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BY BUSEIN SAMILU

**T**he government yesterday announced it will not compensate any individual or company that suffered financial losses during the four-day Internet shutdown.

ICT and National Guidance Minister, Dr Chris Baryomunsi, told this publication that any losses incurred between January 13 and 18 should be accepted as a sacrifice for national peace.

"We are not compensating anybody who made losses. Digital services are integral, and we understand the implications of the shutdown, but we have to weigh them against the security concerns," he said.

He added: "Imagine if the whole country burns because of misinformation and disinformation, even the businesses cannot thrive, so all of us first secure the interest of our country, and whatever was lost should be taken as a sacrifice."

Dr Baryomunsi's remarks came shortly after the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) issued a statement confirming that Internet services, switched off on January 13 and partially restored on January 18, had now been fully reinstated.

# Govt restores internet, says no compensation for losses

"The Uganda Communications Commission informs the General Public that internet services have been fully restored across the country, following successful completion of the necessary technical and security assessments. Members of the public can now access the Internet and all online services without the previously imposed restrictions," the statement, posted on UCC's official social media platforms at exactly 12:40pm yesterday, read.

It added: "UCC sincerely appreciates the patience, cooperation and understanding shown during the period of limited Internet access and remains committed to monitoring the digital environment to promote a safe, stable and reliable online experience for all users."

Uganda's four-day Internet blackout, imposed ahead of the January 15 presidential and parliamentary elections, left a lasting scar on the economy, costing an estimated Shs57b and crippling vital digital services relied upon by millions daily.

Data from the Cost of Shutdown Tool (COST) shows that the blackout, enforced more than 24 hours before polling day, drained nearly Shs15b from the economy each day, a case of money going down the drain.

The shutdown, ordered by UCC on the directive of security agencies, was justified as a measure to curb alleged online

## INTERNET SHUTDOWN

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misinformation that authorities feared could spark electoral violence. But analysts argue the cure was worse than the disease, with economic consequences swept under the rug.

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Mobile money transactions, the lifeblood of Uganda's cash-lite economy, were among the hardest hit. MoMo Uganda Managing Director Richard Yego said on Monday that the company was still counting the cost.

Industry data shows MTN MoMo alone handles transactions exceeding Shs430b daily, mostly small payments below Shs50,000. These micro-trans-

actions keep the wheels of commerce turning, especially for low-income households and informal traders.

Agent banking services, which extend banking to remote communities, were also thrown off balance. As of 2026, agent banking in Uganda transacts an estimated Shs80.5b per day, an activity that was severely curtailed during what UCC called a "temporary suspension."

According to COST reports, platform-specific losses were eye-watering: Facebook and YouTube accounted for more than Shs3.5b per day, while WhatsApp alone bled over Shs7b daily.

Although MTN Uganda and Airtel Uganda declined to comment on their losses, this newspaper's calculations based on financial reports suggest a combined hit of roughly Shs20b.

For instance, Airtel Uganda's half-year report (January–June 2025) showed Shs525.73b in data revenue. Spread across 181 days, that's Shs2.9b daily. The four-day blackout, therefore, cost Airtel about Shs11.6b.

MTN's unaudited nine-month results (January–September 2025) were also used to estimate losses, though the company has yet to put a figure on the damage.

Ms Rhona Kyongera, the senior manager of communications at MTN Uganda, said yesterday the exact amount lost has not been quantified. Mr David Birungi, the public relations officer

at Airtel Uganda, said the firm is in a closed period and cannot comment on financial matters.

Despite the losses, Ms Kyongera confirmed that MTN clients who purchased internet bundles but couldn't use them during the blackout will be compensated. "Some of our clients have already been refunded, while others will continue to receive their bundles. As long as you were affected by the blackout, you will get your internet bundles back," she said.

MTN Uganda currently boasts 33.5 million active clients, with 11 million internet subscribers. Airtel has 7.5 million internet subscribers.

Meanwhile, two advocates last week sued UCC and major telecoms: MTN Uganda, Airtel Uganda, and Tangerine Limited (Lyca Mobile), arguing that the shutdown was unconstitutional and unlawfully disrupted communication nationwide.

On January 13, ahead of the January 15 presidential and parliamentary polls, UCC, guided by security agencies, ordered all telecom companies and internet providers, including government-owned NITA-U, to pull the plug on internet services.

The blackout remained in place during tallying, which saw incumbent NRM leader Yoweri Museveni declared the winner with 7.6 million votes, extending his rule to 45 years.