

Belarus blocks online sites, closes stores to stem currency panic

December 21 2014



Customers look at laptops in a shop in the Russian town of Klintzy, near the border with Belarus, on December 20, 2014

Belarus blocked online stores and news websites Sunday, in an apparent attempt to stop a run on banks and shops as people rushed to secure their savings.

In a statement Sunday, BelaPAN news company, which runs popular

independent news websites Belapan.by and Naviny.by, said that the sites were blocked Saturday without any warning.

"Clearly the decision to block the IP addresses could only be taken by the authorities because in Belarus the government has monopoly on providing IPs," it said.

Other websites blocked Sunday were Charter97.by, BelarusPartisan.org, Udf.by and others with an independent [news](#) outlook.

The blockage started on December 19, when the government announced that purchases of foreign currency will be taxed 30 percent and told all exporters to convert half of their foreign revenues into the local currency.

"Looks like the authorities want to turn light panic over the fall of the Belarussian ruble into a real one," Belarus Partisan [website](#) wrote, calling the blockages "December insanity."

Internet shopping websites were also blocked en masse. Thirteen online stores were blocked Saturday for raising their prices or showing them in US dollars, deputy trade minister Irina Narkevich said, Interfax reported.

The government announced a moratorium on price increases for consumer goods and ordered domestic producers of appliances to "increase deliveries" and keep prices the same at the risk of their management being sacked.



People stand in line at a currency exchange office in Minsk on December 19, 2014

Belarussians lined up for hours to clear out their bank accounts and swept store shelves to secure their savings, stocking up on foreign-made appliances and housewares.

The Belarussian ruble has lost about half of its value since the beginning of the year, having been hit hard by the depreciation of the Russian ruble since its economy is heavily dependent on its giant neighbour.

With foreign currency swiftly depleted in exchange offices, Belarussians even launched a black market website dollarnash.com where individuals could buy and sell dollars and euros.

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