

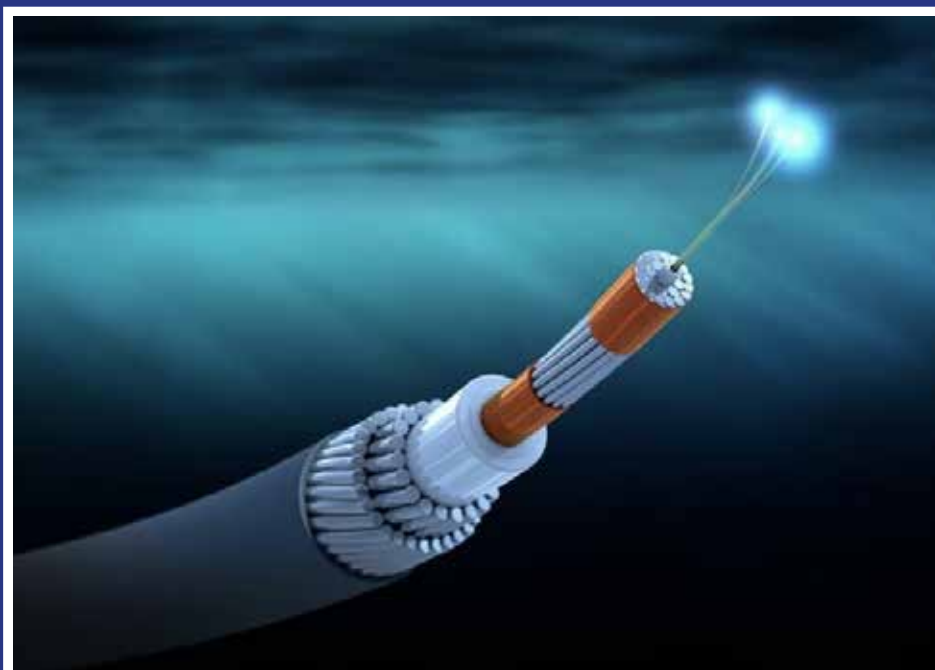


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General News

Ghana, African countries must invest in inland cables to avert network disruption - Internet Service Providers

A board member of the Internet Service Providers, Daniel Kofi Ansah Akuffo, has advocated for the exploration of inland cables in Ghana to mitigate potential disruptions in the telecommunications sector.

This proposal comes in light of ongoing outages affecting multiple submarine fibre optic cables, which serve as crucial conduits for internet connectivity in the country.

Mr. Ansah Akuffo described the gradual outages as hectic when he revealed that out of the five submarine cables supplying internet to Ghana, four are currently totally offline.

"It was a very hectic day for all of us. Ghana is supplied by five submarine cables and one is currently totally off and just about yesterday, some other three also went off. These cables ran from South Africa to Europe and what this means is that we should be looking at our telecommunication infrastructure."

Hetherecalledforimprovement in Ghana's telecommunication

infrastructure to reduce the impact of future blackouts.

"Diversification is very important and what I think we should do is look at in-land cables in Ghana and Africa as a whole. We should look at interconnectivity. One cable has about four set of fibre and so when there is a cut in one end, it becomes a problem, so what we are doing now is to use a cable from Nigeria to complement the challenges."

On Thursday, March 14, mobile network customers observed hours of disruption in internet, data and voice services providers by telecommunication companies in the country.

The difficulty experienced by companies and members of the general public has been attributed to outages on multiple submarines optic fibre cables that come into Ghana.

In a press statement, the Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications, noted that some of the cables were down while others continued delivering limited capacity.

"This is impacting internet, data and Voice over IP (VoIP) services of

the members of the Chamber; the Mobile Network Operators and the Data Service Providers to varying degrees. As a result customers and subscribers are currently experiencing service challenges," the statement noted.

The National Communications Authority (NCA) noted that the internet challenges go beyond Ghana's border.

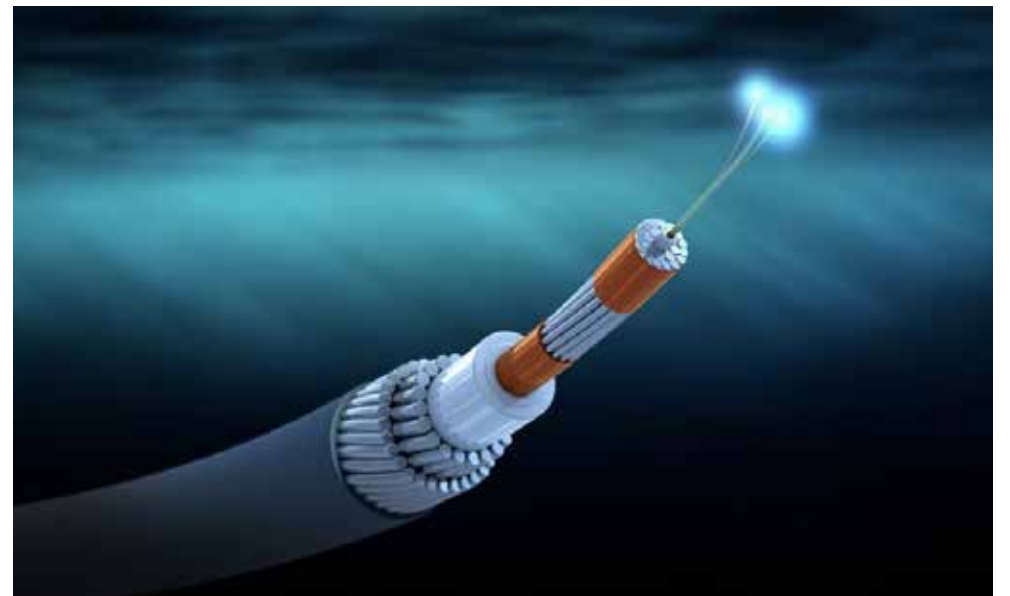
In a circular, the NCA indicated that the "disruptions affecting multiple undersea cables responsible for carrying international traffic have occurred in Senegal and Cote

d'Ivoire and with some disruptions in Portugal."

The Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications and NCA have both assured that further investigations are being carried out as well as work to resolve the problems to restore services to customers.

"The inconvenience to customers is deeply regretted" the statement drafted by the Telecommunications Chamber concluded.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tetty



File photo

Volta coastline recorded 14 tidal wave destructions between January 2017 and February 2024

Member of Parliament for Keta, Kwame Dzudzorli Gakpey, has noted that the people living around the Volta Coastline have experienced 14 tidal wave destructions within the span of 7 years.

In an address to parliament, the Minister indicated that its impact on the communities along the coast has increased significantly, but the government has turned deaf ears to their plight.

Mr Speaker, in recent years, the frequency of tidal wave destruction and its impact on communities along the coast have increased significantly, but the government's

apparent indifference to the plight of our people is deeply troubling.

Mr Speaker, between January 20 2017 and February 2024 alone, a total of 16 tide wave destructions occurred along the coast of Keta Anglo and Ketu South," Mr Gakpey stated.

Residents living along the coast in Keta and its adjoining communities have once again been hit with devastation caused by tidal waves.

At dawn on February 16, residents were met with a distressing sight of their homes inundated with seawater, exacerbating the

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Keta coastline



General News

Volta coastline recorded 14 tidal wave destructions between January 2017 and February 2024

- Continued from page 2

deterioration of already crumbling structures due to years of enduring tidal waves and their aftermath.

According to some residents interviewed by Citi News, the situation has reached an

intolerable level, prompting urgent calls for a resolution to halt the ongoing crisis.

"The tidal waves have since been worrying us. Last year, we had to suffer from this phenomenon, and this year, we have started

experiencing the same problems. We want the authorities to take urgent steps quickly to ensure this does not affect many people.

"We are also appealing for dredging along the coast. It has been affecting our businesses as

well. The trees here have also been submerged in the sea," a resident lamented.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Amanda Cartey

Saglemi House project has no potable water, electricity to accommodate Akosombo Dam spillage victims – Oppong-Nkrumah

Minister for Works and Housing-designate, Kojo Oppong-Nkrumah, has clarified that the Saglemi Affordable Housing Project is unsuitable for relocating Akosombo Spillage victims due to inhabitable conditions.

Speaking to the media, he emphasized the facility lacks essential amenities like clean water, electricity, and sewage facilities.

According to him, government is committed to providing affected residents with housing equipped with these necessities.

Mr Oppong-Nkrumah's statement came in response to queries from the North Tongu MP regarding the lack of accommodation for victims of recent VRA-induced floods at the Saglemi Housing Project.

"The government prioritizes ensuring that individuals affected by the Spillage have access to essential amenities such as potable water, electricity, and basic sewage systems. Currently, the Saglemi Affordable Housing Project lacks these necessities, rendering it uninhabitable," he explained.

He assured the House of the government's dedication to securing suitable accommodation for the victims.

"Rest assured, the government is committed to facilitating access to decent housing for those affected by the dam spillage. Provision has been made in the 2024 Budget to support the victims, including housing provisions."

"In preparation for government intervention, the Ministry of Works and Housing has collaborated with

the Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority (LUSPA) to develop a roadmap for the provision of affordable housing," he added.

Saglemi Housing project is a public housing project located in Prampram in the Ningo Prampram District in the Greater Accra Region.

The National Democratic Congress (NDC) under John Mahama started the project in 2012 to curb the accommodation deficit in Ghana.

Following a Parliament's approval on October 13, 2012, in line with Article 181(1) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana.

The Ministry of Finance on January 4, 2013, signed a facility agreement

for the release of \$200 million to fund the construction of the 5,000 housing units.

Collins Dauda who was the then Minister for Water Resources, Works and Housing signed the Engineering Procurement and Construction Agreement with Construtora OAS Ghana Limited, represented by Clocanas.

As a result, former President John Dramani Mahama cut the sod for the first phase of the Housing Project in November 2013.

The 300-acre housing development, consisting of 1,502 units ranging from one to three-bedroom apartments and townhouses, is currently 80

percent finished. It is slated for imminent occupation, with the aim of significantly alleviating the nation's housing shortage.

Originally intended to encompass 5,000 residential units, the project covers a vast 300-acre expanse of land. Designed to cater to individuals with modest incomes, the housing complex was planned to be executed in four phases, as per the government's agreement.

The completion of phase one involved the construction of 180 blocks, resulting in over 1,500 flats being made available for occupancy.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe Martekie Doku



Kojo Oppong-Nkrumah, Minister for Works and Housing-designate



General News

Be ready to sacrifice your “fat allowances” when Akufo-Addo signs anti-LGBTQ bill – Obuasi West MP tells colleagues

The Chairman of Parliament's Finance Committee, Kwaku Kwarteng, has stressed the importance of financial resilience for Ghana amidst the ongoing tension surrounding the passage of the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, popularly known as the Anti-LGBTQ+ Bill.

Expressing his support for the bill, the Obuasi West MP, highlighted the need for behavioral change among lawmakers and citizens. He called on Members of Parliament to lead by example by sacrificing their privileges, such as hefty allowances, and for companies to fulfill their tax obligations diligently.

This, he believes, will bolster Ghana's fiscal resilience.

He emphasized that Ghana's sovereignty should not only be defined by debates surrounding LGBTQ+ activities but also by the unity of Ghanaians under a common banner to collectively build and strengthen the nation.

“I will be happy if the President signs the bill into law, but it must come with behavioural change. MPs must be willing to sacrifice

their fat allowances, and companies who default in paying taxes must religiously pay them otherwise, a time will come when we will go broke and despite claiming to be a sovereign country we will accept what we don't like,” he said.

“...”We realise that we are a sovereign country, and we don't want people to be telling us what we need to do; that is all right. So let us ride on the back of this LGBTQ+ issue and use the emotion and passion, given that we are a sovereign country wanting to protect our culture. We have these people who have been ‘feeding us’ and are now trying to tell us what to do; we won't even accept their food anymore.”

On Wednesday, February 28, Parliament unanimously passed the Anti-LGBTQ+ bill after completing the third reading.

The bill has been a subject of intense debate and discussion since its introduction to the legislature three years ago. Proponents argue that it is necessary to uphold cultural and religious values, while opponents argue that certain provisions violate human rights

and promote discrimination.

Since its passage, many opponents have expressed their displeasure, with some civil society groups threatening legal action should President Akufo-Addo assent to the bill for it to become law.

President Akufo-Addo has withheld his decision to assent to the bill owing to the fact the constitutionality of the anti-LGBTQ bill is being looked at by the Supreme Court.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey



Kwaku Kwarteng, Chairman of Parliament's Finance Committee

REGSEC lifts ban on Borteyman lands

The Greater Accra Regional Security Council (REGSEC) has officially lifted the ban on access to the Borteyman enclave and its surrounding lands.

Minister-designate for the Interior ministry, Henry Quartey, made the announcement during a meeting at the Greater Accra Regional Coordinating Council (RCC), where a comprehensive plan of the area was presented by the Lands Commission.

“We have formally lifted the security ban that restricted access to the Borteyman enclave and its adjoining lands. Therefore, land and property owners within the enclave are now free to access their properties,” stated Mr Quartey.

Attendees at the meeting included representatives of the Nungua stool lands, officials of the Lands Commission, members of the Greater Accra Regional Coordinating Council, and staff of the Nungua Traditional Council.

Following deliberations at a meeting held on February 8, 2024, REGSEC have decided to task the Lands Commission with presenting the status of affairs and demarcation of boundaries following a court ruling on land ownership.

The Survey and Mapping Division of the Lands Commission carried out the demarcation exercise to clarify the subject matter of the court

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Henry Quartey, Minister-designate for the Interior ministry



General News

REGSEC lifts ban on Borteyman lands

- Continued from page 4

judgment, identifying boundaries encompassing 465 acres, 114.33 acres, and 62.04 acres, as specified in court judgments.

Speaking to the media, Technical Director of Lands at the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, Maxwell Adu Nsafoah, confirmed that the Lands Commission submitted a report on the demarcation of the land to the

Minister for further action.

Chief Examiner at the Survey and Mapping Division of the Lands Commission, Robert Hackman Antwi, presented the composite plan, detailing adjustments in land measurements based on the site plans utilized.

Nii Bortey Okplen Djalesane II, Oblantai Mantse of the Nungua

Traditional Area, expressed gratitude for the efforts of the Lands Commission, Ministry of Lands, and REGSEC in addressing the land dispute, which had persisted for 23 years, acknowledging the challenges encountered along the way.

In February 2016, REGSEC, under the chairmanship of the then Greater Regional Minister,

designated Borteyman and its neighboring areas as security zones due to intelligence suggesting potential clashes between Top Kings and Empire Builders, embroiled in a longstanding land dispute.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe Martekie Doku

Reverend Fathers, Sisters, training to participate in 2024 elections as monitors

President of the Conference of Major Superiors Religious-Ghana (CMSR-GH), the Very Reverend Paul Saa-Dade Ennin SMA, has announced plans for the Conference to collaborate with the Electoral Commission, enabling its members to serve as monitors for the 2024 elections.

"This initiative forms a key part of our strategy for the 2024 elections. In addition to our prayers as reverends and sisters, we are committed to taking tangible actions. We are currently training our members so that they can obtain accreditations to serve as monitors during the elections," stated Rev. Ennin.

Speaking at the conclusion of a five-day preliminary biannual CMSR-GH meeting held from March 11-15, 2014, at the Arnold Jassen Spirituality Centre in Bortianor Hills, Accra, Rev. Ennin emphasized the broad reach of CMSR-GH members across the country, expressing confidence that their involvement would facilitate the gathering of firsthand information on election proceedings to inform stakeholders effectively.

CMSR-GH serves as the umbrella body representing leaders of reverend fathers, brothers, and sisters from congregations of the Catholic Church in Ghana.

Rev. Ennin urged election stakeholders, including security agencies, political parties, the media, Peace Council, and the Electoral Commission, to take proactive measures to prevent

any actions or inactions that could incite violence.

Furthermore, he cautioned members of the public against allowing themselves to be manipulated by politicians into engaging in violence before, during, or after the elections.

"To the citizens and voters, any

individual or group willing to resort to violence for power cannot be trusted or entrusted with authority. No one should lose their life exercising their constitutional right to vote for their governance," he stressed.

Rev. Ennin strongly denounced vote-buying during elections,

asserting that accepting money or gifts in exchange for votes amounts to compromising one's integrity.

Additionally, he announced plans to undertake a series of activities to advocate against illegal mining and land sales in the country.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Amanda Cartey



File photo



General News

21 dead in ghastly accident on Accra-Kumasi highway

A gory accident involving three vehicles on the Kumasi-Accra highway has claimed the lives of 21 passengers and left several others injured.

The March 15th incident saw a Sprinter bus and another mini-bus on the Breku stretch collide head-on with 14 people dying on the spot, according to reports.

According to eyewitnesses, the unfortunate incident occurred due to over speeding and overtaking by one

of the two drivers, who are said to be deceased.

Sources say seven lives were lost at the Juaso and Konongo Government Hospitals, where the victims had been transported to for medical attention.

Per reports, another accident occurred as a motorist failed to take notice of the mangled Sprinter bus and mini-bus, leading to the death of one

Bodies of the deceased have since been deposited at the Yawkwei Steward Mortuary and Konongo Government Hospital, with survivors undergoing treatment at various health institutions.

Source: The Independent Ghana



Accident Scene

Network crisis affecting Ghana, Ivory Coast, others to be resolved in at least 5 weeks - NCA

The National Communications Authority (NCA) has updated the public on the current network crisis that has negatively affected Ghana and other countries such as Togo, Ivory Coast, Liberia..

The Authority on Saturday afternoon held a face-to-face meeting with all four (4) subsea cable landing service providers (ACE, MainOne, SAT-3 and WACS); and the three (3) mobile network operators (AT, MTN and Telecel).

The meeting was attended by the top management of the above providers and operators to receive updates and to discuss the way forward.

The subsea cable landing service providers, according to the NCA, have remotely identified the approximate locations of the damage and have made preparations to dispatch repair vessels to the location for physical assessment and restoration.

Following this the subsea cable landing service providers have indicated an estimated time frame of a minimum of five (5) weeks for full service restoration from the time the vessels are dispatched to the various locations.

The NCA has noted that it continues to collaborate with relevant stakeholders as "We expect some improvement in data services in the coming days while the operators work around the clock to restore full connectivity."

"The NCA encourages MNOs, Internet Service Providers, and all other providers to actively participate in the operations of the Ghana Internet Exchange (GIX) in order to ensure an efficient local content delivery and a seamless Internet traffic exchange locally, "

the NCA's statement added.

New developments will be communicated when available, the Authority assured.

Source: The Independent Ghana



File photo



General News

Education Ministry tackles furniture deficit at Asuom SHS

Students of Asuom Senior High School can now study in a conducive environment as the Ministry of Education has donated 400 tables and chairs to the school to address the shortage of furniture.

Two alumni of the school, Maxwell Atuanor Dwirah and Owusu-Amponsah Williams, both of 1993 Year Group, reached out to the Education Minister, Dr Yaw Osei Adutwum over the school's challenges.

Dr Yaw Osei Adutwum was informed that there was pressure on the school's infrastructure owing to the increase in enrolment due to the government's Free Senior High School programme.

Following the engagement, the

Education Minister tasked the logistics department of the Education Ministry to send 400 beds to the school, as part of their request, to improve their situation.

On their part, Maxwell Atuanor Dwirah and Owusu-Amponsah Williams expressed appreciation to Dr Osei Adutwum for the timely role out of his duties as Education Minister.

They called on other old students of Asuom Senior High to rally support to improve the conditions of the school, especially in the areas of renovation of the Dining/ Assembly Hall, and the dormitories.

Source: The Independent Ghana



400 tables and chairs for Asuom SHS

Enough of the insults, you don't pay us - National Peace Council tells Ghanaians

Board chairman of the National Peace Council (NPC), Rev Dr Ernest Adu Gyamfi, has expressed dissatisfaction over the persistent bribery and corruption allegations meted out to the council.

According to him, the Council is rendering voluntary services to the country stressing that accusations of financial misconduct are unfounded and unjust.

Dr. Gyamfi emphasized that neither himself nor any other council members receive any compensation for their efforts.

"They don't pay anybody at the peace council, and Ghanaians don't understand, so they always accuse us of taking money, cars, and other things, and they always insult us," he added.

Speaking to the media, he dismissed rumors of financial incentives, stating, "But none of us are being paid; it is purely voluntary work. All the pastors are working, so those outside claiming the Peace Council has received money and other benefits are entirely false. Someone like Archbishop Duncan-Williams, what kind of bribe are you going to give to him?"

He emphasized the council's commitment to serving the country and disregarded insults directed at them, stating, "We are simply serving the country, so those who insult us are simply wasting their time; that's why we remain silent when they insult us."

The National Peace Council plays a crucial role in fostering cooperation among stakeholders in peacebuilding efforts in Ghana.

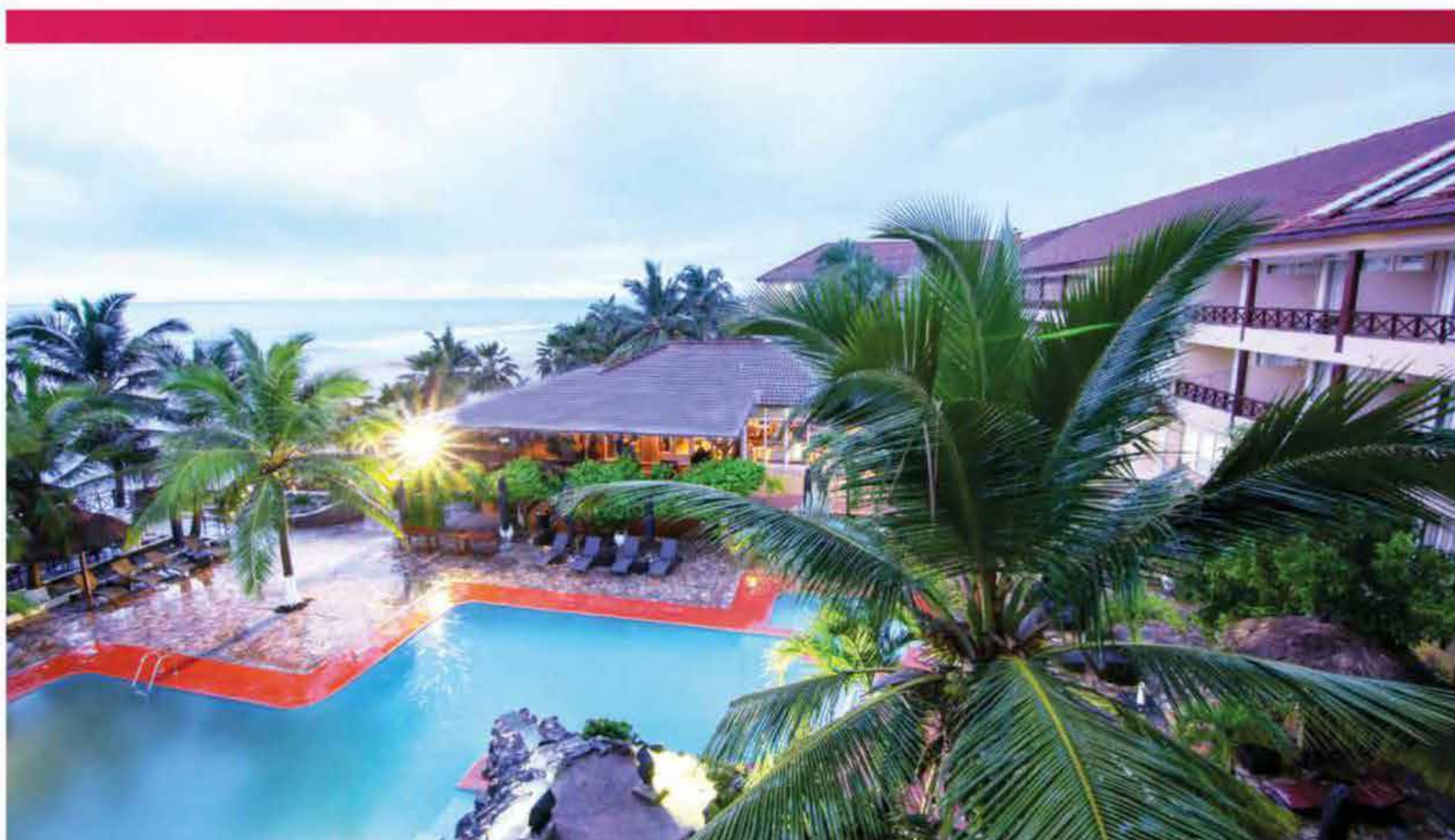
Its primary focus lies in promoting collaborative problem-solving methods to address conflicts, institutionalizing processes for

responding to conflicts, and facilitating outcomes that result in conflict transformation, social cohesion, and reconciliation across diverse sectors.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe Martekie Doku



Rev Dr Ernest Adu Gyamfi, Board chairman of the National Peace Council (NPC)



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Business

IMF boss arrives in Ghana to engage Akufo-Addo, others over economic growth, AI Conference

Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Kristalina Georgieva, has arrived in Ghana, marking her first official visit to the country.

Madam Kristalina Georgieva was accompanied by the Director of Africa Department at the Fund, Abebie Selassie, Stéphane Roudet, IMF Mission Chief for Ghana and other officials as she expects to hold talks with President Akufo-Addo and Vice President Dr Mahamudu Bawumia.

Madam Georgieva will also meet with the Minister of Finance, Dr. Mohammed Amin Adam, and the Governor of the Bank of Ghana, Dr Ernest Addison.

As part of her itinerary, the IMF boss will on Monday, March 18, 2024,

attend an Artificial Intelligence (AI) conference jointly organised by the Ministry of Finance and her organisation, the International Monetary Fund under the theme, "AI as a Catalyst to Transform Economies in Sub-Saharan Africa".

Madam Georgieva will also be meeting with selected Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and women groups.

In 2023, Ghana secured a \$3 billion IMF extended credit facility (ECF) after then Minister of Finance, Ken Ofori-Atta, was authorized by President Akufo-Addo on July 1, 2022, to commence formal negotiations with the IMF to secure a balance of payment support and resolve Ghana's economic crisis impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the geopolitical armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Ghana's three-year-IMF programme is in its first year of implementation, with the nation so far, receiving a total of \$1.2 billion from the IMF in two payment tranches of \$600 million each.

It is expected that during Madam

Georgieva's stay in Ghana, the IMF and the government officials will be seeking ways through which they can consolidate collaboration to see Ghana through her current programme with the Fund.

Source: The Independent Ghana



Kristalina Georgieva in a chat with Dr. Mohammed Amin Adam

Ghana, Ivory Coast scaling down cocoa production over high cost of beans - Reports

Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, the world's largest cocoa producers, have either halted or reduced processing in major plants due to soaring bean costs, leading to a global increase in chocolate prices, Reuters has reported.

The two West African nations, which together produce nearly 60% of the world's cocoa, have been grappling with extreme weather changes and cocoa pod diseases for several months, according to a report by the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) published on Tuesday.

Cocoa supplies from Cote d'Ivoire between October 2023 and February 2024 dropped by approximately 39% compared to the previous year, totaling 1.04 million metric tons, Afreximbank reported. Meanwhile, Ghana's exports decreased by about 35% to 341,000 metric tons between September 2023 and January 2024.

Benchmark cocoa futures for March

delivery on the Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) in New York surpassed \$6,000 per metric ton last Friday before easing to around \$5,880 per ton, still surpassing the previous record high of \$5,379 set in 1977.

Industry analysts have warned that bean prices could continue to rise due to the global supply threat posed by the weather phenomenon El Nino, which caused droughts in West Africa in the third quarter of 2023 and is expected to persist until April.

"We need massive demand destruction to catch up with the supply destruction," Reuters quoted Steve Wateridge, director of Tropical Research Services, as saying.

Transcao, a state-owned cocoa processor and one of Ivory Coast's nine plants, has stated that it cannot afford to purchase beans at current prices and is relying on existing stock. Global trader Cargill has also faced challenges in sourcing beans for its major processing plant in

Ivory Coast, leading to a shutdown of operations for about a week last month, according to anonymous sources cited by Reuters.

In Ghana, the world's second-largest cocoa grower, the majority of its eight plants, including the state-owned Cocoa Processing Company (CPC), have repeatedly suspended operations for weeks since last October, as reported by the news agency. CPC has indicated that it

is operating at only about 20% capacity due to the shortage.

Last week, Michele Buck, CEO of American candy giant Hershey and one of the world's largest chocolate manufacturers, forecasted that "historic cocoa prices" would restrict earnings growth in 2024, potentially resulting in product price increases.

Source: The Independent Ghana



File photo



International

Niger ends military agreement with US, calls it 'profoundly unfair'

Niger's military government announced that it has ended an accord with the US that allowed military personnel and civilian staff from the Department of Defense to operate in Niger – days after holding high-level talks with US diplomatic and military officials this week.

"The government of Niger, taking into account the aspirations and interests of its people, decides with full responsibility to denounce with immediate effect the agreement relating to the status of military personnel of the United States and civilian employees of the American Department of Defense in the territory of the Republic of Niger," Niger military spokesman Colonel Major Amadou Abdramane said in a statement on national television announcing the change.

Abdramane added that the agreement between the two

countries – signed in 2012, was imposed on Niger and had been in violation of the "constitutional and democratic rules" of the West African nation's sovereignty.

"This agreement is not only profoundly unfair in its substance but it also does not meet the aspirations and interests of the Nigerien people," he said.

Niger was once a key regional partner for the US, but relations have deteriorated since the military junta claimed power in July 2023 in what the US formally designated as a coup.

Since then, the US has withdrawn many of its 1,100 troops who were stationed in Niger. Senior Pentagon officials believe that keeping a presence in Niger is vital to efforts to tackle terrorism in the region. In October, the Pentagon said it was still assessing how the change would impact approximately 1,000

US forces stationed in the country.

In a letter sent to Congress in December 2023, President Joe Biden noted that approximately 648 US military personnel remain deployed to Niger.

'Condescending attitude'

The announcement comes after a senior US delegation's three-day visit to Niger this week.

Abdramane said that the US delegation was received out of "courtesy" and "did not respect diplomatic practices" by not providing information regarding the date of its arrival, the composition of the delegation and the purpose of the visit.

During meetings, Nigerien and American officials discussed the military transition in Niger and military cooperation between the two countries, Abdramane said.

"The government of Niger regrets the desire of the American delegation to deny the Nigerien people the right to choose their partners and the types of partnerships capable of helping them truly fight against terrorists," Abdramane said.

Abdramane said Niger "forcefully denounces the condescending attitude" of the US.

"This attitude is likely to undermine the quality of our centuries-old relations and undermine the trust between our two governments," he said.

He also rejected what he said were allegations of a secret deal made between Niger, Russia, and Iran.

CNN said it has reached out to the US Department of Defense for comment.

Source: CNN



Niger military spokesman Colonel Major Amadou Abdramane

International

Russia election: Arrests for vandalism as ballot boxes targeted in Putin vote

Several people have been detained for vandalism at polling stations on the first day of voting in presidential elections, Russian officials say.

Incidents involved green dye being poured into ballot boxes, the boxes being set alight and fireworks being set off inside polling stations, state media reported.

Vladimir Putin is certain to win six more years in office after the vote. However, officials have called on law enforcement officers to be vigilant.

Voting is taking place in Russia over three days until Sunday. The result is not in doubt as Mr Putin has no credible opponent, however state-run media said that turnout had reached 23% by late afternoon in Moscow.

Most of the incidents were reported at polling stations in Moscow, Voronezh in south Russia, and the

region of Karachay-Cherkessia in the north Caucasus, according to state news agency Tass.

BBC Verify has so far verified footage of six incidents across Russia, including a video showing a woman throwing a petrol bomb near a St Petersburg polling station.

Other authenticated videos showed paint being poured into ballot boxes at various polling stations. In one, a woman could be seen pouring bright green liquid into a box in Moscow. Another showed a fire breaking out at a voting booth.

Russia has also enforced the vote in occupied areas of Ukraine - in the small town of Skadovsk, Russian-appointed officials said an improvised device exploded in a rubbish bin in front of a polling station, but no one was hurt.

At least eight people have been arrested although officials have not said if the acts of vandalism were

protests against Mr Putin.

According to some videos posted on Telegram, some of the people who vandalised the ballot boxes reportedly shouted pro-Ukrainian slogans.

The deputy chairman of Russia's Central Election Committee, Nikolay Bulayev, said on Friday there had been five incidents involving liquids being poured into ballot boxes.

According to Interfax news agency, the liquid was zelyonka ("brilliant green" in English) dye, which is an antiseptic solution but has been used in protests in Russia and Ukraine.

Election Commission chief Ella Pamfilova described the saboteurs as "scumbags" and said some of those detained for vandalising the boxes with dye admitted that they had done it for money. They could be jailed for up to five years, she

added.

One of those detained had been promised 100,000 roubles (£850; \$1,080), she was quoted as saying.

Yulia Navalnaya, the widow of Mr Putin's most vocal critic, has called on Kremlin opponents to go en masse to polling stations at noon on Sunday to protest against the election. Her husband, Alexei Navalny, died suddenly in an Arctic Prison last month.

Ms Navalnaya has urged the West not to recognise Mr Putin's fifth term as president and Nato's secretary general has said the vote will not be free and fair.

Polling stations opened in the Kamchatka Peninsula, Russia's easternmost region, at 08:00 local time on Friday (20:00 GMT on Thursday) and will finally close in the westernmost Kaliningrad exclave at 20:00 on Sunday.

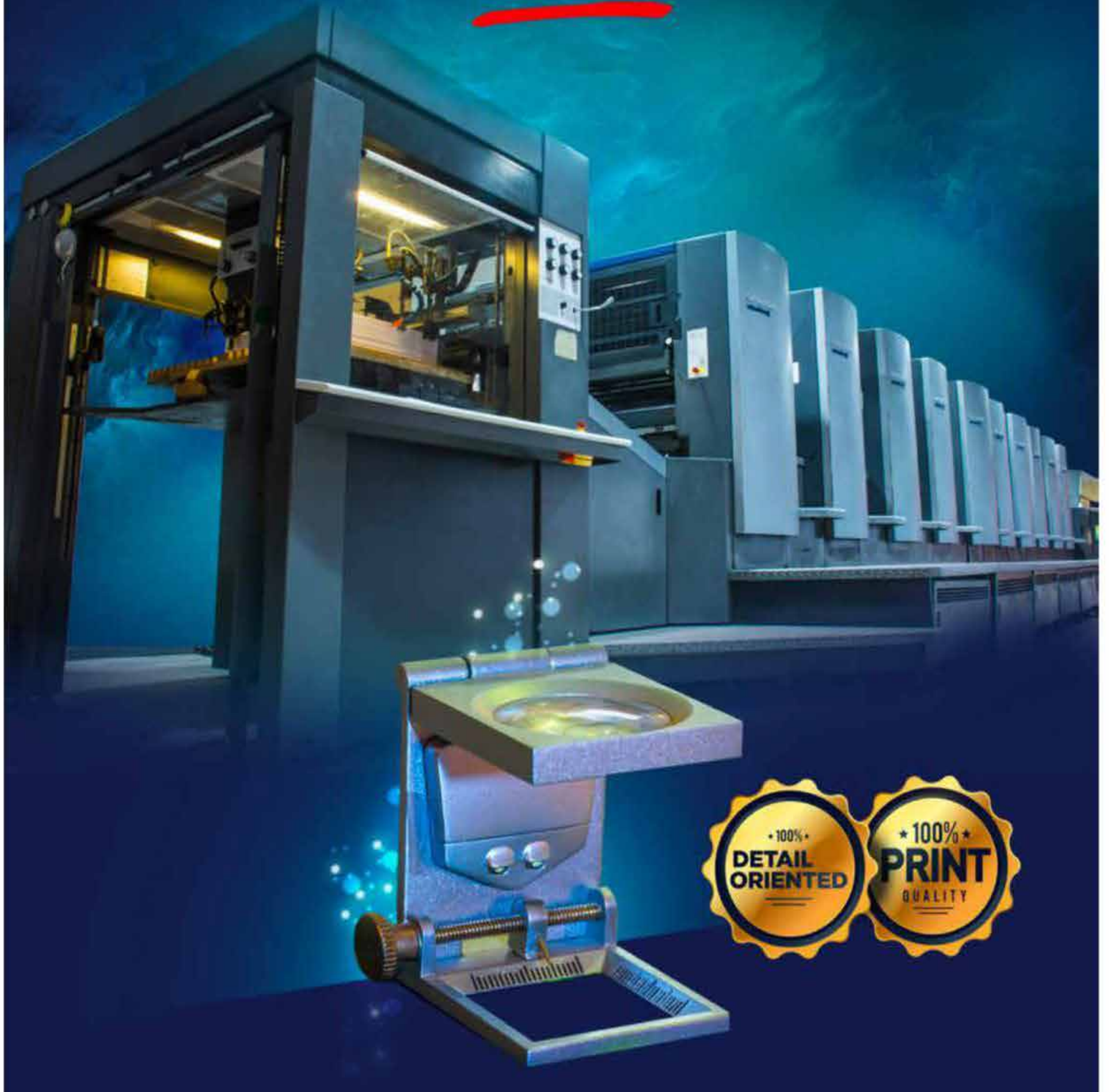
Source: BBC



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