Google says bill could spark anti-trust complaints

SOFIA (Reuters) - Google warned on Tuesday it will not hesitate to file anti-trust complaints in the United States if high-speed Internet providers abuse the market power they could receive from U.S. legislators.

The U.S. Senate Commerce Committee last week approved sweeping communications reform legislation that would make it easier for telephone companies like AT&T to offer subscription television to consumers.

But it narrowly rejected attempts by some lawmakers to strengthen safeguards on Internet service, which had pitted high-speed Internet, or broadband, providers such as AT&T against Internet content companies like Google.

The battle centred on whether broadband providers can charge more to carry unaffiliated content or to guarantee service quality, an issue called Net neutrality.

"If the legislators ... insist on neutrality, we will be happy. If they do not put it in, we will be less happy but then we will have to wait and see whether or not there actually is any abuse," Vint Cerf, a Google vice-president and one of the pioneers of the Internet, told a news conference in Bulgaria.

"If we are not successful in our arguments ... then we will simply have to wait until something bad happens and then we will make known our case to the Department of Justice's anti-trust division," he said on Tuesday.

Cerf is visiting Bulgaria at the invitation of President Georgi Parvanov to discuss ways to boost information technology business and Internet access in the country.

The U.S. bill includes provisions aimed at preserving consumers' ability to surf anywhere on the public Internet and use any Internet-related application, software or service.
"My company, along with many others believes that the Internet should stay open and accessible to everyone equally," Cerf said.

"We are worried that some of the broadband service providers will interfere with that principle and will attempt to use their control over broadband transport facilities to interfere with services of competitors."

Despite extensive lobbying by the telephone carriers, prospects for a final law this year remain uncertain. Congress faces a dwindling number of work days because of the November elections.

If the measure passes the full Senate, it would have to be reconciled with a narrower bill approved by the House of Representatives.