing target for RIM as increasingly affluent Indians buy smartphones.

RIM said earlier this month it was "optimistic" it could avert a threatened shutdown by India of the core features of the smartphone over security worries, but it has made few public comments as the deadline approached.

Home Secretary G.K. Pillai was due to make a final decision on BlackBerry's fate at a meeting next Monday, the day before the August 31 deadline, an official at the home ministry said, declining to be identified.

"We hope for a satisfactory resolution," the official told AFP.

Home Ministry officials have been holding discussions with RIM technical representatives and cellular phone companies on ways to break the impasse.

India, battling insurgencies from Kashmir in the northwest to the far-flung northeast, has raised fears that BlackBerry services could be used by militants.

Islamist militants used mobile phones to coordinate the 2008 Mumbai attacks that killed 166 people.

India has already sent a notice to mobile operators ordering them to ensure security agencies can monitor BlackBerry messages by the end of

the month.

The cellular operators are legally obliged to ensure security agencies have access to all services carried on their networks.

A shutdown would affect corporate users among BlackBerry's 1.1 million customers, whose communications have a higher level of encryption. India can already monitor so-called BlackBerry "consumer mails" that are less encrypted.

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