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Welcome to Russia in 2025. Wave Your Comfortable Modern Life Goodbye.

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Residents in a park in Moscow. **Dmitry Belitsky / Moskva News Agency**

Good news, comrades! The future is here — and it looks a lot like 1985.

Senior lawmaker Vladimir Gutenev, who also heads the State Duma's Industry and Trade Committee, recently urged Russians to prepare for "regular and necessary" internet shutdowns.

"We're used to paying with cards or smartphones and having constant connectivity," he said. "But now it's important to accept temporary restrictions as a necessity."

Then, with a patronizing jab, Gutenev added: "Don't turn into a hipster who only lives in the center of Moscow. Life is not limited to comfort."

The reason? National security, of course.

Also, Ukrainian drones.

Also, because we said so.

So, forget your cards, your banking apps, your streaming services. The Motherland demands cash payments, offline living and an end to all this whining about modern comforts.

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These outages, which have hit 77 regions, sometimes all at once, are officially meant to stop Ukrainian drones from using mobile networks to find their targets. In practice, they have stopped shopkeepers from taking card payments, taxi drivers from navigating and small businesses from functioning. It is a digital Iron Curtain: clunky, controlling and straight out of the Soviet playbook.

If multiple reports are true, Russians' WhatsApp and Telegram chats will soon be joining Netflix and Visa in exile, while officials in Crimea are already bracing for months of extended internet blackouts.

Moscow's censors, inspired by China's Great Firewall, are now working on their own knockoff version — call it the Great Wall of Russia, assembled with Soviet-era concrete and held together with duct tape.

VPNs, once the quiet lifeline of students, journalists and anyone with curiosity, are being hunted like contraband cigarettes. Soon, the only "V-P-N" permitted may well be the "Very Patriotic Network," a safe and state-approved gateway to the internet that conveniently loads nothing but Kremlin press releases and the weather forecast for Sochi.

Younger Russians, raised on Instagram, Yandex cabs and instant payments, will feel the loss far more sharply than their parents, who actually remember queues for toilet paper.

It is not just internet access. Over the last few months, Russia has been quietly reviving old-school barter deals, swapping chickpeas and lentils for Pakistani rice and mandarins as sanctions tighten their grip on the economy.

The Kremlin's economic strategy seems to be part fortress, part village marketplace. It is tall enough to block outside influence, but still porous enough for trade in legumes.

To an outsider, it may look like deprivation. But for many Russians, the adjustment is less about hardship and more about habit. A country that endured bread lines, ration cards, and the chaos of the 1990s has learned to live without convenience, and sometimes without choice.

The Kremlin's gamble rests on a familiar formula: frame scarcity as resilience, sell isolation as sovereignty and count on the public to swap card payments for cash, online shopping for face-to-face bargaining and global connectivity for state-approved news feeds.

Moscow's leaders know that these conditions would provoke unrest anywhere else. In Russia, they are banking on the people's endurance, on the quiet skill of making do.

The rest of the world might see internet shutdowns and chickpea-for-mandarins barter as signs of decline. But the Kremlin prefers to present them as proof of independence from the West's decadent order.

The message is clear: you do not need the global internet to be a proud Russian. You just need cash in your pocket, ample buckwheat in your cupboard and the good sense not to complain when the Wi-Fi cuts out.

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Indeed, the Kremlin can only dream of sealing Russia off like China or North Korea. Half of the world's best hackers cut their teeth in a St. Petersburg basement. The same computer wizz-kids who can turn a microwave or a washing machine into a makeshift server if it runs on code to circumvent Western sanctions could turn their talents to skirting Moscow's restrictions.

When the Very Patriotic Network starts buffering, expect a thriving black market in outlaw SIM cards, pirate satellite dishes and USB drives passed hand-to-hand like samizdat.

Moscow can pull the plug. But somewhere in Novosibirsk, a teenager will be watching the BBC streaming service before the router cools. The Kremlin can slow the digital tide, but it cannot stop it without strangling the same cyber talent it quietly celebrates when it suits.

That is why the real bet is not on total isolation — it is on endurance.

The Kremlin's message is clear: security over comfort, loyalty over convenience. For a nation that survived the Siege of Leningrad, the collapse of the U.S.S.R. and the chaos of the 1990s, life without the internet may be irritating, but it is nothing they cannot handle.

The tragedy is how easily they have learned to handle it.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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