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Govt plans law on what can be seen in India from skies

- **Rajesh Ahuja, Hindustan Times, New Delhi**
- Updated: Mar 21, 2016 08:52 IST



Under the draft legislation — tentatively titled Geospatial Information Regulation Bill — disseminating, publishing or displaying information that is likely to affect “security, sovereignty or integrity” of the country will become a punishable crime, a senior government official told Hindustan Times.

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The Centre is drafting a law to regulate data and high resolution images collected from the skies and shared through applications such as Google Earth, a move aimed at securing strategic installations from enemy eyes.

Under the draft legislation — tentatively titled Geospatial Information Regulation Bill — disseminating, publishing or displaying information that is likely to affect “security, sovereignty or integrity” of the country will become a punishable crime, a senior government official told Hindustan Times.

The term geospatial refers to data on a location collected through satellites, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), aircraft and balloons.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) has its own app called Bhuvan which provides geospatial data to the public. Many other applications give a 360-degree view of important towns and cities around the world which, security agencies believe, could be used by terrorist groups to plan attacks.

“A draft bill has been prepared and is being circulated among all stakeholders for their views to firm up the legislation,” said the official involved in drafting the bill. He spoke on the condition of anonymity.

“The idea is not to ban such applications but regulate them,” the official added. India has no specific law to regulate geospatial information despite security and privacy concerns, the official said.

Stressing that the company takes security very seriously, a Google spokesperson said: “We believe that geospatial information can be used to empower individuals and organisations to make positive contributions in their respective environments.”

Investigators who probed the 2008 Mumbai attack suspect that the terrorists were shown their targets on apps such as Google Earth by their handlers prior to the strike. The government so far has not allowed Google to take three-dimensional images of India.

The draft suggests establishing a security vetting authority to scrutinise applications of geospatial information or data providers that intend to put data in public domain. “Such a legislation is urgently required. If it is enacted and applied along with the Information Technology Act, it can help the government in regularising geospatial information or data,” said lawyer Pawan Duggal who specialises on cyber laws.

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From Hindustan Times