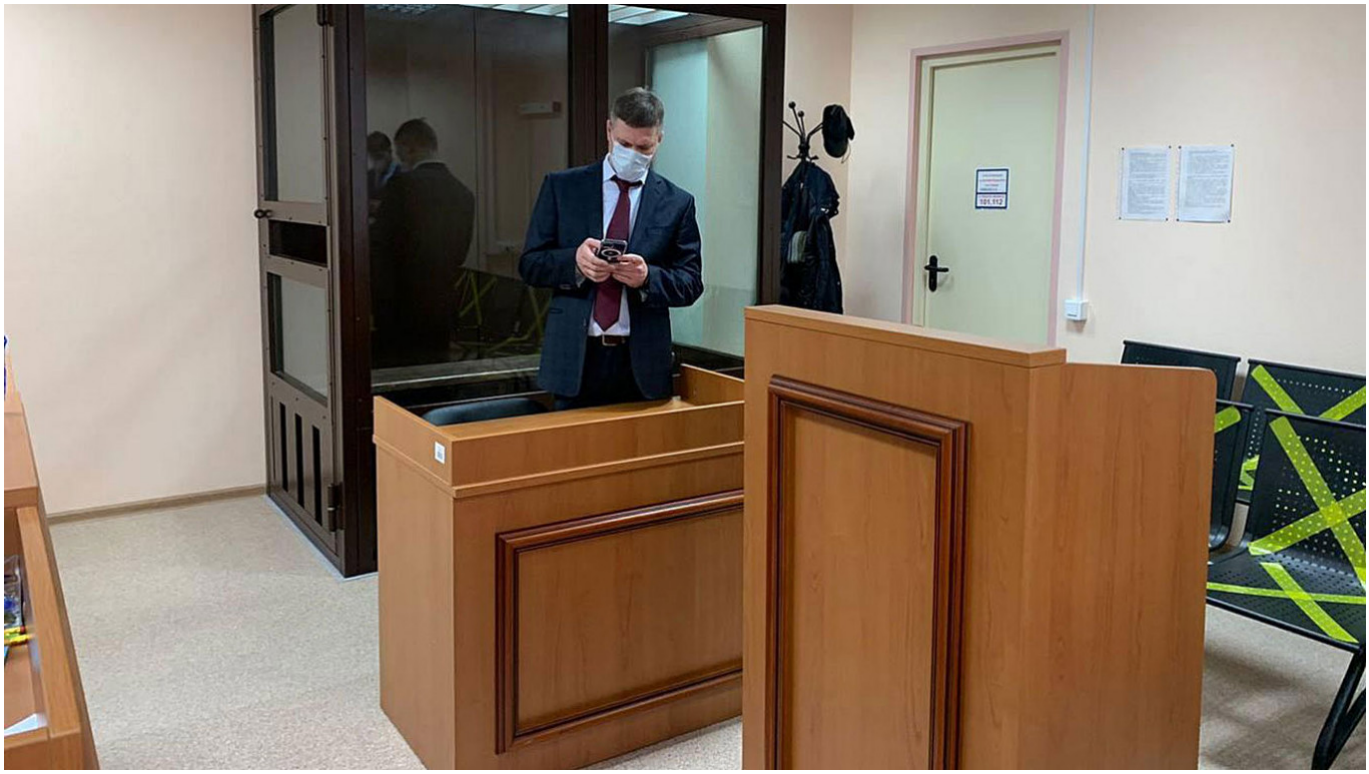
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Russia Fines Google, Meta Record $125M for Banned Content

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Russia has slapped tech giants Google and Meta with record penalties totaling over $125 million for repeated failure to remove banned content, state media reported Friday.

The fines mark the first time Russia has imposed a fine based on a company's turnover and comes as Moscow amplifies pressure on foreign internet platforms, which it says regularly fail to take down content in compliance with Russian law.

The content subject to removal ranges from pornographic material and posts promoting drugs and suicide to messages calling for Russians to protest in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, whose groups were outlawed as "extremist" this year.

A Moscow magistrate's court fined Google 7.2 billion rubles ($98.4 million) under a legal clause that allows courts to impose between 5% and 10% of a company's turnover, according to the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

According to the RBC news website, Google Russia earned 85 billion rubles ($1.1 billion) in 2020.

The court fined Meta, formerly Facebook, 1.9 billion rubles ($27 million) later on Friday, also for failing to remove banned content.

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State media regulator Roskomnadzor, which filed the suit against Google earlier in December, said the company had been fined a total of 37.5 million rubles ($510.5 million) before Friday's ruling for failing to remove 2,600 items that Russia deems illegal.

Google said it will determine its next steps after examining the court ruling, RIA Novosti reported.

Roskomnadzor said Meta — Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram's parent company — had previously been fined a total of 90 million rubles ($1.2 million) for penalties that include content violations.

The state regulator accused Meta in October of repeatedly failing to remove information "dangerous to citizens" on Facebook and Instagram, threatening turnover-based fines.

Moscow has stepped up pressure on mostly U.S.-based tech companies for what it calls interference in Russia's domestic politics as well as failure to open physical offices and transfer users' data to servers within the country.

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