



KASHMIR'S COMMUNICATION SHUTDOWN

245 DAYS OF CONTROL

AUGUST 4, 2019 – APRIL 5, 2020

2019	
August 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A massive internet shutdown is imposed on the eve of abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution by the Parliament of India as stated by Presidential order 272. Former chief ministers Farooq Abdullah, Omar Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti are all arrested. All communication including telecommunications (mobile and landlines), postal services and internet are shut down.
August 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All educational institutions, including schools, colleges and universities, are officially closed. The Department of Posts suspends booking and transmission of speed post, registration post and parcels. The <i>Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act 2019</i> passes through the Rajya Sabha, India's upper house of Parliament, seeking to revoke Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which had been in place since 1949 and provided the state of Jammu and Kashmir with limited autonomy from India. The J&K Government imposes restrictions under Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure across the Kashmir Valley, prohibiting public assembly of more than four individuals. Government official statement: <i>"As per the order, there shall be no movement of public and all educational institutions shall also remain closed. There will be a complete bar on holding any kind of public meetings or rallies during the period of operation of this order. Identity cards of essential services officials will be treated as movement passes wherever required."</i>
August 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres states that he "has been following the situation in Jammu and Kashmir with concern and makes an appeal for maximum restraint."
August 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The executive editor of <i>Kashmir Times</i>, Anuradha Bhasin, files a petition in the Supreme Court of India seeking a direction for the government of India and the J&K administration to immediately relax all restrictions on freedom of movement of journalists and media personnel in Kashmir and some districts of Jammu. The direction is sought to enable media personnel to practise their profession and exercise their right to report in furtherance of their rights under Articles 14, 19 (1) (a) and 19 (1) (g) and 21 of the Constitution as well as the right to know of the residents of the Kashmir Valley. A 'Media Facilitation Centre' is set up at a hotel in Srinagar, where mostly Indian journalists from outside Kashmir working with Indian national media start accessing the Internet. The centre, with one telephone and four desk top computers, becomes the sole access point for media to use the telephone and internet. Journalists are forced to wait in long queues under CCTV monitoring. Local journalist organisations report that checkpoints and barriers made it exceptionally difficult for journalists to get to the media centre.
August 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) expresses grave concerns over the lack of communication in Kashmir.



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August 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India's Supreme Court finds the lockdown in Kashmir can continue to enable authorities to restore order. In the Anuradha Bhasin case, the apex court refuses to interfere with the restrictions, including the communication clampdown in J&K, saying that reasonable time should be given for bringing normalcy in the sensitive situation and posted the matter for hearing after two weeks. The Department of Posts suspends booking of electronic money orders.
August 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kashmiri journalist Irfan Ahmad Malik is picked up from his home at midnight and detained by security forces without cause. He is released the next day after intervention by the media community.
August 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The UN Security Council holds its first meeting on Kashmir. No determinations are made.
August 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India's Minister of Communications, Ravi Shankar Prasad, announces the resumption of mail services.
August 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Press Council of India (PCI) seeks permission from the Supreme Court to intervene in the petition filed by Anuradha Bhasin challenging the communications shutdown in Kashmir. However, PCI defends the communication blockade J&K "in the interest of the integrity and sovereignty of the nation".
August 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Supreme Court of India issues notice to the Government of India and the J&K government, giving them a week to file their response to the petition filed by Anuradha Bhasin. No order is passed.
August 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kashmiri journalist Gowhar Geelani is barred from travelling to a conference in Germany organised by his former employer Deutsche Welle.
September 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior journalist Peerzada Ashiq who reports from Kashmir for <i>The Hindu</i> is summoned by the Jammu and Kashmir police to Srinagar's Kothibagh police station to reveal the source of his story.
September 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Kashmir Press Club issues a statement asking government "to restore mobile phones, internet and telephone landlines to journalists and media outlets including newspapers and also the club itself".
September 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A female journalist working for a national daily is attacked in Srinagar by police wielding batons. Rifat Mohidin, correspondent for the Chandigarh-based <i>Tribune</i>, said around half-a-dozen policemen had rained their batons on the journalist's car "for several minutes" as she sat inside.
September 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A spokesperson for the Ministry of Home Affairs announces that landlines in Jammu and Kashmir are restored, schools are functioning and health institutions are fully operational.
September 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) files an intervention application to the Anuradha Bhasin case in the Supreme Court challenging the communications shutdown in J&K. The IJU argued the shutdown violates the Indian constitution, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression and speech for journalists and the wider community.



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September 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Supreme Court directs the government "to make the very best endeavour to make sure normal life returns". However, the full bench says the shutdown J&K can be dealt by the J&K High Court.
September 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal Access to Information Day highlights the issue of Kashmir and the continued internet and communications blockade.
October 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kashmir's communications blockade reaches 60 days. Dozens of journalists protest inside the Kashmir Press Club premises in Srinagar against the communications blackout on internet and mobile phone services and say the blockade of internet and mobile phone services is a government gag on local media.
October 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restrictions on post-paid mobile phones are lifted. Pre-paid phones, internet and mobile phone internet and messaging services remain blocked.
October 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Supreme Court seeks the administrative orders and the basis for imposing communication restrictions on internet and mobile services. It also questions the government's delay in filing the orders before the court.
October 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Media Facilitation Centre is moved from private the hotel to the J&K Department of Information and Public Relations.
October 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government of India formally divides the state of J&K into two centrally administered Union Territories, "Jammu & Kashmir" and "Ladakh", a mountainous region bordering China and Pakistan.
November 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freelance journalist Muzamil Mattoo is assaulted by police in Srinagar's downtown area.
November 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN) pass a resolution reaffirming a call to end the internet shutdown, website closures and actions that are undermining the free flow of information in Kashmir.
November 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kashmir's internet shutdown reaches 100 days. Journalists report salary cuts ranging between 20-40 percent as a result of the shutdown. The South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN) expresses serious concern over the communications shutdown and demands the immediate removal of the ban. SAMSN members stand in solidarity with journalists in Kashmir.
November 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Supreme Court reserves its verdict on pleas relating to the J&K shutdown, with the court claiming it is impossible for seven million people to be "locked down".
November 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basharat Masood, Srinagar bureau chief of the <i>Indian Express</i> and Hakeem Irfan who reports from Kashmir for the <i>Economic Times</i> are summoned to the counter-insurgency headquarters of the police in Srinagar.



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December 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporters Anees Zargar and Azaan Javaid are roughed up by the police when they enter a neighbourhood in Srinagar to cover stone-throwing protests.
December 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basharat Masood of the <i>Indian Express</i> and Safwat Zargar of news website Scroll are stopped by the police at Handwara in Kupwara district of Kashmir while on assignment.
December 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The mobile internet shutdown in Kargil is lifted after 145 days.
2020	
January 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India's Supreme Court orders the government to review all restrictions in Indian-administered Kashmir within a week, saying the indefinite suspension of people's rights amounted to an abuse of power.
January 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2G mobile services are restored in five out of ten districts in Jammu. Broadband services are available only for hospitals, banks and government offices.
January 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The J&K government restores access to 153 websites termed 'whitelisted sites' which include mail services, banking services, educational websites, entertainment websites and utilities. Mainstream news outlets and social media websites are not listed as 'whitelisted sites'.
January 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The J&K government extends the list of accessible 'whitelisted' sites to 301 sites, including educational services, banking, travel and food.
January 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ahead of Republic Day, the ban on the 2G (mobile) internet services is lifted after almost six months of a virtual blackout. However, access to the services is restricted to 301 'white-listed' websites. Most of the social media platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram remain inaccessible. 2G services are restored for verified users. Services are snapped again the same day citing "security concerns".
January 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2G services for whitelisted websites are restored a day after being cut.
February 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An official report is released stating that VPN apps are in high demand.
February 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Police question two journalists - Naseer Ahmad Ganie, from <i>Outlook Magazine</i>, and Haroon Nabi, a local journalist - for allegedly publishing a statement of the banned Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and sharing a post on WhatsApp.
February 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A government order is issued to continue internet restrictions in J&K to March 3. The principal secretary to the government, Home Department, says: "It is absolutely necessary so to do, in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the Security of the State and for maintaining public order, in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (2) of section 5 of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 and sub-rule (1) of Rule 2 of the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017".
February 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kamran Yousuf, a multimedia journalist with Newsclick is detained in a nocturnal raid by Pulwama police and questioned for several hours. Later, the police claimed it was a case of mistaken identity.



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February 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authorities in Kashmir file a case against hundreds of VPN users in the region accusing them of “misuse of social media” and propagating rumours in relation to the current security scenario of the Kashmir valley, propagating secessionist ideology, and glorifying militancy acts/militants. While incorporating around 1000 more websites on the white-listed sites, they declare punishment of using VPNs under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).
March 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indian authorities temporarily revoke the ban on social media sites and fixed line Internet access for two weeks, to remain in effect until March 17. Internet access over mobiles remains limited to slow speeds accessed using 2G on verified SIMs.
March 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Police barred Qayoom Khan, a reporter for <i>CNN News 18</i>, and Qisar Mir, from <i>TV9</i>, from reporting on an operation conducted by the counter-terror National Investigation Agency in Pulwama district. Police confiscate the mobile phones and camera of the journalists, deleting all material on the operation including photos.
March 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ban on high-speed 3G and 4G internet services is extended by nine days. Only 2G internet services are working.
March 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The J&K government extends ban on 4G mobile internet amid corona lockdown till April 3.
March 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government of India approaches the Supreme Court of India seeking a directive to prevent publishing of news related to Covid-19 without prior government clearance. The Court denies the request for pre-censorship and that it will not interfere with “the free discussion about the pandemic.” However, it takes serious note of “fake news” and directs news outlets to “refer to and publish official statements on developments. Kashmir newspaper distributors decide to suspend circulation of dailies in view of decline in circulation amid corona lockdown.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> April 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A petition urges the Indian Supreme Court to restore 4G mobile internet service in J&K, saying doctors, patients and the general public were unable to access the latest information, guidelines, advisories, daily updates and restrictions on the COVID-19 pandemic. The petition challenged an internet restricting order issued by the government on March 26 and said the right to internet connectivity had repeatedly been recognised as a “basic necessity or an essential service to ensure the right to health”.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> April 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ban on 4G mobile internet is extended till April 15 by the J&K government