

Cuba wants more Internet access while keeping state control

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A Cuban uses an illegal Wi-Fi connection to surf the Internet, on November 28, 2014, in Havana

Cuba wants to boost public Internet access while keeping the Communist government's control over it, a senior US official close to talks with Havana on technology said Monday.

"They are looking for mechanisms by which, in the first instance, they can expand connectivity while at the same time retaining their mechanism for market management, which is obviously vastly different than ours," said the State Department source.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, questioned whether Cuba can meet United Nations goals of having 60 percent of the population of 11 million online, and having Internet service in 50 percent of homes by 2020—without allowing rival providers to enter the small market.

Private Internet connections in Cuba are strictly regulated by the Americas' lone one-party, Communist-ruled state. Only 3.4 percent of the population can connect from home, according to UN data.

Cuba "would not be the only market in the world with a single provider," the source noted.

Last week, a US delegation traveled to Cuba to follow up on re-establishing normal telecommunications links as part of the two countries' bid to normalize relations.

The team was led by Daniel Sepulveda, deputy assistant secretary of state and coordinator for international communications and information policy.

A "preliminary" round of US-Cuban talks devoted to human rights will help set a format for future discussions on the issue, the State Department said.

The encounter, to be held in Washington on Tuesday, would be the latest in a series aimed at normalizing ties between the two Cold War-era adversaries.

The talks have slowly progressed since US President Barack Obama and Cuba's President Raul Castro surprised the world by announcing on December 17 they were working toward restoring relations severed for more than 50 years.

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