

Google's Street View starts mapping India

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Sunita Choudhury, the city's first woman auto-rickshaw driver, celebrates International Women's Day in New Delhi in March. Internet giant Google on Thursday launched its ambitious "Street View" project in India to provide detailed panoramic images of life in a country of 1.2 billion people.

Google launched its "Street View" project in India on Thursday aiming to collect panoramic images of the vast country ranging from its palaces to its slums.

The 360-degree photographic mapping service, which is already in operation in more than 25 countries, began gathering data in the southern city of Bangalore, a technology hub where many Internet firms are based.

Street View has proved hugely popular since its launch in the United States in 2007, but it has also run into trouble with several governments concerned about privacy.

"Street View is designed to comply with all local laws including those related to security and privacy in India," Google India chief Vinay Goel told reporters in Bangalore.

He said the programme, which allows computer users to simulate walking down streets and around corners, would be useful for "urban development planners, law enforcement agencies, house-hunters, and travellers".

Goel declined to give details about Google's plans to expand the project across India, where cities and villages are often a chaotic jumble of traffic jams, buffalo carts and shanty towns.

The company said that detailed images of Bangalore, which are being collected by special cameras mounted on cars and tricycles, would be made accessible once the data had been processed.

Google said earlier this month that it would appeal against a Swiss ruling ordering it to ensure that all people and cars pictured on Street View were unrecognisable.

France's data privacy regulator imposed a record fine of 100,000 euros (\$142,000) on Google in March for collecting private information while compiling photographs for the service.

Google has also agreed to delete private emails and passwords mistakenly picked up from wireless networks in Britain by its Street View cars.

"We have got permission from Bangalore police, and are in touch with state and central governments," a Google spokeswoman told AFP. "We want to map all of the city, but anyone can complain if they are unhappy about coverage."

Street View tricycles have already collected imagery from international tourist sites including Stonehenge in Britain, Pompeii in Italy and Versailles in France.

"In India too, we are planning to collect images of important monuments and tourist spots after getting necessary sanction from the authorities," Goel said.

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