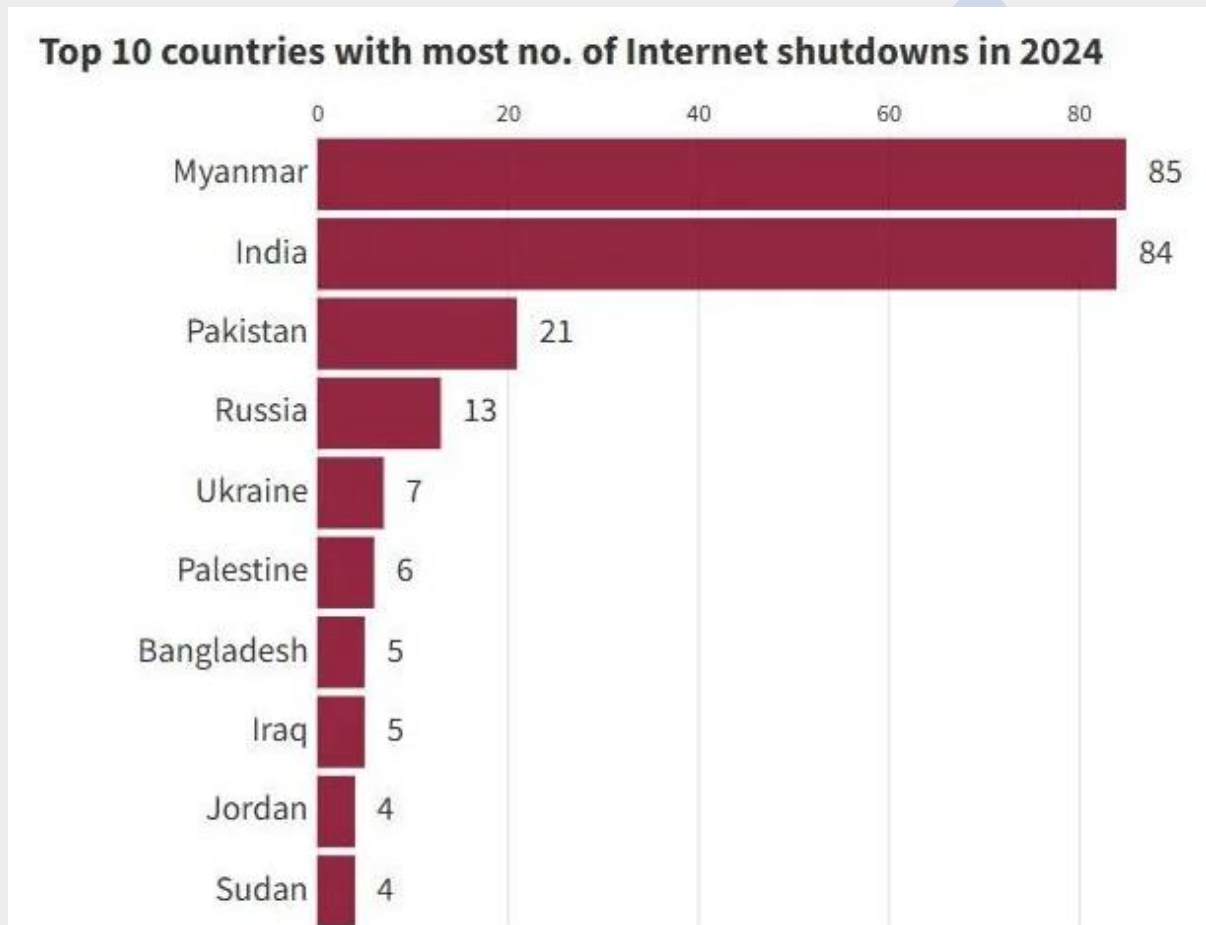


1. Internet Shutdowns in India

Introduction

In 2024, India experienced 84 internet shutdowns, marking a decrease from 116 in 2023. This reduction led to India being ranked second globally in the number of internet shutdowns, with Myanmar surpassing it with 85 shutdowns in 2024.



Primary Causes for Shutdowns

- Protests: Approximately 41 of the 84 shutdowns were implemented in response to protests.
- Communal Violence: 23 shutdowns were linked to incidents of communal violence.
- Government Examinations: Authorities enforced five internet shutdowns during government job placement examinations to prevent cheating and maintain the integrity of the process.

Regional Distribution

Internet shutdowns were imposed across 16 states and Union Territories in India. The most affected regions included:

- Manipur: 21 shutdowns
- Haryana: 12 shutdowns
- Jammu & Kashmir: 12 shutdowns

Notable Incidents

- **Manipur Conflict:** The state of Manipur witnessed significant unrest due to ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities. In September 2024, student protests escalated, leading to clashes with police and subsequent internet suspensions.

Further unrest in November 2024 prompted authorities to impose additional internet shutdowns to control the situation.

Economic Impact

The economic implications of these shutdowns have been significant. In the first half of 2023 alone, India reportedly incurred losses amounting to \$1.9 billion, coupled with a \$118 million decline in foreign investment. Additionally, a single-day shutdown could potentially result in up to 379 individuals facing unemployment.

Since 2016, India has recorded a total of 771 internet shutdowns, accounting for over half of all documented cases globally during this period.

Global Context

In 2024, there was a record number of government-enforced internet shutdowns globally, with at least 296 outages across 54 countries. These shutdowns have been increasingly used to suppress dissent during conflicts, protests, and elections.

While the decrease in the number of shutdowns from 2023 to 2024 is notable, the continued frequency of these disruptions underscores ongoing concerns regarding digital rights, economic impacts, and the balance between national security and freedom of expression in India.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

2. How Trump's 'Gold Card' US visa could work, what concerns it raises

Introduction



President Donald Trump has announced a visa program called "Gold Card" for foreign investors seeking permanent residency in the United States, and ultimately American citizenship.

The Gold Card would be available for about \$5 million. The scheme would replace the EB-5 immigrant investor visa program. The details of the scheme are yet to come out.

EB-5 vs Gold Card

The EB-5 program, created by Congress in 1990 and administered by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), grants permanent residency (Green Card) to foreigners who invest in American businesses. Investors must put in

at least \$1.05 million (\$800,000 in certain specific cases), and create at least 10 jobs for Americans.

While details are not known yet, it appears that the Gold Card will not require an investment in American businesses or the creation of new employment. It could simply be a direct purchase of a Green Card by paying a flat fee of \$5 million to the US government.

Likely benefits to the US...

It could be argued that the "clear and simple" route to residency offered by the scheme will bring high-net-worth individuals to America, whose investments will stimulate the US economy. High-net-worth immigrants often invest in real estate, luxury markets, and businesses.

...And several concerns

While the Gold Card scheme throws up several ethical, legal, and political concerns.

- The program could be seen as putting American citizenship on sale, favouring money over merit, catering to the rich at the expense, perhaps, of talented professionals.
- Immigration programs with an investment component can be vulnerable, in the absence of strong regulatory checks, to possible money laundering and undue foreign influence. Trump was nonchalant when asked whether the program might open America's doors to Russian oligarchs: "Yeah, possibly. Hey, I know some Russian oligarchs that are very nice people."
- If the Gold Card comes without a requirement to invest "in jobs-creating enterprises", passive investors could gain residence in the US with no contribution to its economy.
- The central questions remain whether US citizenship is to be put on sale, and whether US immigration policy should privilege skills, contributions, and diversity. A similar program in Canada, albeit with a much smaller investment amount, was shut down after rampant misuse.

Challenges ahead

IN CONGRESS: Any significant change to immigration policy must be approved by Congress. The Republican party currently has a majority in both houses; however, not all Republicans may want to be accused of selling American citizenship. Democrats will almost certainly oppose the proposal.

IN COURTS: Most legal challenges in visa programs originate from the administration of the program, rather than the program itself. It is too early to guess what legal challenges Trump's Gold Card may face.

Indians and Gold Card

In the 2023 financial year, only 631 Indians obtained US Green Cards through the EB-5 program using consular processing.

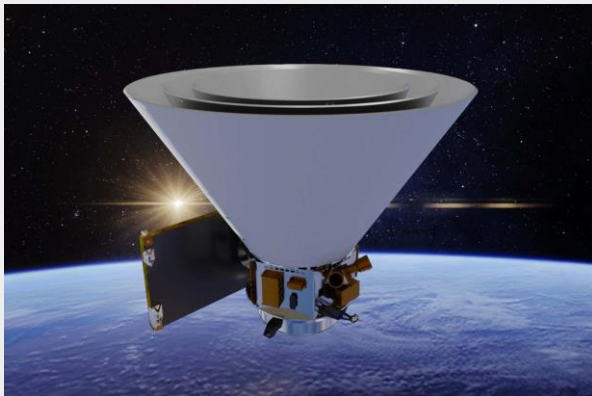
Given this small number for a scheme where the investment required is only about \$1 million, it seems unlikely that the idea of buying a Green Card for five times that sum — more than Rs 43 crore at the current exchange rate — will appear attractive to many Indians.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

3. SPHEREx, NASA's new space telescope

Introduction



National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is tentatively scheduled to launch its new megaphone-shaped space telescope aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California.

During its short two-year mission, the observatory will help better understand things about the formation of the universe, the growth of all galaxies across cosmic history, and the location of water and life-forming molecules in the Milky Way galaxy.

Will make the “most colourful” map of cosmos ever

SPHEREx will map the universe while detecting two kinds of cosmic light, optical and infrared. While the human eye can see optical light, infrared light is invisible to it. That is an issue when it comes to studying the cosmos as it is the infrared light that contains information about the farthest reaches of space, the stars being born, and the details of galactic structures.

To overcome this problem, scientists use specialised cameras and telescopes to study infrared which has a heat signature. One such instrument is the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) whose speciality is infrared and it helps show things in the universe that have remained hidden so far. Notably, the Hubble Space Telescope's speciality is optical, not infrared light. Hubble Space Telescope is the predecessor of James Webb Space Telescope.

While JWST is great at observing highly localised regions of the universe, SPHEREx will image the entire sky as seen from Earth.

Will shed light on a cosmic phenomenon called inflation

One of the primary aims of SPHEREx will be to measure something called cosmic inflation. It refers to a period which took place around 14 billion years ago, during which the universe expanded faster than the speed of light for a fraction of a second. Cosmic inflation remains poorly understood.

Will explore the Milky Way galaxy to identify water- and life-forming molecules

SPHEREx will identify water- and life-forming molecules, also known as biogenic molecules (such as carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen), in the Milky Way galaxy, where the Earth is located.

These molecules are frozen in icy particles which are located in some of the coldest parts of the galaxy. For life to form on Earth, the biogenic molecules would have to somehow travel from these regions to the planet. However, scientists are yet to know exactly how this process happened.

The new telescope will help resolve the mystery as it will provide a complete census of the icy biogenic molecules in the Milky Way galaxy. SPHEREx will locate these molecules not only in this galaxy but also in nearby systems.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

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