Russia passes bill to allow internet to be cut off from foreign servers

Agence France-Presse in Moscow

Critics say measures would be expensive and give vast censorship powers to the government

▲ Police officers detain a demonstrator after the Free Internet rally in March, organised in response to the bill. Photograph: AP

Russian politicians have approved a controversial bill that would allow Moscow to cut off the country's internet traffic from foreign servers, in a key second reading that paves the way for the bill to become law on 1 November.

Lawmakers in the State Duma, parliament's lower house, voted 320 to 15 to pass the proposed bill.

The proposed measures would create technology to monitor internet routing and steer Russian internet traffic away from foreign servers, ostensibly to prevent a foreign country from shutting it down.

Authors of the initiative say Russia must ensure the security of its networks after the US president, Donald Trump, unveiled a new US cybersecurity strategy last year that said Russia had carried out cyber-attacks with impunity.

The legislation has been dubbed a "sovereign internet" bill by Russian media.

Critics say implementing the measures would be expensive and give vast censorship powers to the government's new traffic monitoring centre.

"It's a bill on digital slavery and the introduction of censorship for the web," said Sergei Ivanov, a member of the nationalist Liberal-Democratic party.

The bill's authors insist however that the measures only outline a plan to make Russian internet "more secure and reliable".

"The bill's popular name, the Chinese Firewall, has nothing to do with our initiative," said Leonid Levin, a lawmaker from the ruling United Russia party which dominates Russian parliament.