



# Government wants to read your Gmail

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**New Delhi:** With Nokia succumbing to pressure and recently setting up its email server in New Delhi for government authorities to snoop, the Union Home Ministry, which has tasted blood, is now exerting pressure on Google Inc to share Gmail's encryption keys.

"Yes, the Union Home Ministry is in talks with Google. In case of emergencies like terrorism, we need to have a mechanism to read suspect emails," said Union Home Secretary GK Pillai.

However, Google India's head of products, Vinay Goel, claimed, "We have not received any communication from the government. We are keen on securing user privacy.

In the past, whenever there have been requests, we have worked with the government on a case-to-case basis within the legal framework."

Specifically asked if Google is in talks with the government, Goel said, "I can't comment on any talks with the government."

Incidentally, New Delhi-based cyber law expert Pawan Duggal said that the 2008 amendment to the Information Technology Act, 2000, is draconian as it gives the government carte blanche to do whatever it feels like.

Not only that, the IT Act empowers the government to act if any computer or network physically located in India is affected, even though the company or service provider is located abroad.

"In India, there is no specific law dedicated to privacy. The Supreme Court has stated that Right to Privacy, covered by Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, is a fundamental right to life.

But the 2008 amendment made to the IT Act 2000, gives the government unprecedented powers of monitoring, intercepting and even blocking Internet communication in the interests of national security, protecting friendly relations with foreign countries, and in the face of perceived threats to public order.

Threat to public order could mean just about anything, even something very minor, since it is not clearly defined," said Duggal.

"Well, the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) in Delhi is the government body which is authorised to implement such government orders.

If the service provider's servers are physically located abroad, it will depend on the ruling government's political will to enforce Indian laws," Duggal added.

When Union Home Secretary GK Pillai was asked how the government could violate the privacy of such a huge number of citizens who are Gmail users, he said, "There has to be a mechanism for emergencies.

Out of the several million email IDs, we may have to read only a few hundreds, which are suspect. I feel that is okay. In any case, that is the trend all over the world. Besides, it is allowed by the law."

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