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State Mulls Using Post Offices to Expand Broadband

By The Moscow Times

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The Communications and Press Ministry is considering involving some 42,000 post offices across Russia to create a nationwide network of broadband Internet access, Communications and Press Minister Nikolai Nikiforov said in an interview.

"In Russia, we still have a lot of rural areas that are in what we call the 'digital gap.' They don't have cell coverage; they don't have broadband," he told The Wall Street Journal at the Mobile World Congress this week. "Broadband and LTE are strategic objectives."

The ministry is planning to create a public-private partnership in which the government will install a fiber-optic network to almost every one of Russia's 42,000 post offices. Then the government will lease space on the cables to cellular providers, allowing them to provide cellular-phone coverage using metro cells, devices that provide cellular cover over just a small area, the minister said in comments carried by The Wall Street Journal.

“We want to offer our post offices this fiber as a noncompetitive infrastructure to all operators. We don’t want to be the next telecom operator. We want the post office to be an infrastructure platform for all operators to come in and offer their services,” Nikiforov said.

Yekaterina Osadchaya, a spokeswoman for the ministry, said it would hold a tender for construction of infrastructure, Vedomosti reported. She added that it would make sense for Russian Post to participate, given its extended network and “social function.”

A representative of Russian Post said it was not aware of the tender but would take part in it if the ministry provides support, Vedomosti reported.

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