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General News

Pay road contractors what you owe them - Asantehene to Roads Minister

Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, has called on the government to revamp its financial dealings with road contractors to prevent the neglect of road construction projects due to delayed payments.

During an encounter with Francis Asenso Boakye, the newly appointed Minister for Roads and Highways, at the Manhyia Palace on March 18, the Asantehene expressed his concerns.

"It is not good to hold contractors up in waiting when it comes to payment. Put measures in place to deal with these incidents as you take over," he stated.

The Asantehene disclosed his observations about the Kuntense road, noting its poor condition and the absence of the assigned contractor, attributing it to payment issues.

He suggested implementing a staggered payment approach to ensure regular financial support for contractors, thus aiding them in adhering to project timelines.

Emphasizing the vital contribution of road infrastructure to Ghana's

socio-economic growth, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II highlighted the Ministry of Roads and Highways' duty to focus on constructing and maintaining key road networks across the country.

He underscored the necessity of

expedient payments to contractors to tackle their prevalent difficulties and to guarantee the standard and longevity of road constructions.

The Concerned Cocoa Road Contractors in Ghana, in December last year, convened an emergency

meeting to discuss strategies for addressing the issue of delayed payments, which had resulted in a debt of Ghc4 billion owed by COCOBOD.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tetty



Francis Asenso Boakye with some members of the ministry for Roads and Highways, at the Manhyia Palace

Accept LGBTQ community and Ghana will flourish - IMF Boss advises

Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Kristalina Georgieva, has highlighted the importance of inclusivity in societal development, in light of Ghana's Parliament endorsing an anti-LGBTQ bill.

Addressing journalists on March 18, Georgieva advocated for a society that accepts individuals regardless of sexual orientation, ethnicity, or race, asserting that inclusivity is key to a nation's prosperity.

"I understand that people in Ghana have taken the bill to the court. All I can say is that a more inclusive

society is a more successful society. You want Ghana to flourish, make it so that everybody can contribute to the fullest of this country," she stated.

The contentious bill received unanimous parliamentary approval on February 28, following its third reading, sparking heated debates since its proposal three years prior.

Supporters of the bill claim it preserves cultural and religious norms, while critics argue it infringes on human rights and fosters discrimination.

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Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)



General News

Accept LGBTQ community and Ghana will flourish - IMF Boss advises

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Following the bill's passage, its detractors, including various civil society organizations, have voiced their discontent, with some threatening legal action if President Akufo-Addo signs it into law.

The President has yet to endorse the bill, pending a Supreme Court decision on its legality.

Georgieva also linked Ghana's

recent economic woes to several factors, notably the COVID-19 pandemic's repercussions and fiscal mismanagement during the 2020 elections.

She stressed the value of learning from historical events to inform future governance.

Highlighting the significance of sound macroeconomic and

financial management, Georgieva called for the implementation of resilient fiscal and monetary policies to support enduring economic growth and withstand global financial challenges.

"The best avenue to pursue that is to get your policies in good order, get your institutions to deliver transparently for the economy for people. Nothing is more effective

than strong macroeconomic and financial performance in a country.

"We have seen in Ghana, yes it was the COVID-19 shock that brought so much hardship on people. But it was also the excessive spending during the general elections period. Learn lessons from the past, apply for the future," she advised.

Source: The Independent Ghana

Current internet challenges will not affect 2024 elections - EC assures

Director of Electoral Services at Ghana's Electoral Commission (EC), Dr. Serebour Quaicoe, has provided assurances that the upcoming 2024 general elections will proceed smoothly, despite the country facing internet connectivity issues.

Dr. Quaicoe clarified that both presidential and parliamentary election results are declared manually, eliminating dependency on internet services.

In response to apprehensions about possible internet problems on the day of the elections, Dr. Quaicoe has clarified that the Biometric Verification Devices, crucial for the electoral process, function independently of the internet, utilising SD cards to store data.

"Our results declaration process is basically manual. The Biometric Verification Devices use SD cards with the data on them, and they don't use Internet, so there is no way the 2024 elections will be affected if there are issues with Internet connectivity as being experienced now," Dr. Quaicoe assured in a statement to the Daily Graphic.

He further detailed that the EC's procedure involves manual tallying and aggregation of votes, with the subsequent collation of results being carried out on computers that are not reliant on internet access.

"So, the election day has nothing to do with Internet connectivity. The

officers will physically send the results to the collation centres, and the results will be collated manually on the access sheet, which has no Internet connectivity. The region will also do the collation just using the computer without Internet connectivity," he explained.

Amidst the current internet challenges that have impacted

sectors such as banking, education, and transport, Dr. Quaicoe has called for calm, reinforcing that these issues will not impede the electoral proceedings.

The National Communications Authority has recognised the severity of the situation and is actively collaborating with relevant parties to reinstate stable internet

services.

Measures are being taken to evaluate and mend the disruptions to enhance data services, aiming to prevent any interference with the electoral process as the nation prepares for the 2024 general elections.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Sebastian Akaho-Tay



Dr. Serebour Quaicoe, Director of Electoral Services at Ghana's Electoral Commission (EC)



General News

NCA is not putting in much efforts to make Ghana's internet stable - Sam George

The apparent delay in fully restoring internet connectivity has been attributed to the ineffectiveness of the National Communications Authority (NCA) by the Deputy Ranking Member on the Communications Committee of Parliament, Samuel Nartey George.

Since Thursday, March 14, Mobile Network Operations (MNOs) have experienced disruptions, leaving many Ghanaians without internet connections.

On Monday, March 18, the NCA announced that MNOs would reassess their operations and consider prioritizing and allocating more data resources to key stakeholders. They will work with Subsea Cable Landing Service Providers to progressively improve internet data capacity.

The stakeholders include various entities such as the Bank of Ghana (BoG), Ghana Association of Banks (GAB), Ghana Interbank Payment and Settlement Systems (GhIPSS), Ghana Stock Exchange (GSE), Central Securities Depository, Ghana Water Company Limited, Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG), MNOs, Subsea Cable Landing Service Providers, Ghana Internet Exchange (GIX), and the Accra Internet Exchange (AIX).

In an update to Parliament, the Minister for Communications and Digitalisation, Ursula Owusu-Ekuful, indicated that the government would

immediately license satellite firms as a backup for network operators in response to the disruption in mobile network services.

During the parliamentary session, Mr. George highlighted that Cote d'Ivoire, despite being the hardest hit, is faring better than Ghana due to proactive measures taken by its regulator.

He criticized the NCA for not fulfilling its regulatory duties and pointed out that instead of focusing on its task, it was competing with the Ghana Chamber of Telecom. Mr. George emphasized the need for the NCA to prioritize solutions rather than merely identifying problems, as expected of a regulatory body advocating for the rights of Ghanaian citizens and customers.

"Mr speaker, the cut happened off the coast of Cote d'Ivoire. Cote d'Ivoire was the most impacted country on Thursday. As we speak today, Cote d'Ivoire's recovery is ahead of Ghana simply because their regulator had put in place the right mechanisms.

"In the case of AT, and if you ask what Cote d'Ivoire is doing, they are using MOVE. The MOVE operator cable. They immediately allowed all the other operators to pick it up on MOVE. When you speak about the success of AT, AT is simply able to carry traffic because they have redundancy using the Nigerian link. But is that not supposed to be a prerequisite for all

the other operators in the country? Who is supposed to monitor that?"

"It is the regulator. So, if the regulator has slept on his job and today, we are found in this position, and then we want to raise our hands up in the air and say, oh, other countries that were affected have recovered and are recovering faster than Ghana because the regulators are proactive," he stated.

"Our regulator today is competing with the Ghana Chamber of Telecom. The Ghana Chamber of Telecom served the interest of the telecom companies and is their advocaCY. The Ghanaian regulator is supposed to be the advocate for the rights.

The NCA, the National Communications Authority, is supposed to be the advocate for the rights of Ghanaian citizens and customers.

"Therefore, updates that have been put out by the NCA are simply mirroring the statements of the chamber of Telecom. They don't tell us what remedial actions regulatory policy are being put in place for the Ghanaian customer. They're only telling us what the problems are. That is the language of the regulator. He's going to tell you what the problems are. I am expecting the NCA to tell me what the solutions are, not what the problems are," he said.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe Martekie Doku



Samuel Nartey George, MP for Ningo-Prampram

Presidency 'warns' Parliament against sending anti-LGBTQ bill to Akufo-Addo

The Office of the President has requested Parliament not to forward the anti-LGBTQ bill to President Akufo-Addo for his assent.

This decision, according to Nana Bediatuo Asante, the Secretary to the President, is based on the recognition of two pending applications for an order of interlocutory injunction before the Supreme Court.

These applications aim to prevent Parliament from sending the bill to the President and to restrain the President from giving his assent to the bill until the final determination of the matter.

In a statement issued and signed by Nana Bediatuo on Monday, the office revealed that the Attorney-General had informed the President, via a letter dated March 18, 2024, that he had been duly

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Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of Ghana



General News

Presidency 'warns' Parliament against sending anti-LGBTQ bill to Akufo-Addo

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served with both applications.

The statement further disclosed that the Attorney-General had advised the President not to take any action regarding the bill until the issues raised by the suits are resolved by the Supreme Court.

"It is the understanding of this Office that both applications have also been duly served on Parliament. Therefore, it would be improper for you to transmit the Bill to the President and equally improper for this Office to receive the Bill until the Supreme Court

determines the matters raised in the suits," it added.

The Office also clarified that it is a well-established legal principle that during the consideration of an interlocutory injunction application, the status quo should be maintained. This means that no action should be taken that could prejudice the requested injunctive relief or undermine the authority of the court.

"In the circumstances, you are kindly requested to cease and desist from transmitting the Bill

to the President until the matters before the Supreme Court are resolved," it added.

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 assent as the constitutionality of the bill is being contested at the Supreme Court.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

Nothing excessive, nothing unreasonable - Freddy Blay defends GNPC's increased allowances

Chairman of the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) Board, Mr. Freddie Blay, has staunchly defended the augmentation of the management's allowances, countering allegations by Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, MP for North Tongu, of the increments being extravagant and irrational.

Mr. Blay elucidated that the decision to enhance the allowances was taken back in 2022, contrary to the opposition MP's portrayal of it as a recent event.

"GNPC agreed unanimously to increase allowances, and it was not excessive. It was not unreasonable. This decision was made in 2022, so if someone is complaining about it and making it seem like it happened in 2024, they are only exploiting these reasonable increases for their own gain," Mr. Blay conveyed to GH One.

This statement was in response to Mr. Ablakwa's censure of the GNPC board and management for purportedly inflating their allowances by up to 150% amidst the country's economic hardships.

Mr. Ablakwa, via his X platform, contended that the daily hotel rate allowances had escalated from \$400 to \$1000, be it in Euros or pounds, contingent upon the destination.

He also asserted that the per diem

for the Board Chairman had risen from \$500 to \$850, and for the CEO and other board members, from \$500 to \$700, again in Dollars, Euros, or Pounds, based on the location of travel.

"It is even more depressing to read other memos requesting that the salary of the CEO be doubled. Angry insiders say the CEO, Mr. Opoku Ahweneh Danquah, who is President Akufo-Addo's nephew, always gets what he wants. This

betrayal of the Ghanaian people and gross insensitivity cannot continue," he expressed.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo



Mr. Freddie Blay, Chairman of the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) Board



General News

Preparation complete for SHS Common Core Curriculum rollout – NaCCA

The implementation of the Common Core Curriculum in Senior High Schools (SHSs) is on the verge of commencement, following its successful application at the Junior High level three years prior.

The first cohort of students under this system is poised to undertake the inaugural Common Core-based examination this year.

The readiness for this transition comes after the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) conducted trial tests during the curriculum's development phase, incorporating valuable feedback to refine it.

Currently, a second trial test is underway in 31 schools nationwide.

The Director-General of NaCCA, Professor Edward Appiah, revealed in an exclusive interview with the Daily Graphic in Accra that these trial tests, conducted every two weeks, will persist until August, with the academic year slated to commence in September. Notably, all 38 subjects, including STEM subjects, are being trialed.

"The trial tests, which are done every two weeks, will continue

until August, and the academic year will come alive in September.

"We are doing the trial test in all the 38 subjects, including the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects," the Director-General of NaCCA, Professor Edward Appiah, said in an exclusive interview with the Daily Graphic in Accra last Friday.

To ensure alignment with tertiary institution expectations, NaCCA engaged vice-chancellors extensively throughout the curriculum's development. Professor Appiah highlighted the receptiveness of vice-chancellors to the new curriculum, expressing their excitement despite providing valuable suggestions for consideration.

Moreover, NaCCA has developed teacher manuals and professional learning community (PLC) manuals to guide educators on the curriculum's implementation effectively.

The new curriculum, grounded in subject-based learning, offers greater flexibility compared to previous program-based approaches. This flexibility addresses concerns raised by stakeholders, particularly

universities, regarding students' preparedness for diverse academic paths.

Although students are mandated to write examinations in eight core subjects, they have the flexibility to select one or two elective subjects from a range of options.

This approach ensures students' exposure to a broad spectrum of

knowledge areas, fostering a well-rounded educational experience.

Ultimately, NaCCA remains committed to ongoing engagement with professional bodies to ensure the curriculum's continued alignment with evolving educational needs and standards.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe Martekie Doku



SHS Student

Produce load-shedding timetable by April 2 - PURC directs ECG

The Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC) has issued a directive to the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG), demanding the submission of a load-shedding schedule by April 2, 2024.

This order comes as a response to the persistent internet and electricity supply issues plaguing the nation.

While ECG has previously stated that there is no current need for a load-shedding timetable, the company acknowledges that the power system is strained, with 630 transformers being pushed

beyond their limits during peak usage times.

On March 18, 2024, PURC released a decree requiring ECG to produce a detailed load management plan.

This plan must include specifics such as the capacity and present load of each overloaded transformer, their geographical coordinates, the specifications of new transformers to be installed, the schedule for their installation, the proposed load management strategy, and evidence of communication with the affected consumers.

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File photo



General News

Produce load-shedding timetable by April 2 - PURC directs ECG

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The statement from PURC stipulated, "Where required by the Commission on reasonable notice, a public utility shall deliver to the Commission the contracts, reports of engineers, documents, books, accounts and any other records in the possession or

control of the public utility and relating to its property or service or affecting its business, or copies verified in the manner specified by the Commission. Ratings and current loadings of the overloaded distribution transformers; GPS location of all overloaded

distribution transformers; ratings of the new transformers to be installed in each location; timelines and duration for injection of transformers for each location; load management timetable corresponding with the timelines and duration for each transformer

injection; evidence of publication of above to consumers. ECG shall comply with all other Orders by the close of day April 2, 2024."

Source: The Independent Ghana / Sebastian Akaho-Tay

Former Chief Justice Anin-Yeboah made new governing council chair at KNUST

Ghana's former Chief Justice, Kwasi Anin-Yeboah, has been appointed as the chair of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology's (KNUST) new governing council.

He takes over from Nana Effah Appenteng, the Omanhene of Bompata Traditional Area, whose tenure ended in 2023.

The council's composition includes notable academics and professionals such as Prof. Mrs. Rita Akosua Dickson, KNUST's Vice-Chancellor, alongside Mr.

Kofi Karikari, Dr. Abena Oforiwa Ampomah, Prof. Ernest Owusu Dapaa, Prof. Samuel Asare-Nkansah, and Prof. Eric K. K. Abavare.

Other members are Dr. Daniel Opoku, Mr. Abubakr Zakaria, Mr. Michael Ayuni, Mr. Mark Kakraba-Ampeh, Mr. Kofi Adusei, Miss Yvonne Adobea, Mr. Andrews Kwasi Boateng, Prof. Ellis Owusu-Dabo, Mr. Zakaria Yeboah, and Mr. Johnson Owusu.

In a separate development, the Student Representative Council

(SRC) of KNUST has come under fire for the extravagant purchase of a Toyota Hardbody LX Pickup, costing GH¢ 850,000.00.

The vehicle, intended to enhance campus security, has sparked a backlash on social media.

The funding for this purchase was accumulated over two administrations, with the Abuah-Reginald administration of 2021 contributing GH¢350,000.00, and the Frank-Deborah administration of 2022 adding another GH¢500,000.00.

The vehicle's commissioning was overseen by the current Yvonne-Nkay-Led Administration, in the presence of KNUST Management and representatives from the previous administrations.

Contrary to expectations of commendation, the SRC's decision to allocate such a significant sum to a single vehicle has led to widespread disapproval among students.

Source: Amanda Cartey / Amanda Cartey



Kwasi Anin-Yeboah, Ghana's former Chief Justice



General News

Mahama promises 'Okada' drivers electric bikes; reiterates commitment to legalise their operations

Flagbearer of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), John Mahama, has announced plans to introduce electric motorbikes for commercial use, commonly known as 'okada,' if elected president.

He made this pledge during a Town Hall engagement with residents of Worawora in the Biakoye Constituency of the Oti Region on March 19, 2024.

These electricity-powered motorbikes will replace the current fuel-powered engines used in commercial activities, according to the former president.

Mahama emphasised that the adoption of electric-powered bikes will reduce the operating costs associated with using 'okada' and tricycles for transportation purposes.

"There are electric motorbikes that run on electricity. Once you charge it at night, you are good to go. It consumes less electricity and it is better than using fuel. We will introduce them if we come to power" he said.

Investigative reports by an Accra-based media house reveal that some tricycles on the streets are already electric-powered, and

increasing their number is expected to decrease gas emissions.

The "Building Ghana Tour" by the NDC has provided hope to commercial tricycle operators nationwide, advocating for the legalisation of their operations and reduced fuel prices.

Mr. Mahama, seeking a return to office, has reiterated his commitment to legalising their operations.

"If we come into power, we will legalise okada business. We will train you on how to go about the business, being able to ride motorcycles alone does not make

you a commercial rider. We will register all of you so your operation can be regulated," he emphasised.

The use of motorbikes and tricycles for commercial activities has become widespread across the country, though the activity is illegal.

In most rural areas, it has become the most reliable means of transport. And in cities such as Accra, it has become the first point of call for commuters to escape the heavy traffic.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo



File photo



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Business

Govt to approve Starlink's operation in Ghana amidst network crisis

Minister for Communications and Digitalisation, Ursula Owusu-Ekuful, has revealed the government's intention to license Starlink, a satellite internet network, to operate in Ghana.

This move is aimed at tackling internet disruptions in the country.

Briefing Parliament on the issue of internet disruptions on March 18, she said "We have licensed satellite gateway air stations, landing rights, and satellite air station networks. One web has already been licensed. Starlink is in the process of being licensed, and other operators are being encouraged to land in Ghana.

"We must also invest in operationalising RASCOM, the Regional African Satellite Company, instead of each country going alone."

She advised organizations to learn from these internet disruptions by storing their content, databases, applications, and services in at least two tier-three or tier-four data centers in the country, located at different locations.

Additionally, she recommended utilizing the National Data Center as either their primary or backup recovery data host.

Before the recent internet disruption, the minister noted that her department lacked the framework for licensing satellites. However, over the years, it has acquired the necessary expertise to license these satellites.

"The NCA did not have a framework for licensing satellites but the Authority has in the last year concluded bench-marking and learning from other jurisdictions where this has been implemented. Currently, they have developed a satellite licensing framework in Ghana which has been approved by its board and awaiting the final policy approval.

"This framework will provide the policies and rules relating to the application for frequency authorisations for satellite services in Ghana. It outlines the various categories of satellite services, the licensing requirements, and its associated fees," she added.

In December 2023, the ministry issued a warning to the public against purchasing products from Starlink, emphasizing that the company was not licensed to operate in Ghana.

The notice said, "Any entity which provides electronic communication services in Ghana without a Licence or Authorisation from the NCA is in direct violation of Section 3(1) of the Electronic Communications Act 2008, Act 775 which states that, 'Except as otherwise provided under this Act a person shall not operate a public electronic communications service or network or provide a voice telephony service without a licence granted by the Authority'".

Presently, Madam Owusu-Ekuful has assured that the ministry has conducted due diligence and is prepared to grant an operating license to Starlink to enhance internet accessibility.

"A draft framework was subjected to industry consultation and approved by industry. The objective of the framework is to provide increased regulatory oversight for the services,

more connectivity solutions or options for consumers, and other measures," she added.

She noted, however, that the service provided by Starlink is costly. According to her, there are plans to involve other sector players to serve individuals across various economic backgrounds.

"However, I must remind us all that the fee charged by the satellite, low-earth orbit satellite operators like Starlink for hardware and services show that they will cater for high-end value subscribers because they are expensive.

"We're currently also having discussions about affordable backhaul satellite solutions with all satellite service providers under the auspices of the ITU. This conversation has been ongoing for a while, but I believe what has happened in the recent past will activate and energise these discussions for solutions to be reached soon."

Source: The Independent Ghana



Kristalina Georgieva in a chat with Dr. Mohammed Amin Adam

Business

AfCFTA: Let's accelerate harmonisation of goods and services across Africa - Shippers Authority

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Ghana Shippers Authority (GSA), Mr. Baffour Okyere Sarpong, has stressed the urgent need to expedite harmonisation of standards for goods and services in support of the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

In a news brief, he asserted that the move was crucial for enhancing commercial activities within AfCFTA and bolstering businesses across the continent.

The African Organisation for Standardisation (ARSO), an

intergovernmental standards body operating under the African Union, is actively engaged in developing and implementing standards to enhance Africa's internal trade, global product competitiveness, consumer welfare, and future international trade standardisation.

Mr. Okyere Sarpong said the harmonisation of standards would help eliminate technical barriers inhibiting continental trade.

He underscored the importance of Shippers Councils across the continent sharing data to enhance

AfCFTA trade, and called for collaboration to exchange vital information related to cargo handling, customs procedures, and trade regulations to foster economic growth.

He said this during a courtesy by a delegation from the Cameroon Shippers' Council (CNSC) to the Ghana Shippers Authority at the Ghana Shippers' House in Accra.

The delegation, led by Assistant Director of Trade Facilitation at the CNSC, Faliki Aicha, included Lewono Mbassi Marguenle,

Export Promotion Officer, and Garba Houdou, Client Service and Standardisation Officer.

Mr. Faliki said the visit was to participate in the 67th Ghana's Trade Fair to promote goods and services of Shippers in Cameroon under the AfCFTA.

She said: "We are committed to data sharing among Shippers Councils as a key enabler for realising the full potential of this landmark trade agreement."

Source: GNA



Baffour Okyere Sarpong, The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Ghana Shippers Authority (GSA)



International

Foreign students attacked in India over Ramadan prayer at university hostel

At least four foreign students have been injured after a Hindu far-right mob allegedly stormed a university hostel in India's western Gujarat state and attacked the group of students for offering prayers during the holy month of Ramadan, local media has reported.

India's Ministry of External Affairs on Sunday pledged to take "strict actions against the perpetrators", as the local police in the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi said an investigation was under way in connection with the attack at the Gujarat University.

The students told local media that a small group had gathered on Saturday night inside the boys' hostel premises for the Ramadan tarawih prayer as there is no mosque on the university campus based in Ahmedabad. Soon after, a mob armed with sticks and knives stormed the hostel, attacked them and vandalised their rooms, they said.

"A group of 15 students were offering prayers when three people came and started shouting 'Jai Shri Ram' [Hail lord Ram]. They objected to us praying here," local media quoted a student as saying.

"After some time, about 250 people came and shouted 'Jai Shri Ram'. They pelted stones and vandalised hostel properties."

A student from Afghanistan told local NDTV network: "They attacked us inside the rooms too. They broke laptops, phones and damaged bikes," adding that the AC and sound system were destroyed as well.

Videos posted on X showed ransacked student dorms and a mob destroying the students' motorbikes with long tools.

"We cannot survive like this," one African student said in his video filmed from the hostel. In the background, loud shouting and sounds of items being demolished, broken and smashed by the mob are heard.

"We came to India to study and now we're being attacked just because it's time for Ramadan and Muslims were praying. Now they're breaking down the bikes, everything is being demolished down[stairs]," he said.

The Indian Express news website reported two of the students were severely injured and are recovering at a hospital after students from Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and several African countries were attacked.

'Strict action against the perpetrators'

"Yesterday, at around 10:30pm a group of students were praying. Around 20-25 people came and asked them why they were praying here and should instead go the mosque," Ahmedabad Police Commissioner GS Malik told reporters at a briefing on Sunday.

"An argument broke out between them, stones were pelted and their rooms were vandalised by the people who came from outside."

He added that a complaint has been received against 20-25 people and one of the accused has been identified. Nine teams have been formed to investigate the incident, he said.

Five people have been arrested in connection with the attack.

India's External Affairs Ministry said on X that the state government is "taking strict action against the perpetrators".

"Two foreign students were injured in the clash. One of them has been discharged from hospital after receiving medical attention," spokesman Randhit Jaiswal said.

Asaduddin Owaisi, a member of parliament from the southern city of Hyderabad, called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah to "intervene to send a strong message?"

"What a shame. When your devotion and religious slogans only come out when Muslims peacefully practice their religion," he posted

on X.

"Domestic anti-Muslim hatred is destroying India's goodwill," he wrote tagging S Jaishankar, India's external affairs minister.

Hindu far-right groups have campaigned against Muslim prayers in public spaces. Earlier this month, a policeman in the capital New Delhi was suspended after he kicked Muslim men offering prayers on the side of a road.

Gujarat University Vice-Chancellor Dr Neerja A Gupta told local media that the international students need to be trained in "cultural sensitivity".

"These are foreign students and when you go abroad, you must learn cultural sensitivity. These students need an orientation. We will sit with them, provide cultural orientation and discuss how to strengthen their security," NDTV quoted Gupta as saying.

Source: Al Jazeera



The attackers also vandalised the hostel room in the university's premises

International

Bill to reverse Gambia FGM ban reaches next stage

A bill seeking to decriminalise Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in The Gambia has passed its latest parliamentary stage, known as the second reading.

Though FGM was criminalised in The Gambia in 2015, some seeking to overturn the ban argue that it violates religious freedom and is against the country's cultural

practices.

The bill will now go to a committee of MPs for further consideration.

Survivors of FGM and activists had hoped it would be thrown out. They said that not only did the practice cause lifelong damage but it was also against a woman's right to bodily autonomy.

They have also argued that

removing the ban on FGM would tarnish The Gambia's human rights record.

There was a heated debate in parliament but in the end 42 members voted for the bill, four voted against, while one abstained.

Despite the ban being in place since 2015 it was not until convictions in 2023, when several women were

jailed for performing FGM, did calls to reverse the ban gain momentum.

According to a recent survey, 73% of women in The Gambia have undergone FGM with 65% of those cut being under the age of five.

If the bill is passed, The Gambia would be the first country to have reversed a ban on FGM.

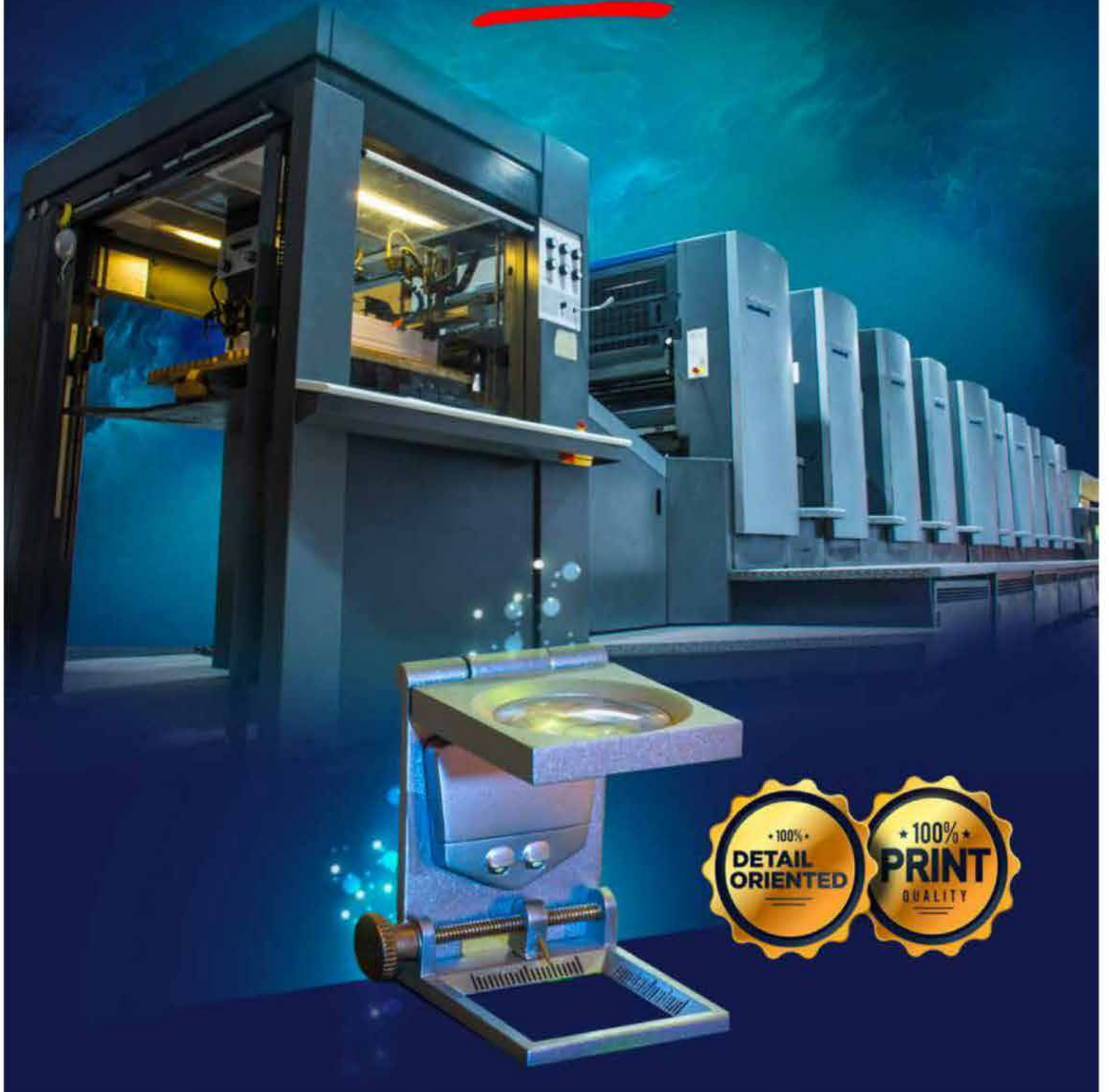
Source: BBC



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