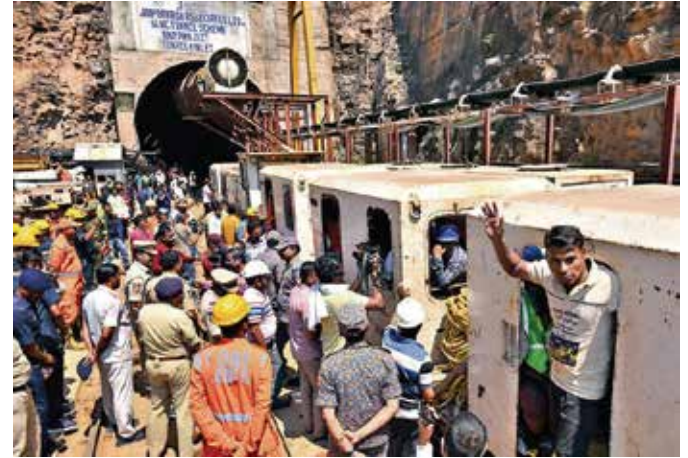




## Slush and water seepage hinder rescue operation

### DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Seepage of water and heavy slush are hindering rescue operations for eight people trapped 14 km inside the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel in Telangana since Saturday. The site has become unstable, with water seeping in at 3,000-5,000 liters per minute, making it difficult for rescue teams. Despite the involvement of multiple agencies, including the Army and Navy, efforts to clear the last 50 meters filled with debris remain risky. The Navy's Marcos divers are unable to navigate due to the high slush content. Additional agencies, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and CSIR-NGRI, will join the operation. Geological tests are being conducted to assess the risk of further collapse while dewatering and debris removal continue.



## The right's rise, Europe's state of denial

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The U.S. and Russia recently held bilateral talks in Saudi Arabia, excluding Ukraine and Europe, while a prior Swiss-hosted peace summit, led by Ukraine, the EU, and the U.S., excluded Russia. At the Munich Security Conference, U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance criticized Europe for suppressing right-wing parties, restricting free speech, and enabling mass migration, which he argued threatened democracy. However, before the 2024 elections, both the U.S. and Europe sought to curb the rise of far-right parties, fearing their impact on liberal values. This was evident in Romania, where a court annulled an election victory of a far-right candidate who opposed aid to Ukraine.

#### What the U.S. forgets

In February 2025, the U.S. accused Ukraine, Germany, and Europe of not doing enough to resolve the conflict, despite having spent over \$110 billion on the war. It overlooks its own role in sabotaging Russia-Ukraine peace talks in 2022 and Germany's forced support for Ukraine despite sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines. The U.S. also pressures Europe to take more responsibility for NATO, despite historically opposing European defense independence. Additionally, the U.S. criticizes Europe's handling of migration and radical Islam but previously focused on right-wing extremism as the main threat, downplaying Islamist terrorism at the UN.

#### The problem with Europe

Europe's liberal policies have enabled violent dissidents, terrorists, and radical groups to exploit open societies, leading to demographic shifts and security threats. This has fuelled the rise of right-wing parties as voters react against perceived threats to their identity and values. The recent German elections narrowly kept the far-right at bay, but Europe remains in denial about the consequences of its policies. India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar criticized Western hypocrisy for promoting democracy at home while supporting undemocratic forces abroad, citing regime changes in Afghanistan and Syria. On Ukraine, a divide emerged between the U.S. and Europe at the UN, where the U.S. sided with Russia against a European-Ukrainian resolution. Despite Europe's symbolic win, without U.S. support, the Ukraine war is effectively lost.

#### The trans-Atlantic partnership is relevant

Despite tensions at the Munich Security Conference and the UN General Assembly, the trans-Atlantic partnership between the U.S. and Europe remains intact. The U.S.'s apparent retreat from Europe is seen as a tactical move to renegotiate terms rather than a strategic shift. With Germany's new centrist leadership, Europe has an opportunity to

reassess its security, address radical influences, adopt a more independent foreign policy, and recalibrate its relationship with the U.S. Given the growing alliance between Russia and China, the U.S.-Europe partnership remains crucial. The U.S. is unlikely to fully disengage, and Europe's resilience is underestimated.

## Human smuggling must engage Parliament's attention

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The plight of Indian illegal immigrants, particularly those deported from the U.S. and those abandoned in conflict zones like Iraq. Many return humiliated and in dire conditions. The core issue is the growing problem of illegal immigration, driven by human smuggling networks, particularly in states like Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, and Kerala. These traffickers, operating without fear of law or consequences, exploit desperate individuals seeking better opportunities abroad. Human smuggling, known as \*kabootarbazi\*, is highly profitable and requires no expertise, making it a persistent issue in rural India.

#### Horror and misery

The grave issue of human smuggling in India, where traffickers exploit gullible youth with false promises of prosperity abroad. These migrants often endure horrific conditions, including forced labour, abuse, and even death in transit. Smugglers operate with impunity, profiting immensely while fuelling corruption and organized crime. Despite the severity of the crisis, India's Emigration Act, 1983, fails to address human smuggling adequately. The passage calls for urgent legislative action, advocating for a strong central law to combat this menace. While Punjab has taken steps to curb the issue, enforcement remains weak.

#### Punjab's Act

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#### Parliament must act

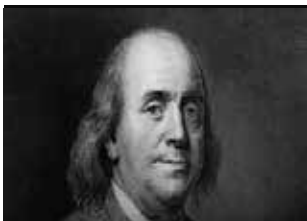
The Emigration Act, 1983, and the Punjab Travel Professionals Regulation Act, 2012, serve complementary roles in regulating recruiting and travel agents. Punjab is the only state with such a law, but human smuggling remains unaddressed in the Emigration Act. The passage calls for strict enforcement of Punjab's law and urges Parliament to enact a strong national law to regulate human smuggling, control borders, and protect Indian lives.

## Blunt weapon

### INTERNAL SECURITY

In 2024, India saw a slight decline in Internet shutdowns compared to 2023, but it remained the global leader in such restrictions, according to reports by the Software Freedom Law Center and Access Now. The government justifies shutdowns as a tool for maintaining law and order, especially since most Internet use in India is mobile-based. However, data shows that nearly half of the 84 shutdowns in 2024 were imposed during protests, with some even for preventing exam cheating. While shutdowns may help curb misinformation in volatile situations, they also delay crucial responses to violence and disrupt livelihoods, healthcare, and education. The Supreme Court's ruling in \*Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India\* emphasized the need for necessity and proportionality in such measures. Despite calls for impact assessments, the government has made little progress in this regard.

Even for those supporting Internet shutdowns as an emergency measure, the lack of proper procedure is concerning. Reports by Access Now and SFLC indicate that many shutdowns occur without valid orders detailing their duration and reasons, violating the Telecommunications Suspension Rules. Ideally, each shutdown should be reviewed for necessity and impact. The global total of 296 shutdowns in 2024 is alarming, and India's leading position highlights the need for restraint. The ultimate goal should be zero shutdowns, as this is an index in which no country should aim to be at the top.



*"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."*

*—Benjamin Franklin*

## Wild and safe

### ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

Kerala is witnessing a growing human-wildlife conflict, with recent fatalities occurring deep in forests, near human settlements, and even within villages. With 29% of the state covered in forests and an impending dry spell, urgent action is needed. The state government faces criticism for its handling of wildlife, with groups like KIFA and sections of the church calling for culling due to a perceived population increase. However, Forest Department data contradicts this, showing a decline in wild elephant numbers and a significant drop in snakebite deaths. Overall, wildlife-related human fatalities have fallen from 146 in 2018 to 57 in 2023. Despite this, concerns remain, especially as many victims belong to tribal communities traditionally skilled in coexisting with wildlife. The government should investigate this as part of its initiative to document and assess tribal knowledge on wildlife management.

Human-wildlife conflict in Kerala is exacerbated by habitat fragmentation, unregulated tourism, cattle grazing, encroachments, and food waste dumping near forests. Invasive plants and monoculture plantations have further disrupted wildlife feeding patterns. In response, the Kerala government has taken steps such as allowing local bodies to cull feral wild boars and classifying human-wildlife conflict as a State-specific disaster. Efforts include participatory forest management, restoring 5,031 hectares of natural forest, and constructing ponds and check dams. However, challenges remain, such as incomplete elephant-proof walls and the dominance of industrial plantations. The State's 10 conflict mitigation missions must be prioritized, with a multi-agency approach involving various departments to balance human safety and wildlife conservation.

## Should a third language be compulsory?

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Centre and the Tamil Nadu government are at odds over the three-language formula in the NEP 2020. The Union government links its implementation to the release of Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan funds, while Tamil Nadu sees it as an attempt to impose Hindi and insists on continuing its two-language policy.

#### What are constitutional provisions?

The Constitution designates Hindi as the official language of the Union, while English was initially intended for official use only until 1965. However, the Official Languages Act, 1963, allows the continued use of English alongside Hindi indefinitely. State legislatures can choose Hindi or any regional language as their official language(s). Additionally, the Union is responsible for promoting Hindi to serve as a unifying medium of expression across India's diverse cultural landscape.

#### What is the three-language policy?

The three-language formula was introduced in the 1968 National Education Policy (NEP), requiring non-Hindi-speaking states to teach Hindi, which led to protests in Tamil Nadu. The state has since followed a two-language policy of Tamil and English in government schools. The NEP 2020 retains the three-language formula but does not impose any language, allowing states, regions, and students to choose, provided at least two languages are native to India.

#### What are the issues?

The ASER reports by NGO Pratham highlight poor learning outcomes in India. In 2022, nearly 60% of Class V students could not read a Class II-level text, and in 2023, 25% of youth (14-18 years) struggled with reading in their regional language, with over 40% unable to read English sentences. Foundational numeracy skills are also weak. The Ministry of Education's 2022 report states that 85% of elementary education spending comes from states and only 15% from the Centre. Overall education expenditure remains around 4-4.5% of GDP, falling short of the 6% NEP 2020 target.

#### What can be the way forward?

India's proficiency in English has contributed to its global competitiveness, while promoting Indian languages in schools is desirable. However, given poor learning outcomes and limited resources, government schools should prioritize teaching the mother tongue/local language, English, and foundational numeracy. Private schools teaching a third language often see limited proficiency. The 2011 Census shows 26% of Indians are bilingual and 7% trilingual, with higher numbers in urban areas. Urbanization and migration will likely increase multilingualism. Constructive dialogue between the Centre and Tamil Nadu is needed to prevent funding delays, and states should have greater autonomy in school education policy.

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## What did the HC rule about arresting women at night?

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court ruled that the restriction on arresting women at night under the BNSS 2023 is directory, not mandatory. A single judge initially ruled an 8 PM arrest violated Section 46(4) of the CrPC, but a two-judge bench later overturned this, stating the provision is not absolute.

#### What are the safeguards?

Section 43(5) of BNSS (formerly Section 46(4) of CrPC) provides two safeguards for the arrest of women: it prohibits arrests between sunset and sunrise except in exceptional cases, and requires prior magistrate approval through a written report by a woman officer in such cases. While intended to protect women, the law does not define "exceptional circumstances." Additionally, Section 46(1) states that only a woman officer should physically arrest a woman unless circumstances require otherwise.

#### What did the Madras HC rule?

The Madras High Court ruled that Section 46(4) of CrPC is not mandatory, as it does not specify consequences for non-compliance. It emphasized that police officers perform a public duty and strict adherence to the provision could hinder justice. In cases where a woman commits a heinous crime at night and a magistrate is unavailable, requiring prior permission could allow the accused to escape, thus compromising public interest.

#### What is history of Section 46(4) CrPC?

The 135th and 154th reports of the Law Commission of India recommended that women should not be arrested after sunset and before sunrise, except in exceptional cases. In such cases, prior permission from a superior officer should be obtained, or if urgent, an arrest report should be submitted to the superior officer and magistrate. These recommendations led to the insertion of Section 46(4) of CrPC in 2005 with some modifications.

#### What has the Supreme Court said?

The Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court directed the State to ensure that no female is detained without a lady constable present and never after sunset or before sunrise. However, the Supreme Court noted that strict adherence to this directive could create practical difficulties in certain situations.

#### Will the ruling dilute the provision?

The Court ruled that while Section 46(4) of CrPC/43(5) is directory, not mandatory, police must not disregard it. Non-compliance may not invalidate an arrest, but officers must provide justification. The Court also directed the police to establish guidelines defining exceptional circumstances.

## 'Accepting Taliban envoy in Delhi will undermine India's credibility'

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Amid reports that India may accept a Taliban-appointed diplomat to head the Afghanistan Embassy in Delhi, Afghan exiles at a Madrid conference urged New Delhi not to normalize ties with the regime. India has already accepted a Taliban-approved nominee as \*Acting Consul-General\* in Mumbai. If India proceeds, it would align with countries like China, Russia, and Pakistan, while 16 nations have rejected Taliban envoys. Former Afghan Ambassador Ashraf Haidari warned that such a move would undermine India's anti-terrorism stance. Meanwhile, former Indian Ambassador Jayant Prasad supported engaging with the Taliban but opposed legitimizing them due to their oppression of women and minorities. Reports suggest India is close to finalizing an agreement, but the External Affairs Ministry has called such claims hypothetical..



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## India's last imported warship likely to be commissioned in June

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Indian Navy crew arrived in St. Petersburg to prepare for the commissioning of \*Tamal\*, a stealth frigate being built in Russia, expected to take place in early June. This will be the last warship commissioned outside India as the country now designs and builds its own. Around 200 personnel will undergo training before moving to Kaliningrad for trials. \*Tamal\* is part of a 2016 agreement for four frigates, with two imported and two built in India under technology transfer. The ship has completed manufacturer trials and is now undergoing final acceptance trials, expected to last 45-50 days.

## Coast Guard helps secure India's sovereignty, stops illegal infiltration: Rajnath

### INTERNAL SECURITY

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) apprehended 115 pirates, seized illegal drugs worth ₹37,000 crore, and intercepted 14 boats over the past year, according to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. Speaking at the 18th ICG investiture ceremony, where 32 personnel were honoured, he emphasized the force's role in ensuring maritime security, preventing illegal infiltration, and safeguarding national sovereignty. The ICG also conducted rescue operations, saving 169 lives and providing medical aid to 29 injured individuals. Singh urged the force to stay vigilant against emerging threats like cyberattacks, signal jamming, and GPS spoofing, alongside conventional security challenges.

## Women shifting from unpaid domestic work: govt. survey

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

A survey by the National Statistics Office found that workforce participation among individuals aged 15-59 increased in 2024, with men at 75% (up from 70.9% in 2019) and women at 25% (up from 21.8%). Women's time spent on unpaid domestic services dropped from 315 minutes in 2019 to 305 minutes in 2024, indicating a shift toward paid work. On average, individuals engaged in employment spent 440 minutes daily, with men spending 473 minutes and women 341 minutes. Men spent 88 minutes on unpaid domestic services, while women spent 137 minutes on caregiving compared to 75 minutes by men.

### Leisure activities

A survey on time use found that individuals aged six and above spent an average of 171 minutes daily on culture, leisure, and mass media activities, with men spending 177 minutes and women 164 minutes. Children aged 6-14 spent 413 minutes daily on learning, while self-care and maintenance accounted for 708 minutes daily. Among individuals aged 15-59, 41% of women participated in caregiving compared to 21.4% of men, with women spending 140 minutes daily on caregiving versus 74 minutes for men. Additionally, 16.8% of the population engaged in producing goods for personal use, spending 116 minutes daily. The survey covered 1,39,487 households and enumerated 4,54,192 individuals across rural and urban areas.

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# CBSE proposes draft policy for conducting two Board examinations from 2025-26

## POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The CBSE has proposed allowing Class 10 students to take Board exams twice a year starting from the 2025-26 academic session to improve their performance. A draft policy has been released for public feedback, with responses accepted until March 9.

### Scrutiny planned

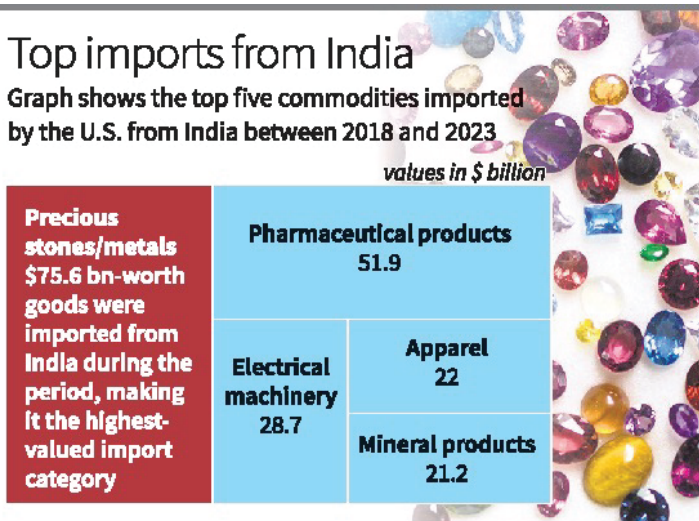
CBSE plans to allow Class 10 and 12 students to take Board exams twice a year starting from 2025-26, aligning with the National Education Policy, 2020. The first exam will begin on the first Tuesday after February 15, 2026, and an improvement exam will be held in July. The proposal, discussed in a meeting chaired by Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, is open for public feedback until March 9 before finalization. Around 26.6 lakh Class 10 and 20 lakh Class 12 students are expected to appear.

### Students' choice

Students will have the option to take the Board exams twice a year, either to improve their scores or opt out of the second attempt. The first exam's results will be available on DigiLocker for Class 11 admissions if students choose not to reappear. The final mark sheet and pass certificate will include scores from both exams, along with internal assessments, and the better of the two marks will be recorded.

# 'India, U.S. in talks to mitigate impact of reciprocal tariffs'

## POLITY & GOVERNANCE



Source: UN Comtrade

India can mitigate the impact of higher U.S. tariffs through negotiations, increased market access for U.S. farm products, and higher energy purchases, according to Moody's. Talks are underway to reduce import tariffs and potentially initiate a trade deal by late 2025. In the Asia Pacific, countries like India, Vietnam, and Thailand have significant trade exposure, particularly in electronics, motor vehicles, food, and textiles. While India's overall exposure is lower than others, sectors like food, textiles, and pharmaceuticals face risks. However, analysts believe India will not see major negative effects due to stable crude oil prices, geopolitical stability, and increased technology transfers.

# Reserve Bank lowers risk weight on banks' exposure to NBFCs

## ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has lowered the risk weight on loans given by Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) to non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) and microfinance loans. The risk weight had been increased by 25 percentage points in 2023, but after review, the RBI decided to restore previous levels, effective April 1. This move aims to ease pressure on the sector and improve credit flow.



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# 'Govt. mulls green finance unit to reach climate goals'

## ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

The government plans to establish a National Green Financing Institution to support its net-zero target by 2070, as current climate finance flows are insufficient, according to NITI Aayog. The institution will focus on aggregating green capital from various sources and reducing the cost of capital to bridge the funding gap for climate initiatives.

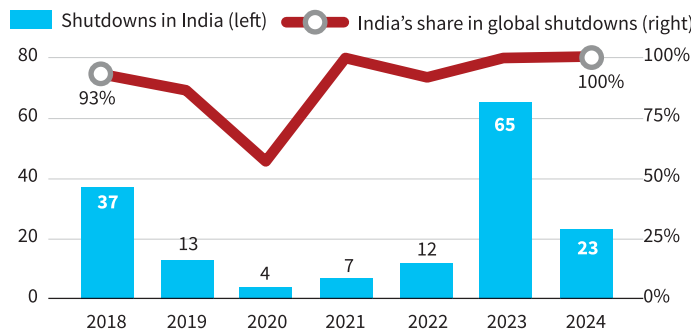
# India sole nation to curb Internet over communal unrest in 2023-24

## POLITY & GOVERNANCE

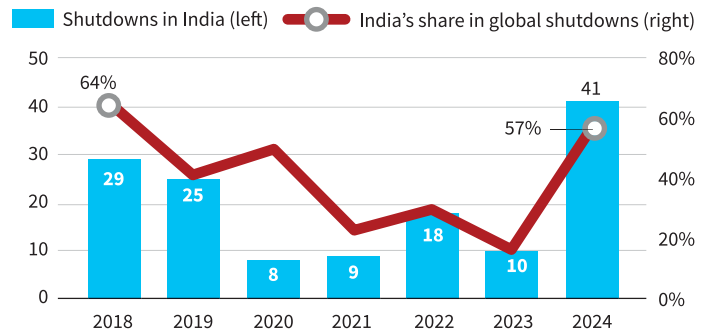
### Access denied

The data for the charts were sourced from Access Now. It also includes The Hindu's calculations

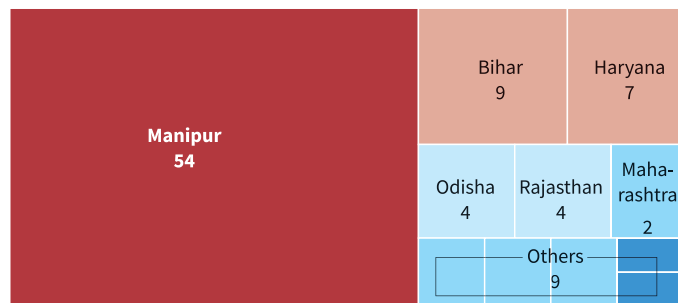
**Chart 1:** The number of Internet shutdowns in India due to communal violence and India's share in global shutdowns for the same reason



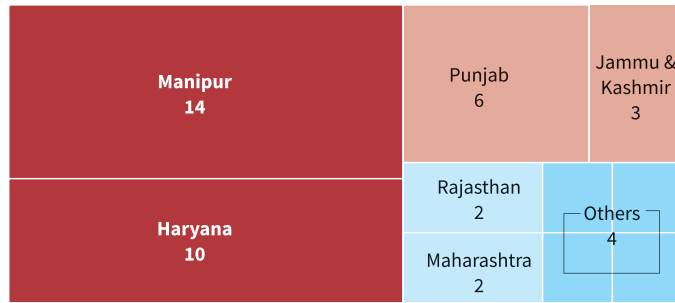
**Chart 3:** The number of Internet shutdowns in India due to protests and India's share in global shutdowns for the same reason



**Chart 2:** The chart shows the State-wise breakdown of Internet shutdowns due to communal violence in 2023 and 2024



**Chart 4:** The chart shows the State-wise breakdown of Internet shutdowns due to protests in 2024



**Chart 5:** The chart shows the reason-wise share of Internet shutdowns in India (in %) between 2016 and 2024

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Protests	50.0	37.7	21.4	20.2	7.8	8.7	19.8	8.9	50.6
Communal violence	0.0	0.0	28.2	10.9	3.9	6.8	14.8	55.4	27.2
Unknown	23.3	24.6	3.1	1.7	0.0	0.0	1.2	6.3	7.4
Exam cheating	0.0	0.0	3.8	0.0	1.9	3.9	3.7	0.9	6.2
Elections	0.0	2.9	3.8	3.4	1.9	0.0	1.2	0.9	3.7
Information control	3.3	1.4	0.8	0.8	0.0	2.9	1.2	12.5	2.5
Religious holiday/anniversary	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.9	4.9	1.9	3.7	8.0	2.5
Conflict	0.0	0.0	0.0	35.3	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	0.0	5.8	4.6	16.8	68.0	0.0	1.2	7.1	0.0
Political instability	23.3	27.5	34.4	4.2	10.7	74.8	53.1	0.0	0.0
Visits by government officials	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0



vignesh.r@thehindu.co.in and samreen.wani@thehindu.co.in

Globally, there were 88 Internet shutdowns due to communal violence in 2023 and 2024 and all of them were in India. In fact, nearly 95% of all Internet shutdowns ordered by the state due to communal violence since 2018 have occurred in India, says a report by Access Now, a digital advocacy group.

**Chart 1** shows the number of Internet shutdowns in India due to communal violence and India's share in global shutdowns for the same reason. In 2023 and 2024, most of these shutdowns occurred in Manipur (54 instances), followed by Bihar (9), and Haryana (7) (**Chart 2**).

In 2024, there were 41 Internet shutdowns due to protests — the highest in the last seven years. India accounted for about 57% of global Internet shutdowns due to protests in 2024 — the highest for any country (**Chart 3**).

Manipur also featured first among the States where a shutdown was imposed in 2024 due to protests, followed by Haryana and Punjab. Jammu and Kashmir had 3 instances of Internet shutdowns due to protests in 2024 and Rajasthan and Maharashtra experienced 2 each (**Chart 4**).

**Chart 5** shows the share of Internet shutdowns in India by reason since 2016. In 2024, over 50% of shutdowns were due to protests. In 2023, over 50% of shutdowns were due to communal violence. In 2021 and 2022, political instability was the main reason.

An Internet shutdown can be either a complete restriction, cutting off all access, or a partial curb, limiting only specific services such as social media platforms. These shutdowns may be imposed at varying levels, affecting an entire state or targeting specific districts within a region.



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