

## ‘Technology and Society’ Series

### Concept Note: Internet Shutdowns

#### Introduction

Internet shutdowns are now a common and frequent phenomenon around the world. The Internet is an essential and vital resource, hence governments have found it a handy facility to cut down, when there is a need to exercise control over the public. The reasons provided are varied: for security, to control mobs or violence, to prevent rumours, to block foreign news and propaganda, and to prevent cheating in exams. India holds the dubious distinction of having the largest number of Internet shutdowns in any country in the world.

The Indian Central government, state governments, and various municipal regimes have thought it necessary and important to cut down Internet connectivity, choke mobile bandwidth and restrict sites. Shutdowns range from a few hours to days, to weeks, and now to months and years.

This contrasts starkly with the logic and rationale of social and economic development through information technologies that countries have embarked on. Referred to as ICT for development, the purpose of this model of development is to enhance ICT access to citizens and consequently enhance access to services that were restricted to the privileged few. The Internet enables access not only to entertainment, news and general information, but also to essential services such as government sites, telemedicine, commercial transactions, transportation, mobility, digital payments and much more. For the last two decades in India, various governments have enhanced facilities for ICT-based development by increasing the penetration of the Internet into remote and far-flung areas of the country. This has enabled citizens of all walks to access and build on these conveniences. To now curtail and restrict the Internet seems counterintuitive.

In this event, a panel comprising key researchers, policy makers, journalists and legal experts will examine the multiple and varied aspects of shutdowns and how they affect the lives of ordinary people.

Some of the questions that the discussions will include are:

1. Why are Internet shutdowns being done? What are the various stated and unstated reasons for them?
2. What is the extent of shutdowns in India? How does India compare with the rest of the world?
3. When are Internet shutdowns justified, in the sense that they appear necessary in the context of a democratic society and its functioning?
4. How do shutdowns affect ordinary people? What is the range of restrictions that they impose?



5. Do Internet shutdowns have differential effects on different people / communities in the same region?
6. How have the mainstream media and political parties reacted to the Internet shutdowns and how has been the public discourse around the world?
7. Is the Internet now to be considered a fundamental right, like the right to vote or the right to practise religion? Are there significant judgments on this aspect from countries across the world?

### A Roundtable on 'Internet Shutdowns'

November 11, 2020 | 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm | Zoom meeting hosted by IIM Bangalore

#### *Agenda*

03:45 pm - 04:00 pm	Online Registration
04:00 pm - 04:10 pm	Introduction and Opening Remarks
04:10 pm - 04:20 pm	Narration of the issue by affected citizens and a short film
04:20 pm - 04:40 pm	Elaboration of the issue under discussion
04:40 pm - 05:30 pm	Brainstorming on the reasons, rationale, available judgements from countries across the world, etc.
05:30 pm - 05:50 pm	Open Discussion
05:50 pm - 06:00 pm	Closing Remarks