

Impact of internet shutdowns

2618. SHRI P.L. PUNIA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the data as regards the internet shutdowns issued by the Central or State Governments in the previous three years, State-wise and the reasons therefor;

(b) whether the Ministry has recorded the impact of such internet shutdowns on the social, economic and political environment of the States, if so, the details thereof; and

(c) whether the Ministry has taken any necessary steps to provide relief to the people suffering from internet shutdowns in the respective States?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI MANOJ SINHA): (a) Central Government has not issued any order of internet shutdown under the provisions of Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017.

Police and public order are State subjects as per the Constitution and States are responsible for prevention, detection and investigation of crimes through their law enforcement machinery. Concerned State Governments are empowered to issue orders for temporary suspension of internet services to maintain law and order in the State or part thereof under the provisions contained in the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017. Records related to internet shutdowns ordered by State Governments are not maintained by Department of Telecommunications (DoT).

(b) No, Sir. DoT has not assessed the impact of such internet shutdowns on the social, economic and political environment of the States. However, DoT had received a joint representation dated 08.08.2018 from telecom service providers, wherein, it was intimated that frequent suspension of internet services were being ordered by various State Governments. Accordingly, on 28.09.2018, all State Governments have been advised to sensitize the concerned officials/agencies against precipitate actions leading to shut down of internet services, and to ensure that the provisions of “Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017” are adhered to.

(c) In temporary shutdown of internet services in a region, internet/data services are suspended temporarily only and other communication means/services like voice calling and Short Message Service (SMS), remain available during the suspension period of internet services, through which people in the region can communicate.