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Siberia Becomes the Birthplace of 4G

By Ken Martinez

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A woman walks by an advertisement for 4G internet. **Denis Grishkin**

MegaFon became the first of the country's big three mobile operators to launch a high-speed 4G network in Russia Monday, choosing the unlikely proving ground of Novosibirsk and a partnership with wireless Internet provider Skartel to start the service.

The mobile network, whose technology has the theoretical potential to allow data connections of up to 326 MB per second, will already be active Monday, the company's deputy director Valery Ermakov told Vedomosti.

The biggest barrier for launching 4G networks in Russia has been the delayed tender process for distributing rights to the necessary frequencies.

MegaFon's entrance into the 4G market was enabled by a deal with Skartel, which already has the rights to a range of required frequencies.

Under the deal, each operator will serve its own customers, though they will operate on the

same network. Skartel was the first company to launch a 4G network under its Yota brand in Novosibirsk in December.

MegaFon will sell customers a new modem that can connect to the network for 2990 rubles ($100) — the same price Yota charges — though it hasn't yet revealed how much the 4G service itself will cost. But the operator will whet consumers' appetites by offering the service free until June 30 to customers who purchase the modem.

Yota advertises 4G connections for between 500 rubles and 1400 rubles per month on its site, with price depending on speed.

Skartel and Megafon both have plans to expand the number of cities in which they offer the new service, with 4G networks set to launch in Moscow May 10 and 14, respectively.

MegaFon plans to roll out the system in Sochi and Krasnodar by the end of June, with St. Petersburg, Vladivostok and other cities coming online by the end of the year.

Rostelecom has also made a deal with Skartel to share infrastructure and plans to launch an LTE network in Moscow in the summer, with commercial use starting Sep. 1. Both MTS and VimpelCom have said they are waiting for the frequency tender process to be completed so that they can launch their own LTE networks.

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