

BY SYLVIA KATUSHABE

KAMPALA: Internet users were last evening left stranded after the Uganda Communication Commission (UCC), directed all Internet service providers to temporary switch off Internet a day to the presidential and parliamentary polls.

Addressing journalists at UCC offices in Kampala, the Executive Director, Mr Peter Nyombi, explained that the shutdown was aimed at protecting the national security, public safety and order during the polls that can turn heated.

"On the recommendation by the Interagency Security Committee, the UCC has directed all licensed mobile network operators and Internet service providers to implement the temporary suspension of the Internet services," Mr Nyombi said.

He stressed that the affected services include public Internet access, sale and registration of new SIM cards and outbound data roaming services to one network area countries.

Mr Nyombi stressed that the suspension will remain in force until a restoration notice is issued by the regulator.

During this period, all non-essential public Internet traffic will be blocked, that include social media platforms, web browsing, video streaming, personal mail services and messaging applications, among others.

However, he warned on the misuse of phone calls and messaging services that have been left on for communication, saying their misuse would affect the country.

The UCC boss further noted that the suspension also applies to mobile broadband, fiber optic licensed lines, fixed wireless access, microwave radio

Ugandans stranded as govt shuts down Internet one day to polls



According to UCC data, Uganda has an estimated 10.6 million Internet users, underscoring the economic and social stakes of connectivity. PHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK

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On the issue of mobile money, Mr Nyombi explained that the Governor, Bank of Uganda, will guide on the same. By last evening, the mobile money services were still operational.

Asked why government did not use other alternatives rather than switch off the Internet, Mr Nyombi said he got strict recommendations to shut down the Internet.

"I got strict recommendations, the other alternatives that there is, I can't comment on them now. What we are effecting now is that there is temporary switch off of Internet," Mr Nyombi said.

2021 General Election

During the 2021 General Election, the government imposed a nationwide Internet shutdown that lasted about 100 hours. According to estimates by TOP10VPN, the restrictions cost Uganda approximately Shs390b, placing the country among the top five globally in economic losses linked to Internet shutdowns.

Until yesterday, Mr Nyombi had downplayed the rumours of government harbouring plans to shut down the Internet, saying no such directive had been issued.

"We have not got any directive from the government to switch off the Internet during or after the elections," Mr Nyombi said.

"Nobody in government has told UCC to prepare or do anything related to an Internet shutdown. If such a decision were to be taken, UCC would come out earlier to brief the country and explain why," he added.

He had assured the public that Internet services would remain stable, urging media houses, digital users, and consumers to use online platforms responsibly to avoid actions that could prompt regulatory intervention.

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**10.6M
INTERNET
USERS**