Reasons for the Asian optical cable outage



Overview

Red Sea Cable Cuts Disrupt Internet Access Across Asia and Middle The cause of the cable cuts remains unclear. While there is concern that the Houthi rebel.

Key Takeaways

The Asian optical cable outage was primarily caused by undersea fiber-optic cables being severed near the Red Sea, likely due to commercial shipping activity, with additional risks from shallow waters and regional geopolitical tensions.

Primary Cause

The outage on September 6, 2025, involved multiple submarine cables near Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, including SEA-ME-WE-4 (SMW4), IMEWE, FALCON, and GCX. Early analysis by the International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC) indicated that commercial shipping activity, particularly vessels dropping and dragging anchors, was the most probable cause of the damage. Anchors can easily sever cables in the relatively shallow waters of the Red Sea, making this region particularly vulnerable.

Contributing Factors

High Shipping Density: The Red Sea is a busy maritime corridor connecting Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Congested shipping lanes increase the likelihood of accidental cable damage. Geopolitical Tensions: The Red Sea is near conflict zones, and there have been concerns about potential sabotage.

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For instance, Yemen's Houthi rebels have been accused of targeting commercial shipping, raising suspicions about deliberate threats to cable infrastructure. Limited Redundancy: The Red Sea has relatively few alternative subsea cables. Any disruption in this corridor can significantly slow down internet traffic, cloud services, and e-commerce operations across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

Technical Complexity of Repairs: Repairing undersea cables is highly specialized. Only a few companies worldwide can perform deep-sea cable repairs, which can take weeks or months due to the need for precise location, specialized divers, and complex undersea operations.

Impact

The outage caused widespread internet slowdowns in countries including India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait. Cloud services like Microsoft Azure reported increased latency, with traffic rerouted through alternative paths outside the Middle East to maintain connectivity. Delays of up to 30% were reported between India and Europe, highlighting the Red Sea's role as a critical digital corridor.

Summary

In essence, the Asian optical cable outage was the result of accidental physical damage from shipping activity, compounded by shallow waters, limited cable redundancy, and regional geopolitical risks. The incident underscores the fragility of global internet infrastructure and the importance of maintaining alternative routes and satellite-based backups to mitigate such disruptions.

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Red Sea Cable Cuts Disrupt Internet Access Across Asia and Middle

The cause of the cable cuts remains unclear. While there is concern that the Houthi rebels in Yemen may have targeted the cables as part of their campaign related to the Israel-Hamas conflict,

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