

# Internet shutdown won't affect poll – EC

BY DAVID WALUGEMBE

**KAMPALA:** The Electoral Commission (EC) has stated that the ongoing internet shutdown will not impact the polling exercise that commences today, countrywide.

EC Spokesperson Julius Mucunguzi, last evening explained that their system wasn't affected by UCC'S shutdown before urging the electorate to turn out in large numbers to cast their votes for the positions of President and Members of Parliament.

"The entire voting process will not be affected by the internet shutdown. The machines don't require internet to operate, and vote counting doesn't require internet to happen," he said.

Mr Mucunguzi added: "Voters don't need internet to vote, they are aware that today, they will show up to cast their ballot and choose their leaders. They will walk physically to the polling stations across the country to exercise that mandate, and they don't do it online," he said.

The EC spokesperson emphasised that the Biometric Verification Machines (BVM) that will be used to verify voter information also do not require internet to operate.

He also urged voters to show up physically to the polling stations across the country to get verified and allocated ballot pa-

## ABOUT SHUTDOWN

On Tuesday evening, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) directed all internet service providers to temporarily switch off the internet, less than 48 hours before the polls. Addressing journalists at the UCC offices in Kampala, Mr Peter Nyombi, the executive director of UCC, explained that the shutdown was aimed at protecting national security, public safety, and order during the polls.

"On the recommendation of 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 explained. 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 application.

pers, and pass through the voting verification offline process to cast the ballots.

When asked about the transparency in results transmission from the polling stations to the national tally centre, Mr Mucunguzi said they will work with agents stationed at each polling station.

"The polling will happen openly in the presence of each candidate's agents, observers, and EC officials. After polling, they will be transmitted through the EC system from the polling stations to the national tally centre, from where Justice Simon Byabakama, EC chairperson, will read them as they come in," he noted.

To ensure transparency in transmission of the results from the polling station to the tally centre, the largest Opposition political party in Parliament, the National Unity Platform (NUP), had demanded from EC provides them with the tally sheets before results could be transmitted to the national tally centre.

Uganda has an estimated 10.6 million internet users, according to UCC data, underscoring the economic and social stakes of connectivity.

According to TOPIOVPN, a UK-based digital research platform, Uganda lost Shs390 billion during the 2021 General Election due to internet restrictions, ranking fifth globally in terms of economic impact.