

Govt restores internet but warns public against misuse

BY BUSEIN SAMILU

KAMPALA. The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) has restored internet services but cautioned Ugandans to exercise restraint and responsibility online, warning that misuse could trigger another shutdown.

The UCC Executive Director, Mr Nyombi Thembo, said the restoration followed advice from the Inter-Agency Security Committee after an assessment of the post-election security situation. He said the return of connectivity would be phased and carefully monitored.

"This phased and responsible return to connectivity reflects the Commission's commitment to balancing national security with the legitimate needs of citizens for information, communication and economic activity," Mr Thembo said while addressing journalists at UCC offices in Kampala.

He urged users to avoid spreading unverified information, hate speech or inflammatory content that could incite violence or undermine public order.

"Responsible digital citizenship means verifying facts before sharing, respecting the views of others and contributing to national unity rather than division. Remember, freedom comes with responsibility," he said.

UCC switched off the internet on Tuesday last week ahead of the Thursday, January 15, presidential and parliamentary elections, plunging the country into a digital blackout that lasted through the voting and tallying period.

The shutdown remained in place until Saturday night after the Electoral Commission had earlier in the day, declared President Museveni, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) flag bearer, winner with 7.6 million votes, extending his rule to 45 years.

Mr Thembo defended the suspension, describing it as "necessary and proportionate". He added that telecom operators were yesterday directed to restore key essential services to ensure business continuity and access to critical information.

Among the services restored are web browsing, access to news websites, educational resources, government portals, financial services, email and other essential online activities.

Restricted services

However, social media platforms and over-the-top (OTT) messaging applications remain temporarily restricted.

"In line with the directive issued to all licensed mobile network operators and internet service providers, social media platforms and messaging applications remain restricted to continue safeguarding against misuse that could threaten public order," Mr Thembo said.

He noted that some users may attempt to bypass the restrictions using Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), warning that security agencies remain alert.

"Anyone who attempts to use online platforms to incite violence or do wrong things will be dealt with....," he said.