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Internet failure hits two continents

- Story Highlights
- Extensive Internet failure has affected much of Asia, the Middle East, north Africa
- **NEW:** Two undersea cables believed damaged, possibly by a ship's anchor
- It has caused major disruptions to business, television and phone services
- Several reports say damaged cable in the Mediterranean could take a week to fix

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (CNN) -- High-technology services across large tracts of Asia, the Middle East and North Africa were crippled Thursday following a widespread Internet failure which brought many businesses to a standstill and left others struggling to cope.

Industry experts are blaming damage to two undersea cables but it is not known what caused the damage.

Reports say that Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain Pakistan and India, are all experiencing severe problems.

Nations that have been spared the chaos include Israel -- whose traffic uses a different route -- and Lebanon and Iraq. Many Middle East governments have backup satellite systems in case of cable failure.

Stephan Beckert, an analyst with TeleGeography, a research company that consults on global Internet issues, said the damaged cables collectively account for the majority of international communications between Europe and the Middle East.

Du, a state-owned Dubai telecom provider, attributed the outage to an undersea cable cut between Alexandria, Egypt and Palermo, Italy, according to an internal memo obtained by CNN.

In India, Spectranet and Telecomasia.net, two large Internet service providers. Reliance were experiencing problems but a third major Indian Internet provider, said it was not affected.

An official at Egypt's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, speaking on condition of anonymity told AP it was believed that a boat's anchor may have caused the problems, although this was unconfirmed. Beckert agreed that was a likely cause.

The head of an Egyptian Internet service provider called the situation a "wake-up call" for the region, which he said is too dependent on underground lines and does not have a strong enough back-up system. Mohammed Amir, head of Quantum, an ISP in Cairo, described the situation as "a major problem," but expressed hope that the worst of it is over.

The two cables damaged are FLAG Telecom's FLAG Europe-Asia cable and SeaMeWe-4, a cable owned by a consortium of more than a dozen telecommunications companies, Beckert said.

He added the options while those cables are repaired were re-routing traffic around the globe or using an older undamaged cable that has less capacity -- both of which would cause usage delays.

Kuwait's Ministry of Communications said the problem could take two weeks to solve, according to a statement carried by the state news agency, KUNA.

There were concerns in India that an Internet slowdown could affect trading patterns at the country's two major exchanges, the National Stock Exchange (NSE) in Delhi and the SENSEX exchange in Bombay.

Rajesh Chharia, president of India's Internet Service Providers' Association, explained that some firms were trying to reroute via Pacific cables and that companies serving the eastern US and the UK were worst affected, AP added.

Besides the Internet, the outage caused major disruption to television and phone services, creating chaos for the UAE's public and private sectors.

The Du internal memo called the situation in Dubai "critical" and stated that the cable's operators did not know when services would be restored.

"This will have a major impact on our voice and Internet service for all the customers," the memo stated. "The network operation team are working with our suppliers overseas to resolve this as soon as possible."

The outage led to a rapid collapse of a wide range of public services in a country which proudly promotes itself as technological pioneer.

Sources from [Emirates Airlines](#) confirmed to CNN Arabic that the outage did not affect its flight schedules -- a statement which assured hundreds of travelers worried after rumors about the possibility of rescheduled flights due to the faults.

However, Dnata, a government group in charge of providing air travel services in the Middle East and ground handling services at [Dubai International Airport](#), acknowledged facing problems because of the outage, sources from its technical department confirmed to CNN Arabic.

The outage heavily crippled Dubai's business section, which is heavily reliant on electronic means for billions of dollars' worth of transactions daily.

Wadah Tahah, the business strategies and development manager for state-owned construction company EMAAR, told CNN Arabic that it was fortunate the outage started Wednesday, when there had been only moderate activity in the UAE markets. He said that softened the blow to business interests.

But Tahah warned that if the outage continued, "such a situation could create problems between brokers, companies, and investors due to loss of control."

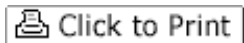
CNN's Elham Nakhlawi, Mustafa Al Arab, and Caroline Faraj in Dubai, Tess Eastment in New Delhi, and Aneesh Raman in Cairo contributed to this report.

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