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Electronic Cards Not Mandatory

By The Moscow Times

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The government dropped its plans to make universal electronic cards mandatory for all citizens, Communications and Press Minister Nikolai Nikiforov said Tuesday.

The cards will be voluntary, and citizens will have to apply for one, whereas previously they had to apply to opt out of the system.

The cards will serve as an electronic ID, driver's license, car insurance certificate, ATM card and migration document all in one.

Regional officials said that their budgets would be left to foot the bill for the cards because the federal budget didn't allocate any funds, so amendments to the plan were made, Vedomosti reported.

Distribution of the cards in Tatarstan would cost the region a hefty 725 million rubles ($24 million).

Talk of introducing such a card has been circulating since 2005, when Sberbank proposed setting up a countrywide unified payment system called Sbercard.

The idea didn't resurface until 2009, when the government announced plans for the Universal Electronic Card. Then-President Dmitry Medvedev first demonstrated the card in the spring of 2011, saying it would be ready by January 2012. Amendments were later issued to push that deadline back a year, however.

The concept of each citizen having an electronic card containing all his personal data has been met with some skepticism, with many warning of security risks.

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