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Govt-Imposed Internet Shutdowns Cost $7.69b in 2024

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News Desk

ISLAMABAD: Government-imposed internet shutdowns cost $7.69 billion in 2024 worldwide.

**Most affected nation**

According to a report published by TechRadar, Pakistan was the single most affected nation ($1.62 billion), followed by Myanmar ($1.58 billion) and Sudan ($1.12 billion).

While 2024 was not the most costly year to date it still managed to break some (negative) records.

**Self-imposed outages**

2024 was the year with the highest number of countries affected. Citizens in 28 countries suffered from 167 major self-imposed internet outages, impacting 648.4 million people. The internet disruptions were also the longest ever recorded – 88,788 hours, a 12 per cent increase from 2023.

Despite being widespread, social media blocks declined overall in 2024 compared to previous years.

The latter finding was especially surprising, according to Simon Migliano, Head of Research at Top10VPN.

He told TechRadar: "This was probably due to disruptions like Pakistan’s shutdown of X generating a lot of attention, whereas the long-running internet blackouts in regional Myanmar and Azerbaijan fell off the agenda after a while."

**Most extreme**

TechRadar reported, internet shutdowns are the most extreme form of internet censorship, as not even the best VPN apps can help citizens bypass restrictions. They occur when a government decides to completely shut off the country's internet.

These incidents may be confined to specific areas – this is what often happened in India, with regions like Jammu, Kashmir, Manipur, and Punjab being affected in the past – only targeting either mobile or fixed connections or the whole infrastructure.

Every year, several motivations push governments worldwide to pull the plug on the internet despite the economic repercussions. Experts found that in 2024 civil conflict was among the main reasons being government-imposed restrictions – certainly the one with the biggest economic impact.

Iraq suffered the highest number of internet shutdowns yet again last year, with 61 incidents. These were all prompted by school exams. However, as mentioned earlier, Pakistan suffered the biggest economic impact following internet and social media blocks linked with elections and anti-government protests. Similarly, the internet outages in Myanmar and Sudan were all linked to conflict.

**Bypassing shutdowns**

Citizens can use a virtual private network (VPN) or similar circumventing tool to bypass government-imposed social media blocks. This security software masks users' real IP address location to make them look like they are browsing from different countries within a few clicks.

This is exactly why VPN usage has been skyrocketing globally in 2024. Over the year, Proton VPN documented spikes in sign-ups in at least 15 countries.

**Twitter in Pakistan**

X (formerly Twitter) was the most blocked social media platform in 2024 due to the extended blockage enforced in Pakistan (where the platform has been blocked since February), Myanmar, and Venezuela.

TikTok followed suit. Experts found the TikTok shutdown in Kyrgyzstan, enforced in April (and still ongoing), to be the main cause, accounting for the majority of the 8,115 hours of blocks on the platform. "Shorter but still significant blocks" also occur in Senegal and New Caledonia. The latter was especially relevant as it was the first time a Western democracy (France) imposed such a restriction on the Internet.

**Not satisfied**

According to Business Recorder, the government, on Wednesday, failed to satisfy the Senate Standing Committee on Information Technology and Telecommunication regarding blocking internet services in any part of the country, as it was not covered in the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (PECA) Act.