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RIM opens eavesdropping facility in Mumbai India

Monday, 31 October 2011 By [Danny Bisaerts](#)

Research In Motion Ltd., known for their Blackberry devices, has set up a facility in Mumbai to help the Indian government carry out lawful surveillance of its BlackBerry services, according to people familiar with the matter, but the move hasn't fully satisfied India's appetite for access to messages on the popular smartphones.

Last year, India threatened to shut down BlackBerry encrypted email and instant messaging services because it couldn't wiretap them. The government put the onus on Waterloo, Canada-based RIM to come up with solutions. Several government-set deadlines have passed and, though India still isn't happy with its surveillance capabilities, it is no longer threatening to shut down the service.

RIM partly assuaged India by setting up the small Mumbai facility earlier this year to handle surveillance requests from India. India can submit the name of a suspect its investigators want to wiretap, and RIM will return decoded messages for that individual, as long as it is satisfied the request has legal authorization, according to the people familiar with the matter.

The Mumbai facility handles lawful intercept requests for consumer services including the BlackBerry Messenger chat service, these people say. India saw the move as a positive step, but would prefer an arrangement where it has the ability to decode messages itself, so that it can conduct surveillance without disclosing the names of suspects to RIM.

India still has no method to intercept and decode BlackBerry enterprise email, which is used by corporate customers and features a higher level of encryption than consumer email and instant messaging. BlackBerry has repeatedly said it doesn't have the keys to unlock enterprise email messages —security is one of the service's key selling points. The Indian government isn't as concerned as it once was about enterprise email, however, since growth is happening mostly in consumer services, the people familiar with the matter say.

Another idea India has explored is whether it can put an official on RIM's premises in Canada to help facilitate the nation's surveillance requests in a more secure manner, one of the people familiar with the matter said. It isn't clear how far that proposal went.

RIM in a prepared statement said it "continues to work very well" with the Indian government. "We are not operating under any deadlines and we

believe the government of India is now applying its security policy in a consistent manner to all handset makers and service providers in India, which means that RIM should not be singled out any more than any other provider."

Indeed, smartphone technology isn't India's only concern. A recent report by an Indian government expert committee—which hasn't been released publicly—identified several technologies that the country would like to monitor more closely, including Microsoft Corp.'s Internet phone service Skype and social-media services Facebook and Twitter, one of the people familiar with the matter said.

A spokeswoman for Twitter wasn't immediately available for comment. Microsoft declined to comment, and Facebook couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

India's minister of state for telecommunications, Milind Deora, said the government is working with RIM to find a way to satisfy India's interests, adding that the extreme options are to shut down BlackBerry services in India or leave in place the status quo. "We want to avoid those extreme options at all costs," Mr. Deora said. "We are trying to find some middle ground."

RIM has been going through hard times lately as it loses smartphone market share to competitors like Apple Inc.'s iPhone and devices that use Google Inc.'s Android operating system. The company's woes were compounded by a recent multiday BlackBerry service outage in several countries, including India, for which co-chief executive Mike Lazaridis offered an apology to customers.

Fast-growing markets like India offer a potential avenue for future growth. Though RIM doesn't disclose its subscribers in India, people close to the company say it has about two million subscribers out of more than 70 million users globally. But there is plenty of opportunity, given that most of the nation's 866 million mobile-phone customers are just now upgrading to smartphones.

In its statement, the company said, "RIM's business continues to grow very nicely in India and that is our primary focus."

RIM has faced similar demands in the past year from several governments across the Middle East and Asia. It has generally said it will meet lawful intercept obligations, but won't compromise its users' privacy or change the architecture of its technology in any of the 175 countries where it operates.

RIM doesn't disclose the specific arrangements it makes in any country to facilitate lawful intercepts.

RIM officials have previously expressed concerns that India doesn't have sufficient legal safeguards to protect consumer privacy and ensure that wiretapping isn't abused. In India, the Home Ministry signs off on all surveillance requests by central government agencies.

A spokesman for India's Home Ministry didn't respond to a request for comment.

Many of India's issues with BlackBerry could have been averted if the country had developed more advanced capabilities to decrypt data on its own. The Messenger service, for example, has one master key to unlock messages, and it can be discovered relatively easily with good decryption

technology, according to people familiar with the matter.

(Source:WSJ)

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Danny Bisaerts has grown over the past decades from a development background into the world of Information Security and Physical Security. He has spent a lot of time in the world of finance, government, consulting, manufacturing, telecommunications and utilities ...

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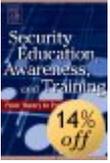
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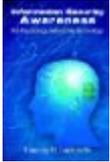
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