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Google Russia to File for Bankruptcy

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Google's office in Moscow. **Google Russia / vk.com**

Google's Russian branch has initiated a bankruptcy procedure over its inability to pay a $100-million fine for keeping up content Moscow deems illegal, media reported Wednesday as Russia continues to intensify its pressure on Big Tech following its invasion of Ukraine.

Google confirmed the reports the next day.

"Google Russia has published a notice of its intention to file for bankruptcy," a spokesperson for the company told AFP.

"The Russian authorities' seizure of Google Russia's bank account has made it untenable for our Russia office to function, including employing and paying Russia-based employees, paying suppliers and vendors, and meeting other financial obligations," the company said.

A Moscow court fined Google 7.2 billion rubles ($113.5 million) in December 2021 for failure to remove content banned in Russia. Google, which tried but failed to appeal the ruling, missed a March 19 deadline to pay the fine.

Related article: Russia Accuses Google, YouTube of 'Terrorist' Activities

Google submitted a notice of intent to declare insolvency to Russia's official registry Fedresurs "because since March 22, 2022, it foresees its inability to fulfill its monetary obligations," the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

In its statement to AFP, Google said it will continue to provide free services "such as Search, YouTube, Gmail, Maps, Android and Play" to customers in Russia.

A senior Russian cabinet minister this week stressed that unlike Facebook and Instagram, which have been declared "extremist," Russia was not planning to block YouTube.

Alphabet Inc's Google last month halted its advertising in Russia to comply with unprecedented Western sanctions imposed over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

YouTube has also blocked Russian state-run media outlets that have championed the war. Russia retaliated with fines but stopped short of banning the website.

Even before invading Ukraine, Russia had amplified pressure on U.S.-based tech giants for what it calls interference in its domestic politics and a range of other infractions.

AFP contributed reporting.

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