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# General News

## If you want electricity, tell Parliament to approve loans - NAPO

Energy Minister, Dr Matthew Opoku Prempeh has urged Parliament to swiftly approve loans for critical projects, particularly in the energy sector, to ensure the extension of electricity to rural communities.

His call follows a query from the Member of Parliament for Nkwanta North Constituency, who raised concerns about the status of the Ghana China Water deal, which aimed to finance various infrastructure projects, including rural electrification.

Dr. Matthew highlighted that while Phase 1 connected about 19 communities to electricity, Phase 2, awarded in 2017, has faced delays, with no community connected since then. He cited the challenge of cost-sharing with the energy ministry, including the burden of purchasing poles.

The minister emphasized the importance of parliamentary approval for loans to address the funding challenges facing

critical projects, such as rural electrification. He attributed these challenges to Ghana's recent partnership with the IMF and the economic impact of COVID-19.

"It was a contracted project and if they find out after going to site there are more projects or towns that should have been included in the project, these challenges pop up. After the contractor has gone out for feasibility, they find out that there are many more communities that should have been included, it means they will have to come for extra funding and it is the extra funding that has been the major problem. especially after the COVID and IMF project," he said.

"Even when they get it passing it through Parliament is also another problem. I won't blame us but I will blame parliament for even getting loans through Parliament... You hear press conferences say the country that is broke we have taken 3.5 billion. I say don't do that because if you do that and

come and ask me for money for electrification, how do I get the money when you don't pass my loan" he noted.

Regarding additional funding needs due to unforeseen project expansions, Dr. Matthew emphasized the necessity of securing extra funding, which has been hindered by delays in parliamentary approval.

He urged Parliament to expedite the approval of pending loans to facilitate the government's efforts in securing funds for all ongoing projects, including rural

electrification initiatives.

Dr. Matthew emphasized the urgency of passing loans to ensure the realization of electrification projects, urging Parliament to collaborate with the government in this regard.

"So I think when we come back there are loans that need to be quickly passed. Let us help the government in passing those loans so that your 12 communities can benefit," he added.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo*



*Dr Matthew Opoku Prempeh, Energy Minister*

## Poor salaries for PPA staff make them gullible for corrupt practices - James Klutse Avedzi

Chairman of Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC), James Klutse Avedzi has raised concerns about the impact of low remuneration on the staff of the Public Procurement Authority (PPA), potentially leading to corrupt practices within the organisation.

Speaking on a forthcoming TV3 interview, Dr. Avedzi highlighted a specific incident to underscore his point.

He noted that the PPA engaged a corporate lawyer on a contract basis, paying them GH¢4000.

However, upon regularisation, the lawyer's salary dropped to GH¢2000.

"There was an issue in the 2022 report, which we looked at; where a lawyer was employed or recruited as a legal person for the Authority and this lawyer was being paid

GH¢4000 as his or her salary. Now, that was on contract, but when this lawyer was regularised, [went] through the Public Service Commission, and eventually given an appointment letter, the salary dropped to GH¢2000.

"And so, we realised that the salary is one motivating factor that when these requests come to them, probably with some purse, they will be willing..... to compromise on their work," James Klutse Avedzi stated.

This significant reduction, he argued, could have adverse effects on the Authority's operations.

Dr. Avedzi emphasised that many PPA staff members receive minimal salaries, making them susceptible to compromise, especially when faced with inducements.

The PAC Chairman's remarks reflect broader concerns about

the relationship between remuneration and integrity in public institutions, particularly those involved in critical areas like

procurement.

*Source: Independent Ghana / Sebastian Akaho-Tay*



*James Klutse Avedzi, Chairman, Parliament's Public Accounts Committee*

# General News

## 2024 Polls: EC to begin voter ID cards replacement on May 30

The Electoral Commission (EC) has announced its intention to replace voter ID cards starting from Thursday, May 30, until Friday, June 14.

This initiative will also facilitate the transfer of votes and applications for proxy voting.

During this period, these services will be available at EC district offices, selected electoral areas, and public universities. This forms part of the commission's preparations for the 2024 general elections scheduled for December 7th.

It's important to note that it is considered a criminal offense for a guarantor to vouch for more

than 10 people, non-Ghanaians, or individuals under 18 years of age.

In anticipation of the December 2024 polls, the EC had previously announced plans to update the voter register, set to take place from May 7 to May 27, 2024. The objective of this update is to include newly eligible voters, specifically those who have recently turned 18, into the voter register.

Additionally, individuals over 18 years old who have not yet registered for a voter's ID card will have the opportunity to do so during this period.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo*



File Photo

## Broadcasting bill will soon be laid before Parliament – Fatimatu Abubakar

The Minister-designate of Information, Fatimatu Abubakar, has announced that the Broadcasting Bill is ready to be presented to Parliament.

This announcement was made during the World Press Freedom Day celebration in Koforidua, Eastern region, on Friday.

Abubakar stated, "I am pleased to announce that the draft broadcasting bill has been finalised. We have received legal advice from the Attorney General's office and are looking forward to engaging with the parliamentary select committee, specifically the communication committee, to facilitate the bill's presentation in Parliament."

The purpose of this bill is to establish comprehensive legislation governing broadcasting services, overseen by the National Media Commission (NMC) and the National Communications Authority (NCA), in compliance with the constitution.

Additionally, Abubakar highlighted the government's commitment to enhancing the welfare and safety of journalists.

She mentioned ongoing discussions with the Judicial

Service to ensure accountability and severe punishment for individuals who assault journalists and media outlets.

Furthermore, collaborative efforts have been made to provide training sessions for journalists across the

country.

Abubakar noted, "We have conducted extensive training in partnership with various organisations, benefiting over 140 journalists from different media outlets nationwide. These

training sessions have equipped journalists with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their profession."

*Source: Independent Ghana / Sebastian Akaho-Tay*



Fatimatu Abubakar, Minister of Information

# General News

## Kumasi Airport to be renamed, commissioned on May 10

Preparations are underway for the commissioning of Kumasi Airport, set to be renamed Nana Agyemang Prempeh I International Airport on May 10, 2024.

The event, which is set to be graced by President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo and esteemed dignitaries such as Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Minister of Transport Kwaku Ofori Asiamah, and Managing Director of the Ghana Airport Company Limited, Yvonne Nana Afiriye Opare, promises to be a significant milestone in Ghana's aviation sector.

The commissioning signals the beginning of full operations at Kumasi Airport by June 2024.

Also, the facility is currently undergoing essential equipment testing to ensure smooth domestic and international flight operations under the auspices of the Ghana

Airport Company Limited.

With a capacity to serve over 800,000 passengers annually, the airport will focus on travellers from the northern and middle belt regions, addressing the increasing demand for air travel.

Transport Minister Kwaku Ofori Asiamah expressed satisfaction with the progress of the airport project during a recent inspection on May 3, 2024.

However, concerns were raised about the facility's long-term maintenance, given its vital role in the socioeconomic development of the Ashanti Region and beyond.

Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II commended the government for the project, highlighting its potential to create jobs and boost economic growth in the region.

Phase II of the project, launched in 2018, includes the construction of a modern terminal building

and additional infrastructure to accommodate one million passengers annually.

Originally built in 1943, the airport has undergone numerous renovations and expansions over the years.

Prior to its latest expansion in 2023, the airport served more than 400,000 passengers, ranking

as the second busiest airport in Ghana after Kotoka International Airport in Accra.

While Kumasi Airport received its international designation in 2014, it mainly operated regional flights until the recent expansions.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo*



Kumasi Airport

## AG's advice on Cecilia Dapaah case wrong, hogwash - Martin Kpebu fires

Private legal practitioner, Martin Kpebu has challenged the traditional notion that a predicate offence must be established in money laundering cases before pressing charges.

Kpebu argues that failure to disclose the source of income alone is sufficient grounds for a money laundering charge.

A predicate offence, typically the initial illegal activity in a chain of criminal actions, is considered fundamental in establishing money laundering.

The private legal practitioner asserted, for instance, tax evasion can serve as a predicate offence, leading to the laundering of illicit proceeds generated from such activities.

Kpebu's comments come in response to the Office of the Attorney-General advising the Economic and Organised Crime

Office (EOCO) against pursuing money laundering investigations regarding former Sanitation Minister Cecilia Dapaah's transactions.

The Attorney-General's office, in a letter dated April 25, 2024, highlighted that the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) had not submitted a collaborative investigation report to EOCO.

Moreover, the OSP had not responded to requests for findings, presenting only limited documentation to EOCO.

Disputing the Attorney General's advisory, Kpebu stated on TV3's Key Points show, "The advisory is totally wrong ... hogwash. It is clearly a mistake and must be withdrawn. Failure to disclose the money itself can be used as

money laundering; they can use it as a basis to charge for money laundering."

Kpebu emphasised Ghana's departure from the notion of requiring a predicate offence for money laundering charges, marking a shift in legal perspective on such matters.

*Source: Independent Ghana / Sebastian Akaho-Tay*



Martin Kpebu, Private Legal Practitioner

# General News

## NACOC undertakes a search operation at Nsawam Prison

A joint team comprising nine members from the Narcotics Control Commission (NACOC) and 20 operations officers from the Ghana Prisons Service has carried out a security sweep at the Nsawam Medium Security Prison in the Eastern Region.

The operation, conducted on Sunday, April 14, 2024, aimed to locate and confiscate any illicit drugs within the facility.

Despite thorough searches conducted in and around the prison premises, no narcotics were found.

The NACOC officers were accompanied by five security dogs, which were deployed to assist in the search.

Every conceivable area

accessible to inmates, including cells, workshops, classrooms, religious spaces such as churches and mosques, as well as the prison hospital, underwent inspection.

Additionally, the perimeter wall surrounding the prison was scrutinised for any signs of hidden narcotics.

Despite the deployment of sniffer dogs throughout the facility, no traces of illicit drugs were detected, concluding the search without any discoveries.

Assistant Director of Prisons Andrews Osei, serving as the Second-in-Command at Nsawam Medium Security Prison, expressed gratitude to the NACOC officers for their diligent operation.

He assured them that the prison

staff would maintain their vigilance in regular searches to prevent narcotics and other contraband from infiltrating the prison environment.

Highlighting the purpose of the exercise, he stated, "The aim of this operation was to locate and confiscate narcotic drugs within the prison facility, countering the perception that prisons are hotspots for illegal narcotics."

He commended the authorities of

Nsawam Medium Security Prison for their cooperation in facilitating the operation and praised the overall management of the Prisons Service for maintaining a narcotic-free environment, contrary to popular belief.

NACOC plans to extend similar exercises to all prison facilities nationwide.

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



Nsawam Prison

## Increasing trend in tattoos, piercings, bleaching among pre-tertiary students alarming - GES

The Ghana Education Service (GES) has voiced alarm at the growing prevalence of tattooing, multiple piercings, and skin bleaching among students, describing it as a "worrying trend."

In addition, the GES has expressed serious concerns about teenage pregnancies and cohabitation, citing their negative impact on students' academic endeavours, particularly young girls.

During visits to various districts in the Central Region as part of the 'Life Skills Programme,' Priscilla Christabel Eshun, the Central Regional Girls Education Officer of the GES, noted with surprise that some students had noticeable tattoos with unconventional names and meanings.

These observations were presented during the Second Quarter Sub-Implementing Partners (IPs) Review Meeting on sexual and gender-based violence, facilitated by the Regional Coordinating Council with support from the United Nations

Population Fund (UNFPA).

Eshun highlighted instances where students had excessively bleached their skin, leading to peeling and unpleasant odours.

"In one of the schools we visited, a young girl had bleached her skin to the point where it was peeling off and emitting an unpleasant smell. We also observed students with multiple piercings in their ears.

"This has become a fashion trend, and many girls are engaging in it without considering the potential health, employment, and other socio-economic consequences."

She also mentioned the prevalence of multiple ear piercings among students, attributing these trends to fashion without considering the potential health and socio-economic consequences.

Furthermore, Eshun disclosed that many boys had dropped out of school and were operating tricycles, with investigations revealing that girls were associating with these boys for

financial support.

"Regrettably, many girls are enticed into such relationships for financial gain, using the money to purchase sanitary pads and other personal items," Eshun revealed.

Expressing regret over these developments, Eshun emphasised that the GES prohibits tattooing, multiple piercings, and skin bleaching according to its Code of Conduct for pre-tertiary school students.

"Students shall not wear chains, bangles, caps, or braces. Wearing of spectacles shall require a medical prescription.

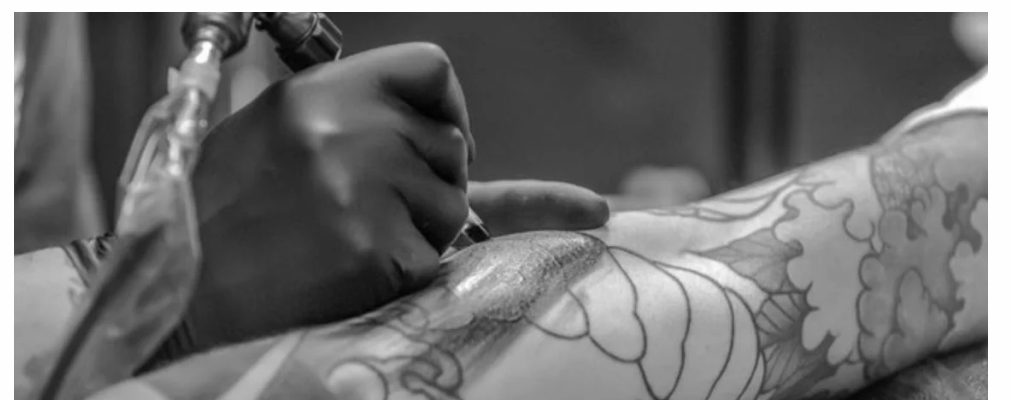
"No alterations to school uniforms

or dress shall be allowed. Possession or use of un-prescribed attire by a student is an offence," Eshun explained.

She reiterated the importance of students dressing neatly, adhering to prescribed dress codes, avoiding accessories like chains and bracelets, and maintaining a decent haircut as defined by school authorities.

"Students should have a decent haircut as prescribed by the school authorities. Hair should be clean, neat, and modest, and avoid extremes in styles and colour. Men's hair should be neatly struck and beard clean-shaven."

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



File Photo

# General News

## Noise-making ban set to start on May 6 - AMA confirms

The Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) has confirmed the implementation of a ban on drumming and noise-making activities within the Ga State.

This ban, set to commence on Monday, May 6, and last until Thursday, June 6, 2024, aims to address various forms of noise disturbances.

Head of Public Affairs, Gilbert Nii Ankrah, reiterated the purpose of the ban, emphasizing its aim to curtail noise disruptions. As per the statement issued by Ankrah, celebratory events and funeral

ceremonies will be suspended during this period.

Additionally, the statement highlighted that only designated task force members, comprising personnel from the AMA, the Ghana Police Service, and representatives from Traditional Councils, identifiable by tags, are authorized to enforce noise reduction measures in the metropolis.

Other individuals or groups are prohibited from engaging in such enforcement activities.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo*



*Gilbert Nii Ankrah, Head of Public Affairs*

## Businesses readying to leave Ghana over harsh economic conditions - FABAG

The General Secretary of the Food and Beverages Association (FABAG), Samuel Aggrey, has revealed a troubling trend, more businesses in Ghana are eyeing exits and slashing their workforce as they grapple with the harsh economic climate.

Speaking on the PM Express Business Edition with host George Wiafe on May 2, 2024, Aggrey emphasised the gravity of the situation.

Aggrey warned that without government intervention to address their concerns, these businesses have no choice but to relocate.

He cited ongoing challenges such as the persistent depreciation of the cedi and insufficient support for local firms facing competition from cheap imports.

"The situation is getting very bad, most of these firms have to comprehend, with unreliable utility supply," Aggrey warned.

Highlighting the urgency of the issue, Aggrey noted the detrimental effects of unreliable utility supplies on businesses.

He expressed concern over firms feeling compelled to leave due

to the unfavourable economic environment, despite efforts to engage with government agencies.

Echoing these sentiments, Senior Economist Prof. Robert Darko Osei from the Institute of Statistics Social and Economic Research (ISSER) emphasised the profit-driven nature of businesses.

Osei stressed that businesses will naturally seek environments where profitability is assured.

"We should understand that for most of these businesses, it's all about the profit and if the situation is not good for them in a country they operate, then they have to take some action". "We should also understand that most of these moves have been influenced by the economic environment and how it is impacting on their operations", he added.

Osei criticised the excessive tax burden on businesses, emphasising that over taxation is not a sustainable solution for Ghana's economic woes.

"As a country we should realise that we cannot tax ourselves out of the current economic situation.

"If we want to keep these businesses, then we need to look

at the tax system going forward", he advised.

However, he expressed hope that adherence to International Monetary Fund (IMF) programs could pave the way for stability and create a more favourable climate for businesses.

The discussion underscored the need for strategic policy decisions to signal government commitment to addressing business concerns and fostering a conducive environment for sustainable

growth.

Osei emphasised the importance of prioritising policies that stabilise the economy and reduce the cost of doing business to retain and attract investments in Ghana.

"Policy Prioritization is also very important in these times, to send some signals to these companies that government is committed to dealing with their issues," he said.

*Source: Independent Ghana / Sebastian Akaho-Tay*



*Samuel Aggrey, General Secretary, FABAG*



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# Business

## BOG governor pledges commitment to safeguard financial institutions against financial crime

Governor of the Bank of Ghana (BoG), Dr. Ernest Addison has reiterated the central bank's commitment to maintaining a vigilant stance in overseeing all financial institutions in Ghana.

Despite this assurance, Dr. Addison highlighted ongoing breaches of guidelines aimed at ensuring the safety and integrity of the banking system, including issues like money laundering, fraud, terrorist financing, corruption, market manipulation, insider dealings, and cybercrime.

Dr. Addison noted that the BoG has recently imposed sanctions and penalties on several banks due to such breaches, emphasising the

need to protect depositors and ensure the stability of the banking sector.

Speaking at an event in Accra, he emphasised the importance of regulatory compliance to foster trust and confidence in financial institutions.

"Let me note that, to protect depositors, while ensuring the stability and soundness of the banking system, the Bank of Ghana will continue to be vigilant to ensure that banks comply with regulatory requirements and guidelines to build trust and confidence in our financial institutions," he said at an event for Name change Galla Dinner for FBN Bank, in Accra on Thursday

May 2.

Furthermore, Dr. Addison acknowledged the rapid evolution of the banking sector, driven by advancements in financial technology (fintech).

He praised fintechs for delivering

innovative products and services, which have contributed to the expansion of financial inclusion and the adoption of technology across banking operations.

*Source: Independent Ghana / Sebastian Akaho-Tay*



*Dr. Ernest Addison, Governor, Bank of Ghana*

## IMF urges stringent tariff adjustments to ensure cost recovery in the energy sector

Deputy Director of the IMF, Ms. Catherine Pattillo and Mr. Luc Eyraud, Division Chief of the African Department, have emphasised the need for Ghana to implement stringent reforms during a press briefing in Accra.

These reforms are essential to empower utility service providers, allowing them to recover costs effectively. The aim is to ensure reliable and sustainable power for both household and industrial use. The IMF representatives also stressed the importance of creating an enabling environment for private sector involvement, particularly in increasing the use of renewable energy. They urged other African nations grappling with energy challenges to follow suit.

Ms. Pattillo highlighted that Ghana, like many other African countries, faces obstacles due to its current tariff structure. This structure fails to adequately support high-cost recovery by utility service providers, thereby limiting their operational capacities.

"Sometimes, the setup of the energy sector does not allow utilities to recover their costs

from the charges they make to operate profitably and efficiently and supply energy as needed," she said.

Regarding the Fund, she said, "we are always discussing with countries how to ensure that their energy sector, which often involves a number of state enterprises, is well managed to recover their costs and provide services."

Mr. Eyraud emphasised the importance of recalibrating tariff systems, noting that it would help boost cost recovery.

He also called on the government to institute mechanisms that would increase the country's share of renewable energy through enhanced private sector participation.

He mentioned South Africa as one country on the continent that had been doing well in the area of renewable energy, "by bringing in more private producers and reducing the barriers to entering the market."

In recent weeks, Ghana has been grappling with intermittent power outages, primarily stemming from financial constraints in acquiring fuel necessary for certain power plants to function at optimal levels.

During an interview with the Ghana News Agency last week, Nana Amoasi VII, representing the Institute for Energy Security (IES), underscored the critical need to provide resources to the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) to address the ongoing power outages.

"We expect the Ministry of Energy to coordinate and work with the Ministry of Finance to find alternative funding sources to deal with the challenge, specifically to procure fuel to get some of the power plants online," he said.

During his speech at the 2024

May Day celebration in Accra, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo expressed confidence in the continuity of power supply, suggesting that certain issues within the sector had been successfully addressed.

"Over time, the issues surrounding transformers and gas supply have been successfully resolved, resulting in a significant improvement in power supply reliability," he said.

*Source: Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo*



*IMF Logo*



# International

## Turkey halts trade with Israel over 'humanitarian tragedy' in Gaza

Turkey has suspended all trade with Israel over its offensive in Gaza, citing the "worsening humanitarian tragedy" in the strip.

The Turkish trade ministry said the measures would be in place until Israel allowed an "uninterrupted and sufficient flow" of aid into Gaza.

Trade between the two countries was worth almost \$7bn (£5.6bn) last year.

Israel's foreign minister accused Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of acting like a "dictator". Israel Katz said on X that Mr Erdogan was "disregarding the interests of the Turkish people and businessmen and ignoring international trade agreements".

He added that he had instructed the foreign ministry to find alternatives for trade with Turkey, with a focus on local production and imports from other countries. The ministry also says it will also take action to reduce economic connections between Turkey and the Palestinian Authority and Gaza, the BBC understands.

Turkish Trade Minister Omer Bolat criticised Israel's "uncompromising attitude" towards a ceasefire, as well as the humanitarian situation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah: "Turkey has suspended all export and import with Israel until a permanent ceasefire is established and the aid into the Gaza is allowed without any interruption."

In 1949, Turkey was the first Muslim-majority country to recognise Israel. But relations have worsened in recent decades. In 2010, Turkey broke off diplomatic ties with Israel after 10 pro-Palestinian Turkish activists were killed in clashes with Israeli commandos who boarded a Turkish-owned ship trying to break Israel's maritime blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Relations were restored in 2016, but both countries expelled each other's top diplomats two years later in a dispute over Israel's killing of Palestinians amid protests on the Gaza-Israel border. Mr Erdogan has become increasingly strident in his

criticism of Israel since the deadly Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October last year.

He has repeatedly criticised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, comparing him to Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini and Joseph Stalin and dubbing him "the butcher of Gaza".

Mr Netanyahu has said Turkey's leader is the last person who can preach morality to Israel. In March he said President Erdogan "supports the mass murderers and rapists of Hamas, denies the Armenian genocide [and] massacres Kurds in his own country".

Earlier this week, Israel reopened the Erez Crossing into northern Gaza for aid lorries

The Turkish leader has for months come under domestic political pressure to announce measures against Israel, from both opponents and allies.

His ruling AK party suffered its worst defeat in two decades in local elections at the end of March, and many religious voters supported the Islamist New Welfare party,

which had called for hardline measures against Israel.

Not long after the vote, Turkey imposed restrictions on 54 products being exported to Israel, from iron and steel to jet fuel, pesticides and construction equipment.

The trade ministry in Ankara said on Thursday that the action was now being extended to all exports and imports. Israel was Turkey's 13th biggest export market in 2023, receiving 2.1% of Turkish exports last year. Turkey was Israel's fifth biggest source of imports last year.

Israel has come under increasing criticism for conditions in the Gaza Strip. A UN-backed assessment said last month that 1.1 million people were facing catastrophic hunger and that famine was imminent in northern Gaza by May. On Thursday, the White House said a pier built by the US military to facilitate the flow of aid into the territory would be open within days.

The US has published photos showing logistics vessels and

personnel assembling the floating pier from steel segments, next to a US Navy ship.

However, the UN says a maritime corridor can never be a substitute for delivery by land, and that land routes are the only way to bring in the bulk of supplies needed.

Earlier this week, Israel reopened the Erez Crossing into the northern Gaza strip for aid convoys, under pressure from its Western allies and following repeated appeals from international aid organisations.

However, Jordan said some of its aid lorries were attacked by Israeli settlers before reaching the crossing.

A recent UN-backed report offered hard statistical evidence that the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza was turning into a man-made famine.

The UN's most senior human rights official, Volker Türk, told the BBC that there was a "plausible" case that Israel was using starvation as a weapon of war in Gaza.

**Source: BBC**



Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkish President

# International

## People eating 'grass and peanut shells' in Darfur - UN says

Time is running out to prevent starvation in Darfur, in western Sudan, a UN agency has warned, as escalating violence devastates the African nation.

People have been forced to consume "grass and peanut shells," the regional director for Eastern Africa of the World Food Programme (WFP) said on Friday. "If assistance doesn't reach them soon, we risk witnessing widespread starvation and death in Darfur and across other conflict-affected areas in Sudan," Michael Dunford added.

Sudan has been gripped by civil war since April 2023, when fighting erupted between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

It quickly descended into a brutal conflict characterised by reports of sexual and genocidal violence and civilian casualties, triggering an exodus of refugees.

On Thursday, two International

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) drivers were killed by gunmen in South Darfur, in an attack that left three other staff members injured, according to the humanitarian organization.

The ICRC team was attacked en route to assess the crisis among communities affected by armed violence in the region, the organization said.

The latest surge in violence comes as the RSF encircles North Darfur's capital, El Fasher.

In the city and its surrounding localities, there have been "increasing arbitrary killings," systematic "burning of entire villages" and "escalating air bombardments," the UN deputy humanitarian coordinator for Sudan, Toby Hayward, said on Thursday.

Hayward added that El Fasher is the only city in Darfur that has not been captured by the RSF and hosts thousands of people who

have been displaced by the war. At least 500,000 of those sheltering in the city have been displaced from violence elsewhere in Sudan, according to the UN's children's agency (UNICEF).

More than 36,000 people have been forced to flee their homes in El Fasher in recent weeks, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported.

At least 43 people have been killed in and around the city since the escalation of fighting a little over two weeks ago, UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell said on Thursday.

"Recent attacks on more than a dozen villages in western El Fasher have resulted in horrific reports of violence, including sexual violence, children injured and killed, homes set on fire, and destruction of critical civilian supplies and infrastructure," Russell detailed.

Meanwhile, deliveries of food assistance in Darfur "have been

intermittent due to fighting and endless bureaucratic hurdles" and at least 1.7 million people within the region are experiencing emergency levels of hunger, according to the World Food Programme.

"The latest escalation of violence around El Fasher has halted aid convoys coming from Chad's Tine border crossing – a recently opened humanitarian corridor that passes through North Darfur's capital," the WFP added.

Restrictions imposed by authorities in the coastal town of Port Sudan have hindered aid deliveries, the WFP said, preventing the transportation of relief via Adré, a town in neighbouring Chad.

More than 8.7 million people, including 4.6 million children, have been displaced by the war in Sudan and 24.8 million need assistance, according to OCHA.

**Source: CCN**



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