



Monday, April 29, 2024



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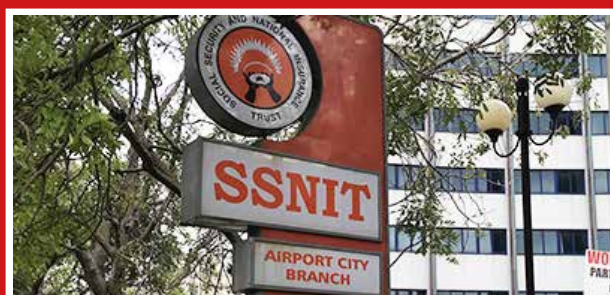
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General News

Ghana records approximately 9,900 cases of snake bites annually – GHS

Ghana has documented 59,600 cases of snakebites from 2015 to 2020, according to a recent data compilation by the Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) division at the Ghana Health Service (GHS). This equates to an average of 9,900 snakebite incidents annually.

Programme Manager of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) at the Ghana Health Service, Dr. Joseph Opare, disclosed these figures during the launch of the African Snakebite Alliance (ASA) Ghana.

The data revealed that males accounted for a higher number of cases, with an average of 5,600 bites per year, compared to females who experienced 4,300 bites annually.

Snakebite is classified among the 20 conditions recognized as Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) by the World Health Organization (WHO), with Ghana endemic to 14 of them.

According to reports, venomous snakebites cause more deaths annually than Ebola. In low and middle-income countries,

snakebite envenoming proves deadlier than nearly any other NTD.

Globally, an estimated 5.4 million snakebites occur each year, leading to 1.8 to 2.7 million cases of poisoning. These incidents

result in between 81,410 and 137,880 deaths annually, as well as approximately three times as many amputations and other permanent disabilities.

Dr. Opare highlighted that snakebite primarily affects individuals in

farming, hunting, fishing, and rural communities in Ghana. The Upper West, Ashanti, and Eastern regions have reported the highest incidences of snakebites.

Source: *The Independent Ghana* / *Amanda Cartey*



Snake

“We will fix it” - Bawumia assures Ghanaians amidst ‘dumsor’ crisis

Vice President Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia has addressed the ongoing intermittent power outages (known as “dumsor”) faced by Ghanaians in major parts of the country.

As he was leaving Parliament, per a video circulating on social media, a concerned citizen shouted “dumsor no,” catching the Vice President’s attention.

In response, Dr. Bawumia said, “yoo, ye be ye,” which translates to “okay, we will fix it.”

Ghanaians have been experiencing these power cuts for over a month, prompting calls for the Ministry of Energy to release an official timetable to keep consumers informed about power availability.

But there has been no sign of a possible timetable anytime soon due to the posture of the Energy Minister, Dr. Matthew Opoku Prempeh, who has dismissed such calls.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the governing board of the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) and Deputy Energy Minister, Herbert Krapa, has assured the public that the government is taking steps to resolve the issue.

He stated that the government is aware of the challenges faced by citizens and is committed to ensuring uninterrupted power supply.

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



Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, Vice President of Ghana



General News

Kasoa-Winneba road project: Major sections to be completed before close of 2024

The rehabilitation and improvement of the Kasoa-Winneba road are progressing well, with contractors indicating that significant sections will be finished and open to traffic before the end of the year.

During his recent visit to the Central Region to assess ongoing infrastructure projects, Minister of Roads and Highways, Francis Asenso-Boakye, inspected the roadworks and received the update on Tuesday.

Recognising the progress made by the contractors, Asenso-Boakye stressed the importance of opening major segments before Christmas to ease congestion issues for

motorists, who have long endured heavy traffic along the route.

Contractors remain optimistic about meeting the year-end deadline for substantial completion of crucial sections, highlighting the consistent progress of the project.

The minister's visit provided first-hand insights into the ongoing work and the condition of vital road infrastructure in the region.

Persistent traffic congestion along the Kasoa-Winneba corridor has presented challenges for commuters and businesses.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe Martekie Doku



Kasoa Interchange

Gov't to soon handover reconstructed Appiatse township 2 years after tragic incident

The Ministry of Information has announced that the government, in collaboration with Corporate Ghana, will imminently commission and hand over the fully reconstructed Appiatse township.

The tragic incident that occurred on January 20, 2022, saw the loss of 13 lives in an explosion triggered by a vehicle transporting mining explosives in Appiatse.

This catastrophe left numerous residents displaced and without shelter, prompting urgent reconstruction efforts.

Following concerns raised by some residents about the sluggish pace of the reconstruction process, the Public Relations Officer (PRO) of the Appiatse Reconstruction Committee, Mr. Thywill Quarshie, provided updates in July 2023.

He disclosed that the first phase of the reconstruction project, consisting of 124 housing units, was nearing completion. These units include a range of accommodation options, from one-bedroom apartments to seven-

bedroom residences, designed to accommodate the victims of the disaster.

Mr. Quarshie further reported that the majority of the buildings had already been roofed, with plans in place to commence external works such as electrical installations, plastering, and painting.

Additionally, significant progress had been made in completing the drainage system, while construction of the road network within the township was underway.

The Appiatse Relief Committee received generous donations totaling GH¢62 million as of August 2023. These funds are dedicated to supporting the ongoing

reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts in the Appiatse community.

As the reconstruction project continues to advance, affected residents can look forward to the restoration of their homes and the return of stability to their lives.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey



Appiatse Reconstruction Project

General News

MHA declares May “Purple Month” to boost mental health awareness

In a notable effort to advance mental health well-being, the Mental Health Authority of Ghana, along with the Ministry of Health and various stakeholders, have declared May as “Purple Month,” dedicated to mental health awareness.

This initiative aligns Ghana with other nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom, which also dedicate May to similar awareness campaigns.

Speaking to the media, CEO of the Mental Health Authority, Professor Pinaman Appau, emphasized the significance of broadening awareness initiatives beyond the traditional recognition of World Mental Health Day on October 10.

“A single day is not enough to address the complex issues surrounding mental health. By expanding our focus to the entire month, we can make a more

substantial impact,” said Prof. Appau.

Previously, Ghana faced challenges as October’s observance of Breast Cancer Awareness Month overshadowed mental health issues.

The strategic transition to May avoids conflicts and enhances the impact of the awareness campaign.

Inspired by Mental Health America’s initiative dating back to 1949, Ghana’s Purple Month aims to boost awareness, combat stigma, and celebrate recovery, following a model that has been successful in other nations.

The choice of purple as the emblematic color symbolizes dignity, peace, and independence, reflecting the Mental Health Authority’s commitment to providing hope and support to those affected by mental health

conditions.

Purple Month seeks to advance mental health treatment and education, fostering dialogue, encouraging proactive approaches to mental health, and ensuring early intervention.

This year’s theme, “Movement: Moving for Our Mental Health,” highlights the beneficial impact of physical activity on psychological well-being.

Dr. Pinaman Appau emphasized the importance of awareness, education, and support for mental health advocacy, especially considering that over 2.3 million Ghanaians experience mental health disorders.

During Purple Month, the Mental Health Authority focuses on several key outcomes, including enhanced understanding of mental health symptoms, diminished

stigma, improved mental health knowledge, and promotion of mental well-being.

Community engagement is crucial, with Purple Month activities including media campaigns, local events, educational programs, and outreach initiatives.

Ghanaians are encouraged to participate by wearing purple, sharing mental health-related information on social media, and promoting movement and wellness using designated hashtags.

Ultimately, Purple Month represents a vital movement toward improving mental health understanding, reducing stigma, and empowering individuals to lead fulfilling lives.

Source: *The Independent Ghana* / Phoebe Martekie Doku



Professor Pinaman Appau, CEO of the Mental Health Authority



General News

Halt plans to paint public basic schools in NPP colours – Apaak to gov't

Deputy Ranking Member on the Education Committee of Parliament, Dr. Clement Abas Apaak, has criticized the Akufo-Addo administration's purported plan to repaint public basic schools in the colours of the New Patriotic Party (NPP).

Reports had suggested that the government intended to repaint existing public basic schools from brown and yellow to blue and white, sparking concerns over the use of public resources for political purposes.

However, the Ministry of Education clarified that the initiative was solely for newly constructed basic schools and that there were no plans to change the uniforms in all public schools.

Regardless, in a statement, Dr. Apaak urged the government to prioritize addressing pressing issues facing the education sector, such as the lack of access to furniture for over a million public basic school pupils and delays in the release of capitation grants.

He emphasized that resources should be allocated to tackle challenges such as infrastructural deficits, lack of textbooks, inadequate security, unpaid utility bills, and other issues affecting teaching and learning in public basic schools.

"According to the Head Teacher, basic school administrators are struggling to manage the affairs of schools, because of inadequate funding, neglect and delay in the releases of the capitation grants, etc.

"These are issues Hon. Yaw Aduwum should be worried about, not the colours of school blocks and school uniforms. Spending public time and resources painting schools in Blue and White, and introducing Blue and White uniforms are clearly misplaced priorities.

"Besides the overt attempt to brand public basic schools in NPP colours, the only other reason is to create an avenue to award sole source contracts to families, friends, and party members," he

wrote in a statement.

Dr. Apaak criticized the government for considering repainting schools and introducing new uniforms when there were more urgent needs to address in the education sector.

He called on Ghanaians to join in resisting what he described as a "needless initiative" and urged the Ministry of Education to prioritize addressing the challenges facing public basic schools.

Source: The Independent Ghana



Dr. Clement Abas Apaak, Deputy Ranking Member on the Education Committee of Parliament,

Mahama wouldn't have been NDC's flagbearer if Akufo-Addo excelled – Martin Kpebu

Legal expert Martin Kpebu has suggested that the resurgence of former President John Dramani Mahama's political career is linked to perceived shortcomings in President Akufo-Addo's performance.

Mr Kpebu made these observations during a discussion with the media on April 27. He proposed that the National Democratic Congress (NDC) likely reinstated Mahama as their flagbearer due to the public's apparent dissatisfaction with Akufo-Addo's governance.

According to Mr Kpebu, Mahama's return to the political forefront might have been avoided if Akufo-Addo had demonstrated stronger leadership and more effective governance.

Regarding the Presidency's response to the KPMG audit report on the GRA-SML deal, Mr Kpebu stated, "you think if Akufo-Addo had performed well with press freedom, and turned the economy, the NDC would have brought JM? No. So Akufo-Addo has single-handedly resurrected Mahama.

"If we have to force him to release the KPMG report, then it means we have retrogressed under Akufo-Addo".

He argued that Akufo-Addo's handling of issues such as press freedom and the economy influenced the NDC's decision to reconsider Mahama for the presidential position.

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Martin Kpebu, Legal expert

General News

Mahama wouldn't have been NDC's flagbearer if Akufo-Addo excelled – Martin Kpebu

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Addressing the Presidency's response to the KPMG audit report on the GRA-SML deal, Mr Kpebu questioned the need for pressure to release the report, suggesting it reflects a regression in governance

standards under Akufo-Addo's administration.

The KPMG audit uncovered discrepancies in the GRA-SML agreement, notably the absence

of a technical needs assessment before engaging SML. In response, the Presidency issued directives, including potential termination of services and contract renegotiation.

Further investigation by The Fourth Estate revealed false claims made by SML, leading to adjustments to its website.

Source: *The Independent Ghana / Phoebe Martekie Doku*

BVDs found in Madina are outdated devices that had been legally auctioned - EC

The Electoral Commission has denied allegations that it discreetly disposed of 10 Biometric Verification Devices (BVDs) for recycling at a loss to the state.

In a statement issued on Friday, April 26, the Commission clarified that the 10 BVDs discovered at a recycling company in Madina, Accra, were outdated devices that had been legally auctioned.

According to the Commission, these obsolete BVDs were acquired before the 2012 elections and were used in the 2019 District Level Elections (DLE).

The statement explained that the previous administration had

planned to refurbish the outdated devices for the 2018 referendum and the 2019 DLE, despite being advised by the Commission's Biometric Infrastructure managers that the equipment was obsolete and no longer useful.

Contrary to the refurbishment plan, the current Commission decided to procure new equipment instead of repairing the obsolete 2012 devices.

This decision was made to ensure the prudent use of resources and the integrity of the electoral process, ultimately saving the state millions of cedis.

The Commission emphasized that the auction of the obsolete devices

was conducted transparently, and the proceeds were duly deposited into the Consolidated Fund.

It strongly refuted any claims of misconduct and criticized civil society group IMANI Africa for allegedly misinforming the public about the issue.

Bright Simons, the Vice President of IMANI Africa, has raised concerns about the Electoral Commission's disposal of Biometric Verification Devices (BVDs), claiming that the devices were sold for recycling at a loss to the state.

Mr Simons in a series of posts on X platform criticized the EC's assertion that the devices were obsolete, arguing that they were

only used during elections and therefore could not be considered scrap.

In a series of tweets, Simons shared documents from Parliament, the Auditor-General, and the Ministry of Finance, which he claims expose the EC's actions.

He pointed out that millions of dollars were spent on the devices, which are now being sold for scrap at significantly lower prices. He also highlighted that thousands of devices purchased in 2016 and 2018 could not have been obsolete as they are only used during elections.

Source: *The Independent Ghana*



Biometric Verification Devices (BVDs)

General News

Don't travel to Yao and Ansonga of Northern Mali due to terrorist attacks – Foreign Ministry to public

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration has released a travel advisory cautioning Ghanaians against traveling to specific regions in northern Mali.

In an official statement, the Ministry highlighted a recent security threat along the main highways connecting Mali and Niger, especially in the Gao and Ansongo Regions of Northern Mali.

This advisory is issued in response to reports of terrorist activities targeting travelers along these routes.

“The Ministry remains committed to the safety of Ghanaians and will provide updates on the security

situation in the region under reference in due course,” the statement read.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized the importance of prioritizing personal safety during travel.

In September 2023, Islamist militants carried out an assault on a riverboat in northeastern Mali, resulting in the deaths of at least 49 civilians.

Additionally, they targeted an army camp, resulting in the deaths of 15 soldiers, with an estimated 50 militants also reported to have been killed.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Amanda Cartey



Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration

Pension payments are not funded by reserves; we have enough funds - SSNIT

The Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) has refuted claims that it will be unable to pay benefits by 2036 due to a depletion of reserves.

A recent report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) suggested that SSNIT's reserves might be depleted by 2036, casting doubt on its ability to meet future financial commitments to beneficiaries.

The report highlighted a concerning trend of increasing administrative expenses as a percentage of member contributions, raising questions about the utilization of funds.

However, SSNIT has clarified that it currently receives sufficient contributions to cover accruing benefits and has a partially funded scheme in place, as per ACT 766.

This means that pension payments are funded by contributions and investment returns, rather than reserves, ensuring the continued payment of benefits to members.

Furthermore, the Trust said

there has been steady growth in contributions, adding, “This growth is well supported by the current demographics and the dedicated activities of our staff in getting new employers and contributors to join the scheme”.

“That investment income has been healthy and would offset any unexpected deficits that may arise”, it mentioned.

SSNIT further emphasized that the government is up-to-date on its contributions for public sector workers, and arrangements are in place to settle any outstanding amounts.

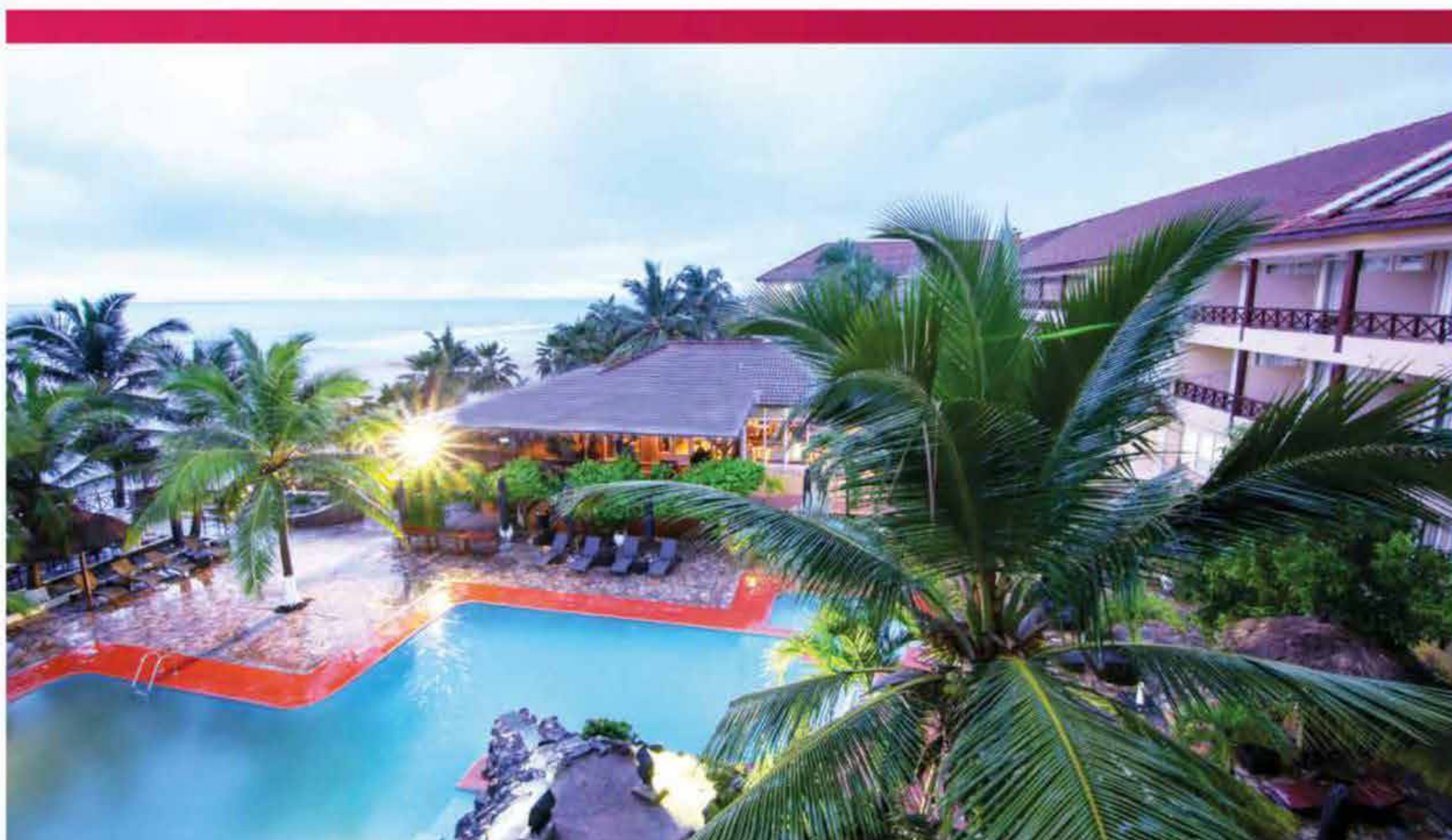
Notably, the Trust has maintained a spotless record of timely pension payments since the scheme's inception in 1991.

Reaffirming its commitment to responsible stewardship, SSNIT assured its members and the general public that it will continue to manage the Fund prudently, ensuring the fulfillment of its benefit payment obligations well beyond 2036.

Source: The Independent Ghana



SSNIT Office



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Business

Global food prices to drop by 6% in 2024 – World Bank

The World Bank's April 2024 Commodity Outlook Report anticipates a significant global decline in food prices, projecting a 6 percent decrease in 2024, followed by an additional 4 percent drop in 2025.

This decline is primarily attributed to reduced prices for grains, oils, and meals, while other food categories are anticipated to experience price increases in 2024. However, 2025 is expected to bring widespread decreases in food prices.

The report predicts an 11 percent decrease in the grains price index in 2024, fueled by increased global grain supplies. Wheat prices are forecasted to decline by 15 percent in 2024 due to heightened production, with an additional

2 percent decrease expected in 2025.

These projections emerge amidst robust export competition, slightly elevated production, countered by somewhat greater consumption, and the lowest end-of-season stocks-to-use ratio in eight years.

Global maize production is poised to reach a record high in the 2023-24 seasons, while global rice production in 2023-24 remains stagnant, with the stock-to-use ratio dropping to its lowest level in three years.

Rice prices are expected to increase by 8 percent (year-on-year) in 2024 due to tight global markets and India's export restrictions.

In Ghana, however, the food inflation rate has risen, climbing from 27.0 percent in February to 29.6 percent in March 2024.

This uptick in food inflation raises concerns amidst ongoing worries about food insecurity in the sub-Saharan region. The effects of these global food price fluctuations on Ghana's food market and overall

food security situation are yet to unfold.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Amanda Cartey



Food stuffs

LPG marketers chide gov't over new taxes

The Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) Marketers Association has voiced its concerns regarding the government's approach to boosting LPG consumption, cautioning that the continual introduction of taxes could impede this objective.

Their statement comes in response to the National Petroleum Authority's (NPA) recent imposition of a new tax on LPG as part of the revised pricing structure, effective April 1, 2024.

The Association strongly criticized this move, particularly condemning the addition of \$80 per metric ton (MT) as part of the suppliers' premiums, specifically designated for Bottling Plant and Cylinder Investment Margins.

They argued that this imposition was unjustifiable and indicated the Authority's disregard for the decline in consumption since 2021.

Engaging the media, the Vice

President of the Association, Gabriel Kumi, emphasized that the government cannot expect to both increase LPG consumption and introduce more taxes, likening it to wanting to "have its cake and eat it too."

He said that such actions would

deter people from consuming the product.

"You can't eat your cake and have it. You can't set such laudable objectives and at the same time you keep piling taxes on the product to push away consumers."

"...There's no way you can continue piling taxes on the product and at the same time expect to achieve an increment in consumption," he stated.

Source: The Independent Ghana



File photo

International

Power restored to Sierra Leone as minister quits

Electricity supplies have been restored to Sierra Leone following weeks of power cuts, after it paid off part of the \$48m (£38m) bill it owed to a Turkish company.

The \$18m payment came as the country's energy minister resigned, saying he took full responsibility for the crisis.

Most electricity supplies to the capital, Freetown, come from a Turkish ship anchored off the country's coast.

Last week, Karpowership said it had severely cut supplies to the city - from 60 megawatts to 6 megawatts - because of the unpaid bills, but the disruption has been going on for far longer.

Residents of the country's main cities have been going for days on end without any power and hospitals have also been affected.

The Reuters news agency quotes

a doctor as saying that at least one infant has died because of a lack of power, while medics have been using mobile phones to provide light as they carry out procedures.

Before supplies were restored, Fatmata Gassim, a second-year engineering student in Freetown, told the BBC's What in the World podcast of her frustration at the lack of power.

"How do you iron your clothes, how do you make your food, how do you go to sleep? We pay our electricity bills so I don't see why we should be forced to live like this," she said.

Following the resignation of Kanja Sesay, the office of President Julius Maada Bio said the energy ministry would now fall under the direct supervision of the president.

Karpowership previously cut supplies to Sierra Leone in September over unpaid bills.

It is one of the world's biggest

floating power plant operators, with several African states relying on it for electricity.

In October, it briefly cut power to Guinea-Bissau, saying it had no option "following a protracted period of non-payment".

The power ships work by converting gas into electricity, which is then fed into the national grid.

Although access to electricity has increased in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years, it still remains low, with more than 50% of the region's population having no grid connection, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad).

Source: BBC



File photo

At least 23 civilian force members killed in northern Nigeria, officials say

At least 23 members of Nigeria's civilian joint task force were killed on Saturday in separate attacks by militants and an armed kidnapping gang in the north, two officials from the force said on Sunday.

In northeast Borno state, the heartland of an Islamist insurgency, suspected Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) fighters used an improvised explosive device (IED) to blow up a vehicle carrying the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) team, a local force chairman said.

The CJTF was first formed in 2013 to protect communities in the northeast and help the military fight Boko Haram and later its offshoot ISWAP. The force has since been extended to other northern states that are grappling with armed kidnapping gangs.

Tijjanima Umar, CJTF chairman for Gamboru Ngala area near the border with Cameroon, said his team was travelling to Borno state capital

Maiduguri when they drove over the IED.

"As the mine blew up, nine of them died instantly ... while two other people had severe injuries and were immediately taken to hospital for treatment," Umar told Reuters by phone. The Nigerian military was not immediately available to comment.

Although severely curtailed by

Nigerian security forces, Boko Haram and ISWAP still carry out deadly attacks against civilians and the military.

In northwestern Soko state, 14 CJTF members were killed and several were missing following an ambush by gunmen on Saturday, task force sector commandant Ismail Haruna told Reuters.

Haruna said the CJTF members were killed in Sokoto's Isa local government area, where they had raided and destroyed a bush camp belonging to a known armed kidnapping gang leader.

The gang quickly regrouped and ambushed the CJTF as they drove back to Sokoto state capital, he added.

Source: Reuters



Security forces cordon off a street as members of Benin's Trade unions demonstrate to demand higher wages and better working conditions in Cotonou, Benin

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