

GOVT PREPARES FOR PEACEFUL ELECTION

PHOTO BY ROBERT ADIGA

By Edward Anyoli

The move to temporarily suspend public internet access and selected mobile services delivery was to ensure that the country holds peaceful polls, a senior government official has said.

"The Internet is off to safeguard the country so that social media and the Internet are not abused to cause chaos, like it has been abused in other countries," the official said, adding that the heavy deployment has equally been necessitated to ensure peaceful polls across the country.

On Tuesday, the executive director of the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), Nyombi Thembo, suspended public internet access, noting that the measure was triggered to mitigate "the rapid spread of online misinformation, disinformation, electoral fraud" and related risks.

The need to prevent the incitement of violence that could affect public confidence and national security during the election period is the other reason Thembo cited.

He, however, noted that essential services, such as mobile money, banking, National Social Security Fund (NSSF) operations and Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) payments, among others, were not affected by the temporary suspension of internet services.

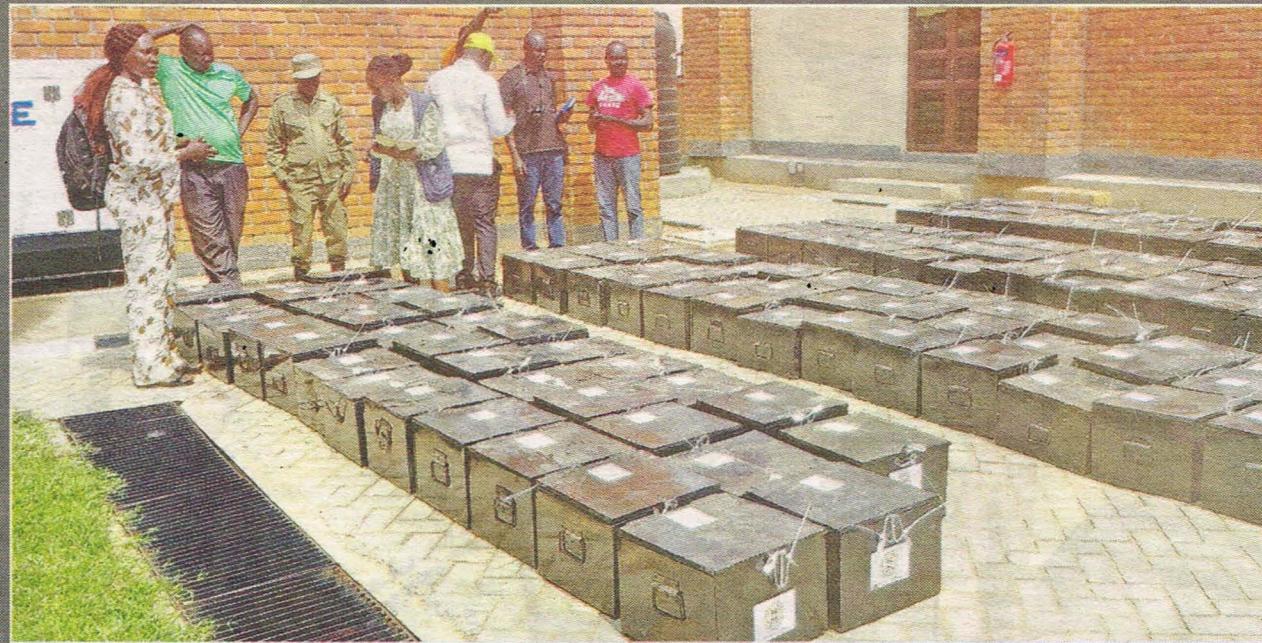
"The suspension is effective January 13, 2026, at 1800hrs and will remain in force, until a restoration notice is issued by UCC. During this period, all non-essential public internet traffic must be blocked. Public internet traffic includes, but is not limited to, social media platforms, web browsing, video streaming, personal email services and messaging applications, among others," Thembo said on Tuesday.

"To safeguard public safety, critical national functions and the operational integrity of communications infrastructure, a strictly defined exclusion list has been established by the UCC," he added.

The exclusion list for essential services includes healthcare systems at national referral hospitals, financial services, critical government services, utility management, especially for power, water and fuel payments and supply.

COURT SERVICES

The Ministry of Information



Marion Audothe (centre), a returning officer, confirming the ballot boxes for Arua district, recently

HATE SPEECH

Recently, Police spokesperson Rusoke Kituuma warned Ugandans against engaging in hate speech, saying it is an offence.

"As we head into the polls, we would like to remind Ugandans that there have been attempts by some sections of the public to promote hate speech through several audios and videos to cause ethnic divisions in the country," he noted.

Preliminary Police investigations, he added, indicate that most of the recordings promoting hate speech are by Ugandans living abroad.

"We urge all Ugandans not to infringe on the rights of fellow Ugandans during this election and the days to come," Kituuma said.

SECURITY FIRST

Augustine Idoot, a lawyer, said the decision to shut down the Internet falls within the mandate of UCC when based on security considerations.

"The decision is lawful because it is affected through a statutory instrument and UCC has the authority to shut down internet services. Although many services are affected, it is sometimes better to prioritise security," Idoot said.

He added that the High Court in Kampala had previously ruled in 2016 and 2021 that internet shutdowns instituted by UCC were lawful and justifiable. However, he noted that the shutdown has far-reaching implications, as many essential services are affected.

John Walugembe the executive director of Uganda's Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs), said the Internet has significantly improved



Walugembe

the way businesses operate, noting that the global shift towards digitalisation has made online connectivity central to commerce and service delivery. As a result, he observed that suspending internet access leads to the loss of numerous business opportunities during the period of closure, including disruptions to critical services, such as healthcare.

However, Walugembe noted that, despite the economic and social costs, shutting down the Internet may be a necessary price to pay where serious security concerns arise.

"While the suspension affects businesses and essential services, it is sometimes better to bear that cost than to expose the country to security risks," Walugembe said.

He added that the decision can be justified, especially when security threats pose a risk to the lives of Ugandans.

and Communications Technology (ICT) and National Guidance noted that court services had also been included on the exclusion list for essential services.

According to the ICT officials, lawyers can file court cases electronically without any challenges.

The notice to lawyers is contained in a joint letter dated January 14, 2026, signed by the ICT permanent secretary, Dr Aminah Zawedde and the Judiciary permanent secretary, Pius Bigirimana.

According to the letter, the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS) will remain operational within court premises at the High Court in Kampala, the Court of Appeal



Emmanuel Dombo

and the Criminal Division.

The Judiciary uses the Electronic Court Case Management Information System (ECCMIS) to deliver judgments and rulings, while lawyers use the platform to file cases. Before the Internet shutdown, advocates and other court users were able to

file cases electronically from anywhere.

Bigirimana said following the shutdown, electronic filing will now be conducted physically at designated ECCMIS kiosks located at the other courts, such as High Court Land Division at Twed Towers in Nakasero, the Anti-Corruption Court and International Crimes Division, the Commercial Court in Nakasero, Jinja High Court and Chief Magistrate's Court, Buganda Road Court, Makindye Chief Magistrate's Court, Mengo Magistrate's Court, Mukono Magistrate's Court, the Wildlife, Utilities and Standards Court in Makindye and Rubaga Chief Magistrate's Court.

"Advocates and the public are advised to visit and file

their cases at the ECCMIS kiosks located at any of the listed stations," Bigirimana said.

Zawedde clarified that the directive is a result of the Internet shutdown. On Tuesday, the Uganda UCC announced a nationwide internet shutdown, until further notice. This marks the third time the Government, through UCC, has shut down internet services, citing security concerns. Similar shutdowns were implemented in 2016 and 2021.

PEACEFUL ELECTION

For John Walugembe, the executive director of Uganda's Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs), it is essential to ensure peaceful elections rather than abuse internet and creating chaos.

This is the point the spokesperson of the National Resistance Movement (NRM), Emmanuel Dombo, emphasised, noting that the suspension of internet services was occasioned to ensure peace during the polls today.

"The decision to shut down the Internet had far greater benefits than if it had not been suspended. You can imagine what has happened in some of our neighbouring countries and other parts of the world, where the Internet has been used to destabilise nations," he said.

Dombo further explained that the heavy deployment of security personnel was meant to deter individuals with malicious intentions from disrupting the voting process and to ensure that Ugandans

cast their ballots peacefully.

He gave the example of the Arab Spring scenario, Sudan and other countries, where he said abuse of the Internet fanned chaos and destruction in those states.

"During the Arab Spring, the Internet – especially social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube – played a key role in scaling up protests and riots by enabling rapid communication and mobilisation. Activists used online platforms to share information, organise demonstrations, expose state violence and draw international attention, often bypassing state-controlled media," Dombo said.

"This digital connectivity helped small, local protests quickly grow into mass movements across countries, such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, demonstrating how internet access can amplify dissent and accelerate political unrest when grievances already exist," he added.

Speaking to *New Vision* yesterday, the Inspector General of Police, Abas Byakagaba, promised to deliver a peaceful election.

Explaining the heightened deployment, especially in hotspot districts, Byakagaba said security forces want to avert a repeat of the November 18 and 19, 2020, riots, which claimed over 50 lives and left scores injured.