

Indian officials to meet to decide BlackBerry ban

August 30 2010, By ERIKA KINETZ , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- Indian authorities are scheduled to meet Monday evening to decide whether to [ban some BlackBerry services in India](#), one day ahead of a government-imposed deadline for the device's maker Research In Motion Ltd. to give security agencies access to encrypted data.

Home Secretary G.K. Pillai will meet officials from the Department of Telecommunications, the Intelligence Bureau and the National Technical Research Organization - a cyber intelligence organization - to discuss BlackBerry security issues, Home Ministry spokesman Onkar Kedia said by phone from New Delhi.

He declined to discuss details of the talks, which will determine whether some one million BlackBerry users in India will be able to use their corporate e-mail and [instant messaging services](#) after Tuesday.

A decision on whether to ban service is "likely" to be reached tonight, Kedia said.

RIM has shown few signs of capitulating to New Delhi's demands for real time access to encrypted corporate e-mail, which the Canadian company maintains is technically impossible for it to provide.

Government officials, speaking anonymously to local media, have suggested that India may be willing to extend the deadline.

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, which 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 RIM'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, 35, a manager at a software association as he thumbed his BlackBerry waiting for a flight from Mumbai to Nagpur recently.

He believes BlackBerry usage is so widespread in India now that it would be politically difficult for the government to enact a ban.

He, for one, would be sad to part with his BlackBerry.

"Once you get used to it, it's an addiction," he said.

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

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

Fear that the Commonwealth Games - a major sporting event to be held

in New Delhi in October - could be a target for attacks have added to pressure on the Home Ministry, which is responsible for national security, 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 of the East, which the government is eager to control.

RIM last week sought to broaden the debate over security, saying that singling it out for scrutiny was "ineffective and counterproductive."

"Anyone perpetrating the misuse of the technology would continue to have easy access to other wireless and wireline services that utilize strong encryption and are readily available in the market today," it said in a statement late Thursday.

But 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 that 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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