UAE Says BlackBerry Ban will Affect Visitors Too

Adam Schreck, AP Business Writer

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) —- The UAE's telecom regulator said Monday its looming ban on BlackBerry e-mail, messaging and Web browsing services will extend to foreign visitors too, raising the stakes in its dispute with the maker of the popular business tools.

Device maker Research in Motion Ltd. has so far declined to comment on the plan to suspend the services, which Emirati authorities announced Sunday.

The UAE contends some BlackBerry features operate outside the country's laws, "causing judicial, social and national security concerns." At the heart of their concerns is the way the BlackBerry handles data, which is encrypted and routed through the RIM's servers overseas, where it cannot be monitored for illegal activity.

Critics of the crackdown say it is also a way for the country's conservative government to further control content they deem politically or morally objectionable. The smart phones enjoy a following not only among the region's professionals, but also among tech-savvy youth who see their relatively secure communication channels as a way to avoid unwanted government attention.

The Telecommunication Regulatory Authority had left the question of phones run by foreign operators unanswered in announcing the ban, scheduled to take effect Oct. 11. But in an e-mailed response to questions Monday, the regulator said the service suspension would apply to all users in the country, including visitors using roaming services on foreign BlackBerry phones.

"Roaming for BlackBerry Messenger, BlackBerry e-mail and BlackBerry Web browsing will also be suspended," the TRA said in its unsigned e-mail. "They won't be able to use the mentioned services in (the) UAE as it's suspended (in) the country."

That would put BlackBerry service out of reach for business travelers and others passing through the Mideast's busiest airport in the international business hub of Dubai, which averages about 100,000 passengers a day.

The UAE has singled out BlackBerry devices for scrutiny before. Last year, RIM criticized a directive by the UAE state-owned mobile operator Etisalat telling the company's BlackBerry users to install software described as a service upgrade. Tests showed the download actually installed spy software on users' phones that could allow authorities to access private information stored on the handsets. It strongly distanced itself from Etisalat's decision and told users how to remove the

software.

The TRA says there are 500,000 BlackBerry subscribers in the UAE. Telecommunication officials in Saudi Arabia have also said they are planning to curtail use of the BlackBerry messaging service, but not other services on the phones.

Source URL (retrieved on *08/28/2014 - 8:00pm*):
http://www.wirelessdesignmag.com/news/2010/08/uae-says-blackberry-ban-will-affect-visitors-too?qt-blogs=0