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General News

OSP probes new BoG headquarters procurement following Mahama Ayariga's petition

The Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) has initiated investigations into suspected corruption in the procurement process of the new Bank of Ghana headquarters in Accra.

The investigation was prompted by a formal petition from Bawku Central MP, Mahama Ayariga, who raised concerns about the substantial increase in project cost without approval from the Public Procurement Authority (PPA).

Mr Ayariga alleged the involvement of the Bank's Governor, Deputy Governors, the Board of Directors, and the project contractor, Goldkey Properties Ltd, in suspected corruption activities.

"I hereby make a formal complaint

to your office to investigate what I believe to be a case of corruption in the procurement of the new headquarters building of the Bank of Ghana at Ridge in Accra. The suspects in this case include the Governor Dr Ernest Addison and Deputy Governors of the Bank of Ghana, namely: (1) Dr Ernest Addison 1st Deputy Governor, Dr Maxwell Opoku Afari, 2nd Deputy Governor, Mrs Elsie Addo Awadzi."

"The Members of the Board of Directors should also be investigated. The other suspect is the Chief Executive Officer of Messrs. Goldkey Properties Ltd who are the contractors. The project consultants supervising the work should also be investigated."

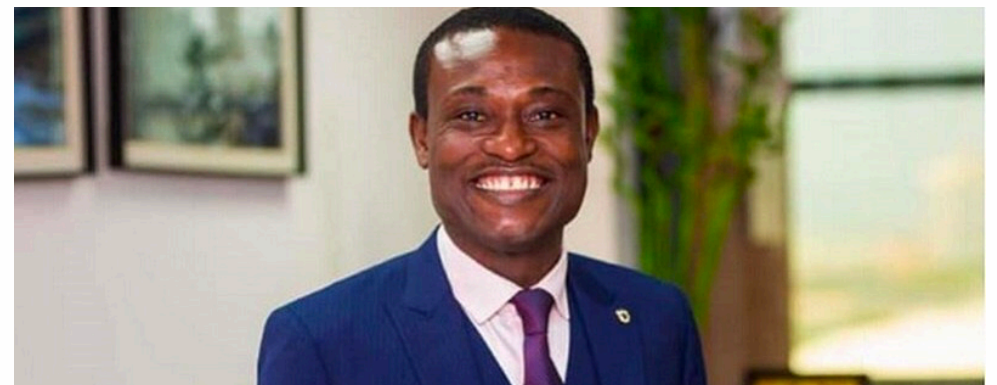
According to Mr Ayariga, he wrote to the BoG Governor for an explanation, and received a response in a letter dated 22nd August 2023 and referenced SF/GEN/7/2023/75, to the effect that "he is unable to provide me with the full details of the project design variation which has led to the price escalation for reasons of "National Security"."

For the Bawku Central MP,

"this refusal to explain the price escalation founds my suspicion of corruption in the procurement."

Meanwhile, the OSP staff has taken Mr Ayariga's statement as part of the investigation, per credible information reaching The Independent Ghana.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey



Kissi Agyebeng, Special Prosecutor

Teachers jailed 12 years for forging judicial documents

In an Accra Circuit Court, two teachers have been sentenced to six years imprisonment each for their involvement in forging Judicial Service official receipts.

Lordfred Heward Mills, the primary figure behind the crime, was sentenced in absentia, while Lawrence Ansu Asante, the second accused person, was escorted to jail by the police.

The court presided over by Mrs. Afia Owusua Appiah found them guilty of conspiracy to utter forged documents and uttering forged documents at the conclusion of the trial.

The prosecution, led by Inspector Wisdom Alorwu, explained that the complainant, Eric Ansah Agyei, was a pastor and resident of Aburi.

Mills, residing in Bubuashie, and Asante, residing in James Town, were sureties in the case of Republic versus Jeffery Wilson Ofori, which was pending before Circuit Court 4, previously presided over by the now-deceased Mr. Emmanuel Essandoh.

The court learned that in June 2021, the complainant gave GH¢3,500 to the accused persons, now convicts, for payment on behalf of Jeffery Wilson Ofori, an accused person in a case. The prosecution revealed that the convicts devised a plan to forge an official Judicial Service receipt and failed to pay the money to the court.

They enlisted the help of Boakye Boateng, who provided them with the forged receipts. Subsequently,

they submitted a Judicial Service official receipt with the number 19/0263336 dated June 11, 2021, with a face value of GH¢3,500.

When the prosecutor, Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Rita Asaah, presented the receipt to the court on November 23, 2021, it was rejected, leading to the arrest of the convicts.

The court ordered their detention at the Community 18 Police Station

for further investigations.

Mills mentioned Boakye Boateng, who is now at large, as the one who issued them the receipts at a fee of GH¢500.

The remaining GH¢3,000 was reportedly shared between the convicts, who admitted to the offense in their caution statements before an independent witness.

Source: Amanda Cartey / Amanda Cartey



File Photo



General News

Companies that sign onto 24-hour economy policy will receive tax incentives - Mahama

Flagbearer of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), John Mahama, has indicated that interested institutions who sign onto the 24-hour economy initiative will enjoy some tax incentives.

According to him, no institution will be compelled to participate. The former president made this known at an engagement with students of the St. Joseph's College of Education at Bechem as the 'Building Ghana Tour' kicked off in the Ahafo Region.

"It is not by force. When we come, we'll open it. The initiative is available, any company that wants to work a shift system and work more than the eight hours that they normally work from eight o'clock to five o'clock, they will sign on. We will give them tax incentives because if you work the extra shift, you will be given tax breaks. Aside from that, you'll be provided with security and everything that you

need to be able to employ more people," he said.

Meanwhile, the former president assures that a team of experts is working to finalise the policy document.

Mr Mahama contends that this policy will address the pressing issue of Ghanaian youth embarking on perilous journeys across the Sahara and the Mediterranean in search of better opportunities in Europe.

On the other hand, Vice President Dr Mahamudu Bawumia has criticised the policy, adding that Mr Mahama lacks an understanding of the policy he is promising to Ghanaians.

"I hear John Mahama has a new idea and he wants to run a 24-hour economy. I say where did he get this idea from? It is not a bright idea! A 24-hour economy cannot be legislated by the government," Dr Bawumia said.

"Today, there are many businesses that are already working for 24 hours. Hospitals are open for 24 hours. You can buy electricity for 24 hours. Because of digitalisation, you can transfer money for 24 hours. There are many chop bars and restaurants that are open for 24 hours."

However, some experts, including a senior political science lecturer at the University of Ghana (UG), Dr Asante, has expressed confidence that Ghanaian voters will be receptive to former President

John Mahama's 24-hour economy policy.

"I can tell you that this will really find favor with voters. Who really wants to put their energies to work, who wants to improve productivity? Who can ensure that the resources we have in this country are put to its utmost use? They will go for this policy I have no doubt in my mind," Dr. Asante stated.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey



John Dramani Mahama, Flagbearer, NDC

"You are brothers" - Ya Na to Bawumia and Mahama

Overlord of Dagbon, Ya-Na Abubakari Mahama II, has advised Vice President Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia to recognize former President John Dramani Mahama as a brother and not an enemy in the presidential race.

The Ya-Na emphasized that this approach will contribute to a clean campaign ahead of the 2024 general elections.

During a courtesy call by Dr. Bawumia as part of his 'Thank you tour,' the Ya-Na stated that both the NPP and NDC flagbearers are his sons.

He highlighted that whoever wins the general election will bring the title of president home to northern Ghana, making it a collective win for all northerners.

"We as Northerners have to be grateful to all Ghanaians for trusting that only a Northerner can lead Ghana after 2024. It is a big opportunity for us to demonstrate

our capabilities, competence, honesty and dedication to moving Ghana forward. My son, His Excellency John Dramani Mahama who is also a son, is your fellow competitor in this election, he is not your enemy or rival.

"He is your elder brother and a former President of Ghana who is also being presented by the largest opposition party in our country to be re-elected as president. As northerners, we have already won the election with whoever we elect because whoever wins the trophy is coming home," he said. The advice from the Dagbon Overlord comes amid ongoing jabs and swipes between former President John Mahama and Vice President Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia.

Former President Mahama has described the Vice President as an extension of President Akufo-Addo whose government has been accused of worsening the plights of Ghanaisn, while Dr. Bawumia

has countered that Mahama has nothing new to offer.

But the Ya-Na has encouraged Dr. Bawumia not to be misled by his campaign team into engaging in name-calling and trading insults, emphasizing the importance of a clean campaign.

"I want you to run a clean campaign with your brother. You are a fine gentleman and everybody knows that, so don't let your team mislead you; it is you that the good Lord has chosen because of what He has put in you and not your team.

"Your team is supposed to translate your thoughts and ideals, including

what all of you have agreed on, into action and not the other way around. Your team works tirelessly for you because of what they have seen in you so don't disappoint them.

"Lead them and don't let them lead you; else you have wasted all their efforts," the Ya-Na said.

Ahead of the NPP Primaries held on November 4, Dr Bawumia entreated his campaign team to desist from engaging in verbal assaults. It is believed that he will maintain such character ahead of the country's December polls.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo



John Dramani Mahama, NDC Flagbearer, on the left, Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, NPP Flagbearer on the right

General News

Breman Asikuma SHS to begin commercial production of fish, vegetables

Management of Breman Asikuma Senior High School (BASS) in the Central Region has begun a 2,400-capacity aquaculture project and acres of vegetables to feed students.

Expected to ease the teaching and learning of Agricultural Science for both Agric and non-Agric students, the intervention will also augment the feeding of nutritious meals to students.

The initiative is in line with the school's "homegrown solution to home problems" in commemoration of its 60th anniversary celebration in 2024.

Ms Sarah Baah-Odoom, the Headmistress of the school, in an interview with the Ghana News Agency, commended the Ministry of Fisheries and Aqua Culture Development, Blue Skies Company, old students, staff, Methodist

Church and the Ghana Education Service for their support.

Currently, she said the school had constructed four fishponds measuring 20 × 15 metres awaiting the arrival of the fingerlings for the aquaculture project to start.

She said aquaculture added to seafood, making it cheaper and accessible to all in the district that depended on imported seafood products.

Through the support of Blue Skies Company, she said the school had started with students' vegetable farms competition to ensure sustainable vegetables' production all year round.

The competition involves using sustainable environmental practices, through which the school had been served with delicious garden eggs stew with banku on two occasions.

She said vegetables play a key role in food and nutrition security

in Ghana, as the country's food system had shifted from food quantity to diet quality and health benefits.

Additionally, she noted the school has large acreage of arable lands for the cultivation of staples to feed students, livestock feed, and the public to rake in more internally generated funds.

Ms. Baah-Odoom said agriculture was the mainstay of Ghana's economy, therefore, it was prudent to embed agriculture in school's curricula to maintain national food security.

Unfortunately, she indicated, agriculture continued to suffer from wrong perceptions at it was often viewed as an inferior and non-academic profession.

However, "the sky is the limit for children when you combine agricultural education with a passion for living sustainably."

Touching on other pertinent issues,

she said the school that started with six students six decades ago had increased in population with 2,811, including 1,526 girls with 768 day students as of November 2023.

Challenges included inadequate security personnel, staff accommodation, dormitories, place of convenience, incomplete fence wall, and library for students and staff.

Source: GNA



File Photo

Stop forcing us to sit in exam halls - Teacher trainees to govt on licensure exams

President of the Teacher Trainees Association of Ghana (TTAG), Jephthah Nana Kwame, has called on the government to review the teacher licensure exams.

In an interview on Eyewitness News, he emphasized that the exams written in various schools provide sufficient assessment for teacher trainees.

According to Nana Kwame, the current focus on theoretical aspects of teaching, where trainees are required to sit for exams, should be reconsidered. Instead, he suggested that teacher trainees should be engaged in practical courses that enhance their skills, moving away from extensive theoretical examinations in exam halls.

"What we have been advocating for is a change in the mode of assessment. We are looking at the relationship between the exams we write at the College of Education

and that of the licensure."

"So, can there be a different way where we can focus on the practical aspect of teaching rather than sitting in the exam hall to write exams to be assessed?"

Meanwhile, former President John Mahama has pledged to cancel the licensure exams, contending that subjecting teacher trainees to an additional assessment for qualification is unnecessary.

He made this known during his 'Building Ghana Tour' in the Bono Region in November. However, the Colleges of Education Teachers Association of Ghana (CETAG) has opposed the proposal.

"In my opinion, it is something that is good and it shouldn't be cancelled. That is CETAG we have stated that we should implement what we agreed two years ago when we had a conference that the students wanting to enter the teaching profession should be subjected to entrance exams,"

Prince Obeng Himah, the President of CETAG told the media.

A total of 6,451 (83.5%) teachers failed the 2023 Ghana Teacher Licensure Examination conducted in May 2023.

The results were released by the National Teaching Council (NTC) after the teachers wrote the re-sit papers. The number was out of the 7,728 teachers who participated in the re-sit exams, thus, only 1,277 passed.

The Public Relations Officer (PRO)



File Photo

of the National Teaching Council (NTC), Dennis Osei-Owusu, has said that the high failure rate in the 2023 Teacher Licensure Examination is a "national security threat."

On the other hand, the Teacher Trainees Association of Ghana (TTAG), is calling for an increment in the teacher trainee allowance.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey



General News

Useless to waive tax on imported electric vehicles used by minority of Ghanaians - Minority Leader

Minority Leader in Parliament, Dr. Cassiel Ato Forson, has rendered certain tax reliefs outlined in the government's 2024 Budget and Economic Policy as useless.

He contends that some of the specified tax reliefs will not provide substantial relief to Ghanaians, characterizing the entire budget statement as lacking substance after its presentation on the floor of parliament on November 15, 2023.

In an interview on JoyNews, Dr. Ato Forson specifically labeled the government's initiative to waive import duties on electric vehicles as 'useless.'

He argued that the majority of Ghanaians cannot afford to use

electric vehicles, coupled with a scarcity of electric charging infrastructure in the country.

"Let me make this point, I don't know how many vehicles in Ghana are electric. Where are the charging ports? How many Ghanaians will benefit from it? Useless" the Minority Leader stated.

"It is to encourage the use of semi-knocked-down electric cars. We live in an economy that we are even struggling to get power. How many cars in Ghana today are electric for them to say that we are giving tax exemption for electric cars? I don't know if you own an electric car, I don't own one. And go out and find out from people. As an MP, I don't know of any individual or public transport that owns electric vehicles," the

lawmaker reiterated.

Despite the fact that the EV policy is dependent on future energy transition initiatives, he emphasized that many Ghanaians are unlikely to gain from the change, so it may not be beneficial in the near run.

"So, it is looking at the future probably but is not giving something presently to the ordinary Ghanaian. What the government must do first of all is to create an enabling environment for electric vehicles. This [Tax waiver] is not. The one to create the enabling environment will be access to charging ports," Dr Ato Forson said.

"...So, if I bring an electric vehicle here to start using it when I travel

to Ajumako and for some reason I need to charge my vehicle, where are the charging ports? Which fuel station can I park in and charge my electric vehicle?" the MP questioned.

Source: Amanda Cartey / Amanda Cartey



Dr Cassiel Ato Forson, Minority Leader in Parliament

Ghana imports \$164m worth of animal internal organs "yemuadie" annually for consumption

Recent information from the Minister for Trade and Industry, Kobina Tahir Hammond, has revealed that Ghana spends a colossal amount of \$164 million to import a chunk of animal internal organs, locally known as 'yemuadie', rice, diapers, among others, every year.

The minister made this known while announcing the government's plan to present a Constitutional Instrument (C.I) to Parliament on November 21, aiming to impose restrictions on the importation of certain strategic products into the country.

Among the items to be affected, totaling over 20, are rice, tripe (commonly referred to as "yemuadie" in Ghana), and diapers.

Speaking during a press briefing in Parliament, the Minister of Trade and Industry, K.T. Hammond said, "Stomach of animals, bladder and the chunk of intestines (yemuadie), the country had had to put in an amount of about \$164 million towards the importation of these items. We are taking steps

to ensure that in terms of rice, there's no poverty of rice in the country."

He added that "there have to be some efforts by the government to ensure that we go back to Acheampong's operation feed yourself."

According to the government, this initiative is part of a broader strategy to boost local production, reduce reliance on foreign goods, and stimulate economic growth.

The Trade Minister also announced the introduction of

the Ghana Standards Authority Regulations 2023, which also seek to streamline the manufacturing of cement to ensure competitive pricing.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey



Tripe meat

General News

Tobacco related illnesses costing Ghana GHC668 million annually - GRA

Tobacco-related illnesses impose an annual economic burden of GHC 668 million, equivalent to 2 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to Dr. Alex Kombat, Senior Revenue Officer of the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA).

He noted that they also constitute three percent of all fatalities in the country.

"Generally, people continue to consume these harmful products because they are addictive and not expensive enough," Dr Kombat said.

He said that the Government and the GRA had seen the need to put taxes on them to increase their prices to deter people from consuming it in large quantities.

Dr Kombat said there was the possibility of the Government using taxes to reduce the consumption of tobacco at the launching of Ghana's 2023 Tobacco Industry Interference Index (TIII) Report, by VALD-Ghana at a stakeholders' meeting in Accra.

Dr Kombat said over the years government had used policy control measures like excise taxes, customs duties, valued-added tax, National Health Insurance Levy, among others at entry points and at domestic front to discourage consumption of these products.

However, the implementation of these policies had not been easy without interferences of industry players," he stated, adding that, Article Six of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control required that parties should implement tax policies to reduce tobacco consumption and help raise revenue.

He said ECOWAS directive on the harmonization of excise duties on tobacco products indicated that the excise duty on tobacco products should include an ad-valorem duty and a specific duty, however the implementation did not go well without a fight from the industry players.

He said the VALD-Ghana worked tirelessly through research and persistent meetings with the policymakers to ensure that this came to pass.

Subsequently, two bills were submitted to Parliament in this regard in December 2022 with the hope that they were going to be passed. Unfortunately, they were not passed in December 2022.

"VALD kept pushing with several press conferences which eventually saw the passing of the excise duty amendment bill into law on March 31, 2023, as an Excise Duty (Amendment) Act 2023 (Act 1093) to amend the Principal Excise Duty Act 2014 (Act 878) to replace the first schedule," Dr Kombat stated.

There is a reduction in interference from 58 per cent to 56 per cent in public health policies from 2020-2021.

The report is to assist the health sector to up its game in reducing the tobacco industry interference in public health policies and it is in accordance with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Article 5.3 and its guidelines.

Mr Labram Musah, the Executive Director of Programmes of VALD-Ghana, who launched the report said the TIII stood as a critical assessment tool designed to scrutinize and quantify the various forms of interference perpetrated by the tobacco industry in public health policymaking.

Giving an overview, he stated that the tobacco industry interference (TII) was meticulously crafted to address the urgent need for monitoring and evaluating the industry's tactics and ensuring transparency in the decision-making process.

"The TII scrutinizes a range of indicators to assess industry

interference, including Industry participation in policy development, corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, benefits to the tobacco industry, unnecessary interactions with the tobacco industry, transparency, conflict of Interest, and preventive measures," he pointed out.

The Report showed that tobacco control regulations in Ghana did not provide explicit provisions to curb the interference of the tobacco industry in policy development and that the Ministry of Health had delayed in developing the code of conduct, which is expected to provide clear guidelines for public officials in their dealings with the tobacco industry.

The rest were the invitation of the Harm Reduction Alliance, a tobacco industry allied organisation after they submitted a memo to the Chairman of the Committee on Defence and Interior of Parliament to be part of the stakeholders' engagement on the Narcotics Control Bill.

Source: GNA



File Photo

6 allegedly killed in Nkwanta shooting incident

Six people are feared dead in a recent shooting incident at Nkwanta South in the Oti Region.

According to eyewitnesses, armed assailants opened fire on residents at the Nkwanta Central Market early in the morning of Tuesday. The victims are currently receiving treatment at Nkwanta St. Joseph Catholic Hospital.

The region has experienced tribal conflicts involving the Adele, Challa, and Akyode ethnic groups

over land litigation issues.

Recent skirmishes have also been linked to contention about a Yam Festival organized by the Akyode people in Nkwanta.

Despite efforts by the Oti Regional Security Council to resolve the issues, tensions persist.

The Oti Regional Minister, Joshua Mukubu, stated that personnel have been deployed to investigate the trigger for the new attack.

The Regional Security Council has

also engaged with chiefs and other opinion leaders to encourage residents to put down their weapons and restore peace.

In the meantime, police and military personnel have been deployed to maintain peace and ensure the safety of residents.

Nevertheless, the Nkwanta shootings have roots extending back to 2018, marked by the tragic incident where seven young men from the Zongo community were fatally shot by the police, who

asserted that the victims were armed robbers.

This incident ignited a violent protest among the Zongo youth, vehemently rejecting the police narrative and demanding justice for the deceased. In response, the government established a fact-finding committee to investigate the shootings.

The committee's report contradicted the police's claim, concluding that the seven men were not armed robbers and identifying

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6 allegedly killed in Nkwanta shooting incident

Continued from page 6

the police personnel involved as the primary suspects.

In response, the government took action by placing 21 police officers on interdiction and pledging to prosecute them for murder.

Source: GNA



File Photo

US will suffer if they stop doing business with Ghana - Sam George tells pro-LGBTQ+ US Ambassador

One of the sponsors of the Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill and MP for Ningo-Prampram, Sam Nartey George, has expressed the view that Ghana stands to lose nothing if the United States of America (USA) decides to sever business ties.

He argued that the U.S. benefits more from trade relations with Ghana, making any legislation to terminate such ties a disadvantage for them.

Engaging the media on Monday evening, he said, "there is more trade coming into Ghana than Ghanaian trade going into the US. We are in a trade deficit doing business with the US.

"If the United States decides to stop doing business with Ghana, it's the United States that is going to suffer not Ghana," he added.

His remarks follow the statement from the US Ambassador to Ghana, Virginia Palmer, who expressed concerns that the anti-LGBTQ+ bill could complicate efforts to promote Ghana as an investment

and trade destination.

Madam Palmer noted that the legislation might result in decreased foreign exchange inflows, negatively impact Ghana's financial standing, and limit workforce options, affecting businesses.

In response, the Ningo-Prampram MP stated that Ghana has the flexibility to engage in business with other nations. He expressed minimal concern about potential revenue implications, emphasizing the country's ability to pursue alternative trade partnerships.

"And whatever business we do with them, the US should be well aware that we are in a global world - China is ready to do business with us, Russia is ready to do business with us. Again when the US Ambassador peddles such untruth, someone holding such a high office is unbecoming of her unless she is a lobbyist or spokesperson of the LGBTQ+ community," he said.

Additionally, the legislator

contested the US Ambassador's statement asserting that the best individuals in a workforce come from the LGBTQ+ communities, stating that such a claim was not grounded in facts.

Mr George took the opportunity to remind Madam Palmer that she lacked the authority to interfere in the decisions and plans of her host country.

"That Article 42 of the Vienna Convention, whether she is the US Ambassador or not, cannot conduct herself in a manner that is offensive to her host country and

so we are serving notice to her to respect our rules but if she does not respect our rules we are going to organise a demonstration against her and insist that the American government changes her because she is pushing an agenda that is not the official position of the US government," he stated.

He added that if the US decides to end business relations with Ghana, "so be it, they are not the only country in the world."

Source: *The Independent Ghana*



Sam Nartey George, MP for Ningo Prampram on the left, Virginia Palmer, US Ambassador, on the right

IMF cautions African states against premature relaxation of stabilization policies

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has cautioned sub-Saharan African nations, including Ghana, against prematurely relaxing stabilization policies as they navigate the path to economic recovery from recent shocks.

In Ghana, Finance Minister Ken Ofori-Atta informed Parliament

about the government's efforts to steer the nation's economy toward growth.

Mr Ofori-Atta attributed the ongoing economic recovery to the swift implementation of robust fiscal and monetary measures throughout the past year and the first half of 2023.

"So far, growth in 2023 has been

more resilient than expected, inflation has declined in line with the fundamentals, the fiscal and external balances have improved, and the exchange rate has stabilised," he said when he delivered the 2024 budget statement in the House on Wednesday, November 15.

But the IMF insists that "to ensure that the coming rebound is more than just a transitory glimpse

of sunshine, it is important for authorities to guard against a premature relaxation of stabilization policies."

The Fund also noted that need to focus on reforms to both claw back lost ground from the four-year crisis and also to create new space to address the region's pressing development needs.

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General News

IMF cautions African states against premature relaxation of stabilization policies

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The Akufo-Addo administration has said it is committed to upholding discipline in order to keep the economy stable.

After the government finished the first review of the three-year, \$3 billion International Monetary Fund External Credit Facility (IMF-ECF) program successfully, the Finance Minister said the country had turned the corner in terms of the economic difficulties.

"We turned the corner when we completed the IMF first review," Mr Ofori-Atta told Parliament

while presenting the 2024 budget statement on Wednesday, November 15.

He further assured that the government is poised to "maintain stability and keep growing and ensure increased growth, currency stability"

"We turned the corner when inflation started declining from 54.1 in December to 35.2 in October 2023, he added. "The recovery is indeed real and is here to stay," he further assured.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Amanda Cartey



IMF Logo

Lands Minister summons Lands Commission boss over alleged sale of Speaker Bagbin's residence

Minister for Lands and Natural Resources, Samuel Abu Jinapor, has requested the presence of some top officials of the Lands Commission to obtain first-hand information on the attempted sale of Speaker Bagbin's residence in Cantonments to a private developer.

Speaker Alban Bagbin, while at the Speaker's Breakfast Forum on Monday, disclosed that his residence was almost sold to a private developer.

He revealed that the attempt to sell came to light when the developer sought to register the land at the Lands Commission.

"Many of you don't know that even the residence of the Speaker was almost sold to the private sector. Actually, it was given out. It was when they went to register that the Lands Commission identified that that was the residence of the Speaker. Luckily, I was inside, so it was saved," he stated.

However, some tabloids in their reportage have asserted that the Speaker's residence was indeed sold.

The Lands Commission, in response, has denied that any such transaction occurred.

In a press statement dated November 20 and signed by Acting Executive Director, Benjamin Arthur, the Commission explained

that the land in question was acquired in 1920 by a Certificate of Title, dated 7th June, 1920 for Government services.

Since 2003, the land has always been used as the official residence of the Rt. Hon. Speaker of Parliament.

By an application dated 15th November, 2022, and numbered PS/LS/002/12/22, Parliamentary Service applied for a Certificate of Allocation to regularise their occupation of the land, which measures approximately 1.66 acres.

At its sixty-fourth (64th)

Regular Meeting held on 22nd December, 2022, the Regional Lands Commission approved the application after all statutory processes, including planning approval from the La Dadekotopon Municipal Assembly, had been duly concluded.

On 14th February, 2023, the Lands Commission said it made an offer of allocation to Parliamentary Service.

"Parliamentary Service accepted the offer, and after paying the requisite fees, a Certificate of Allocation, dated 28th April, 2023 was issued to Parliamentary

Service," the statement added.

The Lands Commission therefore noted that it is "unaware of any purported sale of the Rt. Hon. Speaker of Parliament's official residence to a private developer".

The Commission has reiterated its commitment to the prudent and efficient management of public lands in the national interest, and promote effective land administration that is anchored on the highest standards of integrity, transparency and candour.

Source: The Independent Ghana



Alban Bagbin, Speaker of Parliament



General News

MTN-GRA tax liability case: Court rules in favour of GRA, says it “did not err” in tax imposition

Commercial Division of the High Court in Accra has ruled in favor of the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) in a GH¢19 million tax liability case brought against the authority by Scancom PLC, the owners of MTN Ghana.

“Respondent was therefore right in applying the definition in Section 65 of the Value Added Tax Act, 2013 (Act 870) to the transactions concerned in determining the total cost of imported services and apportioned between the Exempt and Taxable supplies with respect to their contribution to total revenue.

Respondent therefore did not err in law and did not act arbitrarily by imposing Value Added Tax liability on the Appellant for Imported Services for the period January 2014 to December 2017 because of Appellant’s status a Partial Exempt Trader for the period of the assessment” parts of the judgement read.

Scancom PLC had taken the GRA to court, contending that the authority had made a legal error and acted arbitrarily by imposing the tax liability order on the company for the period spanning January 2014 to December 2017.

In 2020, the Ghana Revenue Authority initiated a comprehensive tax audit on

MTN Ghana, covering the period from January 2014 to December 2018.

This audit examined all facets of MTN’s business, encompassing Input Value Added Tax claims related to goods and services procured by MTN Ghana, Value Added Tax on services imported by the company, and Input Value Added Tax claims related to office premises constructed by the telecom giant.

Expressing dissatisfaction with the tax liability, MTN Ghana, asserting that it had fulfilled all its tax obligations, sought legal recourse to overturn the GRA’s order.

The firm thus sought the following relief:

a. An order reversing the Respondent’s decision to impose additional Value Added Tax of GHS8,793,598.00 and penalty and interest of GHS10,933,119 on imported services utilised by Appellant for its telecommunication business.

b. An order reversing the Respondent’s decision to impose additional Ghana Education Trust Fund Levy and National Health Insurance Levy of GHC6,379,483.00 and penalty and interest of GHC2,566,124.00 on imported services utilized by the Appellant for its business.

c. An order quashing the parts

of the Current Tax Assessment relating to the heads “Disputed Assessment”, and overturning the Objection Decision by Respondent as it relates to those parts.

d. Any other order(s) that the justice of the case requires.

However, the court, under the auspices of Her Ladyship Justice Afi Agbanu Kudomor on November 9, 2023, said GRA did not err in imposing the tax liability on MTN Ghana.

According to the court “By virtue of the combined effect of the said provision of the Value Added Tax Act, 2013 (Act 870) for imported services, Value Added Tax will not apply only if the imported services were used in making Taxable supplies (telecommunications businesses). Value Added Tax will, however, apply if the imported services were applied to making Exempt supplies (mobile money business)”.

Find below excerpts of the judgement by the court.

On the second ground of appeal, it is clear from the provisions of the two statutes as amended that the National Health Insurance (Amendment) Act, 2018 (Act 971) and the Ghana Education Trust Fund Act, 2018 (Act 972) are separate from the Value Added Tax Act 2018 (Act 870).

That is, the two laws impose a

tax on the import of services, which is not subject to input tax deduction.

The two laws impose a tax or levy on the import of services, which is not subject to input tax deduction, irrespective of what the imported service was going to be used for during the period under review.

For the relevant periods in 2018 (August 2018 to December 2018), the Value Added Tax rate of 12.5% was inapplicable on Appellant but the Ghana Educational Trust Fund Levy and National Health Insurance Levy each of 2.5%, were applicable to the imported services by Appellant irrespective of whether these imported services were used to produce Taxable or Exempt supplies.

Respondent therefore did not err in law when it imposed the National Health Insurance Levy and Ghana Education Trust Fund Levy (together with interest and penalties) on the Appellant on their Imported Services from August 2018 to December 2018, irrespective of whether they were applied to Taxable or Exempt services. It is for these reasons that the instant Tax Appeal fails. There will be no order as to costs. Each party is to bear its own costs.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo



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Business

3 cement firms shut down for producing substandard products sign undertaking with GSA

Three cement factories, namely Xin An Safe Cement Ghana Ltd, Kumasi Cement Ghana Ltd, and Uniceme Cement Ghana Ltd, which were recently shut down by the Ghana Standards Authority (GSA) on November 13, 2023, have signed an undertaking.

In this undertaking, the companies pledge to adhere to industry standards and refrain from producing substandard cement.

The Director-General of the GSA, Professor Alex Dodoo, disclosed this information, noting that the factories were closed down due to their failure to comply with repeated warnings regarding quality standards.

"It's something we have been questioning, that letter was issued after repeated instructions and we had to act for the sake of our country. Thankfully, this time, the companies have all admitted

their wrongs, we have stopped their operations completely and we are supervising them, and we want more drastic actions," he told the media.

Prior to this, these three cement manufacturers were caught operating despite a ban on their operations by the Ghana Standards Authority (GSA).

As part of its commitment to quality control, the Ghana Standards Authority (GSA) has announced plans to introduce legislation to regulate the production and sale of electrical cables and iron rods.

Professor Alex Dodoo emphasized the organization's dedication to enforcing national standards and protecting consumers from substandard products.

In the implementation of this legislation, Professor Dodoo warned that companies found to be flouting the rules would face strict penalties.

"Before the L.I is laid and passed,

we are going to take action not just against these companies, but companies in the cement, electrical cables and the iron rod industry. We chose these three because they represent areas of biggest risk and challenges at the moment.

"Our actions should speak to the fact that we want them to produce according to national standards and meet national needs. Because much as we want factories, allowing them to make sub-standards products will only make our associations worse."

In addition to enforcing regulations, the Ghana

Standards Authority (GSA) is actively involved in public education campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of purchasing high-quality construction materials.

"For the past three weeks, we have been distributing leaflets educating Ghanaians. You can be rest assured of more and more of carrying out actions and ensuring that offending individuals and organizations pay the necessary administrative penalty or fines as demanded by law."

Source: The Independent Ghana
| Andy Ogbarmey-Tetty



GSA Building

Tax reliefs alone not enough to expand local production – Prof Gatsi

Dean of School of Business of the University of Cape Coast (UCC), Prof John Gatsi, has downplayed the tax reliefs offered to local setups to bolster local production in the 2024 budget statement.

He said while it was laudable to use fiscal policy to incentivise production, such incentives must go beyond tax reliefs to absorb other costs critical to production to achieve the desired result.

He added that the taxes would not bring immediate relief.

"It doesn't take tax incentives alone for people to set up factories. For instance, how much electricity are they paying for? What is the cost of other inputs that they are going to use?" he queried.

The economist was reacting to the 2024 Budget Statement delivered in Parliament by Mr Ken Ofori-Atta, the Minister of Finance, in an interview with the Ghana News Agency (GNA).

The finance minister announced

a raft of tax waivers including import duties on raw materials for the local manufacture of sanitary pads; VAT on locally produced sanitary pads, and duties on semi-knocked down and completely knocked down electric vehicles.

He also announced tax waivers for the importation of agricultural machinery equipment and inputs and medical consumables and raw materials for the pharmaceutical industry.

Prof Gatsi indicated that the tax relief for the local production of sanitary pads, was not enough to immediately expand production capacity to meet demand and bring the needed relief.

"The situation will continue in 2024. So, what it means is that, for 2024, we will still have our market flooded with imported sanitary pads," he cautioned.

"If this continues to be the case, then we are talking about 2025 thereabout but as to whether we will have the full capacity to feed

the domestic market is something that will be contested," he added.

To effectively encourage local production and consumption, Prof Gatsi opined that a complete ban on the importation of sanitary pads or an increase in the taxes on same would have been more prudent.

"It is not bad to try to incentivise domestic production, but you

cannot incentivise domestic production while you are encouraging importation of the same item.

"If you are not encouraging importation of the item, you would have increased the import duty on the importation while you give tax incentives for domestic production," Prof Gatsi added.

Source: GNA



Professor John Gatsi, Dean of Students, UCC

International

Congo-Brazzaville stampede: Over 37 killed during army recruitment drive

At least 37 people have died in a stampede during an army recruitment drive at a stadium in Congo-Brazzaville, the government has said.

Some people tried to force their way through stadium's gates in the capital, Brazzaville, causing the stampede, residents have been quoted as saying.

Last week, the army announced plans to recruit about 1,500 people between the ages of 18 and 25.

Many people were injured in the crush, a government statement said. It did not give a number, but said that a "crisis unit" has been set

up, the AFP news agency reports.

According to the Associated Press agency, as many as 700 people a day have been registering over the last week at recruitment centres.

Youth unemployment is at around 42% in Congo-Brazzaville, with many young people seeing the army one of the few places where they can secure a job.

Details of what exactly happened at Michel d'Ornano stadium are sketchy. Thousands of young people had reportedly gathered outside the stadium on Monday.

Local sources have told the BBC the registration process was to open

on Tuesday morning. Brandon Tsetou, a graduate who survived the crush, said he had queued since early on Monday.

"According to the organisers, it was to be the last day. That's why many of us decided to wait until late into the night, hoping to register," he

told AP.

"Some were so impatient that they had to force their way in, causing a stampede that left a number of people dead or injured, which we deplore."

Source: BBC



File Photo

Israeli tanks surround north Gaza's Indonesian Hospital

Israeli tanks have reportedly encircled Gaza's Indonesian Hospital, where the Hamas-run health ministry said 12 people were killed on Sunday night.

The hospital's director, Dr Marwan Al-Sultan, told the BBC that the post-operative care department was hit and troops were only about 20m (66ft) away.

On Monday evening, he said intermittent shooting could still be heard on site.

The Israeli military said its forces targeted "terrorists" who had opened fire at them from within the hospital.

The head of the World Health Organization (WHO) said he was "appalled".

"Health workers and civilians should never have to be exposed to such horror, and especially while inside a hospital," Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Health ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qudra accused Israel of "tightening its noose" around the hospital in the north of the enclave, and later told AFP news agency 200 patients had been evacuated by bus to Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis.

He said the International

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was helping to coordinate the evacuation of the remaining 400 patients.

Meanwhile, 28 premature Palestinian babies evacuated on Sunday from Gaza City's besieged Al-Shifa Hospital, which Israeli forces raided last week, have been transported to Egypt for treatment.

Israel launched a major military campaign in Gaza in response to a cross-border attack by hundreds of Hamas gunmen on 7 October, in which at least 1,200 people were killed and about 240 others taken hostage.

Gaza's health ministry says at least 13,000 people have been killed in the territory since Israel launched its retaliatory campaign against Hamas.

The UN Security Council has called for "urgent and extended humanitarian pauses" for "a sufficient number of days" to allow UN agencies to safely enter the sealed-off territory.

But five days on, the International Rescue Committee says the killing and suffering of Palestinians has increased, and has urged the Security Council and others to bring about a ceasefire "without limits on its duration, to protect

lives and allow aid to flow".

On Monday morning, video footage verified by the BBC showed several tanks stationed on a road about 240m (800ft) north-east of the Indonesian Hospital, which is funded by Indonesia.

The official Palestinian news agency, Wafa, cited medical sources as saying that dozens of Israeli armoured vehicles were in the surrounding area and that snipers were on rooftops, preventing ambulances from reaching the hospital.

The health ministry said 12 wounded patients and people with them were killed and dozens more were wounded when an Israeli shell reportedly hit the second floor of the facility.

Dr Al-Sultan told the BBC that he heard gunfire all around the building overnight and that at least 10 people were killed.

Al Jazeera posted a video that the Qatar-based network said showed journalist Anas al-Sharif walking through the hospital following the incident. The body of at least one person could be seen, as well as damage to ceilings and equipment in several rooms and corridors.

Sharif reported that "victims are piling up on the floor" and that there was "an overwhelming state

of panic among patients".

Hospitals are specifically protected under international humanitarian law. Any military operation around hospitals must take steps to spare patients, medical staff and other civilians inside them.

A spokesman for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said: "Overnight, terrorists opened fire from within the Indonesian Hospital in Gaza toward IDF troops operating outside the hospital. In response, IDF troops directly targeted the specific source of enemy fire. No shells were fired toward the hospital."

"Despite the challenges the IDF faces in a war against a terrorist organisation which operates out of hospitals, the IDF is committed to international law and takes numerous measures to minimize harm to non-combatants."

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden said he believed a deal to free hostages in Gaza was close, as the ICRC said its president had travelled to Qatar to meet with Hamas and Qatari government representatives.

US national security spokesman John Kirby said he believed "we're closer than we've ever been, so we're hopeful".

The ICRC does not take part in *Continued on page 13*



International

Israeli tanks surround north Gaza's Indonesian Hospital

Continued from page 12

negotiations leading to hostage releases but is there to facilitate any deal that is agreed.

That has been the process with the four hostages freed so far - Qatari negotiations with Hamas followed by the ICRC retrieving the hostages from agreed locations and bringing them back to Israel.

Qatar's prime minister has said a deal to free some of the hostages now hinges on "minor" practical issues.

On Sunday night, the IDF released new videos from Al-Shifa Hospital, where it has claimed there was a vast underground Hamas command centre.

It said one showed a tunnel leading to a blast-proof door and that two others taken from CCTV cameras showed two hostages - one of them wounded - being taken to the hospital on 7 October.

The IDF also said a pathologist's report and its intelligence had shown a female Israeli soldier

whose body was recovered from a building near Al-Shifa last week had been injured in an Israeli air strike and then killed by a member of Hamas inside the hospital.

Hamas has denied using Al-Shifa and other hospitals as shields for its fighters.

At the same time, the WHO has said it was finalising its plans to complete the evacuation of between 250 to 260 seriously wounded or ill patients trapped at Al-Shifa.

"These include around 29 patients with spinal injuries, 22 patients with kidney failure requiring kidney dialysis," the WHO's Regional Emergency Director, Dr Richard Brennan, told the BBC.

"The vast majority of the remaining patients have complicated war injuries - terrible fractures and amputations, bad burns, head, abdominal, chest injuries, and many of which are complicated by severe wound infection."

Thirty-one premature babies were evacuated from Al-Shifa to the Emirates Hospital in southern Gaza on Sunday by the Palestinian Red Crescent and UN, with the assistance of the IDF. At least five other babies had previously died after being removed from their incubators due to a lack of power after the hospital ran out of fuel.

On Monday, 28 of the evacuated babies were taken to Egypt via the Rafah border crossing for treatment. Some are being admitted to the hospital in El-Arish while others in more serious conditions are being flown to Cairo.

Dr Mohamed Salama, head of the neo-natal unit at al-Ahli Emirates hospital, told the BBC that the parents of two babies had refused to send them to Egypt "due to personal circumstances". A third baby was being kept in Gaza because his condition was stable and his parents were unknown, he said.

Dr Brennan described the evacuation as "one of the few bits of good news we've had during this conflict", but noted that the babies had "a long road ahead of them" to recover.

In a separate development, medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said its clinic in Gaza City came under fire on Monday morning.

"Our colleagues saw that a wall was torn down and part of the building was engulfed by fire as heavy fighting took place all around it. An Israeli tank was seen in the street," a statement said.

An MSF member of staff and 20 family members were in the clinic and in extreme danger; while 50 other people were in nearby buildings, it added.

There was no immediate comment from the IDF.

Source: BBC



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