India wants Google, Skype to set up local servers

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Indian men chat outside a BlackBerry phone store in Mumbai. India's government has said that BlackBerry, Google, Skype and other communications providers must set up servers in the country to allow security forces to intercept Internet data.

India's government on Wednesday said BlackBerry, Google, Skype and other communications providers must set up servers in the country to allow security forces to intercept Internet data.

G.K. Pillai, the chief bureaucrat in the Home Ministry, said "all people who operate communication services in India should have a server in India" to aid in monitoring encrypted data.

The government has already asked BlackBerry to set up a server in India

to track the smartphone's secure messaging system and "we have made this clear to other companies" that they must do the same, he told a news conference.

Finnish mobile phone giant Nokia said earlier in the week it would set up a server in the country by early November to ensure that the government had access to data carried by its smartphones.

India's security forces, battling insurgencies ranging from Kashmir in the northwest to the remote northeast, are worried militants could use encrypted services to plan attacks.

Pillai's comments came two days after India gave BlackBerry's Canadian maker a two-month window to provide a solution to its security concerns to avert a shutdown of its encrypted corporate email and messenger chatting services.

Skype, the Internet phone service, and Google, which uses powerful encryption technology for its Gmail email service, are also in the government's firing line as it widens its crackdown on communications firms.

BlackBerry's reprieve came after the government said the handset's manufacturer Research in Motion, or RIM, had made proposals for giving security forces "lawful access" to messages carried on the handsets.

"Discussions with BlackBerry are still continuing. We have given them 60 days' time to find a solution" to government demands for access to messages carried by RIM handsets, Pillai said.

India's home ministry has said it is now reviewing the feasibility of RIM's monitoring proposals.

India, which has the world's fastest growing number of mobile users, is a key market for BlackBerry, which has 1.1 million customers in the country.

"All security concerns (related to BlackBerry) need to be addressed," Home Minister P. Chidambaram said late Tuesday. "Our stand is firm. We look forward to getting access to the data. There is no uncertainty over it."

BlackBerry has become a global market leader in the smartphone sector thanks to its heavy data-protection and analysts say any compromise with the Indian government could damage its popularity.

RIM, which insists it has cut no special deal with India, is already facing threats to its dominance in corporate mobile email from other smartphone makers globally such as Apple and Nokia.

The Times of India reported Wednesday it was the flood of international visitors expected for the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi next month and US President Barack Obama's planned visit in November that resulted in the reprieve for BlackBerry rather than any breakthrough in talks with the company.

The blackout of BlackBerry's core features would have disrupted communications for the two events, the newspaper said, adding there would be more talks with RIM before Obama's visit.

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