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Interior Ministry Issues Protest Warning Amid Calls to Rally Against Internet Curbs

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Vasily Kuzmichenok / Moskva News Agency

Russia's Interior Ministry said Thursday that anyone involved in unsanctioned protests against tightening internet restrictions would be held criminally responsible, a warning that comes after cryptic videos circulating online called for nationwide rallies this coming weekend.

"Calls to take part in unauthorized public events on March 27-29, as well as in other illegal activities across Russia's regions, have been spreading more widely online, including on social media and messaging apps," the ministry said in a statement.

"Participating in such events, or encouraging others to join them (including minors), can lead to administrative or criminal charges," it added.

In recent weeks, videos on TikTok have urged people to protest government internet controls

on March 29. Some of the videos used coded language rather than explicit calls to rally, including posts asking for help finding a "lost cat" at a specific time and location.

Descriptions accompanying some of the videos linked to an anonymous Telegram channel called Scarlet Swan, which independent media identified as a group of activists that has unsuccessfully sought official permission to hold protests.

Related article: Telegram Outages Reported Across Russia as Block Rumors Swirl

Separately, politician Boris Nadezhdin, who attempted to run for president in 2024 on an anti-war platform, also filed requests to hold rallies this coming weekend against growing restrictions on messaging platforms, including Telegram. Those applications were rejected.

Russians have reported significant mobile internet outages in recent weeks amid growing speculation that Telegram could face a full nationwide block next month.

While disruptions to internet access have become a common occurrence throughout the country since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the latest outages have been broader and longer-lasting.

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