

Starlink gets go ahead to provide satellite internet

BY FREDERIC MUSISI

KAMPALA. The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) last Friday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) and a five-year operational licence agreement with the American conglomerate, Starlink Services LLC, to begin operations in the country after nearly a year of regulatory discussions.

Starlink Services LLC, which first launched in Africa in 2023 in Nigeria and has since expanded to 26 African countries, is authorised under the MoU to provide telecommunication infrastructure, maintain an office with critical staff support and legal representation, and issued landing rights authorisation to beam satellite signals within Uganda.

The five-year provisional period will allow UCC and its parent Ministry of ICT to understand Starlink's satellite broadband technology, while the company will study the Ugandan market, which currently relies on a mix of mostly fibre-optic technology and broadband.

StarLink will be offering satellite internet, a type of broadband, the first of its kind in Uganda and related services.

By providing internet beamed from space to the signal receivers, it is expected that the company will facilitate in-



UCC Executive Director Nyombi Tembo shakes hands with a Starlink official after signing the contract. PHOTO/FILE

ternet access to the remotest pockets of the country amid weak broadband infrastructure and large rural populations.

Weather patterns such as heavy rains and clouds are the biggest interference to satellite internet.

President Museveni witnessed the signing of the legal documents between the UCC Executive Director, Mr Nyombi Thembo and the Starlink Market Access Director for Africa, Mr Ryan Goodnight, at State House, Entebbe.

The President, in a statement issued by State House said: "Our interest re-

DIGITAL GROWTH

According to the ICT ministry, Uganda's digital space has grown significantly, with more than 27 million internet subscriptions and internet access reaching an estimated 60 percent of the population.

mains security, revenue assurance, and ensuring proper accountability within the telecommunications sector so we

clearly know what is happening with telecom companies and who the customers are."

Mr Goodnight was quoted as saying: "We believe this partnership will lower internet costs and enable more people to join the digital economy. We are ready to comply with Uganda's laws and work closely with the government and UCC to ensure successful implementation."

Also, in attendance at the signing ceremony were the US Ambassador to Uganda William Popp, Uganda's Ambassador to Washington DC, Robbie Kakonge, and the Ministry of ICT Permanent Secretary Aminah Zawedde.

Dr Zawedde was quoted as saying that the signing of the MoU followed extensive engagements between the government and Starlink officials to ensure compliance with Uganda's regulatory framework.

"We are witnessing the signing of the provisional licence for Starlink after agreeing on the terms and features of the licence," she said.

Discussions between Starlink Services LLC, a subsidiary of SpaceX that holds international satellite and telecommunications licences operating Starlink's global network of low-Earth orbit satellites, and the Ugandan government commenced in April 2025.

Later in December, the government

applied brakes to the clearance of Starlink equipment into the country ahead of the January 15 elections fearing the satellite internet might be hard to jam during the polling day to contain spread of information, including election results.

For Ambassador Popp, who ends his tour of duty later this month, seeing through the StarLink and the Boeing deals are perhaps his biggest two commercial diplomacy scores for his government.

Despite the two deals and another on Kampala accepting unwanted African migrants, it is unlikely that the US President Donald Trump administration will walk back on his 10 percent tariffs on all Ugandan exports that started in April 2025.

The reciprocal tariffs were aimed at dealing with trade deficits with trading partners from around the world.

The Trump administration argued that Uganda's trade practices had resulted in a trade deficit of \$26 million (Shs92.5b), figures that Kampala contested.

According to the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR), total goods trade with Uganda was \$238.9 million (Shs850b) in 2024. Goods exports to Uganda in 2024 were \$106.3 million (Shs378b), down 12.3 percent from \$14.9 million (Shs53b) in 2023.

On the other hand, goods imports from Uganda in 2024 were \$132.6m (Shs472b), up 14.6 percent from \$16.9m (Shs60b) in 2023.