

As Russia blocks Facebook and Twitter demand for VPN surges



As Russian and Ukrainian websites fall victim to cyber-attacks and Moscow restricts access to some foreign social media, internet users across both countries have turned to online tools to help circumvent the blocks.

Demand for Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) that encrypt data and obscure where a user is located has soared, data from monitoring firm Top10VPN showed, peaking 354% higher in Russia last week when compared to the daily average from 16 to 23 February.

Russia, which calls its actions in Ukraine a "special operation", invaded its neighbour on 24 February, attacking from land, sea and air. At home, it is battling to control the narrative, threatening restrictions on foreign and local media that stray from its official version of events. [read more](#)

Photos and videos were slow to load on Facebook, owned by Meta Platforms Inc, and Twitter, both of which have been targeted by state communications regulator Roskomnadzor.

"VPN demand surged in Russia as authorities restricted Facebook and Twitter over the weekend in a bid to control the flow of information from its invasion of Ukraine," Top10VPN said.

Russia banned several VPNs last year but has failed to block them entirely, as part of wider campaign critics say stifles internet freedom.

In Ukraine, Russian hackers were blamed for a spate of cyberattacks that briefly knocked Ukrainian banking and government websites offline, days before the invasion. Russia denied involvement.

VPN demand in Ukraine began noticeably increasing on Feb. 15 in light of cyberattacks, Top10VPN said, and skyrocketed after the invasion, with demand peaking 424% higher than the daily average in the first half of February.

Last week, the websites of several Russian media outlets were hacked, with their regular sites replaced by an anti-war message and calls to stop President Vladimir Putin's invasion.

Global neon production limited due to Russia-Ukraine war

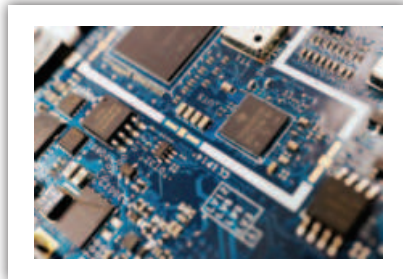
Ukrainian neon supply firms Ingas and Cryoin have recently closed down following the continued attack on Ukraine from Russia.

According to reports, Ukraine alone produces half of the world's neon, which are important components in the production of electronic chips. Reports further suggest that there have been threats to raise prices and aggravate the semiconductor shortage as well.

Some 45% to 54% of the world's semiconductor-grade neon, critical for the lasers used to make chips, comes from two Ukrainian companies, Ingas and Cryoin, according to Reuters calculations based on figures from the companies and market research firm Techcet. Global neon consumption for chip production reached about 540 metric tons last year, Techcet estimates.

Both firms have shuttered their operations, according to company representatives contacted by Reuters, as Russian troops have escalated their attacks on cities throughout Ukraine, killing civilians and destroying key infrastructure.

The stoppage casts a cloud over the worldwide output of chips, already in short supply after the Covid-19 pandemic drove up demand for cell phones, laptops and later cars, forcing some firms to scale back production.



Before the invasion, Ingas produced 15,000 to 20,000 cubic metres of neon per month for customers in Taiwan, Korea, China, the United States and Germany, with about 75% going to the

chip industry, Nikolay Avdzhly, the company's chief commercial officer, said in an email to Reuters.

The company is based in Mariupol, which has been under siege by Russian forces. On Wednesday, Russian forces destroyed a maternity hospital there, in what Kyiv and Western allies called a war crime. Moscow said the hospital was no longer functioning and had been occupied by Ukrainian fighters.

Cryoin, which produced roughly 10,000 to 15,000 cubic metres of neon per month, and is located in Odessa, halted operations on 24 February when the invasion began to keep employees safe, according to business development director Larissa Bondarenko.

Bondarenko said the company would be unable to fill orders for 13,000 cubic metres of neon in March unless the violence stopped. She said the company could weather at least three months with the plant closed but warned that if the equipment were damaged, that would prove a bigger drag on company finances and make it harder to restart operations quickly.

Ukrainian neon is a byproduct of Russian steel manufacturing. The gas, which is also used in laser eye surgery, is produced in China as well, but Chinese prices are rising steadily.

Neon prices rose 600% in the run-up to Russia's 2014 annexation of the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine, according to the U.S. International Trade Commission.

Companies elsewhere could initiate neon production but it would take nine months to two years to ramp up, according to Richard Barnett, chief marketing officer of Supplyframe, which provides market intelligence to companies across the global electronics sectors.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Taking it to the next gear

From winning pro racing competitions to engineering world-class vehicles in international events, Bangladesh has recently made amazing strides in the world of automobiles. This week's Cover Story focuses on the five Bangladeshi teams participating in year's Formula Student, a global motorsport competition for university students. Check out our full feature on these teams and how they are preparing to represent our country on the grand stage.

Aside from cars, we also talk about building a professional portfolio for writers in Next Step and some handy tips for your new tablet in Bytes. As always, plenty to look forward to.

Stay safe everyone. Until then.

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Volkswagen unveils a new electric version of the classic Buzz

Volkswagen, the German automotive giant, has finally revealed the new electric version of its classic ID Buzz.

With a long wheelbase, a flat front and short overhangs, the new ID Buzz reminds people of the classic old microbus from the past. But while the original 'hippie bus' ran on a small four-cylinder engine behind the rear axle, the new ID Buzz runs completely on electric power.

Volkswagen's latest gem sits on its Molecular Electric Drive Matrix (MEB) electric

architecture. It has a 201-horsepower, 150-kW electric motor powering the rear wheels. Having an onboard battery of 77 kWh, the electric range is expected to be around 400 kilometres.

The two models of the ID Buzz, the ID Buzz people carrier and the ID Buzz Cargo van, have 170-kW charging, implying that the battery can be charged up to 80% in 30 minutes.

The ID Buzz people carrier has a capacity for carrying five passengers.

At the highest specification level, the ID Buzz will have around 30 assist systems on board, including the 'Car2X' communication. It will allow it to download data through the cloud from nearby Volkswagens and learn about traffic nearby. A memory function will 'teach' the van to navigate through multiple scenarios, such as parking the car.

The production of the Buzz ID is set to start later this year, with the first vehicles expected to be on sale in Europe at the end of 2022.

