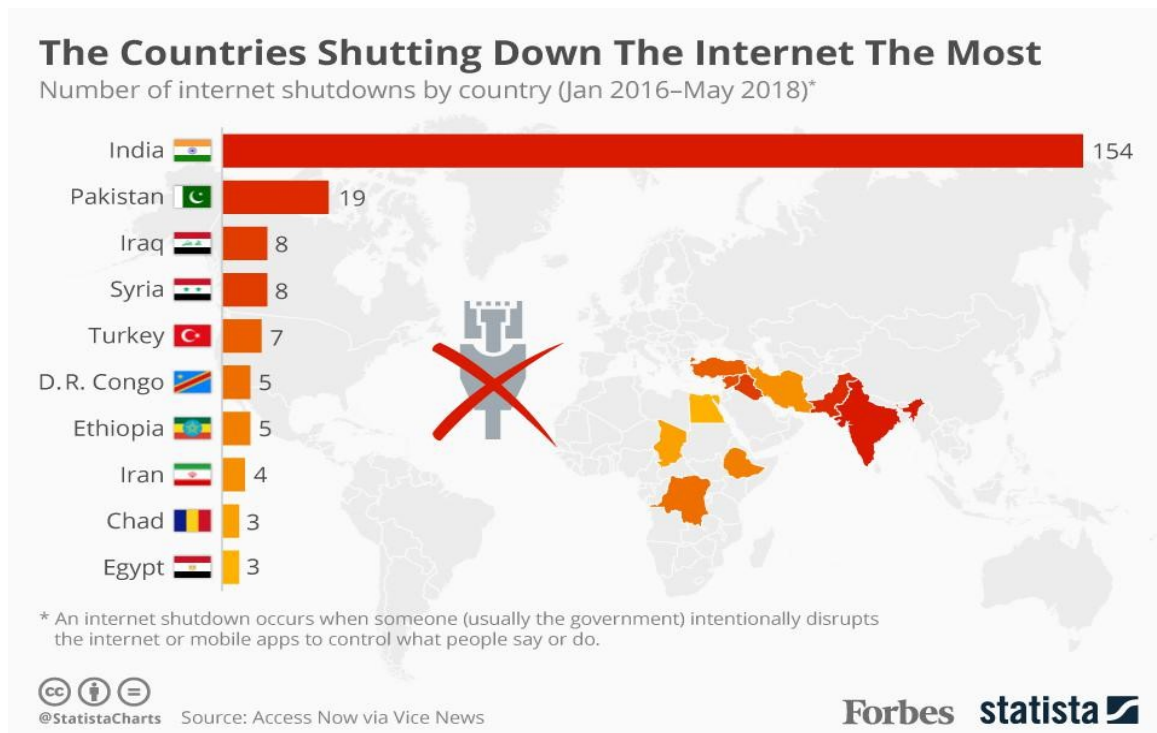


### 3. Internet Shutdowns

**Prelims Syllabus:** Governance

**Mains Syllabus:** GS-II Governance | Government Policies & Interventions for Development

**Mains Tags:** Need for better data collection and decision-making processes with respect to Internet shutdowns.



#### Why in News?

- Suspension of mobile internet by the Punjab government.

#### Highlights:

- Earlier this month, the Punjab government suspended mobile Internet and SMS services in the State for more than four days in the interest of public safety, to prevent incitement to violence and to prevent disturbance of peace and public order.
- The Software Freedom Law Center (SFLC), which keeps a count of Internet stoppages State-wise, has recorded eight such shutdowns in Punjab.
- Between 2012 and March 2023, the southern States recorded only six such shutdowns in this period. There was no instance of an Internet shutdown in Kerala.
- Elsewhere, except Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Sikkim, all the other States recorded at least one such instance, with Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh recording the highest number.

- According to Access Now, a non-profit that defends digital rights, 60% of all the Internet shutdowns recorded between 2016 and 2022 worldwide took place in India.
- Over the past five years, India has recorded the highest number of shutdowns.
- Notably, such shutdowns are never or almost never implemented in most parts of Europe, North and South America and Oceania, while they are rampant in Africa and Asia.

#### **Data collection on Internet shutdowns:**

- The Union government does not collate data on Internet shutdowns imposed by the State governments.
- Collection of centralised data was “strongly recommended” by the Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology, in 2021.
- The Committee wanted the reasons, duration, decision of the competent authority and of the review committees to be noted for every Internet shutdown, and for the information to be made public.

#### **Cost of Internet shutdowns:**

- A report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2022 noted the significant impact of the shutdown on education and healthcare. Students are unable to access online classes and resources, while doctors and medical professionals are unable to access vital medical information and communicate with patients.
- A 2018 paper published by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations estimated that India lost around \$3 billion between 2012 and 2017 due to shutdowns.
- Internet shutdowns have a severe impact on businesses, particularly in sectors such as e-commerce, information technology, and media.
- Shutdowns disrupt supply chains, leading to delays in delivery of goods and services. Small and medium-sized enterprises also face significant losses as they heavily rely on online platforms for sales and marketing.