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State Blamed in LiveJournal Attack

By Alexandra Odynova

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LiveJournal Russia, the country's main platform for uncensored political discussion, recovered Tuesday from its biggest-ever hacker attack — which bloggers said could not have been staged without state resources.

The Cyrillic segment of the blogging service, which numbers 4 million Russian-language users, was first hit by a cyber attack last Wednesday.

Hackers used computers infected by malware, mostly in Asian and Eastern European countries, to flood the servers with requests, paralyzing them for seven hours. A second wave followed Monday, again rendering LiveJournal.com inaccessible in Russia.

Initial speculation suggested that the attacks had targeted individual bloggers, possibly Kremlin critics. Such incidents have taken place before. But LiveJournal management reported that the whole site had been targeted.

"The attack targeted dozens of top bloggers and communities" indiscriminately, said Ilya

Dronov, development director with the site's owner, SUP.

"The reason for attack is more than clear in this case — someone wants LiveJournal to disappear as a platform," he said Tuesday in a post on his own LiveJournal blog, Igrick.

The hackers sought to leave the Russian blogosphere without a single stable platform to operate on, dispersing them to other social networks where "it's easier to fight individual users," Dronov wrote.

He stopped short of naming any names, predicting only that more attacks would follow. SUP will have to ship more powerful equipment to Russia to resist further attacks, Dronov said.

The company "doesn't exclude a lawsuit option," Svetlana Ivannikov, head of LiveJournal Russia, said late Monday in a statement. But she also identified no suspects.

Bloggers, however, minced no words, naming the Kremlin as the only power capable of staging such a large attack.

Anton Nosik, a prominent LiveJournal blogger and former director of SUP, wrote on Snob.ru that massive attacks require considerable administrative and "financial support."

He admitted that it was hard to estimate the attack's cost, but said the pro-Kremlin Nashi movement might be behind it because it was in the past accused — though not convicted — of hacking the blogs of opposition activists and of a cyber attack on the Estonian government's site.

Alexei Navalny, a popular blogger and anti-corruption activist, said the attacks were a start for the Kremlin's "counter-propaganda plan" ahead of the upcoming State Duma vote and presidential race.

The Kremlin has not commented on the accusations, while Nashi spokeswoman Kristina Potupchik said by telephone Tuesday that they were "some person's groundless assumptions."

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