# UAE says BlackBerry is security threat

(AP) -- The United Arab Emirates has declared BlackBerry smartphones a potential threat to national security, saying the devices operate beyond the jurisdiction of national laws and are open to misuse.

The move raises concerns of another attempt by the government to control the flow of information in the Arab Gulf nation, which actively censors websites and other forms of media seen as harming national security or conservative local values. At the same time, however, the UAE is trying to establish itself as an international business hub.

This is the second major controversy over the Blackberry in the UAE. A year ago, the Middle East country's biggest state-run mobile operator was caught encouraging unwitting BlackBerry users to install software on the devices that could allow outsiders to peer inside. The government has never made fully clear what happened in that case.

In the latest flap, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority voiced fears that the BlackBerry manages data in a way that could allow it to be misused. BlackBerry devices were singled out because they are the only phones operating in the country that automatically relay users' information to privately managed data centers overseas, the regulator said.

"As a result of how Blackberry data is managed and stored, in their current form, certain Blackberry applications allow people to misuse the service, causing serious social, judicial and national security repercussions," the regulator said in a statement carried on the state news agency late Sunday.

It said that BlackBerry devices operate "beyond the jurisdiction" of national laws because they immediately send data abroad to be "managed by a foreign, commercial organization."

That is apparently a reference to BlackBerry maker Research in Motion's system of relaying data such as e-mail messages to network servers that are separate from those operated by local mobile providers.

The TRA said the devices were launched in the UAE before "safety, emergency and national security legislation" regulating their use was enacted in 2007. It did not specify what changes it is seeking.

The comments raised questions about the gadgets' legality in the country, home to the Mideast business hub of Dubai.

An official at the TRA said Monday the agency had no further comment, and that no decision about the phones' future in the country had been made. She would not

provide her name, as is customary among Emirati government officials.

Spokeswomen for BlackBerry maker RIM said the Canadian company did not yet have any comment.

Just over a year ago, RIM criticized a directive by UAE state-owned mobile operator Etisalat telling the company's more than 145,000 BlackBerry users to install software described as an "upgrade ... required for service enhancements."

RIM said tests showed the update was in fact spy software that could allow outsiders to access private information stored on the phones. It strongly distanced itself from Etisalat's decision, and provided details instructing users how to remove the software.

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