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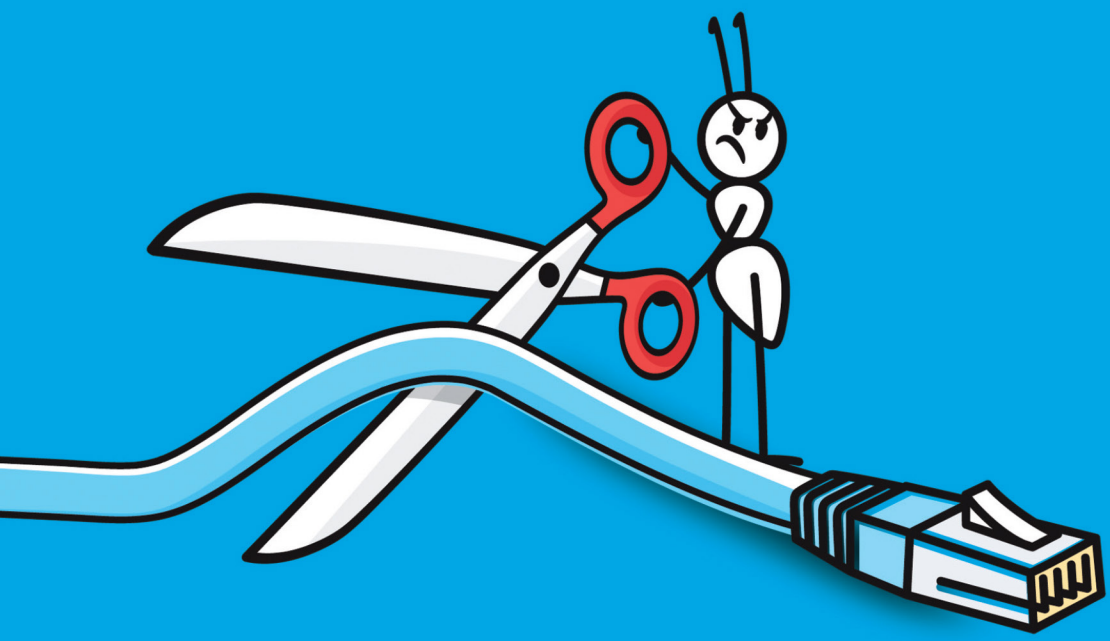
Living in Digital Darkness

A Handbook on Internet Shutdowns in India



May 2018

Living in Digital Darkness: A Handbook on Internet Shutdowns in India

Published by: SFLC.in

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List of abbreviations

CEO	*Chief Executive Officer*
CrPC	*Code of Criminal Procedure*
GDP	*Gross Domestic Product*
ICT	*Information and Communication Technologies*
IPC	*Indian Penal Code*
ISP	*Internet Service Provider*
IT	*Information Technology*
RTI	*Right to Information*
SMS	*Short Message Service*
Telecom	*Telecommunications*
TSP	*Telecommunications Service Provider*
UN	*United Nations*
UNHRC	*United Nations Human Rights Council*
VSAT	*Very Small Aperture Terminal*
WSIS	*World Summit on the Information Society*

List of statutes

- Code of Criminal Procedure Code, 1973
- Indian Penal Code, 1860
- Indian Telegraph Act, 1885
- Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services, (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017
- Information Technology Act, 2000
- Right to Information Act, 2005

Introduction

The Internet has long been identified as one of the greatest technological advancements of recent times, and has proven over the years to be a critical enabler of social and economic change. As observed by the Outcome Document of the High-Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the Overall Review of the Implementation of WSIS Outcomes, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) including the Internet have seen penetration into almost all corners of the globe, created new opportunities for social interaction, enabled new business models, and contributed to economic growth and development in all other sectors. It was further observed that increased ICT connectivity, innovation, and access have played a critical role in enabling progress on the Millennium Development Goals.

"Governments across the world are increasingly resorting to Internet shutdowns (also referred to as Internet blackouts) for a wide range of reasons, all with the objective of controlling the exchange of information online."

However, Governments across the world are increasingly resorting to Internet shutdowns (also referred to as Internet blackouts) for a wide range of reasons, all with the objective of controlling the exchange of information online. The most widely cited reason for instituting Internet shutdowns is that law and order breakdowns are made worse by rumors and misinformation circulating online, and curbing access to the Internet is an effective aid in restoring normalcy. During a shutdown, Government agencies usually order Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) to stop providing Internet services in one or more localities so that residents are prevented from easily accessing and circulating information that is seen as incendiary or otherwise harmful.

The frequent resort to Internet shutdowns by the State as a mitigation and prevention strategy, mostly in the developing countries is a cause of concern. Between January 2012 and May 1, 2018, India has experienced 174 Internet shutdowns for various reasons and durations across 19 of the 29 states in the country[1]. Apart from India, Internet shutdowns have also been reported in over 30 other countries, including among others, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Mynamar, Egypt, Congo, Syria, Sudan, Burundi, Iraq, and Venezuela.

Frequent Internet shutdowns by the State come with several problems, like obstructing the free flow of information and essentially bringing many aspects of modern society to a grinding halt. Businesses, educational institutions, hospitals, and even Governments themselves have come to rely extensively on the Internet over time, and without it, the day-to-day functioning of such entities are significantly crippled. It has also been argued that cutting off

1. Internet Shutdown Tracker, available at: https://www.internetshutdowns.in, last accessed on May 1, 2018

Internet access in a crisis prone/inflicted area might prove to be detrimental rather than beneficial, as a disconnect from the Internet in such situations restricts the accurate and timely reportage that is necessary even for relief and disaster management.

It is troubling that even though the world has taken collective cognizance of the importance of the Internet in enabling sustainable growth and development, and most jurisdictions have laws that guarantee and ensure respect for fundamental human rights such as the right to free speech and expression, Internet shutdowns are nevertheless gaining momentum in many parts of the world. Not only do Internet shutdowns disrupt the smooth functioning of societies, but they also make human rights a hostage to the whims of Governments. Specially in the absence of laws that demand a particular standard of scrutiny and transparency, Internet shutdowns pose serious threats to development and perhaps democracy itself.

Scope

This report seeks to provide a detailed look at how Internet shutdowns work in India so as to add to the growing body of research literature that informs policy discussions in this regard. To this end, it will briefly go over how Internet shutdowns have surfaced and grown in the country, analyze the laws and policies that govern their imposition, provide a glimpse into how Internet shutdowns may cause real-world problems in the long and short run, and take stock of the efforts that have gone into defining and addressing Internet shutdowns as a public policy issue. We hope that this report will prove useful to everyone who wishes to actively or passively participate in the debate around Internet shutdowns on any level. As the Internet stakeholder community comprises virtually all Internet users, this includes everyone from daily consumers of online infotainment, to students, researchers, and academicians who rely on the Internet to a large extent for research, businesses that have migrated much of their day-to-day operations online, civil society members looking to effectively engage in policy discussions, and even the Government, who has the unenviable task of regulating the open Internet in a fair, just, and reasonable manner while making sure that it is not used in ways that threaten the safety and well-being of citizens.

Methodology

A mix of primary and secondary research has been used in drafting this report. Existing literature on the topic such as books, reports, news articles, blog posts and policy papers were consulted while drafting the explanatory sections of this report. All information on the reported instances of Internet shutdowns in India come from the dynamic Internet Shutdown Tracker we maintain at www.internetshutdowns.in, which in turn sources its data primarily from reports published in national and regional newspapers. Some information is also provided by residents from areas affected by Internet shutdowns using the "report a shutdown" feature that is made available to visitors of the website.

As such, we emphasize that the list of recorded Internet shutdowns in India must be approached with a certain amount of caution. We consider newspaper reports of Internet shutdowns to be more or less accurate by default, and therefore do not verify every report separately unless we have a reason to do so. On the

rare occasions when news reports present conflicting information on certain shutdowns for instance, we try our best to independently verify this information from primary sources such as residents from the affected areas. We also verify all information on Internet shutdowns that reaches us by word-of-mouth by soliciting corroborating reports from our sources. Only verified instances are added to our database in such cases. Even so, we advise that our record of shutdowns be treated as an indicative one, and not exhaustive.

Understanding Internet shutdowns

What is an Internet shutdown?
We define an Internet shutdown as "a Government-imposed disablement of access to the Internet as a whole within one or more localities for any duration of time". There are two key-components to this definition:

1. An Internet shutdown is always Government-imposed i.e. Internet Service Providers serving the locality in question are ordered by an agency of the Government to cut-off Internet services to that area.

2. An Internet shutdown always imposes a blanket ban on Internet access, where access to the Internet as a whole is disabled, and not a selective ban, where access to particular content/services is disabled leaving access to other content/services unaffected.

It is pertinent to note that there is an extent of variability in how Internet shutdowns are defined by the global multi-stakeholder community. Some encapsulate instances of selective bans on Internet access within the meaning of the term "Internet shutdown", alongside blanket bans on access to the Internet as a whole. For instance, Access Now – an international non-profit organization that also spearheads the #KeepItOn campaign to end Internet shutdowns – defines an Internet shutdown as, *"an intentional disruption of internet or electronic communications, rendering them inaccessible or effectively unusable, for a specific population or within a location, often to exert control over the flow of information"*[2]. This definition notably excludes any references to the scope of disruption, which means selective bans may also be brought within its ambit.

It is argued at various policy forums that as the fundamental premise of both selective and blanket bans is about disabling access to online content/services, and as the former is an equally condemnable violation of human rights as the latter, there is no reason to view them as separate public policy issues. However, selective bans on Internet access are excluded from the scope of this report as it was felt that the emergence and rapid growth of blanket bans in India warrant treating them as a distinct issue. In addition, selective and blanket bans are built on separate legal foundations in India, and selective bans have rarely been imposed as responses to conflict situations owing to the ease with which they can be circumvented, and prevention/mitigation of conflict has become the primary reason to impose blanket Internet shutdowns in the country.

> **"We define an Internet shutdown as "a Government-imposed disablement of access to the Internet as a whole within one or more localities for any duration of time"."**

Unless specified otherwise, the term "Inter-

2. *What is an Internet Shutdown?*, available at: https://www.accessnow.org/keepiton/, last accessed May 1, 2018

net shutdown" as it appears in this report must be understood to refer to blanket bans on Internet access, and not selective bans.

Why are Internet shutdowns imposed?

In August 2012, residents hailing from North-Eastern India staged an exodus from the South Indian city of Bengaluru after rumors began to circulate on WhatsApp and various social media platforms that large-scale violence was being planned against them in the wake of ethnic clashes in the state of Assam(3). Even though no cases of actual violence seemingly took place in Bengaluru, residents from the North-East were reported as saying that there was an atmosphere of "fear and mistrust" in the city, fueled to a large extent by rumors of impending violence that were circulating online and offline(4). As a result, thousands rushed to the city's railway stations seeking to return to their hometowns, causing several stampede-like situations even after the Government announced two special trains on an emergency basis to accommodate the sudden influx of travelers. The city was thrown into chaos, leaving the authorities scrambling to contain the situation and prevent damage, injuries and loss of life. Moreover, the fact that this incident took place in Bengaluru, which had always been a relatively peaceful city and certainly not one known for incidents resulting from ethnic tensions, drove some to speculate that the panic was engineered through one or more systematic campaigns to create fear using social media, SMS and regional media(5). The speculations were based largely on the fact that none interviewed by the media were able to cite even a single incident of actual violence in the city, and appeared to be acting mostly on rumors circulating online and offline.

Whatever the true reasons behind the uncharacteristic exodus from Bengaluru might have been, it was closely followed by the first instance of an Internet shutdown in India on September 21, 2012, when mobile Internet services were suspended for a few hours in the Kashmir Valley during protests against a movie that was deemed offensive to Islamic sentiments(6). This was the first time as per available information that mobile Internet services alone were suspended in India i.e. not as part of a broader telecommunications clampdown such as those imposed every Republic Day and Independence Day in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The order issued in this regard by Jammu and Kashmir's Home Department does not reveal much information on reasons behind the shutdown, other than that it was imposed under Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 *"in the interest of public safety and for maintaining public order"*(7). However, it can be inferred from the circumstances surrounding the shutdown as well as the language of the Home Department order that it was imposed to prevent further circulation of the movie "Innocence of Muslims", which was considered inflammatory and likely to cause violent protests. While reports were

3. Dipa Kurup, *After Rumors, Northeast People Flee Bangalore,* August 16, 2012, The Hindu, available at: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/after-rumours-northeast-people-flee-bangalore/article3776549.ece, last accessed on April 28, 2018

4. Ibid.

5. Lakshmi Chaudhry, *Mystery of the NE exodus: Why Bangalore?,* August 16, 2012, Firstpost, available at: https://www.firstpost.com/india/mystery-of-the-ne-exodus-why-bangalore-419876.html, last accessed on May 1, 2018

6. Pamposh Raina and Betwa Sharma, *Telecom Services Blocked to Curb Protests in Kashmir,* September 21, 2012, NY Times Blog, available at: https://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/21/telecom-services-blocked-to-curb-protests-in-kashmir/?_r=0, last accessed on April 28, 2018

7. Jammu and Kashmir Home Department Order No. Home – 811 of 2012, available at: http://jkhome.nic.in/7940001.pdf, last accessed on April 28, 2018

conflicted about whether this particular shutdown was a blanket ban on access or a selective ban, it nevertheless appears to be the first time an Internet shutdown was reported in any capacity by India's mainstream media.

Three more shutdowns were imposed in India in 2014, not counting the routine telecommunications clampdowns in Jammu and Kashmir on Republic Day and Independence Day[8]. All three shutdowns were imposed in various localities across Jammu and Kashmir after violence broke out during political and communal tensions. According to news reports, the shutdowns were imposed as a measure to contain outbreaks of violence by limiting the spread of rumors and misinformation online. In fact, every Internet shutdown that has been imposed since September 21, 2012 until April 30, 2018 save a negligible few, was imposed either as a measure to prevent violence when violence was considered likely or as a measure to contain the spread of violence after violence had already broken out.

It would appear that the North-East exodus from Bangalore (and possibly numerous smaller-scale, less widely reported incidents before it) had demonstrated to law enforcement authorities and others in the Government that the Internet can act as a powerful tool for those seeking to disrupt law and order for any reason. As invaluable as the Internet is in enabling sustainable growth and development, the authorities had seen first-hand that it is also vulnerable to exploitation by those with malicious intent. Services like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and others allow virtually anyone to create and broadcast content designed to inspire fear and instigate chaos. In addition, they make it easier for the perpetrators to organize themselves and plan out their disruptions in careful detail. Law enforcement agents also have a more difficult time apprehending the perpetrators who often have the added advantage of encryption protocols covering their digital footprints.

"It would appear that the North-East exodus from Bangalore (and possibly numerous smaler-scale, less widely reported incidents before it) had demonstrated to law enforcement authorities and others in the Government that the Internet can act as a powerful tool for those seeking to disrupt law and order for any reason."

When faced with an imminent or existing law and order breakdown, Internet shutdowns have gradually become a popular component of the wider array of State responses like curfews, media clampdowns and others. It is firmly believed by state agencies that such a blanket shutdown would completely stop the spread of rumors and misinformation online, and by extension, any escalations in panic or violence that may otherwise have taken place. While selective bans on Internet access i.e. access to popular communication and social networking platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have also been imposed during law and order situations in the past, blanket Internet shutdowns are heavily favored by the State as selective bans are relatively easy to circumvent using workarounds like Virtual Private Networks and proxy servers. Instructing TSPs to cut off access to the entire Internet

8. Supra. 1 on May 1, 2018

effectively solves this problem, and ensures that Internet shutdowns function as they are expected to. Problems caused by blanket shutdowns like disruptions in e-commerce, e-banking and e-governance among many others are seen as permissible collateral damage during public emergencies.

There are three primary legislations under which Internet shutdowns are imposed in India – these are (1) Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973; (2) Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885; and (3) the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency and Public Safety) Rules, 2017. The next section of this report will examine how these legislations tackle Internet shutdowns, and how they are used to curb Internet access at various points.

Internet shutdowns under law

When it comes to understanding existing legal mechanism for internet shutdowns in India, there are two statutes and a set of rules i.e Code of Criminal Procedure 1973 (CrPC), Indian Telegraph Act 1885, and Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017 (hereinafter, the Telecom Suspension Rules), which confer powers upon Government agencies to order blanket network outages in districts and states of India.

Section 144, Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973

A vast majority of Internet shutdowns recorded in India between January 2012 and April 2018 have been ordered under Section 144 of the CrPC, 1973. Concrete statistics on the number of invocations is unavailable as news reports often do not mention the provision under which shutdowns were imposed, but it can safely be said from available reports that this provision was heavily favored at least until the Telecom Suspension Rules were notified in 2017, though it has continued to be intermittently used even afterwards.

“A vast majority of Internet shutdowns recorded in India between January 2012 and April 2018 have been ordered under Section 144 of the CrPC, 1973”

The CrPC is a collection of procedural laws that govern how substantive criminal laws enumerated under the Indian Penal Code, 1860 are to be enforced and covers such aspects as investigation and prosecution of offences among others. Within the CrPC, Section 144 resides as the sole occupant under the chapter of “temporary measures to maintain public tranquility” and gives State Governments the “power to issue orders for immediate remedy in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger”.

From a bare reading, the core aspects of Section 144 that are relevant when discussing Internet shutdowns can be broken down as follows:

- The authority to issue orders under this Section lies with the District Magistrate, a sub divisional magistrate or any other Executive magistrate specially empowered by the State Government in this behalf.

- Before an order can be issued under Section 144, the issuing authority must be satisfied that there is sufficient ground for proceeding under this Section, and that immediate prevention or speedy remedy is desirable.

- Any order issued under Section 144 must be in writing, stating the material facts of the case and served in accordance to applicable legal procedure.

- The order so issued and served can “direct any person to do or abstain from a certain act” or “to take certain order with respect to certain property in his possession or under his management”. In other words, the order can ask anyone to do or not do anything, or to perform a specific action as directed with respect to any property they possess or manage.

• In the issuing authority's view, the order must be "likely to prevent, or tends to prevent, obstruction, annoyance or injury to any person lawfully employed, or danger to human life, health or safety, or a disturbance of the public tranquillity, or a riot or an affray".

Section 144 was a provision designed to help contain law and order situations by vesting State Government officials with emergency powers, and it has traditionally been used to issue curfews and dismiss unlawful assemblies during widespread civil unrest. The Section accordingly features broad language that is necessary to allow issuing authorities to carry out their duties effectively, and does not contain any checks and balances to prevent abuse other than limiting the maximum duration of orders to 6 months and empowering third-party State Government officials to rescind orders issued by another.

In context of Internet shutdowns, Section 144 implies that a District or Sub Divisional Magistrate can order TSPs to stop providing Internet services within the Magistrate's jurisdiction (as the network architecture is a property under the TSPs possession and management), if it is felt that doing so would prevent law and order situations from arising or escalating. It must be noted words such as "obstruction, annoyance, disturbance to public tranquillity or an affray" are not defined under the CrPC or any other legislation, thus opening the statutory provision to heterogeneous interpretations.

As an archaic provision of law that has been carried down from the British Raj, this Section was clearly not designed to oversee State actions like Internet shutdowns, where a lot more nuances must ideally be considered before imposing restrictions. A District Magistrate speaking on Internet shutdowns at an event expressed that he prefers imposing shutdowns under Section 144 as the process is less cumbersome when compared to other legislations(9). The orders to invoke Section 144 in online scenario for internet world are far-fetched because they prevent the public at large from accessing and using internet for any purpose including areas like like education and business.

"As an archaic provision of law that has been carried down from the British Raj, this Section was clearly not designed to oversee State actions like Internet shutdowns, where a lot more nuances must ideally be considered before imposing restrictions."

9. *Report Launch by ICRIER, "Internet Blackout: Measuring the Economic Blackout of Internet Shutdowns in India",* See: https://sflc.in/report-launch-icrier-internet-blackout-measuring-economic-blackout-internet-shutdowns-india, last accessed on May 1, 2018

ORDER UNDER SECTION 144 OF THE CODE OF CRIMINAL PROCEDURE 1973

Whereas it has been made to appear before me that the Jat reservation agitation has spread throughout the District Hisar. There are ongoing instances and further likelihood of blockade of Railway track, highway and other roads by the agitators. Similarly, there is likelihood of damage to public property and commission of cognizable offences related to safety and security of individuals and property. This has caused a great inconvenience to the general public and adversely affected the essential services and supply of commodities. Many gatherings of these agitators are being facilitated by way of spreading disinformation and rumours through various social media such as Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, Tumblr, Google+, on mobile phones. Similarly, SMS services on mobile phones are being used to spread disinformation and for facilitating gatherings of agitators. As per reports received, there is imminent danger of disturbance of public tranquility due to inflammatory material being transmitted/ circulated to the public through social media/ messaging services on internet 2G/3G/Edge/ GPRS.

In view of the tense situation in Haryana and on account of Law & Order disturbance, I, Dr. Chander Shekhar Khare, District Magistrate Hisar, by virtue of powers conferred under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, hereby order immediate stoppage the internet services (2G Edge, 3G, 4G, GPRS) provided on mobile network in the territorial jurisdiction of Hisar District, Haryana. Telecom Service Providers are hereby directed to ensure compliance of this order.

This order is issued to prevent any disturbance of peace and public order in the jurisdiction of Haryana and shall remain in effect till further orders.

This Order is being passed ex-parte in view of the emergent situation.

In case of violation of the aforesaid order, person found guilty shall be liable to be punished as per Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code.

Given under my hand and the seal of the court this day, 18th February 2016.

District Magistrate
Hisar.

No. 1194-1256 /PR/MA , dated 18/02/2016

A copy of the above is forwarded to the following for information and necessary action please:-

1. The Deputy Director General, TERM Cell (H), Panchkula.
2. All Telecom Service Providers operating in Haryana Telecom Circle.
3. The Chief Secretary to Govt. Haryana. (For information)
4. The Addl. Chief Secretary to Govt. Haryana, Home Department, Chandigarh. (For information)
5. The Director General of Police, Haryana, Panchkula. (For information)
6. The Addl. Director General of Police, CID (H) Panchkula. (For information)
7. Divisional Commissioner, Hisar .
8. District & Session Judge, Hisar.
9. All District Magistrates in the state.
10. The Superintendent of Police Hisar with 5 spare copies
11. SDM Hisar/Hansi/Barwala.
12. CTM Hisar.
13. Civil Surgeon Hisar.
14. All Tehsildars/Naib Tehsildars in District Hisar.
15. All BDPOs in District Hisar.
16. DIPRO Hisar.
17. PA to DM Hisar.

District Magistrate,
Hisar

(Example of Internet shutdown order issued under Section 144, CrPC, obtained under RTI Act)

OFFICE OF THE DISTRCIT MAGISTRATE, HISAR

ORDERS

In view of restoration of peace and normal situation after jat reservation agitation, throughout the District Hisar, I Dr. Chander Shekhar Khare, IAS, District Magistrate, Hisar do hereby withdraw my earlier order dated 18.02.2016 under section 144 Cr.P.C. issued vide endst. No. 1194-1256PA/MA dated 18.02.2016 regarding stopping the internet services (2G Edge, 3G, 4G, GPRS) and bulk messages provided on mobile network in the territorial jurisdiction of Hisar District, Haryana at 09:00 PM on 01.03.2016 and allow for restoration of above services.

Given under my hand and seal the Court this day of Ist March, 2016.

District Magistrate,
Hisar.

Endst. No. 1786– 1885 /MA dated 1-3-2016

A copy is forwarded to the following for information and necessary action:-

1. Chief Secretary to Govt., Haryana, Chandigarh.
2. Additional Chief Secretary to Govt., Haryana, Home Department, Chandigarh.
3. Director General of Police, Haryana, Panchkula.
4. Addl. Director General of Police, CID, Haryana, Panchkula.
5. Commissioner, Hisar Division, Hisar.
6. Inspector General of Police, Hisar Range, Hisar.
7. District & Sessions Judge, Hisar.
8. All District Magistrate in Haryana State.
9. Commissioner, Municpal Corportion, Hisar.
10. Superintendent of Police, Hisar. (With 20 spare copies of the order)
11. Additional Deputy Commissioner, Hisar.
12. General Manager B.S.N.L., Hisar.
13. Deputy Director General TERM Cell (H), Ambala.
14. All Telecom Service Providers Operating in Haryana Telecom Circle.
15. Sub Divisional Magistrate, Hisar/Hansi/Barwala. (With 5 spare copies)
16. District Development & Panchyat Officer, Hisar. (With 9 spare copies)
17. All Tehsildar/Naib Tehsildar of Hisar District.
18. Executive Officer/Secretaries of Municpal Corporation/ Council/Committee Hisar/Hansi/ Barwala/Narnaund/Uklana.
19. DIPRO, Hisar with 10 spare copies of the order.
20. PA to DC/Steno to CTM/DRO/DDPO, Hisar.

District Magistrate,
Hisar.

(Example of Internet restoration order issued under Section 144, CrPC, obtained under RTI Act)

The practice of invoking Section 144 to impose Internet shutdowns was in fact challenged at the Gujarat High Court as a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in *Gaurav Sureshbhai Vyas v. State of Gujarat* [W.P. (PIL) No. 191 of 2015]. It was argued that the power to block certain information on an online/ computer related forum was given in Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2005 hence the State Government was not competent to use Section 144 CrPC to restrict the use of Internet. While delivering the judgment for the case challenging the authority behind shut down of mobile Internet in Gujarat, the Gujarat High Court defended the State Government's authority under Section 144 CrPC. It held that the state government is a competent authority under this provision and it depends upon their discretion to exercise the power with prudence, public duty and the sufficiency of action in their view[10]. Furthermore, the court refrained from exercising appellate power to decide upon the 'sufficiency of matter to exercise power under Section 144.' It limited its decision to the question of whether there was an 'arbitrary exercise of power (by the state government) without any objective material.' The petitioners in this case argued for the use of Section 69A to block specific social media websites, through which the messages apprehended to cause violence were being spread. The court, disregarding this point, maintained that the scope of operations of Section 69A and Section 144 were different and overlapped, only to cover 'public order'. The court concluded that state government, which had the rightful authority in times of emergency, deemed fit to block entire mobile Internet services, failing which, the situation would have worsened.

A Special Leave Petition (SLP) challenging the order of the Gujarat High Court in the abovementioned case of *Gaurav Sureshbhai Vyas v. State of Gujarat* was also dismissed by the Supreme Court in February 2016. While upholding the power of the state governments to restrict access to Internet, the Apex Court observed that "It becomes very necessary sometimes for law and order"[11].

Section 5(2) Indian Telegraph Act, 1855

Though Section 144 of CrPC continues to be the provision most often used to invoke blanket bans on Internet in India, Section 5(2) of Telegraph Act 1855 has also been invoked multiple times to order temporary Internet service disruptions. In fact, one of the first Internet shutdowns to be reported by mainstream media in 2012 was imposed under Section 5(2) of Telegraph Act and since then, there have been many more instances where Internet shutdowns were instituted under this provision.

Before examining Section 5(2) in further detail, let us first see how the Internet even falls within the purview of a 19th century legislation meant to govern the long-extinct domain of telegraph communications. In short, the definition of the term "telegraph" as provided under Section 3(1AA) of the Telegraph Act goes far beyond actual telegraphs, and includes *"any appliance, instrument, material or apparatus used or capable of use for transmission or reception of signs, signals, writing, images and sounds or intelligence of any nature by wire, visual or other electro-magnetic emissions, radio waves or Hertzian waves, galvanic, electric or magnetic means".* It is this broad and future-proof definition that brings virtually any communication system – including the Internet – within the Act's purview.

10. See https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Gaurav-Vyas-v.-Guj.pdf, last accessed on April 27,2018

11. Samanwaya Rautray, *Supreme Court Upholds Internet Ban by States,* Economic Times, February 12, 2016, available at: https://tech.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/internet/supreme-court-upholds-internet-ban-by-states/50955292, last accessed on April 27, 2018

As per Section 5(2), Central/State Governments or their authorized officers can, among other things, prevent the transmission of any telegraphic message or class of messages during a public emergency or in the interest of public safety, if it is considered necessary or expedient in the interest of (1) sovereignty and integrity of India; (2) security of the State; (3) friendly relations with foreign states; (4) public order; or (5) preventing incitement to the commission of an offence. As described earlier, the term "telegraph" can be interpreted broadly enough to cover Internet services within the ambit of the Telegraph Act and as a result, the Government's power to prevent the transmission of telegraphs also applies to the Internet. While the terms "public emergency" and "public safety", at least one of which must be present to issue an Internet shutdown order, are not defined under the Telegraph Act or any other law, they were interpreted by the Supreme Court of India in the matter of *People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India*[12] to mean "the prevalence of a sudden condition or state of affairs affecting the people at large calling for immediate action", and "the state or condition of freedom from danger or risk for the people at large" respectively. Even with the Supreme Court's guidance, these terms remain open to broad interpretation by the Government, and there is no objective standard to determine if a given situation qualifies as a public emergency or threatens public safety. Also undefined are all five additional grounds described above, such as "sovereignty and integrity of India", "security of the State" and others.

In short, Section 5(2), much like Section 144 of the CrPC, is a provision of law that was clearly not designed to sanction any sort of State action with respect to the Internet and offers vast avenues for subjective interpretation of its language. This means that it is almost entirely up to the subjective interpretation of the authority issuing orders under the Section to determine if a given situation qualifies for action. Making matters worse, there were no procedural guidelines governing Internet shutdowns issued under the Telegraph Act until the Telecom Suspension Rules were issued in 2017 on how Internet shutdown orders must be issued, reviewed and enforced. In fact, there has been no indication that the ad-hoc procedure that was followed by the Government up till the Telecom Suspension Rules envisaged a review mechanism at all.

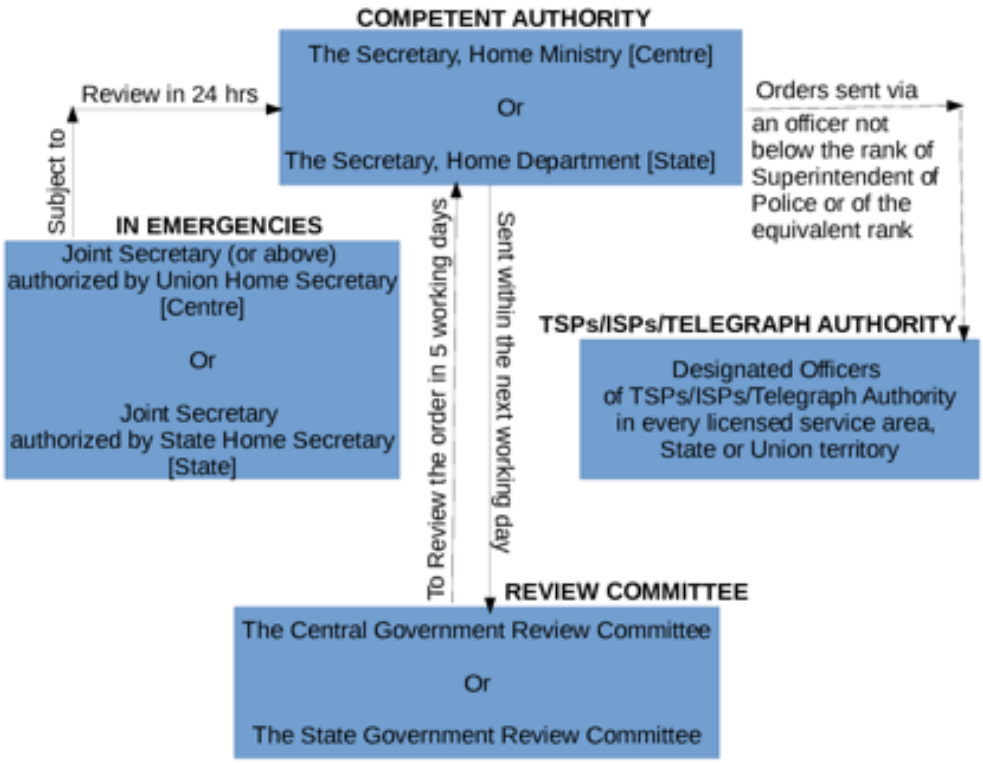
"There were no procedural guidelines governing Internet shutdowns issued under the Telegraph Act until the Telecom Suspension Rules were issued in 2017 on how Internet shutdown orders must be issued, reviewed and enforced."

Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017

The substantive law regarding suspension of Internet services was thus broadly interpreted from Section 5(2) of Telegraph Act 1855, while the procedural law regarding the same was not part of the original Act or Rules. The procedure to suspend telecom services in case of public emergency or public safety and consequently, the suspension of Internet services in India was notified under Section 7 of The Telegraph Act, 1855, on 7th August 2017. The rules are called *"Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017"*.

The 'competent authority' which may order

12. AIR 1997 SC 568



such directions are:

- In case of Government of India, the Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs.

- In case of a State Government, the Secretary to the State Government in-charge of the the Home Department.

According to these rules, directions to suspend telecom services shall not be issued except by an order made by a 'competent authority'. Thus, according to rule 2(1) the directions to suspend the telecom services shall be made only under these rules and according to the procedure mentioned therein. This also implies that directions for suspension of telecom services, consequently network shutdowns may not be ordered under any other provision of law, including Section 144 of CrPC 1973.

However, 'in unavoidable circumstances', such an order might be issued by an officer of the rank of Joint Secretary or above who has been duly authorised by the Union Home Secretary or State Home Secretary. But the term, 'unavoidable circumstances' has not been defined under the Telegraph Rules, Telegraph Act or any other legislation or judgments by court of law. As a result, there exists no objective standard to determine whether a given situation qualifies as an unavoidable circumstance. This raises a pertinent question: who decides whether a circumstance is unavoidable and how?

Moving ahead, the Rules also state that the order issued under 'unavoidable circumstances' will be subject to the confirmation from the competent authority

as stated above within 24 hours and will cease to exist in case of failure to obtain of such confirmation.

The rules further mandate that the order passed by the competent authority must "contain reasons for such direction" and a copy of the order shall be forwarded to a Review Committee by the next working day. The Review Committee shall comprise of:

- Where it is constituted by the Central Government- Cabinet Secretary, and Secretaries of Legal Affairs and Department of Telecommunication;

- Where it is constituted by State Government- Chief Secretary, Secretary Law or Legal Remembrancer In-Charge, Legal Affairs and Secretary to the State Government (other than the Home Secretary).

The Review Committee will have to meet within five working days of the issuance of order and record its findings on the suspension order whether it is in accordance with the provisions of sub-section (2) of section 5 of the Indian Telegraph Act.

Here ends the procedure delineated with respect to suspension of telecom services under *"Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017"*. However, there are still several areas of concern surrounding these Rules.

Firstly, the rules provide that the oversight of telecom suspension is to be carried out by a single Review Committee, which comprises entirely of the members of the executive. This severely compromises the independence and impartiality due to apparent conflict of interest when the authorization, conduct and review is carried out by a single arm of Government machinery. The public oversight principle is therefore not complied with.

Secondly, the new rules also fail to accommodate the principle of transparency. There is no provision under the rules which provide for notification of shutdowns in press or official gazettes. Considering that TSPs offering Internet services in the country do not consistently issue notifications before shutdowns are imposed, users in affected areas are often caught unaware and have little to no time to make arrangements to mitigate the impact of shutdowns.

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This concludes a brief look at the provisions of law that collectively enable the Government and its agents to suspend telecom services across India.

Internet shutdowns in India

SFLC.in has been tracking incidents of Internet shutdowns across India in an attempt to draw attention to how the number and frequency of shutdowns, which are imposed for reasons ranging from curbing unrest to preventing cheating during examinations, have been rising at an alarming rate over the years. This data is made publicly available in the form of an interactive Internet Shutdown Tracker hosted on our dedicated website www.internetshutdowns.in, which also features additional resources on the topic.

In the absence of any reliable means to gain access to Internet shutdown orders issued by various Government agents, our data is collected mostly from media reports (online and print). Over the course of the project we have expanded to include a citizen reportage mechanism i.e. a mechanism for citizens in or around affected areas to bring instances of shutdowns to attention, and provide input on how the shutdowns affected them and their communities.

Below is the comprehensive list of shutdowns that we have recorded starting January 2012. The data starts from 2012 because the earliest instance of an Internet shutdown that was reported by mainstream media came on January 26, 2012, when mobile Internet services were shut down in the Kashmir valley as part of a broader telecommunications clampdown on the occasion of Republic day. As the table reveals, there has been a staggering increase in both the number and frequency of Internet shutdowns over the years. Whereas 3 shutdowns were reported in 2012, all in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the number rose to 70 in 2017 across 19 states. As of April 2018, 45

S.No	Year	State	Region	Reason	Kind of service restricted	Duration	Nature
1.	2018	Jammu & Kashmir	Tral and Awantipora areas of Pulwama district	Following thekilling of four Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) militants, one policeman and an army man in an encounter that took place between a contingent of counter-insurgent forces and militants, Mobile Internet Services were suspended in Tral and Awantipora areas of Pulwama district located in Jammu & Kashmir on Tuesday, 24th April 2018.	Mobile	No Info.	Reactive

S.No	Year	State	Region	Reason	Kind of service restricted	Duration	Nature
2.	2018	Jammu & Kashmir	Srinagar, Kulgam, Pulwama and Islamabad	Mobile Internet services were suspended in Srinagar, Kulgam, Pulwama and Islamabad districts of Jammu & Kashmir on Friday, 20th April 2018, as a precautionary measure to prevent miscreants from creating any law and order problems in the area.	Mobile	24 – 30 Hours	Preventive
3.	2018	Rajouri	Srinagar, Kulgam, Pulwama and Islamabad	Following the death of a youth, mobile internet services were suspended in Rajouri district of Jammu &Kashmir on Friday, 20th April 2018, as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of provocative posts and pictures.	Mobile	Less than 24 Hours	Preventive
4.	2018	Jammu & Kashmir	Kathua, Samba, and Jammu	Following the reports of stone pelting in Vijaypur area, Internet services were suspended in Kathua, Samba, and Jammu districts of Jammu & Kashmir on Tuesday, 17th April 2018, as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of rumours and hate messages.	Mobile	1-10 Hours	Preventive

5.	2018	Punjab	Kapurthala, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Sahid Bhagat Singh Nagar	Mobile Internet services and SMS services were suspended in Kapurthala, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Sahid Bhagat Singh Nagar districts of Punjab for three days, the suspension orders were issued on Saturday 14th April 2018, and were extended until 16th April 2018. The suspension was ordered as a precautionary measure to check rumour mongering on social media, following the Hindu-Dalit clashes over a poster of B.R. Ambedkar.	Mobile	72 Hours	Preventive
6.	2018	Uttar Pradesh	Meerut	Mobile Internet services were suspended in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh for 24 Hours from 9 pm on Friday, 14th April 2018 till 8pm on Saturday, 15th April 2018 as a precautionary measure in the light of widespread protests by Dalits on April 2, 2018.	Mobile	Less than 24 Hours	Reactive
7.	2018	Jammu & Kashmir	Anantnag & Kulgam	Following an encounter with militants in Jammu and Kashmir's Kulgam district, which lead to killings of a civilian and an army personnel, Internet services were suspended in Anantnag & Kulgam districts of Jammu & Kashmir on Wednesday, 11th April 2018.	Mobile	48 Hours	Reactive

8.	2018	Uttar Pradesh	Saharanpur and Hapur	Following the violent clashes between supporters of the Bharat bandh and a pro-reservation group comprising OBCs and Dalits, Internet services have been suspended in Saharanpur and Hapur districts of Uttar Pradesh since midnight, 9th April 2018.	Mobile	No Info	Reactive
9.	2018	Rajasthan	Jaipur and Bharatpur	Internet services were suspended in Jaipur and Bharatpur districts of Rajasthan on Tuesday, 10th April 2018, as a precautionary measure to prevent any violence or hindrance to IPL match due to Bharat Bandh organized by Dalits.	Mobile	Less than 24 Hours	Preventive
10.	2018	Madhya Pradesh	Gwalior, Bhind, Morena and Jabalpur	Internet services were suspended in Gwalior, Bhind, Morena and Jabalpur districts of Madhya Pradesh on Monday, 9th April 2018, as a precautionary measure to prevent rumour mongering and spread of violence during Bharat Bandh on Tuesday.	Mobile	24 Hours	Preventive
11.	2018	Uttar Pradesh	Meerut, Agra, Bareilly and Saharanpur	Mobile Internet service were suspended in several districts, Meerut, Agra, Bareilly and Saharanpur of Uttar Pradesh city, on Tuesday, 3rd April 2018, as a precautionary measure, following the violent protests against Supreme Court's ruling on SC/ST Act.	Mobile	No Info.	Reactive

12.	2018	Jammu & Kashmir	Shupiyan, Pulwama, Kulgam and Anantnag and Ganderbal	Following the killing of a civilian youth in violence, mobile Internet services were suspended in four districts of South Kashmir, Shupiyan, Pulwama, Kulgam and Anantnag and Ganderbal district of Central Kashmir on Tuesday, 3rd April 2018, to prevent law and order problems.	Mobile	12 Hours in Central Kashmir Internet was restored after 5 days in four districts of South Kashmir, Shupiyan, Pulwama, Kulgam and Anantnag and Ganderbal	Reactive
13.	2018	Madhya Pradesh	Gwalior, Morena and Bhind	Following the killing of four people in Madhya Pradesh on Monday, 2nd April 2018, during 'Bharat Bandh' called by various Dalit organisations to protest the alleged dilution of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, Internet services were suspended in district Gwalior, Morena and Bhind districts of Madhya Pradesh.	Mobile	24-48 Hours	Reactive
14.	2018	Rajasthan	Jalore, Barmer, Sikar, Alwar and Ahore	Following the violent protest by Dalits, Mobile Internet services were suspended in Jalore, Barmer, Sikar, Alwar and Ahore districts of Rajasthan on Monday, 2nd April 2018, as a a precautionary measure to avert further violence.	Mobile	24 Hours	Reactive

15.	2018	Rajasthan	Sriganganagar and Hanumangarh	Following the violent protests by SC/ST on general category traders, Mobile Internet services were suspended in Sriganganagar and Hanumangarh districts on Monday, 2nd April 2018.	Mobile	24-48 Hours	Reactive
16.	2018	Jammu & Kashmir	South Kashmir valley	Mobile Internet services were suspended in the South Kashmir valley of Jammu & Kashmir on Sunday, 1st April 2018, as a precautionary measure following the killing of eleven militants in three separate gunfights across the state with security forces.	Mobile	24 hours	Reactive
17.	2018	Punjab	All districts	In the view of strike calls by dalit groups in Punjab, expressing concerns over the alleged "dilution" of SCs/STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the Punjab government has ordered suspension of Mobile Internet services (2G/3G/4G/CDMA), all SMS services and all dongle services etc, provided on mobile networks except voice calls in the territorial jurisdiction of the state of Punjab, from 5 pm on April 1, 2018, to 11 pm on April 2.	2G/3G/4G/ CDMA), all SMS services and all dongle services etc, provided on mobile networks	24-72 hours	Preventive

18.	2018	Rajasthan	Jaitran	Following the clashes that erupted in Jaitran, a town in Rajasthan on Saturday afternoon after a few miscreants allegedly pelted stones at a procession which was being carried out on the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti, Internet Services were suspended in Jaitran town of district Jaipur in state of Rajasthan on Saturday, 31st March 2018 following as a preventive measure to avert further spreading of rumours.	Mobile	24-48 Hours	Reactive
19.	2018	Bihar	Nawada	Following the bout of violence and clashes between two communities in Nawada, internet services were suspended on Friday, 30th March, 2018 in Nawada district of Bihar.	Mobile	No Info	Reactive
20.	2018	Rajasthan	Bundi	Mobile internet services were suspended in Bundi district of Rajasthan, on 30th March 2018, as a precautionary measure to prevent any threat to peace and communal harmony in the city as a procession of Hanuman Jayanti was scheduled to be taken out in the markets on Saturday.	Mobile	No Info	Reactive

21.	2018	Bihar	Samastipur	The Internet services were suspended on Thursday, 29th March 2018, in Samastipur district of Bihar, as a preventive measure to check the spread of rumours, following the communal violence during Ram Navami procession.	Mobile	No Info.	Reactive
22.	2018	West Bengal	Asansol & Raniganj city	Internet services were suspended in Asanol & Raniganj city located in Paschim Bardhaman district in the state of West Bengal on 28th March 2018 to prevent spread of rumours following violence over a Ram Navami procession.	Mobile	7 days	Reactive
23.	2018	Bihar	Aurangabad	Internet services were suspended for 24 hours on Monday, 26th March 2018, in Aurangabad district of Bihar to contain spreading of rumours and prevent communal encounters that started over Ram Navami on Sunday.	Mobile	24 hours	Preventive
24.	2018	Jammu & Kashmir	Baramulla and Badgam	Following the killing of a Lashkar-e-Taiba militant in encounter with security forces, mobile Internet Services were suspended in Baramulla and Badgam districts of Jammu & Kashmir on Sunday, 25th March 2018.	Mobile	24 hours	Reactive

25.	2018	Odisha	Bhadrak	Internet services were suspended for 48 hours on Saturday, 24th March 2018, in Odisha's Bhadrak district as a precautionary measure to maintain communal harmony ahead of Ram Navami.	Mobile	48 Hours	Reactive
26.	2018	Jammu and Kashmir	Kulgam & Anantnag districts	Internet services were suspended on Friday, 24th March 2018, in Kulgam & Anantnag districts of Jammu & Kashmir following the killing of two Jaish-e-Mohammad militants in a brief gunfight overnight at Dooru area of south Kashmir's Anantnag district.	Mobile	No Info	Reactive
27.	2018	Rajasthan	Tonk	Section 144 was imposed and Internet services were suspended, in Tonk district of Rajasthan following the stone pelting by miscreants from a mosque at a procession marking the Hindu New Year on Sunday, 18th March 2018. The incident led to a stampede like situation, 20 people were injured and 10 were taken to hospital.	Mobile	No Info	Reactive

28.	2018	Bihar	Bhagalpur	Internet services have been suspended since Saturday, 17th March 2018 in Bhagalpur district of Bihar, to prevent communal riots.	Mobile	No Info	Reactive
29.	2018	Jammu and Kashmir	Srinagar and Anantnag	Internet services were suspended in Srinagar and Anantnag districts of Jammu & Kashmir, on Monday, 12th March 2018, as a reactive measure following the killing of three militants in Hakoora area of South Kashmir's Islamabad district.	Mobile	20 hours	Reactive
30.	2018	Jammu and Kashmir	Baramulla	Following the protests erupted in the area against the death of an elderly man who was crushed to death after police vehicle hit him, Internet services were suspended in Baramulla district of North Kashmir on March 8, 2018.	Mobile	No Info	Reactive
31.	2018	Jammu and Kashmir	Shopian and Pulwama	Mobile Internet services were suspended on 4th March 2018, in Shopian and Pulwama districts of Jammu and Kashmir as a reactive measure to prevent violence and spread of any rumour after 6 people, 2 militants and 4 civilians were killed in exchange of fire between security forces and terrorists.	Mobile	72 hours	Reactive

32.	2018	Jammu	Bandipore	Internet services were suspended on 1st March, 2018 in the Bandipora district of Jammu and Kashmir as a preventive measure following the killing of LeT millitant in a gun battle with government forces in Hajin township of North Kashmir.	Mobile	No Info	Reactive
33.	2018	Rajasthan	Tonk	Following the clashes between two communities in Tonk district of Rajasthan, mobile Internet services were suspended on 18th February 2018, for 24 hours.	Mobile	24 hours	Reactive
34.	2018	Uttar Pradesh	Firozabad	Mobile Internet services were suspended for a few hours in Firozabad district of Uttar Pradesh on 16th February 2018. The services were suspended to prevent rumour mongering in the view of alleged assault on two minority group men and a police officer by 3 BJMY members along with 20 others.	Mobile	No Info	Reactive
35.	2018	Ajmer, Alwar, Banswara, Baran, Barmer, Bharatpur, Bhilwara, Bikaner, Bundi, Churu, Chittaurgarh, Dausa, Dhaulpur, Dungarpur, Ganganagar, Hanu-	Firozabad	On 11th February, 2018 jammers were used and internet services were suspended around some exam centres across the state of Rajasthan to prevent cheating in Rajasthan Eligibility Examination for Teachers (REET).	Mobile	No Info	Preventive

35.	2018	mangarh, Jaipur, Jaisalmer, Jalor, Jhalawar, Jhunjhun, Jodhpur, Karauli, Rajasamand, Sawai Madhopur, Sikar, Sirohi, Tonk, Udaipur			Mobile	No Info	Reactive
36.	2018	Jammu and Kasmir	Kupwara, Sopore and Baramulla	Mobile Internet services were reportedly suspended in Kupwara, Sopore and Baramulla areas of Kashmir for approximately 12 hours on the night intervening 03 to 04 February 2018 to prevent rumours following reports of a Cordon and Search Operation in Kupwara. The reports were denied by police	Mobile	12 Hours	Preventive
37.	2018	Uttar Pradesh	Aligarh	Internet was shut down from 27 January 2018 to 10 pm on 28 January 2018 in Kasganj district of Uttar Pradesh following violent clashes that have ensued since the death of a 16 year old boy in stone pelting and firing of gun(s) on Republic Day - 26 January 2018. The area was already under curfew for a day before the shutdown was imposed.	Mobile	24 hours	Reactive

38.	2018	Jammu and Kashmir	Anantnag, Bandipore, Badgam, Baramula, Ganderbal, Kupwara, Pulwama & Srinagar	Mobile Internet was shut down on January 25 at 7:30 PM across the entire Kashmir Valley in anticipation of militant activity on Republic Day - January 26.	Mobile	24 hours	Preventive
39.	2018	Jammu and Kashmir	Shupiyan, Pulwama, Anantnag & Kulgam	Pulwama, Shupiyan, Anantnag and Kulgam faced an Internet shutdown starting from 24 January 2018, while the rest of Kashmir's Internet speeds were reduced to 128 kbps following the death of two militants and a civilian.	Mobile	No info	Preventive
40.	2018	Jammu and Kashmir	Anantnag & Kulgam	Mobile Internet service were suspended in the twin districts of Anantnag and Kulgam of Kashmir on 9th January, 2018 following clashes in Larnoo area after protests by youth to disrupt the anti-militant operation wherein one militant was killed by the government forces. The services were reportedly restored in the area in the morning of 11th January, 2018.	Mobile Internet services	42 hours	Reactive
41.	2018	Jammu and Kashmir	Badgam	Mobile Internet service in central Kashmir's Badgam district were suspended yet again on 8th January, 2018 to prevent rumour mon-gering as a gunfight raged between militants and government forces in Patrigam village of Chadoora.	Mobile Internet services	No info	Preventive

42.	2018	Maharashtra	Kolhapur	Following protests by Dalit groups during the day-long bandh, called to protest against the violence post the celebrations of Bhima Koregaon battle, Internet services were suspended in Kolhapur district of Maharashtra on 4th January, 2018 for a period of 24 hours due to escalating tension in the district.	No info.	24 hours	Reactive
43.	2018	Maharashtra	Aurangabad	In the wake of Maharashtra bandh called by Dalit organisations protesting the clashes at the bicentenary celebrations of the battle of Bhima-Koregaon on 1st January, Internet services were suspended on 3rd January, 2018 in Aurangabad district of Maharashtra.	Mobile Internet	No info	Reactive
44.	2017	Rajasthan	Bundi	Amid the call given by some Hindu organizations to perform puja on 1st January at Maandhata Balaji Temple in Bundi city, Kota divisional commissioner on Saturday issued orders to temporarily suspend internet services including 2G, 3G, 4G data, bulk SMS, Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter and other social sites in Bundi district for 48 hours, from 6am on 31st December to 6am on 2nd January, 2018.	Mobile Internet	24-72 hours	Preventive

45.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Pulwama	Mobile Internet services were suspended in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir on 31st December, 2017 after a group of militants entered into commando training centre (CTC) of CRPF at Lethpora area of Pulwama triggering fierce gunfights.	Mobile Internet	No info.	Preventive
46.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Pulwama	Mobile Internet was suspended in the Pulwama district of Kashmir on 26th December, 2017 following the killing of top Jaish-e-Muhammad commander Noor Muhammad.	Mobile Internet	No info.	Preventive
47.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Pulwama and Shopian	Mobile Internet services were suspended for three days in the twin districts of Pulwama and Shopian in south Kashmir on 18th December, 2017 in the wake of a gunfight between militants and government forces in Batmurran village of Shopian district.	Mobile Internet	72 hours	Preventive
48.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kupwara	Mobile internet services were suspended in Kupwara district of Jammu and Kashmir on 17th December, 2017 as a precautionary measure after protests erupted over the death of a taxi driver who was killed in Army firing.	Mobile Internet	72 hours	Reactive

49.	2017	Telangana	Adilabad	Internet services were suspended in Adilabad district of Telangana on 16th December, 2017 as a precautionary measure to curb the spread of rumours on social media in the wake of clashes between Adivasis and Lambadas	No info	No info.	Preventive
50.	2017	Udaipur and Rajsamand	Adilabad	Mobile Internet services were suspended in Udaipur and Rajsamand district of Rajasthan in the evening of 13th December, 2017 as a precautionary measure for a period of 24 hours after some Hindu organizations announced a rally in support of Shambhu Raigar, who brutally murdered a Muslim man and filmed the act over love jihad.	Mobile Internet	24 hours	Preventive
51.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Sopore, Baramulla, Handwara, Kupwara	Mobile Internet services were suspended on 11th December, 2017 in Sopore, Baramulla, Handwara and Kupwara districts of Jammu and Kashmir as a precautionary measure following the kiling of three militants in Handwara's Yunso village	Mobile Internet	No info	Preventive

52.	2017	Rajasthan	Bhilwara, Chittorgarh, Nimbahera	Internet services were suspended in Bhilwara, Chittorgarh and Nimbahera of Rajasthan on 3rd December, 2017 to prevent rumours from spreading on social media after clashes between two communities broke out when muslim community was taking out barawafat procession on the occasion of Eid-e-Milad.	No info	No info.	Reactive
53.	2017	Haryana	Jind, Hansi, Bhiwani, Hisar, Fatehabad, Karnal, Panipat, Kaithal, Rohtak, Sonipat, Jhajjar, Bhiwani, Charkhi Dadri	Mobile Internet services were suspended on 11th December, 2017 in Sopore, Baramulla, Handwara and Kupwara districts of Jammu and Kashmir as a precautionary measure following the kiling of three militants in Handwara's Yunso village	Mobile Internet	25 to 72 hours	Preventive
54.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Pulwama	Internet services were suspended in Pulwama district of Kashmir on 2nd November, 2017 following a gunfight in which two army soldiers and a militant were killed in Pulwama.	Mobile Internet services	No info.	Preventive

55.	2017	Bihar	Arwal, Bhojpur, Jamui, Katihar, Sitamarhi, West Champaran	Internet services were suspended in several districts of Bihar in-cluding Arwal, Jamui, Bhojpur, Katihar, Sitamarhi and West Champaran on 1st October, 2017 to check spreading of rumours following instances of communal violence in the districts. The services were reported to have been restored in Bhojpur on 4th morning, in Jamui on 4th October midnight while in other districts on 5th October.	No info	More than 72hrs	Reactive
56.	2017	Bihar	Nawada	Internet services were suspended in Nawada district of Bihar on 28th September, 2017 till 5th November to prevent spread of any inflammatory message on social media after communal tension gripped some areas in the district when an idol of Goddess Durga was damaged in stone pelting by a group of anti-social elements.	No info	More than 72 hours	Reactive
57.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Baramulla	Kashmir saw yet another shutdown as mobile Internet ser-vices were suspended in Baramulla district, including Sopore town, on 26th Septem-ber, 2017 to prevent rumours after the killing of top militant commander Abdul Qayoom Najar.	Mobile Internet services	No Info	Preventive

58.	2017	Tripura	Agartala	Internet services were suspended as a preventive measure in Agartala city of Tripura on 21st September, 2017 following the killing of a journalist, who was covering a clash between two political parties in Mandwai of West Tripura. The services were reportedly restored on 25th September, 2017.	No info	More than 72 hrs	Preventive
59.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kulgam, Anantnag	Mobile Internet services were suspended in Kulgam and Anantnag districts of Jammu and Kashmir on 11th September, 2017 to prevent spreading of rumours after two militants were killed in a gunfight with government forces.	Mobile	Info not available	Preventive
60.	2017	Rajasthan	Sikar	Mobile and broadband Internet services were suspended in Sikar district of Rajasthan on 11th September, 2017 to prevent law and order circumstances after the situation became intense with farmers setting off on a march to seize the collectorate following the ongoing farmers' protest in the State.	Both	Info not available	Preventive
61.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Baramula	Internet services were suspended on 9th September, 2017 in the Sopore town of Baramula district in Jammu and Kashmir as a preventive measure after a gunfight between militants and security forces broke out in the town.	Info not available	Info not available	Preventive

62.	2017	Rajasthan	Jaipur	Mobile Internet services were imposed in several parts of Jaipur city in Rajasthan on 9th September, 2017 as a reactive measure after one person was killed and 11 others were injured in a clash between locals and police personnels in the city.	Mobile Internet	Info not available	Reactive
63.	2017	Haryana	Sirsa	Mobile Internet sevices were suspended in Sirsa district of Haryana on 8th September, 2017 till 10th September to prevent rumour mongering and disturbance of public order in view of the 'sanitisation' process being carried out at the Dera Sacha Sauda headquarters.	Mobile Internet	25 to 72 hours	Preventive
64.	2017	Bihar	Madhepura, Supaul, Saharsa, Purnia, Araria, Kishanganj, Katihar	Internet services were suspended in seven districts of Bihar on 5th September, 2017 as a precautionary measure to prevent spread of rumours following communal tensions after dozens of slaughthered cattle carcasses were found floating in a canal in Bihar's Madhepura district.	Info not available	25 to 72 hours	Preventive

65.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kupwara	Mobile Internet services were suspended yet again in Kupwara district of Jammu and Kashmir on 4th September, 2017 as a precautionary measure after two Hizbul Mujahideen militants were killed in a gunfight in Sopore district of Kashmir.	Mobile Internet	Info not available	Preventive
66.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Shopian, Kulgam	Mobile Internet services were suspended in Shopian and Kulgam districts in Jammu and Kashmir on 2nd September, 2017 as a reactive measure after clashes broke out following the killing of a LeT terrorist in an encounter with the security forces.	Mobile Internet	Info not available	Reactive
67.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Pulwama	After a 'Fidayeen' attack by the militants on District Police Lines, mobile Internet services were suspended in Pulwama district of Kashmir on 26th August, 2017 as a precautionary measure to prevent law and order situation	Mobile Internet	Info not available	Preventive
68.	2017	Ganganagar, Hanumangarh	Pulwama	Following the conviction of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh in a rape case, mobile Internet services were suspended in the districts of Sriganganagar and Hanumangarh on 25th August, 2017 for 48 hours in response to the violent backlash from the Dera followers.	Mobile Internet	25 to 72 hours	Reactive

69.	2017	Chandigarh	Chandigarh	Ahead of the verdict in the rape case against Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, mobile Internet services were suspended in Chandigarh on 24th August, 2017 for 72 hours as a precautionary measure anticipating violent backlash from the Dera followers.	Mobile Internet	25 to 72 hours	Preventive
70.	2017	Haryana	All the districts of Haryana	Ahead of the verdict in the rape case against Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, mobile Internet services were suspended in Haryana on 24th August, 2017 for 72 hours as a precautionary measure anticipating violent backlash from the Dera followers. The ban was further extended till 29th August, 2017. While the internet was restored in other parts, it continued to remain suspended in seven 'sensitive' districts of Haryana till 30th August, 2017	Mobile Internet	More than 72 hours	Preventive
71.	2017	Punjab	All the districts of Punjab	Ahead of the verdict in the rape case against Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, mobile Internet services were suspended in Punjab on 24th August, 2017 for 72 hours as a precautionary measure anticipating violent backlash from the Dera followers. The ban was further extended till 29th August, 2017	Mobile Internet	More than 72 hours	Preventive

72.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Pulwama	Mobile Internet services were suspended yet again in Pulwama district of Kashmir on 16th August, 2017 to prevent rumour mongering after a Lashkar commander was killed in a gunfight with the security forces.	Mobile Internet	Ongoing	Preventive
73.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Mobile and broadband Internet services were suspended in the Kashmir valley in the morning of 15th August, 2017 as a precautionary measure on Independence Day. Services were reportedly restored later in the day.	Both	Less than 24 hours.	Preventive
74.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Shopian, Kulgam	Internet services were suspended in Shopian and Kulgam district of Kashmir on 13th August, 2017 to prevent the spreading of information after three Hizbul Mujahideen militants including the operations commander, and two army men were killed in an encounter.	No Info.	Ongoing	Preventive
75.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Pulwama	Internet services were suspended in Pulwama district of Kashmir on 9th August, 2017 as a precautionary measure after three militants were killed in a gunfight with the Government forces in the Tral township. However, the services on state-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited remained functional.	No Info.	Ongoing	Preventive

76.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Baramulla	Mobile Internet services were suspended in Baramulla district of Kashmir as a precautionary measure on 5th August, 2017 after three LeT militants were killed in an encounter with the security forces in the Sopore town of the district.	Mobile Internet	Ongoing	Preventive
77.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Mobile Internet services were suspended yet again across Kashmir on 1st August, 2017 as a precautionary measure fearing clashes after the killing of Lashkar-e-Toiba commander Abu Dujana and his aide in an encounter with the security forces. The services were restored on 2nd August, 2017 after remaining suspended for over 24 hours.	Mobile Internet	24 hours or more	Preventive
78.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Pulwama	Mobile Internet services were suspended in Pulwama district of Kashmir on 30th July, 2017 as a preventive measure to prevent spreading of rumours following the killing of two militants in a shootout in Tahab village.	Mobile Internet	No info.	Preventive

79.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Budgam	Mobile Internet services were suspended on 21st July, 2017 in Budgam district of Kashmir as a precautionary measure after a young tailor was killed in army firing in Beerwah town of the district. The services were reported to have been restored on 25th July, 2017, four days after they were suspended.	Mobile Internet	73 hours or more	Preventive
80.	2017	Tripura	Agartala, all districts	Internet services were suspended in Tripura on the morning of 20th July, 2017 to prevent Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura (IPFT) from spreading false propoganda following the eleven day blockade demanding a separate tribal State 'Tipraland'. The services were restored on 20th July, 2017- 14 hours after they were shut.	No info	Less then 24 hours.	Preventive
81.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	While mobile Internet services were already shut, broadband services too were snapped in Kashmir Valley on 18th July, 2017 as a precautionary measure after the killing of three terrorist in an encounter with the security forces.	Broadband	No info.	Preventive

82.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Mobile Internet services were shut down yet again as a precautionary measure in Anantnag district on 16th July, 2017 following the killing of militants in gun-battle with forces on 15th July.	Mobile Internet	No info	Preventive
83.	2017	Gujarat	Morbi, Surendranagar	Internet services were suspended in Morbi and Surendranagar districts of Gujarat on 14th July, 2017 to prevent rumour mongering on social media following violent clashes between members of Bharwad and Rajput communities. The services were restored on 18th July, 2017.	Info not available	73 hours or more	Preventive
84.	2017	Rajasthan	Nagaur, Bikaner, Churu, Sikar	Internet services were suspended in the evening of 11th July, 2017 in the districts of Nagaur, Bikaner, Churu and Sikar to prevent spread of rumours after the violence in Sanvrad with Rajput community demanding Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) enquiry in the encounter of gangster Anand Pal Singh. The services reportedly resumed on 14th July, 2017.	No info	24-72 hours.	Preventive

85.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Jammu	Both Internet and broadband services were suspended in Jammu late at night on 10th July, 2017 as a precautionary measure following the killing of Amarnath pilgrims in a militant attack in the Kashmir Valley. The services were reportedly restored on 12th July, 2017, 36 hours after they were suspended.	Both	25-72 hours	Preventive
86.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Just a day after the Internet services were restored, both mobile and broadband Internet services were again suspended in the Kashmir Valley in the night of 10th July, 2017 at 10 pm as a precautionary measure after the appeal of separatists to people to launch a "Kashmir awareness" campaign on social media on 11th July. However, the services were restored in the midnight after remaining suspended for around two hours.	Both	24 hours or less	Preventive
87.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Both mobile and broadband Internet services were suspended in the Kashmir Valley on 6th July, 2017 as a precautionary measure in view of law and order situations on the first death anniversary of Hizbul Mujahideen 'commander' Burhan Wani. While the 2G mobile Internet services were restored on the night of 8th July, 2017, broadband services were restored in the morning of 9th July, 2017.	Both	25 to 72 hours	Preventive

88.	2017	West Bengal	North 24 Parganas	Baduria and Basirhat areas of North 24 Parganas district in West Bengal saw suspension of Internet services on 5thJuly, 2017 after violent communal clashes broke out over an objectionable Facebook post by a 17 year old boy. The services were restored on July 10th, 2017 in Basirhat.	Info not available	73 hours or more	Reactive
89.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Anantnag	Mobile Internet services were shutdown on 1st July, 2017 to prevent rumour mongering on social media websites after violent clashes between militants and government forces in Brenthi Dialgam village.	Mobile Internet	No info	Reactive
90.	2017	Rajasthan	Churu, Nagaur	Mobile Internet was suspended on 30th June, 2017 to prevent rumour mongering after the protests by the Rajput community over the encounter killing of gangster intensified. The services were reportedly restored on July 5, 2017.	Mobile Internet	73 hours or more	Preventive

91.	2017	West Bengal	Darjeeling	Days after mobile Internet services were shutdown in Darjeeling, broadband services were also suspended in the area for a period of 7 days on 20th June, 2017 in the interest of public safety, following the indefinite strike by Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) for a separate Gorkhaland.	Broadband	Ongoing	Preventive
92.	2017	West Bengal	Darjeeling	Mobile Internet services were blocked in Darjeeling on 18th June, 2017 following deaths of party supporters in violent clashes between the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha and security forces after the former called for a complete strike in its agitation for a separate Gorkhaland.	Mobile Internet	Ongoing	Reactive
93.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Mobile Internet was shutdown again in Kashmir Valley on 16th June, 2017 as a precautionary measure after firing by the security forces'caused the death of a youth leading to escalated tensions in the region. The services resumed on June 19th, 2017.	Mobile Internet	73 hours or more	Preventive

94.	2017	Uttar Pradesh	Saharanpur	Internet services were suspended in Saharanpur district yet again on 8th June, 2017 following the arrest of the main accused in Saharanpur violence, for a period of two days, to prevent any unrest. The services were reportedly restored in the afternoon of 12th June, 2017.	Info not available	73 hours or more	Preventive
95.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Kashmir Valley witnessed another suspension of mobile Internet services on 7th June, 2017 after the death of a civilian in firing by security forces.	Mobile Internet	No info	Preventive
96.	2017	Madhya Pradesh	Mandsaur, Ratlam, Ujjain, Neemuch, Indore, Dewas	Internet services were suspended in the districts of Mandsaur, Ratlam, Ujjain, Neemuch, Indore, Dewas on 6th June, 2017 following the farmers' protest in Madhya Pradesh demanding higher rates for their produce. The services were restored on 11th June, 2017.	Info not available	73 hours or more	Preventive
97.	2017	Maharashtra	Nashik	Mobile Internet services were suspended in Nashik for a few hours on 5th June, 2017 as the State-wide strike called by farmers turned violent in the former area.	Mobile Internet	Less than 24 hours	Reactive

98.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Mobile Internet services were suspended yet again in the Kashmir Valley region as a preventive measure on 27th May, 2017 in order to check rumour mongering following the encounter of a Hizbul terrorist. The services were reportedly restored on 2nd June, 2017.	Mobile Internet	More than 72 hours	Preventive
99.	2017	Uttar Pradesh	Saharanpur	Mobile Internet services were suspended in Saharanpur on 24th April, 2017 to contain rumour mongering on social media amid violent caste based clashes between Dalit and Rajput community. The services were restored after 10 days on June 3, 2017	Mobile Internet	73 hours or more	Reactive
100.	2017	Odisha	Kendrapara	Internet services were reportedly suspended for 48 hours in Kendrapara on 19th April, 2017 to prevent rumor mongering over a social media post with objectionable content. The services were reported to be restored on 21st April, 2017.	Info not available	25 to 72 hours	Preventive
101.	2017	Rajasthan	Udaipur and Fatehnagar	As a precautionary measure, mobile Internet services were suspended in Udaipur and Fatehnagar areas on late 18h April, 2017 to curb the escalation of tensions over a social media post saying, "Pakistan zindabad hai, aur zindabad rahega.". The service was reported to be restored on 19th April, 2017.	Mobile Internet	24 hours or less	Preventive

102.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Mobile Internet services were ordered to be suspended yet again on 17th April, 2017 as students across the Valley held protests against the recent clashes between students and police in Pulwama district. Moreover, social media websites were ordered to be restricted even on fixed line networks to restrict the spread of rumors and messages. The mobile Internet services were reportedly restored on 29th April, 2017 following the direction of the State Government to block access to 22 social media sites and applications on all platforms.	Mobile Internet	73 hours and more	Reactive
103.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	On 13th April, 2017, broadband services were suspended yet again in light of re-polling in 38 stations of Budgam district. Both, broadband services, as well as mobile Internet that was suspended since 9th April, 2017 was restored in the evening of 13th April, 2017.	Both	Less than 24 hours	Preventive
104.	2017	Odisha	Bhadrak	As a preventive measure in the area that recently witnessed communal violence over derogatory remarks about Hindu deities, Internet services were reportedly suspended for 48 hours under Section 5 of the Telegraph Act on 9th April, 2017. These services were reportedly restored on 11th April, 2017.	Information not	25 to 72 hours	Preventive

105.	2017	Jammu and Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Both, mobile and broadband services were suspended from midnight in three districts of Srinagar, Budgam, and Gandarbal on 8th April, 2017 as a precautionary measure to curb spread of rumors ahead of the Srinagar bypoll. However, the restriction on Internet services was extended to the entire Kashmir valley on 9th April, 2017. While broadband services were restored on 11th April, 2017, mobile Internet services remained suspended till 13th April, 2017.	Both	Broadband: 25 to 72 hours Mobile: 73 hours or more	Preventive
106.	2017	Rajasthan	Sikar	Mobile Internet services were suspended in the Sikar district of Rajasthan on 31st March, 2017 after clashes amongst youngsters during a religious procession resulted in stone-pelting, injuring one policeman. Mobile Internet services were restored in the evening on 6th April, 2017.	Mobile Internet	73 hours or more	Reactive
107.	2017	Haryana	Rohtak, Sonipat, Jhajjar, Bhiwani, Panipat, Hisar, Kaithal, Charkhi Dadri, Fatehabad, Jind and Sirsa	Mobile Internet services were suspended in 'sensitive' districts including Rohtak, Sonipat, Jhajjar, Bhiwani, Panipat, Hisar, Kaithal, Charkhi Dadri, Fatehabad, Jind and Sirsa on 18th March, 2017 as a precautionary measure in the wake of Jat protests outside the Parliament. The services were restored on 19th March, 2017.	Mobile Internet	24 hours or less	Preventive

108.	2017	Haryana	Rohtak and Sonepat	Internet services were suspended in the districts of Rohtak and Sonepat for 24 hours – from 5 pm on 25th February to 26th February, 2017 while the Jats observed 'Black Day' in Haryana on February 26, 2017.	No conclusive information available	24 hours or less	Preventive
109.	2017	Haryana	Jhajjar, Panipat, Sonipat, Hisar, Rohtak, Jind and Bhiwani	Mobile Internet services were suspended indefinitely on 17th February, 2017 in the districts of Jhajjar, Panipat, Sonipat, Hisar, Rohtak, Jind, and Bhiwani following violent protests during the ongoing Jat agitations, and were reportedly restored on 19th February, 2017.	Mobile Internet	25 to 72 hours	Reactive
110.	2017	Haryana	Rohtak, Bhiwani, Hisar, Sonipat, Panipat	Mobile Internet was suspended in districts of Rohtak, Bhiwani, Hisar, Sonipat, and Panipat starting 31st January, 2017 due to the ongoing Jat agitations in various parts of the state.	Mobile Internet	No Info On	Preventive
111.	2017	Nagaland	Entire state	Mobile Internet services were disrupted in the entire state starting 30th January, 2017 as clashes ensued between the locals and police over the State government's decision to apply reservation in civic body elections. The services were restored on 20th February, 2017.	Mobile Internet	73 hours or more	Reactive

112.	2017	Haryana	Jhajjar	Owing to the agitations being held by the Jat community, mobile Internet services were suspended in Jhajjar starting 29th January, 2017.	Mobile Internet	No Info	Preventive
113.	2016	Nagaland	Wokha and Phek	Mobile Internet services were suspended in Wokha and Phek districts starting 19th January, 2017 due to violence in the area on the issue of reservation in local body elections. The suspension later spread to the entire state of Nagaland on 30th January, 2017, and Internet services resumed on 20th February, 2017.	Mobile Internet	73 hours or more	Reactive
114.	2016	Rajasthan	Bhilwara	Internet services were suspended in the district of Bhilwara to maintain law and order for reportedly 72 hours starting 27th December, 2016 as the Nagrik Suraksha Manch (a citizens' group) called for a city wide Bandh to protest lack of action taken against the accused in the ongoing communal riots.	No conclusive information	25 to 72 hours	Preventive
115.	2016	Rajasthan	Bhilwara	Mobile internet services were disrupted in the district of Bhilwara on 19th December, 2016 due to the ongoing communal tensions.	Mobile internet	No conclusive info	Reactive

116.	2016	Manipur	East and West Imphal	Orders were issued by the District Magistrate to disconnect mobile Internet services in East and West Imphal from 18th December, 2016 due to law and order turmoil over economic blockade by the United Naga Council (UNC). Mobile Internet services were reportedly restored on 30th December, 2016 after a 12 day disruption.	Mobile Internet	More than 72 hours	Reactive
117.	2016	Rajasthan	Bhilwara	Internet services were suspended under Section 144 on 13th December 2016 till 5 pm in the district of Bhilwara due to the onslaught of communal tensions coinciding with the preparations of a Muslim religious function, Barafwat.	No conclusive information	24 hours or less	Reactive
118.	2016	Jammu and Kashmir	Anantnag	Mobile phone services were reportedly suspended in parts of Kashmir, including Anantnag on 8th December, 2016 as a gun-fight ensued between militants and the security forces.	No information available	24 hours or less	Reactive
119.	2016	Bihar	Bhojpur, East Champaran, Gopalganj	Both, mobile and broadband internet services were disconnected from 15th October to prevent misuse of social media platforms due to violent communal clashes in the area. They were restored in Bhojpur on 18th October, 2016, whereas East Champaran was connected back to internet on 20th October, 2016.	Both	More than 72 hours	Reactive

120.	2016	Maharashtra	Nashik	Mobile Internet services and bulk SMS were blocked for two days (48 hours) on 10th October, 2016 in Nashik district as protests emerged over the alleged rape attempt of a 5 year old girl by a teenage boy.	Mobile Internet	25-72 hours	Reactive
121.	2016	Uttar Pradesh	Bijnor district	Internet services were suspended in the Bijnor district on 18th September, 2016 for reportedly 48 hours after communal clashes ensued in the region due to the alleged harassment of a school girl.	N/A	25-72 hours	Reactive
122.	2016	Rajasthan	Bhilwara	Internet services were blocked for 24 hours in Bhilwara on 16th September, 2016 after the stabbing of a 21 year old as he was returning home from Ganpati Puja.	N/A	24 hours or less	Reactive
123.	2016	Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir	Ahead of Eid celebrations, fixed-line Internet services were suspended in Kashmir on 12th September, 2016 as a precautionary measure in light of the ongoing violence in the region. These services were reportedly resumed on 17th September, 2016. However, mobile Internet services remain suspended since 9th July, 2016.	Both	More than 72 hours	Preventive
124.	2016	Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir valley	After the disconnect from mobile internet services since 9th July, 2016, broadband internet services were also suspended in the Kashmir valley on 13th August, 2016 for 5 days as a precautionary measure to prevent rumor mongering due to unrest between the protestors and the security forces.	Both	More than 72 hours	Preventive

125.	2016	Arunachal Pradesh	Itanagar	Mobile internet services were disrupted for two days in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh on 10th August, 2016 following the death of former Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Kalikho Pul.	Mobile Internet	25-72 hours	Reactive
126.	2016	Bihar	Saran district	Due to communal clashes in the Saran district after a video of the desecration of hindu deities went viral on social media, all internet services were shut down in the district under Section 144 of CrPC on 6th August, 2016 till 8th August, 2016 to prevent spread of rumors.	No conclusive information	25-72 hours	Reactive
127.	2016	Jammu & Kashmir	Jammu region	Due to bandhs being declared in the Chenab valley to show solidarity with protests being undertaken by Kashmiris, mobile internet services were suspended in Jammu region on 5th August, 2016. The services were reportedly restored on the same day.	Mobile internet	24 hours or less	Reactive
128.	2016	Jammu & Kashmir	Pulwama district and the towns of Ananatnag, Shopian, Pulgam and Sopore, and some parts of Srinagar	Following the killing of Burhan Wani, Kashmir valley and the Jammu region experienced a suspension of mobile internet services to check the spread of rumors by anti-social elements on 9th July, 2016. However, mobile internet services were restored in Jammu region on 26th July, 2016; after being suspended for 17 days. Reportedly, mobile internet services were restored in Kashmir valley on 19th November for post paid connections and on 27th January, 2017 for pre-paid connections.	Mobile internet	More than 72 hours	Reactive

129.	2016	Rajasthan	Barmer and Jaisalmer	After the death of a person in police firing, mobile internet services were shut down in Barmer and Jaisalmer for 48 hours on 30th June, 2016 as calls for a Bandh was announced by the community members of the person who was killed.	Mobile Internet	25-72 hours	Reactive
130.	2016	Jammu & Kashmir	Poonch district	Over a controversial issue, mobile internet services were suspended in the Poonch district on 22nd June, 2016 on operational and security grounds and to prevent law and order situations and were restored the same day.	Mobile Internet	24 hours or less	Preventive
131.	2016	Jammu & Kashmir	Jammu	Mobile internet services were suspended in Jammu region on 22nd June, 2016 ahead of a wrestling match, the venue for which is disputed between two communities, and experienced violence in 2014 as well. There is no exact information available as to when the services were restored.	Mobile internet services	No info available	Preventive
132.	2016	Jammu & Kashmir	Entire state	Mobile internet services were suspended in the entire state after a youth resorted to vandalization and desecration of a temple in Jammu, that led to a spur of violence in the region on 15th June, 2016. The services were reportedly restored on 18th June, 2016.	Mobile internet services	More than 72 hours	Reactive
133.	2016	Haryana	Rohtak	Mobile internet services and bulk SMS were blocked in Rohtak on 5th June, 2016 , along with the prolonged shut down in Sonipat as well, to curb the use of social media from instigating violence in the Jat agitation. There is no information available regarding the restoration of internet services.	Mobile internet services	No info	Preventive

134.	2016	Haryana	Sonipat	Mobile internet services were blocked in Sonipat, Haryana on 4th June, 2016 until further notice to prevent spread of misinformation prior to the agitation organized by the Jat community on 5th June, 2016. There is no information available regarding the restoration of internet services.	Mobile Internet	25-72 hours	Reactive
135.	2016	Uttar Pradesh	Azamgarh	In Azamgarh, the local administration resorted to suspension of mobile & broadband services from 16th to 18th May, 2016 as a precautionary measure to check the outbreak of riots due to communal tension in the area.	Both	25 to 72 hours	Preventive
136.	2016	Gujarat	Ahmedabad, Mehsana, Surat and Rajkot,	Pursuant to the Patel reservation agitation, mobile internet sevices were suspended in various parts of Gujarat on 17th April, 2016 and restored on 19th April, 2016.	Mobile internet	25 to 72 hours	Reactive
137.	2016	Jharkhand	Bokaro	Subsequent to the communal clashes in the city of Bokaro during celebration of Ram Navami, internet services were cut off from 16th April, 2016 to 18th April, 2016 to prevent spreading of communal fear and hatred through social media.	No info available	25 to 72 hours	Reactive
138.	2016	Jammu & Kashmir	North Kashmir, Srinagar and south Kashmir's Pulwama district	To check rumor mongering about an incident that led to death of 4 people in a firing by security forces, mobile internet services were suspended in the area on 14th April, 2016 and restored on 18th April, 2016	Mobile internet services	More than 72 hours	Reactive

139.	2016	Haryana	Rohtak, Jhajjar	Mobile internet services were suspended in various districts in Haryana as a prohibitory measure in light of the possible re-agitation of the Jat community for classification as Other Backward Classes (OBC) on 18th March, 2016 and restored on the same day.	Mobile Internet	24 hours or less	Preventive
140.	2016	Gujarat	Mehasana	Mobile Internet services were suspended in the district of Mehasana on 28th February, 2016 for 12 hours from 8 am to 8 pm as the Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti (PAAS) decided to continue with their women's conference despite being officially refused permission by the district Government.	Mobile Internet	24 hours or less	Preventive
141.	2016	Gujarat	Entire state of Gujarat	Mobile Internet services were suspended for 4 hours in the entire state to prevent cheating on the Revenue Accountants Recruitment Exam on 28th February, 2016	Mobile Internet	24 hours or less	Preventive
142.	2016	Rajasthan	Bharatpur	Due to the agitations of the Jat community for reservations as OBC, internet services were shut down on 22nd February, 2016 and restored on the evening of 23rd February,	No info available	24 hours or less	Reactive
143.	2016	Haryana	Jhajjar, Panipat, Sonipat, Hisar, Rohtak, Jind and Bhiwani	Subsequent to the Jat reservation protest in Haryana, mobile Internet, and SMS services were blocked in many areas beginning 19th February, 2016.	Mobile internet	No info available	Reactive
144.	2016	Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir	On the occasion of Republic Day, mobile internet services were snapped for a few hours as a precautionary measure on 26th January, 2016	Mobile internet	24 hours or less	Preventive

145.	2015	Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir	On the visit of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, the mobile internet services were temporarily blocked in the Kashmir region as a precautionary measure for his high profile address at a public rally on 7th November, 2015.	Mobile Internet	24 hours or less	Preventive
146.	2015	Rajasthan	Bhilwara	In an incident of communal tension over the alleged killing of a muslim youth, internet services were suspended in both these areas for 24 hours on 24th October, 2015.	Info not available	24 hours or less	Reactive
147.	2015	Gujarat	Rajkot	On 17th October, 2015, mobile internet services were suspended for 2 days in the area due to threats made by Hardik Patel to hold a protest in the stadium where a one day international cricket match was scheduled between the teams of India & South Africa.	Mobile internet	25 to 72 hours	Preventive
148.	2015	Meghalaya	Garo Hills	Internet services were blocked in the Garo Hills region for 24 hours to prevent spread of inflammatory messages during the voting period for the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) elections on 11th October, 2015.	Mobile internet	24 hours or less	Preventive
149.	2015	Jammu & Kashmir	Jammu	Jammu experienced suspension of mobile internet services on 8th October, 2015 for around 5 hours to prevent misuse of social media after three carcasses of slaughtered cows were found in the Udhampur area, and the organization of a beef party by an independent MLA	Mobile internet	24 hours or less	Preventive

150.	2014	Gujarat	Godhara	Mobile internet services were shut down as a precautionary measure in the town for 24 hours on the occasion of Ganesh Visarjans, when derogatory messages against Islam started making rounds on Whatsapp on 28th September, 2015	Mobile Internet	24 hours or less	Preventive
151.	2014	Jammu & Kashmir	Entire state of Jammu & Kashmir	Mobile, and wireless internet services were shut down during Eid celebrations on 25th September and 28th September, 2015, apprehending violence against the prohibition on cow slaughter and selling of beef in the State.	Both	73 hours or more	Preventive
152.	2014	Gujarat	Surat	The city of Surat experienced suspension of mobile internet services on 19th September, 2015 as Hardik Patel was detained by the police for violating prohibitory orders against taking out a rally in the area.	Mobile internet	No info	Reactive
153.	2015	Gujarat	Navsari district	From 12th September to 13th September, 2015, mobile internet services were cut off in the district of Navsari, Gujarat in lieu of a march organized by Hardik Patel & his affiliated political organization.	Mobile internet services	24 hours or less	Preventive
154.	2014	Manipur	Entire state of Manipur	Complete internet shut down (mobile and broadband, except for certain BSNL lines) starting 2nd September, 2015 for a week after violence in Churachandpur district.	Both	More than 72 hours	Reactive
155.	2014	Gujarat	Entire state of Gujarat, with prolonged bans in Surat & Ahmedabad	Mobile Internet services shut down in the entire state of Gujarat from 25th August to 2nd September, 2015 after a mega rally led by Hardik Patel seeking OBC status for the Patel community. Mobile internet remained blocked in Ahmedabad & Surat, even post 2nd September, 2015	Mobile Internet	More than 72 hours	Reactive

156.	2014	Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir	Due to the sudden rise in militant activities in Kashmir, as a preventive measure, mobile internet services were suspended from 8:30 am till 12:00 noon during the Independence Day celebrations in the area on 15th August, 2015. Similar measures are adopted on both, Republic Day & Independence Day in the area every year.	Mobile Internet	24 hours or less	Preventive
157.	2014	Jammu & Kashmir	Jammu	Both, mobile and broadband Internet services were temporarily blocked in Jammu due to the ongoing clashes between the Sikh groups and the state police of Jammu & Kashmir on 5th June, 2015. Although broadband services were restored on 6th June, 2015, there is no information available about the restoration of mobile Internet services.	Both	25 to 72 hours	Reactive
158.	2014	Nagaland	Entire state of Nagaland	Mobile and broadband Internet servies were suspended for 48 hours on 7th March, 2015, after lynching video of a rape accused goes viral.	Both	25 to 72 hours	Reactive
159.	2014	Gujarat	Vadodara	Mobile Internet blocked for three days starting 27th September, 2014 in the city of Vadodara, after riots over a morphed picture of a Muslim religious shrine.	Mobile Internet	25 to 72 hours	Reactive
160.	2014	Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Mobile Internet services were blocked as a part of a security protocol on the occasion of Independence Day on 15th August, 2014. The services were restored within a few hours after the official ceremony was completed.	Mobile Internet	24 hours or less	Preventive

161.	2014	Jammu & Kashmir	Parts of Kashmir	Internet blocked in parts of Kashmir to stop political leaders from addressing a UNHRC event in Geneva via video link on 17th March, 2014. There is no conclusive information available with respect to the restoration of internet services.	Information not available	Info not available	Preventive
162.	2014	Jammu & Kashmir	Few areas in the state	The Defence Ministry had asked the Department of Telecom to selectively ban mobile Internet in some places considered 'hot spots' in the state on 11th March, 2014. There is no information available about the restoration of services in the area.	Mobile internet	No info available	Preventive
163.	2014	Jammu & Kashmir	Most parts of Kashmir	Due to organization of protests at the first death anniversary of Afzal Guru on 9th February, 2014, mobile internet services, and internet through plugged in devices was blocked in most parts of the Kashmir valley as a precautionary measure against apprehended violence till around 5:30 pm on 10th February, 2014.	Mobile internet	25 to 72 hours	Preventive
164.	2014	Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	As a precautionary measure on 26th January, 2014, mobile internet, along with mobile telecommunication services was suspended for a few hours.	Mobile internet	24 hours or less	Preventive
165.	2013	Jammu & Kashmir	Entire state	Mobile internet and telephony services were suspended on 15th August, 2013 for security reasons on Independence Day.	Mobile internet	24 hours or less	Preventive

166.	2013	Jammu & Kashmir	Entire state	The entire state experienced a blackout of mobile internet services, lasting almost 5 days, starting 10th August, 2013, due to communal riots that spurred in the Kishtwar district of the state.	Mobile internet	More than 72 hours	Reactive
167.	2013	Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Disconnect of internet services through mobiles & dongles in the Kashmir valley post the killing of four people in the Ramban district after clashes with the Border Security Forces (BSF) on 18th July, 2013.	Mobile internet	No info available	Reactive
168.	2013	Jammu & Kashmir	Entire state of Jammu & Kashmir	TV News channels and mobile Internet banned immediately after Afzal Guru's execution on 9th February, 2013 till 15th February, 2013.	Mobile internet	73 hours or more	Reactive
169.	2013	Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	On the occasion of Republic Day, as a part of a security drill, mobile phone and Internet services were suspended on 26th January, 2013.	Mobile internet	24 hours or less	Preventive
170.	2013	Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Mobile internet services were suspended on 21st September 2012 till 5:00 pm owing to the protests over the movie 'Innocence of Muslim's.	Mobile internet	24 hours or less	Reactive
171.	2013	Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir Valley	Mobile services were suspended on 15th August, 2012 as a precautionary measure for an hour owing to Independence Day.	Mobile internet	24 hours or less	Preventive

172.	2013	Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir valley	Mobile Internet as a part of a larger mobile telephony ban was restricted on 26th January, 2012 as a standard security protocol.	Mobile internet	24 hours or less	Preventive

Between January 2012 and April 2018, we recorded 172 shutdowns across 19 Indian states, and the number of shutdowns almost doubled every successive year during this period. News reports also provide additional details such as contexts behind shutdowns, types of service affected (mobile/fixed-line), and duration of shutdowns. Based on available information, three groups of preliminary patterns can be made out regarding how Internet shutdowns are imposed:

• Mode of restriction: Whether the order issued restricted mobile, fixed line, or both the modes of connecting to Internet services?

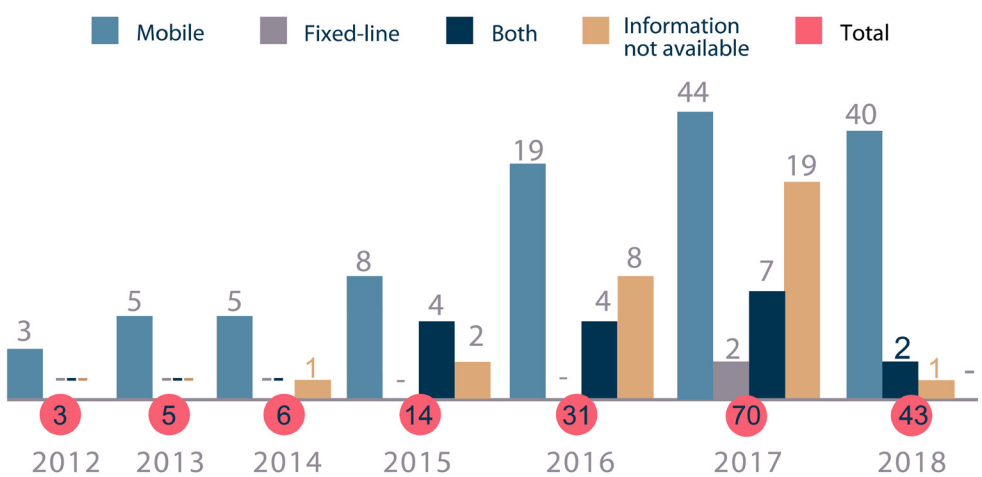
• Duration of the shutdown: Ranging from less than 24 hours to more than 72 hours; how long was the Internet shutdown instituted for?

"Between January 2012 and April 2018, we recorded 172 shutdowns across 19 Indian states, and the number of shutdowns almost doubled every successive year during this period."

• Nature of the shutdown: Was the Internet shutdown a preventive measure taken in apprehension of an event, or as a reaction, post the occurrence?

We emphasize again that the statistics provided here must be treated as purely indicative. Not all news reports provide all the above categories of information every time, and an extent of human error in reportage must also be factored in. Instances where information was unavailable are clearly marked as such.

(Mode of Restriction)



Mode of Restriction

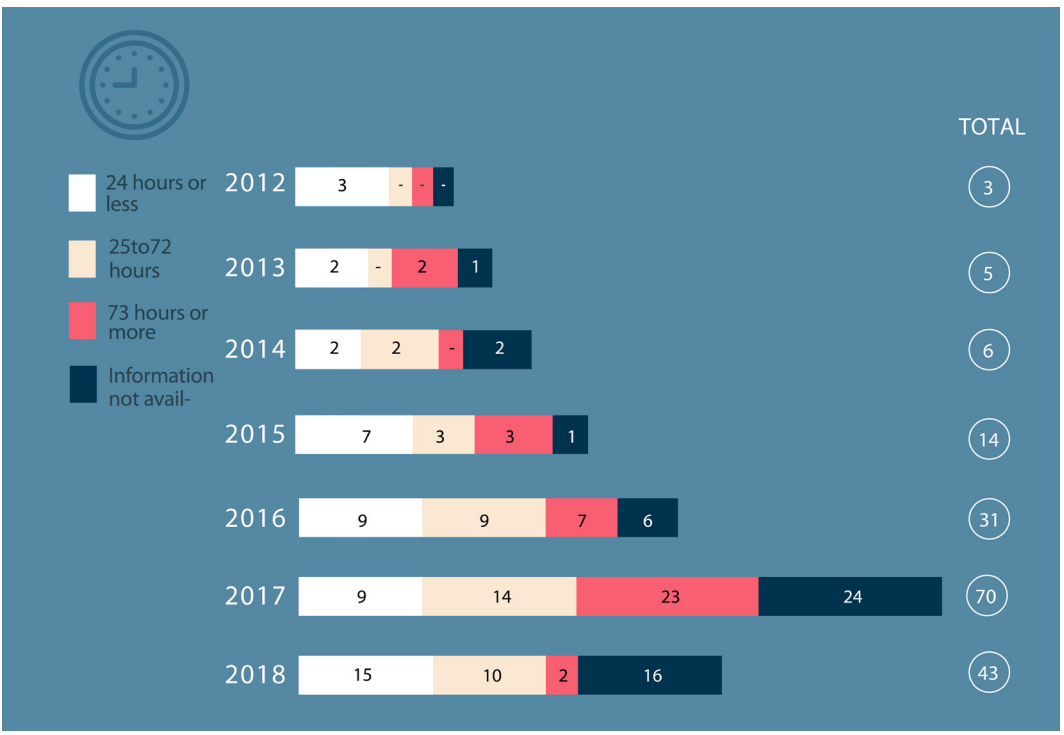
Of the 172 reported incidents, 124 were targeted at mobile Internet services alone (3 in 2012, 5 shutdowns each in 2013 & 2014, 8 in 2015 and 19 in 2016, 44 in 2017 and 40 till April 2018), 17 targeted both mobile and fixed-line Internet services (4 each in 2015 and 2016, 9 in 2017, and 2 in 2018), while only 2 shutdowns targeting fixed-line services alone were recorded during the period of study.

The heavy bias towards targeting mobile networks for shutdowns over fixed-line can be explained by the fact that 95.13% of Indian Internet users access the Internet over mobile networks (phones and dongles), and only 4.87% of Internet users access the Internet using fixed-line services (including wired connections, Wi-Fi, Wi-Max, radio and VSAT)[13]. In other words, of approximately 446 million Internet subscribers in In India, 424 million are mobile Internet users[14].

"The heavy bias towards targeting mobile networks for shutdowns over fixed-line can be explained by the fact that 95.13% of Indian Internet users access the Internet over mobile networks"

These numbers indicate that Government agencies often order mobile Internet shutdowns instead of fixed-line shutdowns because an effective shutdown means preventing maximum number people from accessing the internet to communicate or spread rumours. And since the number

(Duration of Shutdown)



13. Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, *Yearly Performance Indicators of Indian Telecom Sector (Second Edition)*, May 4, 2018, available at: http://trai.gov.in/sites/default/files/YPIRReport04052018.pdf, last accessed on May 4, 2018

14. Ibid.

of mobile Internet users far outnumber fixed-line Internet subscribers in India, restricting mobile internet services is seen as a more effective measure.

Duration of Shutdowns

47 of the 172 Internet shutdowns between 2012 and 2018 lasted less than 24 hours, 38 lasted between 24 and 72 hours, 37 lasted for over 72 hours, while no information was available on the respective durations of 50 Internet shutdowns. The non-availability of information is attributable chiefly to the fact that no public notifications are issued by the Government or Internet Service Providers before, during, or after shutdowns, leaving stakeholders outside affected areas to source this information from available news reports, which do not consistently mention the durations for which Internet access was blocked.

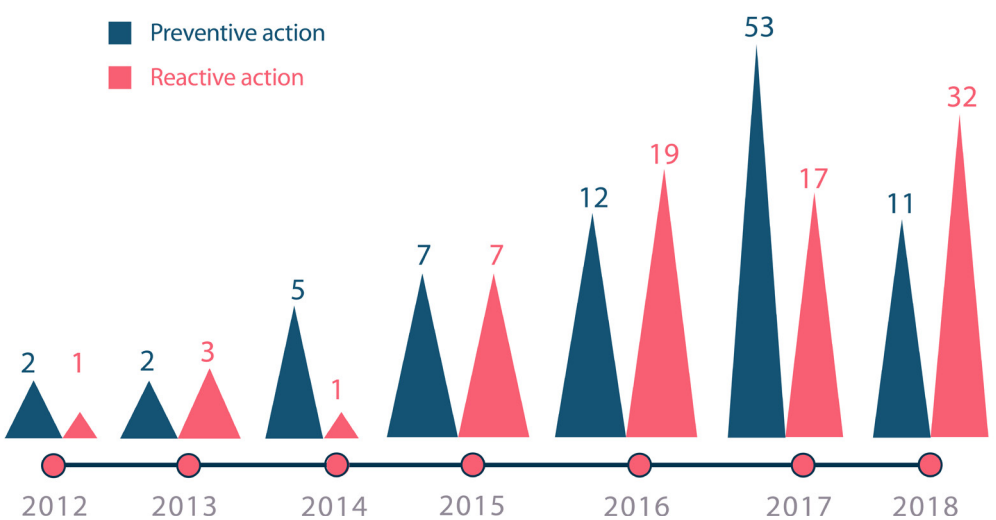
As the above graph reveals, the number of shutdowns lasting over three days has been quickly rising over the years, as has been those lasting between one and three days. Short-duration shutdowns i.e. those lasting less than a day have also been increasing over time, though at a seemingly slower pace. Interestingly, the logest shutdown recorded in India was in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, where Internet services remained suspended for almost 6 consecutive months.

Nature of Shutdowns

Of the 172 Internet shutdowns recorded between January 2012 and April 2018, 92 were observed to be preventive measures i.e. restrictions imposed in anticipation of law and order breakdowns, whereas 80 shutdowns were reactive in nature i.e. imposed in order to contain on-going law and order breakdowns.

It is especially interesting to note that the number of preventive shutdowns often match and at times surpass the number of reactive shutdowns overall. In 2017, the number of preventive shutdowns were almost three times the number of reactive shutdowns, indicating that Internet shutdowns are increasingly being resorted to even before law and order breakdowns have actually taken place.

(Nature of Shutdown)



Voices of the affected

Over the last decade, Internet has become an essential utility to facilitate activities of all kinds including but not limited to communications, business, education, health and journalism. In order to gain a better understanding of how Internet shutdowns impact the daily lives of residents, we reached out to people across the nation to pen down their experiences during the times of Internet shutdowns. Following is a collection of brief quotes we received from those affected by Internet shutdowns, explaining how Internet shutdowns have affected them and others they know.

Impact on Business & Economy

A report[15] by the Brookings Institute, which aimed to quantify the losses suffered by various countries due to such internet, adjudged India to have topped the list by incurring losses to the tune of US $968 million in the year 2016 itself. To measure national Internet shutdown costs, Brookings used the following formula: [national GDP * duration (measured as percent of the year based on number of days the Internet was shut down) * extent of digital economy (measured as percent of national economy derived from the digital economy) + the multiplier effect of the disrupted digital economy]. Another report[16] by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, which quantatitavely assessed the economic impact of Internet Shutdowns across India, projects an economic loss of approximately US $3.04 billion due to Shutdowns in the country during the period of 2012-17. To determine economic impact of shutdowns, ICRIER relied on the estimated elasticities of mobile and total Internet in combination with the estimated economic cost of Internet traffic affected by shutdowns. Yet another report prepared by Deloitte and launched by the Global Network Initiative, found that an average high-connectivity country stands to lose at least 1.9% of its daily GDP for each day all Internet services are shut down. For an average medium-level connectivity country, the loss was estimated at 1% of daily GDP, and for an average low-connectivity country, the loss was estimated at 0.4% of daily GDP[17]. All of these reports convey that with the growing dependence on online ecosystem, the economic impact of internet shutdowns has also magnified.

“All of these reports convey that with the growing dependence on online ecosystem, the economic impact of internet shutdowns has also magnified.”

With the Digital India campaign, businesses are rapidly adopting online business models, where Internet disruptions for even a few hours brings

15. Darrell M West, *Internet shutdowns cost countries $2.4 billion last year,* Center for Technology and Innovation at Brookings, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/intenet-shutdowns-v-3.pdf, October 2016

16. Rajat Kathuria, Mansi Kedia, Gangesh Varma, Kaushambi Bagchi, Rekha Sekhani, The Anatomy of an INTERNET BLACKOUT: Measuring the Economic Impact of Internet Shutdowns in India, ICRIER, http://icrier.org/pdf/Anatomy_of_an_Internet_Blackout.pdf, April 2018.

17. Deloitte, *The Economic Impact of Disruptions to Internet Connectivity,* October 2016, available at: https://globalnetworkinitiative.org/

the business to a halt due to breakdown of communication channels with their potential customers, payment gateway operators, delivery personnel and other such intermediary parties involved.

Dipak Birolia, cotton bales trader in Adilabad town in state of Telangana expressed his concerns about how the long term Internet Shutdown affected his export business. He struggled to keep his business running, he had to travel 40 kms every day to access internet and generate E-way bills to ensure transportation of his goods. He said, *"We faced a lot of problems when there was no internet in our region for more than a month. We have an export business that requires the filing of various bills etc. Since there was no internet, we couldn't generate E-way bills for transportation of goods. We used to go 40 km every day to Maharashtra in order to access the internet and complete our work. This was only once, but after that, we haven't faced any problem." - Dipak Birolia, cotton bales trader in Adilabad town.*

There are certain businesses that run only through the Internet. E-commerce websites, websites for job procurement, e-trading, e-banking applications are among the few business models for which Internet is essential and is absolutely necessary to facilitate services to customers/subscriberes. Internet disruptions affect their entire economic existence.

Sairee Chahal, Founder & CEO, of SHEROES, told us about her online platform which aids women across the nation from diverse background in finding jobs. She expressed her concerns during the time of network disruption as, *"SHEROES works with women from over 20,000 locations and internet shutdowns have adversely impacted our daily business. Internet serves as a lifeline for income for many and shutdowns change that negatively".* The impact of shutdown is not limited to big traders, E-commerce, or big companies but an Internet blackout tends to equally impact even the smallest business which has any form of Internet dependence. An operator at a service center from Mutnur village of Adilabad district narrated his experience to us. According to him, *"Various business areas suffered when there was no internet for 30-45 days in our region. Our work includes filling of online applications, generating certificates like birth certificate, OBC certificate etc. Since we couldn't do any bank transactions, our customers also faced a lot of inconveniences."*

Impact on Human Rights

Internet disruptions have a direct impact on human rights and the same has been acknowledged by the Special Rapporteur's June 2017 Report to the Human Rights Council which states that the users affected from an Internet shutdown are cut off from emergency services and health information, mobile banking and e-commerce, transportation, school classes, voting and election monitoring, reporting on major crises and events, and human rights investigations.

In addition, a resolution[18] was passed by the United Nations Human Rights Council on 1st July 2016, condemning network disruptions and measures resorted by states to curb online access and/or dissemination of information. The resolution further affirmed that rights in the online sphere, especially the right to freedom of expression requires the same standard of protection as in the offline world. It recognized the role of Internet in promoting affordable educational opportunities.

The general population of India agrees with

18. United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development.*, Thirty-second session, Agenda item 3, 27th June 2016

the views cited by United Nations with respect to human rights violation caused by network disruptions. Faizal Farooqui, CEO of Mouthshut.com, expressed that, *"Internet shutdowns are a violation of the Constitutional Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression. They cause damage to the economy, individuals and businesses. They also cause longterm harm to the people of affected regions by denying them access to knowledge".*

Burhaan Kinu, Sr. Photojournalist, Hindustan Times had similar concerns as Mr. Farooqui, he said that, *"curbing Internet services violates basic human rights and does irreversible economic and social damage to common citizens of the state".*

In addition, a homemaker, Anuradha Devi also gave a detailed account on how Internet disruptions have affected her daily life. While there was a 100 day internet blackout in Darjeeling, she realized the importance of the Internet, she felt isolated from the community and felt a forceful disconnect from the rest of the world.

In her words, *"Earlier, I was using the Internet for the sole purpose of being active on social networking. However, the Internet Shutdown in Darjeeling made me realize the actual importance of the Internet and pointed my attention towards the fact that how important it has become for us to get information about the world and be connected with each other. Not only we were cut-off from the outside world but there was no way we could reach them and tell our condition".*

> **"As I passed my class 12 exams, I was thinking of pursuing law but could not even apply for the course as there were no Internet services. Even the mobile networks kept on fluctuating which made it difficult to get any kind of updates on admissions and otherwise."**

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Impact on Education

An Internet shutdown is more than just a disconnection from Whatsapp, Facebook or Twitter; it means limiting access to knowledge and learning opportunities for students. It also leads to restriction from avenues for learning that are provided by platforms like Coursera or edX. During an Internet shutdown, students are bereft of access to information, education programs, fellowships among other educational activities.

Geeta Devi, a class XIIth student from Darjeeling spoke to us about the difficulties she and peers faced in the application process for their college admissions during a sixty four day Internet Shutdown in Darjeeling. It was a crucial time for all the newly school graduates to apply for their higher studies, but due to lack of proper internet services they failed to recieve everyday updates on admissions. As a result, Geeta missed the deadline and couldn't apply for the course she desired to pursue. She says, *"The 64 days long Internet shutdown in Darjeeling started in*

the month of July, that was the time when admissions in most of the colleges and universities begin. As I passed my class 12 exams, I was thinking of pursuing law but could not even apply for the course as there were no Internet services. Even the mobile networks kept on fluctuating which made it difficult to get any kind of updates on admissions and otherwise. I am not the only one who is suffering, all the students in Darjeeling are facing similar issues."

Psychological impact

When Internet services suddenly become unavailable at a time when so many aspects of our lives are dependent on it, the impact can be felt not just economically but also psychologically. Saadia Ishfaq, a Community Manager, Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir told us that she felt like as if she was being strangulated. *"Life came to a standstill. Snapping of Internet services was the biggest blow. There was no communication at all. One couldn't reach out to anybody."*

Another eleventh grader from Darjeeling, Ayush Chaurasia, reported his experience during a month long Internet Shutdown in the city. Internet shutdowns are a hindrance to the ability of children to research and study. In addition, the impact of shutdowns is not limited to their education but it also affects psychology of children since the shutdown leaves a child disconnected from the rest of her peer group.

"It has been over two months. I haven't gone to school. All the schools in Darjeeling are closed due to persistent upheaval and chaos. As far as the internet is concerned, I am unable to access any kind of information. I used to continuously visit many online portals for my research work but now I cannot even study a small piece of information as there is no internet. I cannot connect to my friends and there is no exchange of any kind of information due to internet shutdown."

Impact on health industry

Internet is an indispensable utility service for health care industry. Most of patient information repositories, documentations and records are maintained on online servers. At the time of an Internet shutdown, it becomes impossible to work on these servers. In addition, doctors often consult their peers in complicated cases for advice, and with the advent of the Internet and messaging services like WhatsApp, communications have become easier through images and videos. However, Internet shutdowns prevent them from communicating with their peers and experts virtually.

"Most hospitals host their databases on servers online. Also, various life saving drugs and surgical instruments are shipped to us from across the world. Ordering, making payments and subsequent tracking of shipment—all happen online. With the Internet shutdown, we needed to improvise with a contingency plan since we didn't have access to detailed patients' information."

Dr. Regina Rajkumari, Surgeon, a native of Manipur, recited her experience from an Internet Shutdown, *"Most hospitals host their databases on servers online. Also, various life saving drugs and surgical instruments are shipped to us from across the world. Ordering, making payments and subsequent tracking of shipment—all happen online. With the Internet shutdown, we needed to improvise with a contingency plan since we didn't have access to detailed patients' information."*

Conclusion

Over the previous sections of this report, we have seen how Internet shutdowns developed as a state response to law and order situations and how existing legal frameworks govern their imposition. We have had a look at all the shutdowns that have been recorded in India since January 2012 and identified a few key patterns that emerge from available data. We have also heard from individuals who were directly or indirectly affected by Internet shutdowns, and heard first-hand accounts of how recurring Internet shutdowns deal a heavy blow to socio-economic welfare and growth. As Internet shutdowns continue to gain favor with the Government as an effective way to control the spread of rumors and misinformation during imminent/existing law and order breakdowns, it is safe to say that this is one of the most pressing public policy issues in the contemporary landscape.

A number of actors in the multi-stakeholder community have also taken cognizance of the urgency of this issue and joined the narrative against Internet shutdowns. In India, various civil society organizations, academic institutions, and policy think tanks have published research reports on Internet shutdowns. Other stakeholders like media organizations and industry stakeholders routinely participate in the discourse in some capacity by organizing and speaking at various events and consultations. Even Government officials have infrequently participated in policy discussions on Internet shutdowns, though their narratives have mostly focused on how shutdowns solve a real security concern and how there are no other viable alternatives.

On the international plane, there are even more organizations that have already dedicated a great deal of resources to studying and fighting Internet shutdowns. For instance, Access Now – a global civil society organization headquartered in the United States spearheads the #KeepItOn campaign with a dedicated website that provides a vast array of information material including contributions from a number of partner organizations across the world. Other stakeholders like the Internet Society, Global Network Initiative, Brookings Institution and even the United Nations have all weighed in on the issue of Internet shutdowns. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Protection and Promotion of Freedom of Expression and Opinion has in fact issued several calls to end Internet shutdowns to countries where they are common, including India.

“As the narrative against Internet shutdowns gains momentum on a global level, India stands out as a shining example for all the wrong reasons. With at least 172 shutdowns recorded between January 2012 and April 2018, India has the distinction of being home to the highest number of shutdowns recorded anywhere in the world, that too by a wide margin.”

As the narrative against Internet shutdowns gains momentum on a global level, India stands out as a shining example for all the

wrong reasons. With at least 172 shutdowns recorded between January 2012 and April 2018, India has the distinction of being home to the highest number of shutdowns recorded anywhere in the world, that too by a wide margin. According to Access Now, which also runs a Shutdowns Tracker on a global scale, India in September 2017 topped the list of 30 countries that witnessed shutdowns in the preceding 21 months.

This is a very curious state of affairs, as the Government of India's flagship initiative Digital India places great emphasis on the Internet and technology in general to carry the country to the next phases of its development trajectory. The Government strong push for digitalization is also visible in projects like the Aadhaar unique ID program, which seeks to create a central database of demographic and biometric information on Indian residents so as to streamline governance and public life in many ways. This and other programs like smart cities and the Internet of Things all have one thing in common i.e. none can function without reliable access to the Internet at all times. Considering the importance that India places on the Internet in furthering its development goals, it is highly counterintuitive that it has also made a habit of shutting down Internet access during law and order situations, ignoring the obvious and severe collateral damage that such measures come with.

On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that the Internet has indeed presented a range of fresh challenges when it comes to containing law and order breakdowns. The ease with which rumors and misinformation can be circulated online to reach a very large audience, the opportunities the Internet presents for discreet planning and execution of malicious efforts meant to disrupt peace and tranquility, and even features like encrypted communications that are considered indispensable to ensure privacy and security but which also benefits malicious actors, all contribute in equal measure towards making it that much more difficult for law enforcement agencies to prevent/mitigate law and order breakdowns and limit destruction and injuries during turbulent times. All things considered, it is not difficult to see how Internet shutdowns would seem to the authorities to be an attractive way of tackling law and order breakdowns, but it is truly unfortunate

"On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that the Internet has indeed presented a range of fresh challenges when it comes to containing law and order breakdowns."

that this excessive measure is being wantonly resorted to with little to no consideration of how they might impact societies and economies in the long run.

To address the issue of Internet shutdowns in an effective and balanced way, a number of short and long term steps must be collectively taken by the multi-stakeholder community:

- The current legal regime governing Internet shutdowns must be overhauled to place greater emphasis on transparency and accountability. The Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency and Public Safety) Rules, 2017 must become the only legislation under which Internet shutdowns are imposed. This by extension means shutdowns must no longer be imposed under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which is not designed to facilitate carefully considered shutdowns with adequate oversight. The Telecom Suspension Rules must

be treated as the procedure governing shutdowns imposed under Section 5(2) of the Telegraph Act, and all shutdown orders issued under Section 5(2) must abide by the procedure laid out under the Telecom Suspension Rules.

• The Telecom Suspension Rules themselves must be updated with language that requires issuing authorities to exhaust all available alternatives before issuing an Internet shutdown order. Moreover, the Rules must make it necessary to provide adequate notice to the general public before Internet shutdowns are imposed, clearly specifying the duration for which each shutdown is expected to remain in place. Any extensions of existing shutdowns must also be similarly notified. The act of issuing notices may be carried out by TSPs, and issuing authorities must be empowered to issue necessary directions in this regard. Further, the Rules must introduce provisions that require Government agencies to make Internet shutdown orders publicly accessible, and catalogs of all such orders issued so far must also be maintained and made public accessible. Statistics must also be made available on how often the Review Committee meets and the decisions taken at these meetings.

> **"Filling in research gaps and conceptualizing solutions is not something that actors in this space can perform in isolation, which means meaningful collaborations and focused dialogues are indispensable."**

• The multi-stakeholder community must work together to undertake a study of the actual impact of the Internet on spreading rumors and misinformation before, during and after law and order breakdowns. Specifically, the study must attempt to answer at least the following questions:

- Is there a consistent and perceptible increase in the dissemination of rumors and misinformation before, during and after law and order breakdowns?

- Is there a causal link between rumor-mongering online and escalations in real-world law and order problems?

Lack of adequate research in this regard is what stalls most dialogues with the Government on addressing Internet shutdowns, as any calls to end Internet shutdowns are easily countered by the authorities with the insufficiently proven argument that shutdowns save lives by preventing rumor-driven escalations of law and order problems. Depending on the outcome of the study, the multi-stakeholder community must also work together to conceptualize viable alternatives to Internet shutdowns that balance the interests of all stakeholders.

As evident from the above, the campaign against Internet shutdowns is still in its nascent stages, and there is much ground to be covered before the issue can be effectively addressed. Filling in research gaps and conceptualizing solutions is not something that actors in this space can perform in isolation, which means meaningful collaborations and focused dialogues are indispensable in arriving at an expedient solution. We hope that this report is of use to those looking to enter the debate around Internet shutdowns as well as those already in it, and we look forward to working with the community to ensure that the Internet remains a driving force behind sustainable growth.

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Living in Digital Darkness

A handbook on internet shutdowns in India

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