

Russia fines Twitter, Facebook for keeping data abroad

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Twitter and Facebook face even heavier fines if they refuse to comply with the law

A Moscow court on Thursday fined social networking giants Twitter and Facebook for ignoring a Russian law requiring them to store Russian citizens' user data inside the country.

A court slapped the US-based companies with fines of four million rubles each (about \$63,000) for failing to move their servers containing data of Russian users into Russia, Russian news agencies reported.

They have 10 days to appeal.

Contacted by AFP, Twitter said the company did not comment on court decisions.

Both companies have been in a long-running dispute with Russia's internet watchdog Roskomnadzor since a 2014 law passed requiring messaging services, search engines and social networking sites to store Russian data inside Russia.

Russia has already blocked the Telegram messaging app and LinkedIn professional network, although the former remains widely accessible in the country.

Twitter and Facebook are widely used by the political opposition in Russia and activists have expressed concern that locating data inside Russia will make them vulnerable to prosecution.

Russia has launched many cases over extremism and incitement to unrest after users on the country's popular VK social media network reposted messages on political protests or pictures judged as xenophobic.

In some cases internet users have been jailed.

A recent report by rights groups Agora and Roskomsvoboda said that in 2019 there were 200 prosecutions for "internet activity", and the courts handed down 38 jail sentences after criminal convictions.

Another new law passed in December allows Russia to cut internet

traffic from international servers, to achieve what Vladimir Putin has called a "sovereign internet".

State internet watchdog Roskomnadzor said Thursday the new ruling against Twitter and Facebook was the first step in enforcing that law, adding that the companies still had to move their servers, Russian agencies reported.

If they refuse to cooperate over the course of the next year, they will be liable to a second fine of 18 million rubles, the regulator said, TASS agency reported.

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