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North Waziristan's Digital Blackout Cripples Economy

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— *Categories: Economics*

A ten-day internet shutdown in North Waziristan has paralyzed daily life and commerce, exposing the region's vulnerability to digital disruptions. Following a June 28 suicide attack, authorities severed connectivity across the tribal district, causing estimated daily losses of $707-$1,060 per trader across 12,000 businesses. The blackout severed remittance channels for 55% of households relying on overseas income and

disrupted government services, education, and journalism in this strategically important China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) region.

Local business leaders report catastrophic financial impacts, with traders forced to resell inventory at losses exceeding $35,305 collectively. The shutdown exacerbated existing challenges in an area still recovering from Operation Zarb-e-Azb, which destroyed 20,000 shops. Journalists faced particular hardships, with the Miranshah Press Club boycotting government news after losing connectivity. Despite partial restoration, poor infrastructure leaves 70% of Waziristan without reliable internet, even district headquarters relying on basic voice services.

The economic toll mirrors Pakistan's broader struggle with digital instability. As the global leader in financial losses from internet shutdowns ($1.62 billion in 2024), such disruptions carry national consequences. Tribal elder Malik Khalil emphasizes the human cost, with families separated from migrant workers and students unable to access virtual classrooms. Entrepreneurs like Abdullah, who relocated to Peshawar after his startup collapsed, demonstrate how connectivity issues accelerate brain drain from conflict zones.

North Waziristan's ordeal underscores a critical dilemma: balancing security needs with economic survival in the digital age. While temporary blackouts may address immediate threats, their prolonged impact undermines development in regions crucial to Pakistan's stability. As the government negotiates this tension, businesses and civilians pay the price caught between security imperatives and the irreversible reality that internet access now constitutes essential infrastructure for modern life.