Russia's Interior Ministry Offers Millions For Data on Tor Users

July 24, 2014

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Russia's Interior Ministry is offering nearly 4 million rubles ($114,000) for research on ways to get data on users of the anonymous web surfing network Tor.

The announcement, posted on the government's official state procurement website earlier this month, comes amid a massive upsurge in Russian users of Tor, which allows Internet users to anonymously visit websites blocked in their country.

Details about the tender are scarce: It will close on Aug. 13 and the winner will be announced on Aug. 20. Payment — 3.9 million rubles — will come from the federal budget.

The Interior Ministry's Special Technologies and Communications agency, a research and development association, is cited as the federal body in charge of the tender. The e-mail address listed is a Yandex e-mail address, not a government one.

The Tor network has been both praised by Internet users for allowing freedom in online activity in countries where governments have imposed Internet censorship, and slammed by critics who warn it allows criminals using the "dark web" to operate under the government's radar.

The number of Russian users relying on the network to bypass the country's increasingly strict Internet regulations jumped from 80,000 to 200,000 in just two weeks in June.

Russia's Internet laws and laws on extremism mean that any website deemed "extremist" by the communications watchdog is added to a federal register of banned sites and access to the webpages blocked. Websites offering pirated movies and music are also blacklisted in accordance with an anti-piracy law passed last summer.

The Tor software also allows users to skate around such laws without being traced, though that may change if the Interior Ministry's tender is successful.

Internet users have been up in arms over the government's flurry of new laws aimed at tighter control of the Internet — the most recent of which has obligated popular bloggers to register with the state — often warning that social media websites like Twitter and Facebook would be next to go.

Some have even warned that Russia is only a few steps away from becoming the next China or Iran, both notorious for heavy-handed Internet censorship and the blocking of popular websites like YouTube.

See also:

[Anonymous Browser Mass Hit as Russians Seek to Escape Internet Censorship](#)

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https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/07/24/russias-interior-ministry-offers-millions-for-data-on-tor-users-a37660