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Russia's Planned VPN Traffic Charges Hit by Technical Delays – Vedomosti

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Denis Voronin / Moskva News Agency

Russian mobile operators are not technically ready to introduce fees on VPN-related traffic from May 1, three sources familiar with the matter told the Vedomosti business daily, citing difficulties in adapting billing systems to track and charge such usage in real time.

Moscow is facing technical and regulatory hurdles as it seeks to curb the use of virtual private networks (VPNs), which have become a key tool for bypassing internet restrictions. Authorities have pushed telecom providers to limit access to such services, but implementation has proved more complex than anticipated.

Operators are struggling to reconfigure billing systems capable of monitoring traffic consumption and deducting charges from users' accounts as it occurs, the sources said.

"It will take until autumn to rework billing systems," one of them told the newspaper.

Another said several operators had asked for a few months to revise tariff plans and soften the

impact on consumers, adding that the Digital Development Ministry could grant a delay until Sept. 1 or even early 2028.

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Under earlier instructions from the ministry, mobile operators were required from May 1 to introduce additional charges for international traffic exceeding 15 gigabytes per month as part of a broader campaign against VPN services.

Sources cited by the BBC's Russian service said operators could charge an average of 150 rubles ($2.00) per gigabyte above the limit.

Industry participants say the initial timeline was unrealistic and that key questions remain unresolved. It is unclear, for example, how to classify "international" traffic, given that some Russian companies rely on foreign IP addresses.

At the same time, content delivery networks (CDNs) operated within Russia by companies such as Google can effectively localize traffic, further complicating classification.

Operators also lack clear guidance on enforcement if users exceed the 15 GB threshold without paying — whether to throttle speeds, automatically deduct funds, or cut off internet access altogether, one source said.

Implementing the new system would require tracking traffic for around 180 million users and rewriting tariff structures, Konstantin Ankilov, head of consultancy TMT Consulting, told Vedomosti.

Such changes typically take months and in some cases up to half a year, independent analyst Alexei Boiko told the newspaper.

Digital Development Minister Maksut Shadayev said in late March that reducing VPN usage had been set as a priority for his ministry.

As part of the effort, operators were ordered from April 1 to stop allowing Apple ID top-ups via mobile accounts, limiting a common way of paying for VPN services.

They were also instructed to introduce a 15 GB monthly "free" traffic cap for traffic associated with circumvention tools.

Separately, the ministry has moved to revoke accreditation from IT companies that allow access to their services via VPN and to remove such services from "whitelists" that permit access even during internet shutdowns.

Sources cited by Forbes Russia said the push to restrict VPN usage followed a confidential directive from President Vladimir Putin, though the Kremlin has said it is unaware of any such document.

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