

Argument in favor of Internet shutdowns

- **Prevent hate speech, fake news etc:** Official rationales for shutdowns includes combating fake news, hate speech, and related violence, securing public safety and national security, precautionary measures, and preventing cheating during exams etc.
- **Ensure peace and public stability:** Internet shutdown acts as a preventive measure used by the law & order administration as a last resort to address mass protests, civil unrest, curbing the spread of misinformation so as to ensure peace and public safety.
 - Governments are faced with sometimes **challenging situations that may threaten public order and national security.**
- **Avoid disruptive role:** In certain extreme situations where rumours through WhatsApp and other social media start playing a disruptive role, it may become necessary to have internet shutdowns.

Arguments against Internet shutdowns

- **Violate Human rights:** Internet shutdowns attack on civil liberties and the constitutional rights of the citizens. They not only curb dissent but give government excessive control over the dissemination of information and dominance over the narrative.
- **Economic cost:** India lost over \$1.3 billion in internet shutdowns across the country making it the third-most economically affected country after Iraq and Sudan.
- **Fails to achieve the objective:** There is no conclusive evidence showing that Internet shutdowns lead to maintenance or restoration of public order.
- **Social cost:** Fundamental services such as education, health care and other public services are held back. Internet banking stops working. Agricultural extension services and emergency services may be unable to function.

Judgement related to Internet shutdowns in India

- **In January 2020 the Supreme Court while ruling on Jammu and Kashmir Internet shutdown made following observations:**
 - Internet shutdowns can be of temporary period but not for indefinite period.
 - Government to publish all orders imposing restrictions under Section 144.
 - **Freedom of speech and expression through the medium of internet is a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.**
 - The Court had also said that any order with regard to Internet Shutdowns will come under Judicial Scrutiny.
 - **Freedom of trade and commerce through internet** is also a constitutionally protected right under Article 19(1)(g).

Way forward

- Governments should identify best practices in addressing issues at their source, **prioritizing alternative measures to Internet shutdowns.**
- Governments need to do a **cost-benefit analysis of the impact of the cost of Internet shutdowns** before taking such action.
- Venture capitalists and investors should **incorporate Internet shutdowns as part of their risk assessment.**
- All **governments should document the reasons, time, alternatives considered**, decision-making authorities and the rules under which the shutdowns were imposed and release the documents for public scrutiny.

1.5. WHISTLE-BLOWING

Why in news?

Recently, the Vice-President of India has suggested all corporates to encourage whistle-blowing mechanism and provide adequate safeguards for the protection of whistle-blowers.

About Whistle Blowing

- Whistleblowing is the **act of drawing attention to an authority figure or public, to perceived wrongdoing, misconduct**, Corruption, fraud unethical activity within public, private or third-sector organisations.
- In this respect whistleblower can be a **current or former employee, director, officer, company secretary, supplier of goods or services or a volunteer.**
- Whistleblowers often **face reprisals from their employer, who may suffer reputational damage** as a result of the whistle being blown, or from colleagues who may have been involved in the illicit activities. Other problems faced by Whistleblowers includes: