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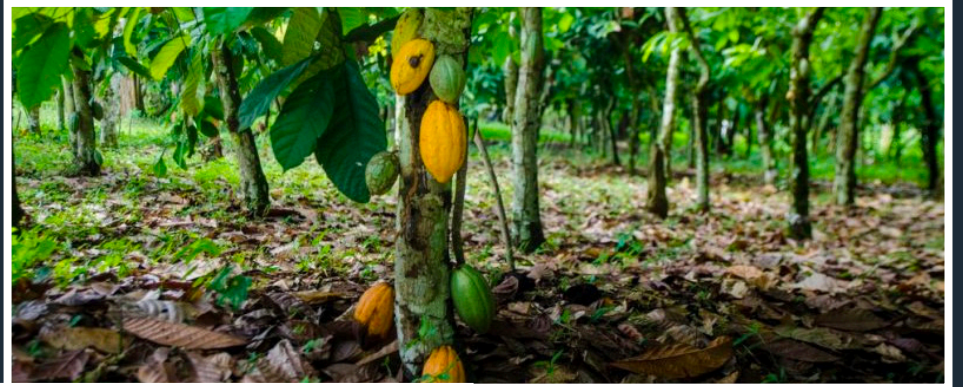


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# General News

## Gold stolen from Asanteman by British now worth over £2billion

Recent revelations suggest that the looted treasures during the Sagrenti War of 1874 in the Ashanti Kingdom by the British extended beyond mere artifacts.

During a keynote address at a symposium commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Sagrenti War of 1874 on February 6, 2024, the Head of the Centre of West African Studies at Birmingham University, Prof. Tom McCaskie, noted that a significant portion of the wealth amassed by Asantehene Kofi Karikari's predecessor, Nana Kwaku Dua I, was lost in the looting, with the entire city of Kumasi left in ashes.

"Kwaku Dua was somebody who really enforced the laws of Asante.

In the process, he gathered together a great deal of money in gold dust principally but also in species and other things," he said.

Expanding on the significance of the gold, the historian elucidated that a substantial sum of money was stored in three distinct locations within Kumasi: Kumasi itself, Aburaso, and Breman. This wealth had been passed down to Kofi Karikari following the death of Nana Dua in 1867.

"The amount of gold contained in Adakakese alone at Kwaku Dua's death was in excess of 400,000 ounces. This in 1867 was worth 1.2 million pounds sterling. The current value of the Adakakese is somewhere over 2 billion

pounds."

"The attempt to get back the treasures looted from Kumasi by Garnet Wolseley in 1874 takes no account—because it cannot—of the gold or gold dust that the British must have carried away with them. We don't know about this because it was loot, a private loot and so it is separate from the

cultural artefacts that Otumfuo is trying to retrieve for Asanteman," he added.

It is believed that the Asantes may be seeking restitution for more than just gold artifacts from the British.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey*



File Photo

## I will provide incentives to farmers to boost production if voted to power - Alan Kyerematen

Independent Presidential aspirant, Alan Kwadwo Kyerematen, has outlined a comprehensive vision to support farmers in the agricultural sector, promising transformative measures if successful in the upcoming 2024 elections.

Mr Kyerematen has pledged to provide incentives for farmers, with the aim of facilitating easier access to financing and subsequently boosting overall agricultural production.

Addressing the issue of produce wastage at farm gates due to transportation challenges, he has promised to implement measures to significantly reduce transportation and logistics costs.

The leader of the Movement for Change has also assured the public of his dedication to enhancing irrigation systems, vowing to introduce a novel financing scheme to elevate both agricultural production and productivity.

During an engagement with the media, Mr Kyerematen emphasized the importance of affordable agricultural financing, stating, "To reduce distribution

and transport costs, you have to provide incentives to improve the distribution and marketing regime. Agricultural production, number 1, is access to affordable agricultural financing."

The former Trade and Industry Minister further stressed the

need for a distinct financing approach, highlighting that a lending rate exceeding 9% would be unsustainable for agricultural productivity.

With a focus on addressing distribution challenges and bolstering irrigation, Mr

Kyerematen's outlined plan aims to reshape the agricultural landscape, promising a revitalized and competitive sector if he emerges victorious in the upcoming elections.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Sebastian Akaho-Tay*



Alan Kyerematen, Independent Presidential Aspirant

# General News

## Loss of experienced MPs every 4 years detrimental to Ghana's democracy - Speaker

Speaker of Parliament, Alban Sumana Kingsford Bagbin, has expressed concern over the loss of experienced Members of Parliament (MPs) during political party primaries held every four years, stating that it undermines Ghana's democracy.

Bagbin acknowledged that primaries are a fundamental aspect of the democratic process but emphasized that it is detrimental for seasoned MPs to be denied the opportunity to continue representing their constituencies.

He highlighted the significant cost to the country associated with this loss of experience.

The Speaker called upon political parties to urgently address this issue, emphasizing the importance of preserving the expertise and continuity that experienced MPs bring to governance.

"We woke up one Saturday and by the evening we've lost 28 MPs through the primaries of the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Earlier last year, we lost 17 MPs through the primaries of the National Democratic Congress ... the primaries are part of the process for the [voters] to determine who represents them in Parliament

but the case of voluntary discontinuance of MPs [from the House] is not a good signal for the legislature and for Ghana's democratic development," Bagbin says.

"Experience, as we all know, counts in this House, but the endorsement of your parties to contest is equally important. The

hemorrhage and cost to the nation is, however, a great concern worth considering by all stakeholders, and I want to appeal to the political parties to take this matter up seriously because the investment that is made in an individual MP is so huge for the nation just to go waste after every four years."

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Amanda Cartey*



*Alban Sumana Kingsford Bagbin, Speaker of Parliament*

## 7,135 food vendors certified by AMA

A total of 7135 food handlers received certificates from the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) in 2023. The certificates were issued following a mandatory medical health screening conducted at the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), where 8407 handlers participated. Out of this number, 6240 were females, while 2167 were males.

All participants belonged to the hospitality industry, including restaurants, drinking spots, pubs, and chop bars. From the total, 5,014 females and 1,121 males were deemed fit and issued suitability health and safety certificates.

Head of Public Affairs at AMA, Mr Gilbert Nii Ankrah, emphasized the importance of the screening exercise in maintaining high standards in the food industry. The initiative aims to enhance public confidence by minimizing potential health risks associated with food consumption.

"The screening included education

sessions on proper hygiene practices, nutrition, and general health awareness, covering various health parameters such as communicable diseases, hygiene-related illnesses, and overall physical fitness," explained Mr. Ankrah.

He further noted that out of the total number screened, 272 vendors were identified with

health concerns and provided with guidance and referrals to appropriate healthcare facilities for further evaluation and treatment.

Encouraging ongoing participation in health screening exercises, the AMA urged all individuals involved in food preparation, transportation, and sale across various establishments to undergo

regular health check-ups.

Despite the rigorous screening process, the cost of acquiring a food handler's certificate remained unchanged at GH¢60 for the 2024 fiscal year, ensuring accessibility for all stakeholders in the food industry.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Jessie Ola-Morris*



*AMA Office Building*

# General News

## Reduce jail term for LGBTQ members, prison could make them worse - Afenyo-Markin

Deputy Majority Leader Alexander Afenyo-Markin has expressed his opposition to an amendment proposed for the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, commonly known as the anti-gay bill. However, Parliament has proceeded to approve the amendment.

The approved amendment entails imposing a custodial sentence of up to six months on individuals who aid, facilitate, encourage, or promote LGBTQ activities. This amendment was proposed by co-sponsor of the bill, Sam George, who believes that stringent punishment is necessary to ensure compliance with the law once

enacted.

In the consideration stage of the amended bill, those found guilty of promoting LGBTQ activities will face a minimum sentence of three months and a maximum of six months, or a fine ranging from GH¢600 to GH¢1200.

Addressing Parliament, Mr Afenyo-Markin suggested, “we should rather look at one month and three months, instead of three months and six months. Yes, if the commensurate penalty unit cannot be defined within the context of the proposal which is two months and four months, then we should not go higher.”

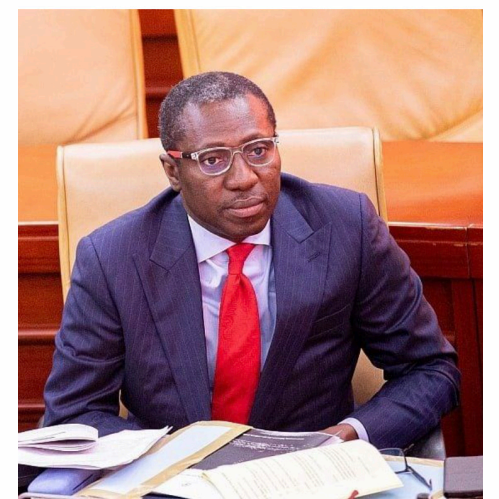
Regarding fines, he added, “the

court has a position on sentencing. It’s the reason why we have now introduced this plea bargain thing. The plea bargain in law that we have enacted is also aimed at dealing with some of these things. In even serious criminal matters, if the person is ready to pay to deal with the issue of the time for the trial and all, and also depopulate our prisons. Even when people go to prison, they become worse off, and a lot of studies have shown that.”

He emphasized the importance of retaining the option of a fine, stating, “this parliament must not depart from that. So please colleagues, we cannot do away with a fine. And we should not attempt

to say that merely being guilty of this should lead to imprisonment without an option for a fine. Let’s be careful.”

Source: *The Independent Ghana* / Amanda Cartey



Alexander Afenyo Markin, Deputy Majority Leader

## National Service will not be compulsory - Bawumia

Flagbearer of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) Vice President Dr Mahamudu Bawumia has revealed his intentions to make the mandatory National Service programme optional if voted into office after the 2024 general elections.

In his address to the nation at the University of Professional Studies (UPSA) in Accra, on Wednesday, February 7, Dr. Bawumia said this will aid the youth get jobs since companies will be encouraged to go to campuses for recruitment annually.

He emphasised that his government will propose that, those who can secure jobs after completion of their education would be exempted from National Service.

“National Service will no longer be mandatory. And students will have the option to decide whether to do national service or not. My government will propose that those who after completion of their education can secure jobs would be exempted from National Service,” Dr Bawumia said.

The National Service Scheme (NSS) in Ghana is a mandatory programme for all Ghanaian citizens who have completed

tertiary education.

Established by the National Service Act of 1980 (Act 426), the scheme aims to foster national unity and development by deploying graduates to serve in various sectors of the country’s economy.

National Service Personnel are

entitled to the payment of monthly allowances, the level of which is determined by the Ministry of Finance.

In July 2023, Management of the National Service Scheme (NSS) secured government approval for an upward adjustment of monthly allowances for National Service Personnel from GHS559.04 to

GHS715.57, effective January, 2023.

But under the current programme, National Service personnel continue to criticise the government over the delay in payment of allowances.

Source: *The Independent Ghana* / Andy Ogbarmey-Tetty



Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, Flagbearer NPP

# General News

## I've successfully restored Asante's soul and spirit - Otumfuo

Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the Ashanti overlord, has announced the successful restoration of Ashanti's spirit and soul by reclaiming artefacts looted from Kumasi approximately 150 years ago.

Seven artefacts, originally taken from Kumasi in 1874, were traced to the Fowler Museum in California, United States. Despite past unsuccessful attempts, including by Otumfuo Agyemang Prempeh II, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II successfully secured the artefacts.

A durbar of chiefs was convened at the Manhyia Palace to unveil the artefacts, coinciding with the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Sagrenti War in 1874. This event also marks the 25th anniversary of Otumfuo Osei Tutu II's ascension to the Golden Stool.

During the unveiling, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II emphasised the significance of the artefacts,

stating, "When we came here, Otumfuo, His Royal Majesty, and I will quote him.

He said that he has been able to return our (Asante) soul to its original place. The items are still items that have spiritual relevance to us. They are still active; they would be activated, and they would be used."

The facilitator of the artefact's return, Professor Kwasi Ampene from the Department of Music at Tufts University in Massachusetts, United States, expressed in an interview that the Asantehene is delighted with the return of the pure gold artefacts, considering them a restoration of the Asante soul to its original place.

Professor Ampene, a member of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, who extensively studied Asante culture, highlighted the spiritual significance of these items for the Asante Kingdom.

The returned artifacts include Asipim chairs made of silver, Sika Amena necklaces, armbands, and anklets – all crafted from pure gold. Another set of artifacts is anticipated from the British Museum in April this year, to be unveiled on May 12, 2024, during the Akwasidae Festival celebrations.

Professor Ampene commended Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II for initiating the return and

acknowledged Opemsuo Osei Tutu Ababio for his efforts in empowering the facilitation process. The Technical Advisor to the project, Ivor Agyemang Duah, stated that the artifacts will be accessible to the general public at the Manhyia Palace Museum once the museum undergoes rehabilitation.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe Martekie Doku*



Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Asantehene

## Organised Labour to go ahead with demo against VAT on electricity despite govt's suspension

The Greater Accra Organised Labour has called for a demonstration against the 15% VAT on electricity consumption, urging drivers, including the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU), to cease their work in solidarity.

Despite the government's suspension of the electricity tax, the union remains committed to carrying out the protest.

They argue that the government's official notification of the suspension has not been received by Organised Labour.

The union insists that only an official letter from the government retracting the VAT can halt the planned demonstration.

**Why did Organised Labour plan a protest?**

Organised Labour's protest stems from dissatisfaction with the government's decision to introduce a 15% VAT on electricity

consumption for residential customers.

Critics contend that the tax is perceived as unjust, burdensome, and lacking sensitivity to the challenges faced by citizens, especially the underprivileged and retirees.

The 15% VAT on electricity for

residential usage was implemented by the government as part of its strategy to boost revenue and address fiscal shortfalls.

The government clarified that the tax would affect only those customers consuming more than the lifeline units of 30 kilowatt-hours per month, which are subsidized for low-income

households.

Additionally, the government stated that the tax aims to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of the power sector, grappling with issues such as substantial debts, low tariffs, and technical losses.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo*



File Photo

# General News

## GRA dismisses claims of auctioning COCOBOD's agrochemicals, fertilizers

The Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) has dismissed claims suggesting it is auctioning agrochemicals, fertilizers, and related items due to COCOBOD's alleged failure to pay duties.

In an official statement, the GRA dismissed such reports as deceptive and urged the public to disregard them.

The statement clarified that the agrochemicals and other items were initially imported by COCOBOD, overstayed at the State Warehouse, and were consequently placed on the Uncleared Cargo List (UCL).

The GRA acknowledged COCOBOD's essential role in Ghana's economy and, despite

being gazetted as required by law, returned the essential commodities vital for COCOBOD's operations to them without auctioning, considering their significant contribution to the country's development.

The statement emphasized that COCOBOD has duly paid the necessary duties on the agrochemicals, and no COCOBOD agro product has undergone auction.

"Management of the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) has sighted a publication in the Herald newspaper on "GRA auctioning COCOBOD's chemicals, fertilizers, others" the statement, dated 2nd February 2024, read.

"The said article states that Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) is unable to pay import duties on some agrochemicals, fertilizers and implements to be used in enhancement of cocoa farming and this has led to an auction of these items by GRA resulting in dire implications to the cocoa season. Management would like to use this opportunity to state that, this article is disingenuous and misleading and seeks to draw conclusions not founded on fact," it added.

GRA urged the public to dismiss the inaccurate publication, emphasizing its commitment to fair application of tax laws while recognizing COCOBOD's significant contribution to the

country's development.

The GRA assured the public of its dedication to revenue mobilization with integrity, fairness, and professionalism.

**Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe Martekie Doku**



Ammishaddai Owusu-Amoah, Commissioner-General of GRA

## Over 500,000 hectares of cocoa farms destroyed by swollen shoot disease - COCOBOD

Chief Executive of Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD), Joseph Boahen Aidoo, has expressed concern over the severe impact of the Cocoa Swollen Shoot Viral Disease (CSSVD), revealing that more than 500,000 hectares of cocoa farms in Ghana have succumbed to the disease.

This disclosure poses a significant threat to the country's cocoa production.

During a panel discussion at a World Cocoa Foundation (WCF) partnership meeting in Amsterdam, Mr. Aidoo acknowledged the gravity of the challenge.

However, he offered assurances that comprehensive measures have been implemented to tackle the CSSVD issue and prevent further devastation.

In addition to CSSVD, Mr Aidoo emphasised the adverse effects of illegal mining and climate change on cocoa production in Ghana.

The unregulated mining industry is causing deforestation, soil degradation, and water pollution, negatively impacting cocoa tree growth.

Climate change, with rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall, and prolonged droughts, is further compromising cocoa tree health and reducing output.

To combat the CSSVD challenge, COCOBOD initiated the Cocoa Rehabilitation Programme in 2018.

This program aims to halt the spread of the disease, restore unproductive farms, and enhance the livelihoods of cocoa farmers.

Activities under the rehabilitation

program include identifying diseased farms, cutting down affected trees, replanting with disease-resistant cocoa varieties, compensating affected farmers, and promoting good agricultural practices.

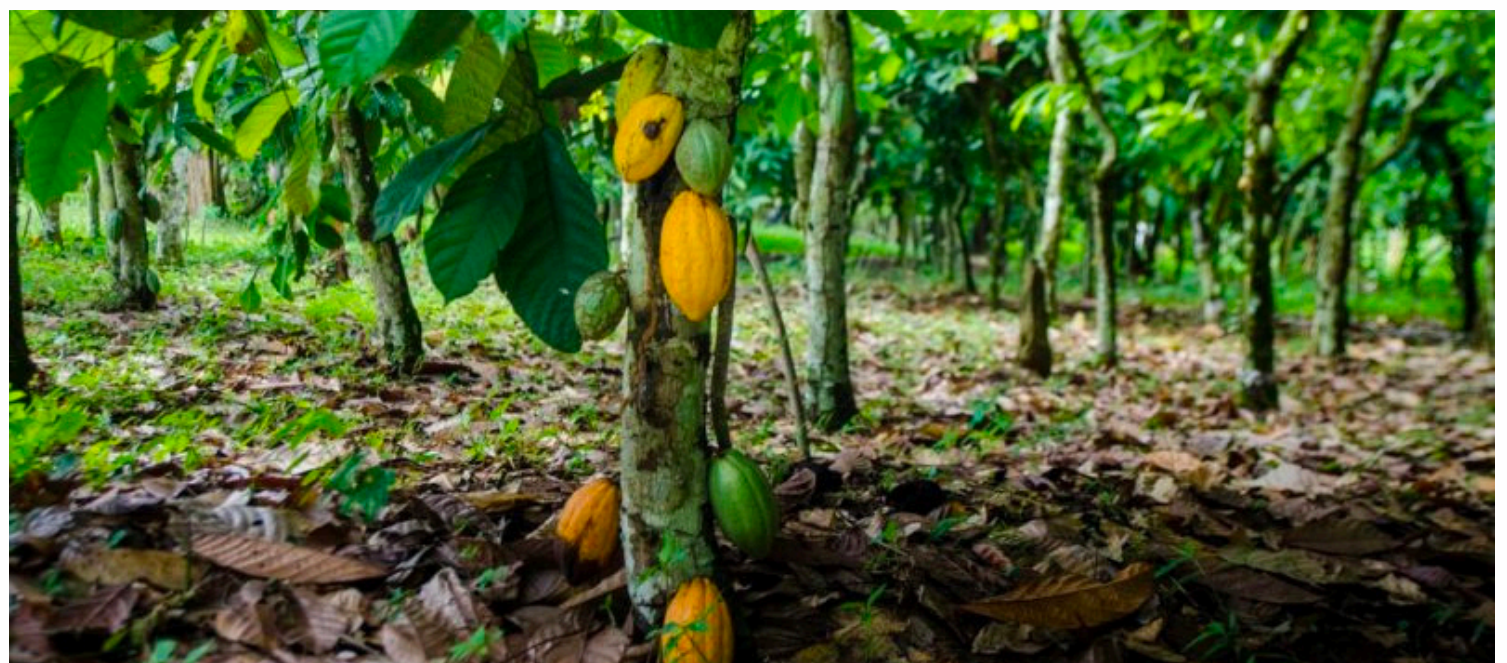
Mr Aidoo underscored the significance of ensuring sustainable incomes for cocoa farmers, citing initiatives like the Living Income Differential (LID) and recent substantial increases in Ghana's Producer Price for cocoa farmers as crucial steps

forward.

Despite these efforts, Mr. Aidoo stressed the necessity for a collective commitment across the industry to prioritise the sustainable incomes of cocoa farmers, backed by concrete actions to ensure their realization.

The Director General of Conseil du Café Cacao, Mr. Yves Brahima Koné, echoed concerns about the significant threat CSSVD poses to West African cocoa production.

**Source: The Independent Ghana / Sebastian Akaho-Tay**



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# Business

## Ghana made \$521m from oil revenue in second half of 2023

Ghana received over \$521 million into its Petroleum Holding Fund (PHF) for the second half of 2023, data from the latest Ghana Petroleum Holding Fund (PHF) semi-annual report.

According to the report, this marks a decline from the US\$696.82 million recorded in the corresponding period of 2022.

In accordance with Section 28 of the Petroleum Revenue Management Act, 2011 (Act 815), the recently released report offers comprehensive insights into Ghana's crude oil liftings and the allocation of revenue to the Ghana Petroleum Funds.

Per the data, Ghana's petroleum revenue performance showcased notable figures during the second half of 2023, with approximately \$319 million garnered from crude oil liftings between May and October of that year. Moreover,

corporate tax contributions totaling \$198 million stemmed from oil liftings by major entities including Kosmos Energy, Tullow Oil, and Petro SA.

In the same period, the Petroleum Holding Funds yielded \$3.3 million in interest, alongside an additional estimated income of \$112,082 from surface rental fees.

Ghana's investments in Petroleum Funds proved fruitful during the period, with the nation accumulating \$1.23 billion in earnings. Notably, the Ghana Stabilization Fund received \$159 million, while the Ghana Heritage Fund saw an influx of \$68 billion.

As per the provisions of the Petroleum Revenue Management Act, oversight of petroleum revenue falls under the purview of the Bank of Ghana, responsible for its reception and disbursement throughout the country.

The legislation mandates that a maximum of 70 percent of the benchmark revenue be directed to the Annual Budget Funding Amount, with no less than 30 percent allocated to the Ghana Petroleum Funds.

Upon transfer of funds into the Petroleum Funds, a minimum of 30 percent is allocated to the Ghana Heritage Fund, while the

residual balance is directed to the Ghana Stabilization Fund.

The report underscores the crucial role of adept management and efficient utilization of petroleum revenue in fostering sustainable development and economic advancement within Ghana.

**Source: The Independent Ghana/ Jessie Ola-Morris**



File Photo

## NLA was not consulted before enactment of betting tax - Sammi Awuku

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the National Lottery Authority (NLA), Sammi Awuku, has disclosed that the authority was not consulted prior to the enforcement of the 10 percent tax on betting and lottery winnings.

Government implemented the 10% betting tax in April 2023 through an amendment to the Income Tax Act 2023 (No. 2), Act 1094.

This tax is applicable to all gross gaming winnings from sports betting and lottery. The Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) began enforcing the 10% betting tax on August 15, 2023.

However, the CEO of the NLA, during an appearance on Adom TV's morning show, revealed that his office wasn't aware of the said tax but was only informed after the law had been passed.

According to him, the legislation was ratified in Parliament before involving his office. In August 2023, the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) informed sports

betting and lottery companies about the imposition of a 10% tax on all winnings.

"The law was passed before engagement with the NLA. GRA didn't consult us. We were consulted after it was passed in Parliament and it was too late. I would have suggested that we charge on a win of a threshold of about 30,000 cedis," he explained. Sammi Awuku also expressed concern about the many illegal lottery offices operating in the country.

He mentioned that a lot of these operators have support from powerful people in society.

"45% of our base is captured by illegal lottery operators. Some of the people who do illegal lottery operations are backed by influential people, which makes our work difficult because we only regulate 55% of general operations," he said.

The NLA boss called for "more consultations with stakeholders before (sic) laws are passed."

Meanwhile, the introduction of the

betting tax garnered dissatisfied reactions, especially among the Ghanaian youth, who accused the government of unfairly targeting their hard-earned winnings and reducing their chances of making profits.

Some experts doubt if the betting tax will really help the economy. They think it might not bring in as much money as the government hopes, and it could make people less interested in investing in gambling businesses.

They suggest the government should find other ways to make money that are more reliable and long-lasting.

But the Ghana Revenue Authority, which is in charge of implementing the betting tax, has defended the policy and said that it aims to improve revenue mobilisation and ensure compliance with the tax laws.

The Akufo-Addo government has reportedly introduced about 50 new taxes, such as the COVID\_19 Health Recovery Levy, since it assumed office.

Many Ghanaians have frowned upon and heartily criticised these taxes, as they believe they add to the already harsh impact of the ailing economy of the country.

**Source: The Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo**



Sammi Awuku, CEO, NLA



# International

## Putin challenger Boris Nadezhdin barred from Russia's election

Russia's election commission has rejected anti-war challenger Boris Nadezhdin as a candidate in next month's presidential vote.

Mr Nadezhdin has been relatively critical of Vladimir Putin's full-scale war in Ukraine when few dissenting voices have been tolerated in Russia.

Election authorities claimed more than 15% of the signatures he submitted with his candidate application were flawed.

He had tried to challenge this, but the commission rejected his bid.

Refusing to give up, Mr Nadezhdin, 60, said on social media that he would challenge the decision in Russia's Supreme Court.

The Central Election Commission said that of the 105,000 signatures submitted by Mr Nadezhdin, more than 9,000 were invalid and they cited a variety of violations.

That left 95,587 names, meaning he was just short of the 100,000 required signatures to register as a candidate, commission member Andrei Shutov said.

"There are tens of millions of people here who were going to vote for me," Mr Nadezhdin complained to the commission. "According to all polls, I am in second place after Putin."

"The decision has been made," declared commission chairwoman Ella Pamfilova. "If Nadezhdin

wants, he can go to court," Tass news agency quoted her as saying.

Russia's presidential election is due to take place from 15-17 March, although the result is not in doubt as only candidates viewed as acceptable to the Kremlin are running.

A final decision on who can take part in the election will come on Saturday, but the election commission chairwoman said it was already clear there would be four candidates on the ballot.

Other than Vladimir Putin, they include nationalist leader Leonid Slutsky, parliament deputy speaker Vladislav Davankov and Communist Nikolai Kharitonov. All their parties have broadly backed Kremlin policies and none of the trio is seen as a genuine challenger.

"Running for president in 2024 is the most important political decision of my life. I am not retreating from my intentions," Mr Nadezhdin wrote on Telegram. "I collected more than 200,000 signatures across Russia. We conducted the collection openly and honestly."

Boris Nadezhdin is one of the few government critics whose voices have been heard on the ubiquitous talk shows on state-run TV since the invasion on 24 February 2022. He has appeared as a type of anti-war "whipping boy" that other guests would target for criticism.

In the 1990s he worked as an

adviser for Putin critic Boris Nemtsov who was assassinated a stone's thrown from the Kremlin in 2015. But he also has ties to Sergei Kiriyenko, a key Putin political overseer.

Although Mr Nadezhdin's run for the presidency was viewed initially with suspicion by some opposition figures, Russia's main opposition leader Alexei Navalny gave his backing to the Nadezhdin campaign from his jail cell inside the Arctic Circle, as did exiled former business magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Mr Nadezhdin appeared on the BBC last month promising to end the war in Ukraine on his first day as president, although he was realistic about his chances of success.

"My first task will be to stop the conflict with Ukraine, and then to restore normal relations between Russia and the Western

community."

He is not the first presidential hopeful to have run on an anti-war platform. In December, former TV journalist and independent politician Yekaterina Duntsova was barred from running because the election commission said there were mistakes on her application form.

Mr Nadezhdin said he had tapped into a wave of anti-war sentiment in Russia, meeting the wives of reservists who want their husbands to return from the war. His campaign started slowly and it was only in recent weeks that Russians began registering their support in large numbers.

His increasing success also attracted condemnation from pro-Kremlin propagandists such as Vladimir Solovyov, who suggested he might be a stooge for "Ukrainian Nazis".

**Source: BBC**



*Boris Nadezhdin, Russian Anti-war Candidate*

## ECOWAS holds emergency session over Senegal crisis and member exits

West African foreign ministers are holding emergency talks on Thursday in Nigeria's capital Abuja to discuss the political crisis in Senegal and disputes with military rulers in three other member states.

The extraordinary session of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) follows President Macky Sall's sudden decision to delay elections in

Senegal, just a week after Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger declared they were quitting the bloc.

The ECOWAS Mediation & Security Council said ministers would gather to "discuss current security and political issues in the region".

It remains unclear whether representatives from the four countries being discussed are attending.

ECOWAS has urged Senegal – one

of its most stable member states – to return to its election timetable, but critics have already questioned the group's sway over increasingly defiant member states.

The turmoil has also brought the almost 50-year-old bloc's broader role into doubt, especially after its warning of military intervention in Niger last year fizzled out with no sign the country's toppled president is closer to being restored.

ECOWAS was formed in May 1975 in Lagos. The only other member to withdraw before now was Mauritania in 2000.

Senegal's troubles are a "new crisis ECOWAS doesn't need", Beninese political consultant Djidenou Steve Kpoton told the AFP news agency. "Its powerlessness in the face of the situation is self-evident."

Other analysts said they had confidence in the bloc's long-

*Continued on page 10*

# International

## ECOWAS holds emergency session over Senegal crisis and member exits

Continued from page 9

term ability to deal with regional problems through mediation. But with its reputation at stake, ECOWAS's handling of the latest political upheaval is being closely watched.

Protests broke out in Senegal this weekend when President Sall announced he was postponing the February 25 vote just hours before campaigning was set to begin.

Lawmakers voted almost unanimously in favour of the delay on Monday night after security forces stormed the chamber and removed some opposition members, who were unable to cast their votes. Across the country, citizens told Al Jazeera they are in shock and remain pensive about what could happen next.

The Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications also shut down mobile internet on the day of the parliamentary vote, citing security concerns. "Dear customers," read a text from phone provider Orange, "By decision

of the state, mobile internet is suspended by all operators."

Observers expressed concern that one of the region's most influential and stable members was tearing up the rule book, sparking violent protests and raising concerns about knock-on effects in the region.

### Sanctions and stability

In a statement late on Tuesday, ECOWAS cautioned Senegal against jeopardising "peace and stability" during difficult times for West Africa. But it was unclear what the bloc would do if President Sall defied its warning.

One power ECOWAS has at its disposal is imposing trade sanctions, as it did against Mali and Niger following recent coups.

But the sanctions have hit citizens hard and military regimes remain in place.

Last month, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, already suspended from ECOWAS, announced their

joint withdrawal, worsening a diplomatic headache for the bloc.

"I think there's still time to backpedal ... we can sit at a table and negotiate," former Malian Prime Minister Moussa Mara told Al Jazeera earlier this week. "That is what I wish for and appeal to our authorities to do, especially as ECOWAS have said they are willing to find a negotiated path forward and the AU [African Union] has pledged to mediate those talks."

Experts also say Senegal is still a long way off the stage where ECOWAS is likely to impose financial penalties.

"Sanctions cannot come in at this point," Idayat Hassan of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank based in Washington, DC, told AFP.

"What can come in is more mediation," she said, expressing confidence in the power of the bloc's backchannel diplomacy.

"ECOWAS is struggling, but it's

nothing new," she said, arguing it was important to take a long-term view of the organisation founded in 1975. "West Africa used to be one of the most coup-prone regions in the world before democratic consolidation began to set in."

While Hassan said there had been a relatively recent reversal, she argued ECOWAS had proven "adaptable, resilient, and able to deal with most of these challenges".

"It cannot be business as usual," said Rama Salla Dieng, a Senegalese lecturer in African Studies at Scotland's University of Edinburgh, who called for a public consultation on the bloc's role.

"We have to be very pragmatic," she said. "If people think that ECOWAS doesn't have a need to exist any more ... then do we still need ECOWAS?"

**Source: Al Jazeera and News Agencies**



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