

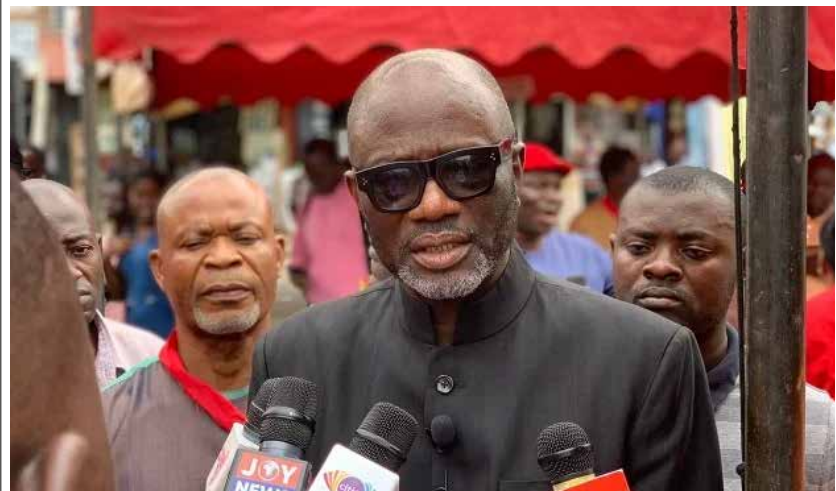


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# General News

## Auditor-General handed a 2-year contract extension by Akufo-Addo

President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo has extended the tenure of Auditor-General Johnson Akuamoah Asiedu for another two years. Mr. Asiedu was initially set to retire on August 1, 2024, after being sworn in by Vice President Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia in 2021.

The extension was announced in an official notice to the staff of the Auditor-General's office.

"I wish to bring to the notice of all staff that His Excellency the President of the Republic of Ghana has extended the tenure of the office of the Auditor General, Mr. Johnson Akuamoah Asiedu, for the next two years. The Service extends its congratulations to our Auditor General on the extension of his appointment. Thank you," the notice read.

Mr. Asiedu's appointment, which began on August 27, 2021, succeeded

that of former Auditor-General Daniel Yao Domelevo.

Before becoming the Auditor-General, Mr. Asiedu served as the Acting Auditor-General.

The extension comes amidst a backdrop of controversy related to the tenure of his predecessor, Daniel Yao Domelevo. In 2021, Domelevo was asked to proceed on compulsory retirement by President Akufo-Addo, a move that sparked debates about his tenure and independence as Auditor-General.

The decision to extend Mr. Asiedu's tenure has been met with mixed reactions, with some praising the continuity it provides and others questioning the necessity of extending the tenure of a retiree.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo*



*Johnson Akuamoah Asiedu, Auditor-General of Ghana*

## Over 11,000 women contracted HIV in 2023 - Ghana AIDS Commission

New data from the Ghana AIDS Commission reveals that 17,774 individuals in Ghana contracted HIV in 2023, with women accounting for a significant majority of the new infections.

During a press briefing in Accra, Dr. Kyeremeh Atuahene, Director General of the Ghana AIDS Commission, disclosed that 11,317 females and 6,457 males were newly infected with HIV last year.

The data includes 4,869 youths aged 15 to 24, 1,698 children under 15, 1,520 adolescents aged 10 to 19, and 16,076 adults over 15.

Despite a 14.8 percent reduction in new HIV infections over the past decade, Ghana has not met its annual target of a 17 percent reduction. Dr. Atuahene emphasized the need for more ambitious goals, setting a target of a 41 percent reduction in new HIV infections between 2023 and 2030.

As of 2023, an estimated 334,095 people in Ghana were living with HIV, with females outnumbering males. The affected population includes 17,550 children under 14, 16,381 adolescents aged 10 to 19, 33,245

young adults aged 15 to 24, and 316,545 adults aged 15 and above.

Despite progress in HIV treatment availability, 12,480 Ghanaians died from AIDS-related illnesses in 2023. Dr. Atuahene emphasized that these deaths were preventable with access to appropriate treatments.

Ghana remains committed to

achieving the global 95-95-95 targets by 2025, aiming to have 95 percent of people living with HIV aware of their status, 95 percent of those diagnosed on antiretroviral therapy (ART), and 95 percent of those on ART achieving viral suppression. In 2023, Ghana achieved 65.3 percent, 69.4 percent, and 89.0 percent for the respective targets.

Dr. Atuahene called for increased efforts to combat AIDS, particularly among the economically active population aged 15 to 49. He emphasized that addressing the AIDS epidemic should be a national priority in Ghana.

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



*File photo*



# General News

## Free SHS' influence on poverty reduction minimal – Study

A recent study by three prominent institutions has found that the Free Senior High School (Free SHS) policy, introduced by the government in 2017, has had a minimal impact on poverty reduction.

The study, conducted by the World Bank, Oxfam in Ghana, and the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana, attributes this to the policy's universal approach, which fails to adequately address disparities in access to secondary education between wealthy and disadvantaged households.

The research, titled "Fiscal Interventions and Welfare in Ghana: A Commitment to Equity (CEQ) Assessment Using the Ghana Living Standards Survey (Round 7)," was presented during the launch of an analytical simulation tool designed to monitor living conditions in the country.

This tool, known as the Microsimulation Tool on Fiscal Incidence Analysis, is based on the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS).

At the presentation in Accra, researchers highlighted that while Ghana experienced steady economic growth of over six percent on average from 2005 to 2017, the benefits of this growth were not equitably distributed.

Director of Research at the International Centre for Evaluation and Research, Dr. Kwadwo Danso-Mensah, noted that this inequity could undermine poverty reduction and welfare improvements that high economic growth might otherwise achieve.

Dr. Danso-Mensah pointed out that although poverty rates have declined, inequality has been rising. He emphasized that the government's role in ensuring that economic growth leads to significant welfare gains through improved income distribution and poverty reduction is crucial.

"This brings to the fore the need

to investigate in a comprehensive manner, the extent to which various governments' spending and taxation instruments independently or together impact on poverty and inequality," Dr. Danso-Mensah said. He stressed the importance of investigating how different government spending and taxation measures impact poverty and inequality.

The study employed the Commitment to Equity (CEQ) assessment framework, which provides a comprehensive analysis of the redistributive impacts of multiple fiscal policy elements.

The simulation results for the Free SHS policy indicated that, in the short term, poverty rates decreased marginally by 0.07 percentage points and 0.22 percentage points at the national

lower and upper poverty lines, respectively. The Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality, also reduced by 0.10 percentage points.

However, Dr. Danso-Mensah noted that the Free SHS policy was less progressive than expected. "This result, however, comes with a strong caveat that the analysis is static and does not incorporate behavioral responses which may reflect increased access or enrollment rates for the poor," he said. The policy's universal nature meant that wealthier households, which already had better access to secondary education, benefitted more.

Paul Coral, Senior Economist at the World Bank, explained that the tool built on the GLSS round seven allows for the assessment

of the distributional impacts of policies and reforms on the poor, the vulnerable, and the population at large.

"The tool allows us to assess the distributional impacts of policies and reforms and their effects on the poor, the vulnerable, and the population at large. It helps identify progressive versus regressive impacts," he added.

The study's findings call for a more targeted approach in implementing policies like Free SHS to ensure that they effectively address inequalities and contribute to significant poverty reduction.

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



Juaben SHS



# General News

## About 86,000 passports are yet to be collected - Osafo-Maafa

Senior Presidential Advisor, Yaw Osafo-Maafa, has raised concerns over a significant number of uncollected passports at various passport offices across Ghana.

According to Osafo-Maafa, approximately 86,000 passports remain uncollected by applicants.

“Because we subsidise the production of these passports, we are printing them for people at \$4 when we should be printing them at \$100. So the subsidy of these passports is locking up the capital of the government. The government’s subsidy in these passports is a big problem,” Osafo-Maafa told the press on Wednesday, June 19, 2024.

Breaking down the numbers, Osafo-Maafa noted that 8,000 passports in Takoradi, 8,696 passports in Cape Coast, and 19,500 passports in Accra have not been collected despite being printed.

To improve passport delivery services, Osafo-Maafa’s office presented modern IT equipment worth \$1.3 million to the passport office in Accra in 2023.

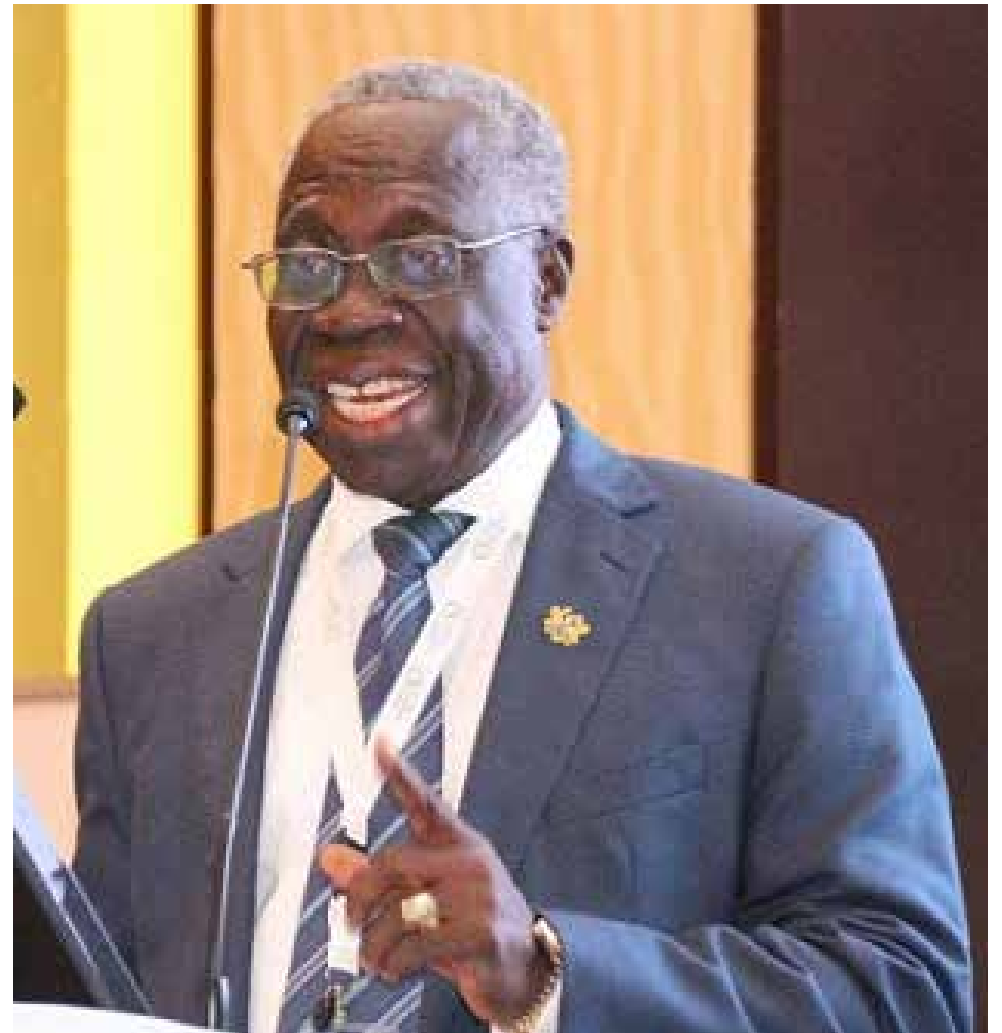
This initiative is part of an ongoing project by the Office of the Senior Presidential Advisor and the Public Sector Reform Secretariat, in collaboration with the World Bank. The project includes 13 selected public sector institutions, with the Passport Office being one of the key service delivery agencies.

Speaking at a ceremony to present the equipment, Osafo-Maafa highlighted that this intervention aims to enhance efficiency in passport issuance.

He also urged passport applicants to collect their documents promptly to ensure the sustainability of the subsidized passport production program.

The uncollected passports issue has sparked discussions about the efficiency and effectiveness of the passport application process and the need for better public awareness to ensure timely collection of issued passports.

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



*Yaw Osafo-Maafa, Senior Presidential Advisor*

## We are floating shares, not selling hotels – Govt clarifies SSNIT Hotels deal

The government has clarified its intentions regarding the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) hotels, stating that it is not selling the hotels but rather floating shares. Palgrave Boakye-Danquah, the government’s Spokesperson on Governance and Security, made this statement during an appearance on Joy Prime’s Prime Morning show.

Boakye-Danquah emphasized that the government’s goal is to issue shares to boost revenue and bring in private sector expertise.

This clarification comes amid growing concerns from political critics, leading to a protest organized by Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, the Member of Parliament for North Tongu. The demonstration, supported by organized labor and various civil society organizations, sought to pressure the government to stop the transaction.

“Ghanaians must know that there is no sale of hotels; it is floating of

shares. Stop misleading Ghanaians; we are not selling any hotel; it’s the floating of shares; 60% of the shares,” Boakye-Danquah stressed.

The NPP spokesperson rejected allegations of “state capture” made by opposing parties, clarifying that the plan to issue shares in state-owned hotels is not capitalism. He suggested that the Minority’s claims are based on a misunderstanding of the decision’s true nature.

“There is no ‘state capture,’ unless, of course, the NDC does not understand what is going on with the investment of SSNIT; they should look at the investments of SSNIT in a value chain,” he told the host.

Boakye-Danquah further explained that the financial performance of Rock City Hotel does not prevent it from making future investments in the hotel industry, which he likened to the aircraft industry with its fluctuating seasons.

“The fact that Rock City has not made as much profit as they expected

doesn’t mean that they cannot go ahead and purchase hotels; it doesn’t mean that the investment Rock City has made and the level of financial muscle they have will not give them the capacity to purchase more. The hotel industry is like the aircraft industry; it’s got its very peak season and its very low season,” he added.

In May, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa exposed the deal and raised concerns over SSNIT’s decision to sell 60% of its stake in the hotels to a government

minister.

Despite calls from the Minority and a petition to the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) urging the president to halt the hotel sale, the Ghana Federation of Labour claims that SSNIT is continuing negotiations to sell its stake in four hotels to Rock City Hotel, owned by Minister of Agriculture, Bryan Acheampong.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Amanda Cartey*



*Palgrave Boakye-Danquah*





# General News

## Motorcycle-related accidents in Bono Region surge by 130% in 2024 Q1 - NRSA

The Bono Regional National Road Safety Authority (NRSA) has sounded the alarm over a dramatic increase in motorcycle accidents within the first quarter of 2024.

According to the Regional Manager of the Authority, Abigail Atinpoka Adongo, there has been a staggering 130% rise in such incidents compared to the same period last year.

The data shows a troubling trend: while 48 motorcycle or tricycle accidents were recorded throughout 2023, with 10 occurring in the first quarter, the first quarter of 2024 alone has already seen 23 accidents.

More worryingly, 17 of these incidents involved victims who were not wearing helmets. Mr Adongo pointed out that this surge is primarily due to a lack of adherence to road traffic regulations and a failure to prioritise safety.

In response, the National Road Safety Authority has stepped up its public education campaigns, emphasising the critical importance of wearing crash helmets.

Recognising the additional risks posed by the election year, the Authority is committed to increasing its efforts to

prevent further accidents and save lives.

To tackle this issue, the Authority is collaborating with the Motor Traffic and Transport Department (MTTD) and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) to enforce helmet laws and promote a culture of safety in the region.

Motorcyclists and passengers are being urged to take personal responsibility for their safety by consistently wearing helmets.

"We are worried as an authority because over the years there has been an increase in the number of motorcyclists involved in accidents or crashes. Last year we recorded 48 that had to do with motorcycles or tricycles," said Adongo.

She further highlighted the significant rise in accidents this year.

"If you take this year's first quarter compared to last year's first quarter, we realize that there has been an increase in the figures. So last year's first quarter, we recorded 10 crashes involving motorcycles. But this year as we stand, in the first quarter we recorded 23 which means that there has been an increase and the increase is about 130 percent which is alarming."

Emphasizing the critical role of helmet use, she added, "As I compared the 2023 first quarter and 2024 first quarter where there is an alarming increase in the first quarter of 2024, we realized that out of the 23 that had the accident, 17 of them were without helmets and six were with helmets. This year being an election year, it

calls for more from the Authority."

The National Road Safety Authority's intensified efforts aim to reverse this worrying trend and ensure a safer environment for all road users in the Bono Region.

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



Motorcycle accident

## Central Region to host another 'Hands Off Our Hotels' protest

Member of Parliament for North Tongu and leader of the 'Hands off our Hotels' demonstration, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, has announced plans for a second protest in the Central Region.

Mr Ablakwa made the announcement on Facebook on June 20, assuring the people of the Central Region that their concerns regarding the sale of Elmina Beach Hotel and Ridge Royal Hotel had been acknowledged.

He stated, "May I respectfully assure the revered chiefs and good people of the Central Region who have called us for a patriotic partnership to stage the next #HandsOffOurHotels demonstration since they are vehemently opposed to the sale of Elmina Beach Hotel and Ridge Royal Hotel both in the Central Region that

we have unanimously agreed and resolved to hold a similar massive protest in the Central Region if President Akufo-Addo fails to stop the sales within the next few days"

The first phase of the protest took place on Tuesday, June 18, 2024, demanding the government to halt the sale of 60 percent shares in four SSNIT-owned hotels to Rock City Hotel, owned by Minister for Food and Agriculture, Bryan Acheampong.

The police abruptly halted the protest against the sale of Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) hotels on Tuesday, June 18, before it reached its intended endpoint at Christ The King.

The demonstrators were stopped

- continued on page 6



Group of protesters led by Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa



# General News

## Central Region to host next phase of 'Hands Off Our Hotels' protest

- Continued from page 5

along Switchback Road in Cantonments, Accra.

Meanwhile, Mr Ablakwa expressed concern about the wellbeing of those affected, stating, "They cannot take the law into their own hands and intimidate innocent

citizens."

He strongly criticized the police for their treatment of protesters, emphasizing that the police would face consequences for any harm inflicted on the demonstrators.

"Let me condemn what the police did, this is a peaceful march, our people conducted themselves well so why do you fire tear gas on innocent civilians? Now we have to rush a few to the hospital?"

"The Police will be held accountable

if anything happens to them. They can't take the law into their own hands and intimidate innocent citizens."

**Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe.M.Doku**

## 10 companies have submitted bids for the Saglemi Housing Project - Oppong-Nkrumah announces

Ten international and local companies have shown interest in completing the Saglemi Housing Project, according to the Minister of Works and Housing, Kojo Oppong-Nkrumah.

He mentioned that these companies had visited the project site to inspect the existing work, and they are currently preparing their proposals, which are expected to be submitted by July 8, based on the Ministry's work plans.

The Minister made the disclosure during a press conference at the Parliament House in Accra, on June 20, 2024.

Once the proposals are received

by the Ministry, an independent evaluation entity would be put in charge to scrutinise and presenting reports based on which the government would award the mandate to a befitting bidder to complete and operationalise the project;

He explained that the government initially borrowed around \$200 million to construct 5,000 housing units, of which only 1,506 are partially finished and can be seen at the Saglemi site.

He pointed out that the project is missing three essential components: water supply, electrical infrastructure, and sewage systems.

An evaluation by the Ghana

Institute of Surveyors estimates that an additional \$100 million is needed to complete these 1,506 units.

Due to financial limitations, Mr Oppong-Nkrumah emphasised that it is difficult for the government to secure an extra \$100 million after having already invested \$200 million in the project.

The Minister went on to explain that given the current financial challenges, it became necessary that "Cabinet took a decision that we should select a private developer or a consortium of private developers and let them invest in it so that we can operationalise it".

However, the evaluation reports that will be presented by the independent entity that would scrutinise the bids would be published for transparency, the Minister said.

"We are committed to every single bid that we are receiving, eventually we will publish every single bid, we will also publish the evaluation report so that you see for yourselves how the various bids were evaluated."

"So, everything is being done above board, so everybody can have confidence that it will stand the test of time," he noted.

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



**Kojo Oppong-Nkrumah, Minister of Works and Housing**





# General News

## Ghanaians' safety is our focus - FDA welcomes Supreme Court's verdict on celebrity alcohol ban

**F**ood and Drugs Authority (FDA) has hailed the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the ban on celebrities in alcohol advertisements as a major win for the public and the health of Ghanaians.

Speaking during a media engagement, Director of Legal and Corporate Affairs at FDA, Joseph Benneh, stated that "this is a victory for all Ghanaians and a victory for public health and safety".

According to him, "there is not much to celebrate, actually. It is just that we are contributing to the health and safety of the people of Ghana, and we are happy the Supreme Court sees eye to eye with us".

This comes after Celebrities in Ghana challenged the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) in court over a ban on their advertising for alcoholic companies.

The case began on November

11, 2022, when artiste manager Mark Darlington Osae sued the FDA, arguing that the ban violated equality and discriminated against the creative industry.

However, the Supreme Court on Wednesday, June 19, 2024 ruled in favour of the FDA where it upheld the Authority's 2016 guidelines, which bars celebrities and popular figures such as musicians among others from promoting alcohol products.

Manager of the musical duo Reggie N Bollie, Mr. Osae, in reaction, contended that the directive discriminates against celebrities and breaches constitutional rights.

He sought the court's interpretation of articles 17(1) and 17(2) of the constitution, aiming to overturn the FDA's directive on the grounds of discrimination.

Nonetheless, in a 5-2 majority decision, the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Gertrude Torkonoo, upheld the FDA's guidelines as

constitutional.

Meanwhile, FDA's Joseph Benneh commended the manager and all other celebrities who partnered with him to seek legal clarity and redress over the ban.

"It is just not about celebrities but of course, they find themselves

within that space and did the right thing in going to court to seek clarification and confirmation as to whether what we are doing is within the context of the constitution" he stated.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo*



FDA head office

## Abossey Okai will not become a political arena - Spare parts dealers caution politicians

**A**bossey Okai Spare Parts Dealers' Association has issued a stern warning to politicians against using their business hub for political activities, emphasising that the area is strictly a commercial zone and should not be exploited for political purposes.

In a statement released on Wednesday, June 19, 2024, by Takyi Addo, the Public Relations Officer of the Association, it was made clear that any attempts by politicians to use the Abossey Okai area for political events without prior communication or consent from the Association would be prevented.

The statement highlighted a growing trend where politicians visit the premises without informing the Association's leadership, transforming the

space into a political stage. The Association reiterated that the primary purpose of the Abossey Okai area is for business operations, not political maneuvering.

"As we approach the December 7 elections, the leadership of the Association wants to clearly state that such behaviors will no longer be tolerated," the statement read.

The Association urged all political parties and their representatives to seek permission before engaging with their members or using the area for political activities.

This protocol is deemed necessary to ensure that the leadership is informed and prepared to manage any issues that may arise.

The statement emphasized that the Abossey Okai area is not to be monopolized by any political party and called on all political actors to

respect this directive.

It concluded by stating, "Abossey Okai is a business center, not a political arena. We expect all

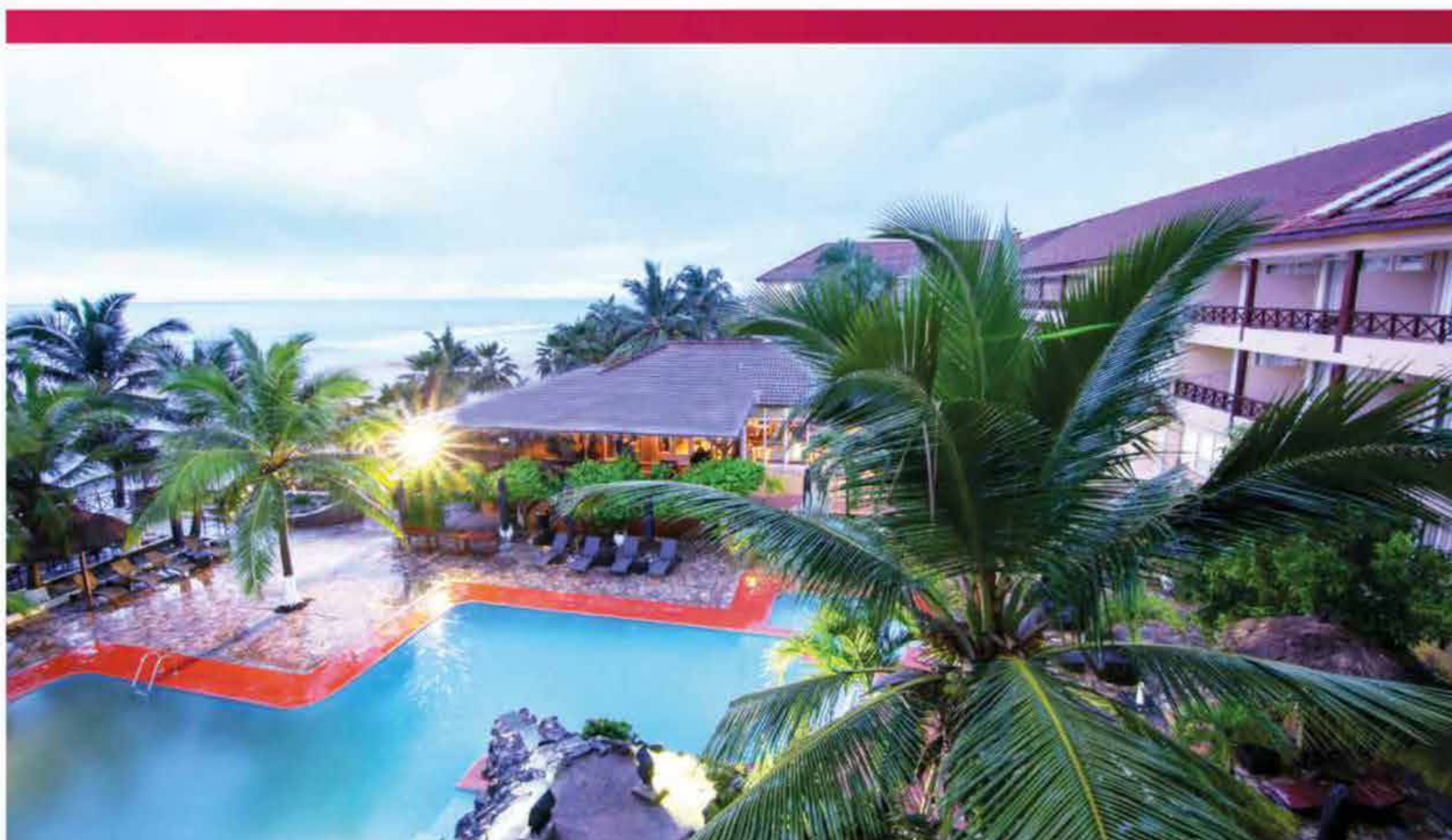
political parties to adhere to these guidelines."

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Amanda Cartey*



Abossey Okai Spare Parts Dealers' Association





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# Business

## Cost of producing goods and services surges by 6.8 %

The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) has reported a year-on-year inflation rate of 23.6% for all goods and services at ex-factory prices in May 2024, marking a significant increase from April 2024's 16.8%.

This surge underscores notable inflationary pressures within the economy during that period.

Additionally, the month-on-month producer inflation rate was recorded at 3.0%.

The GSS further indicated that producer price inflation in the industry sector excluding construction surged to 29.2% in May 2024, up from 20.2% in April 2024. In the construction sector, inflation soared to 54.7% during

the same period.

Within the Services sector, inflation also experienced an uptick from 9.4% in April 2024 to 11.4% in May 2024.

Sector-specific inflation rates above the national average (25.3%) were observed in Construction (54.7%), Mining and Quarrying (40.6%), Accommodation and Food Services Activities (25.9%), and Electricity and Gas (25.4%). Conversely, Water Supply, Sewerage, and Waste Management activities reported the lowest inflation rate at 7.4% in May 2024.

*Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe.M.Doku*



File photo

## Clamp down on Asian businesses operating in the retail space - GUTA to gov't

The Ghana Union of Traders' Association (GUTA) has urged authorities to take decisive action against foreigners operating in the country's retail market.

GUTA argues that this sector, traditionally reserved for Ghanaians, is now dominated by foreign traders, particularly Chinese, who flood the market with inexpensive products.

At the Customs, Controls, and Regulations Forum organized by the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC), GUTA President Joseph Obeng highlighted the issue.

He pointed out that foreign traders, notably those associated with China Mall and China Town, control around 40% of the market, undermining local manufacturers' efforts.

"We have China Mall and China Town, which have taken over 40% of the market, and are derailing the efforts of local manufacturers."

"All they do is to have their subsidized goods being dumped here (in Ghana) and we do not have

the courage to clamp on them," he opined.

These foreign entities, according to Obeng, import subsidized goods that are then dumped in Ghana, harming local businesses.

Obeng expressed concern that Ghanaian traders' market share has dwindled to just 20%, with the majority of goods being imported by foreign traders.

"The local traders' component is only 20%. The bulk of the goods are brought in by foreign traders."

He also noted that foreign traders often repatriate their earnings, exacerbating the depreciation of the cedi, as they do not bring in the necessary foreign exchange for trading but instead turn to the black market.

"They don't bring the correspondent forex for trading, they only go to the black market and change the forex and destroy our economy."

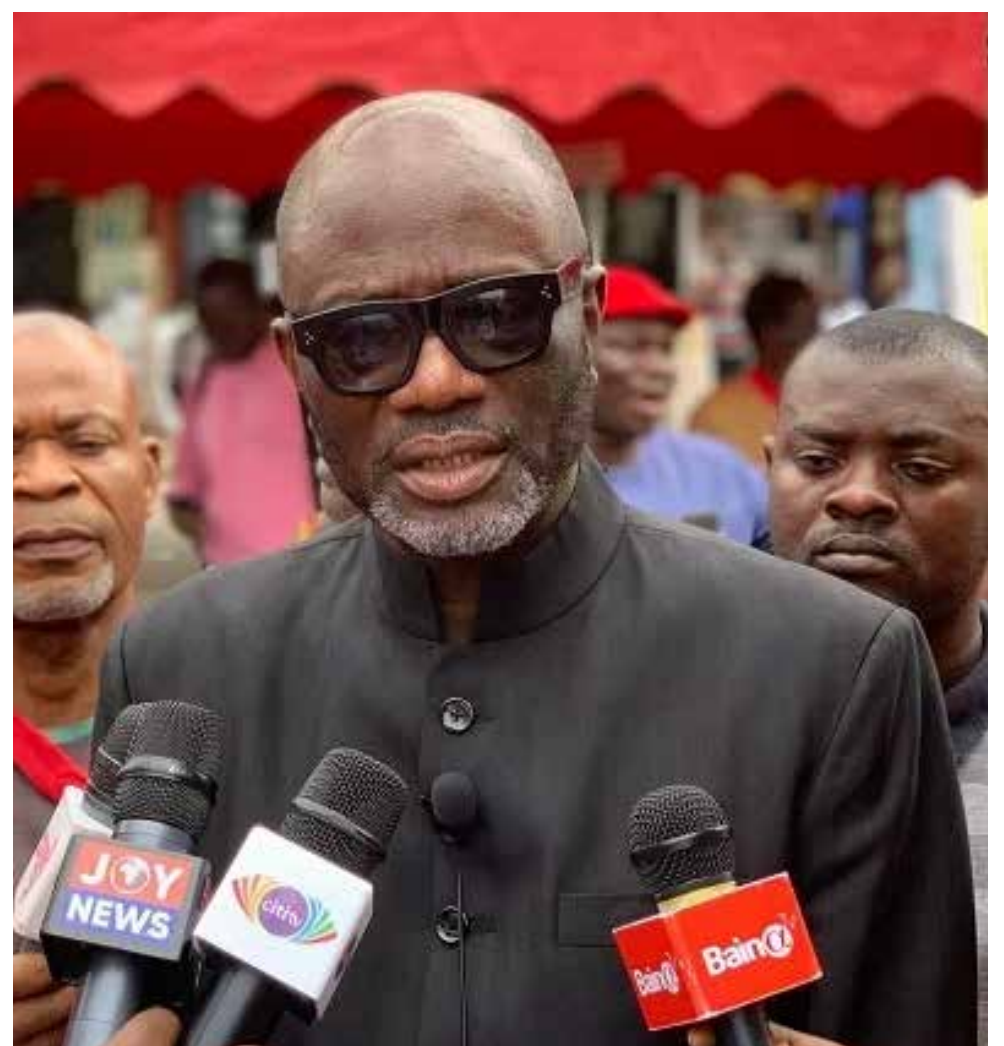
Despite existing laws that mandate certain retail businesses to be operated by Ghanaians, enforcement has been lacking, allowing foreign

traders to increasingly encroach on this space.

The forum organized by the GIPC serves as a platform to address issues affecting businesses and

investors, aiming to prioritize concerns and inform policy reforms.

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



Dr. Joseph Obeng, President-GUTA



# International

## Police battle anti-tax demonstrators as Kenya protests spread

**K**enyans police have clashed with anti-tax protesters in the capital, Nairobi, as demonstrations have spread to across the country, including to the president's home town of Eldoret.

Anti-riot police, some on horseback, fired tear gas to disperse crowds of protesters on the streets of Nairobi.

There were similar protests in other cities and major towns across the country - including Nakuru, Eldoret, Kisumu and Nyeri.

There is a palpable anger among many Kenyans over a controversial finance bill that has introduced a number of unpopular tax proposals.

As the protests started on Tuesday, the public outcry forced the government to withdraw some of contentious provisions, including a 16% tax on bread and an annual 2.5% tax on vehicles.

But protesters say this is not enough and have demanded that legislators, who are currently debating the bill in parliament, to reject the entire bill

"I dropped out of college as my parents couldn't afford my education. I'm hustling to go back and now you want to take the little I make and make me not even buy sanitary pads?" Aristaricus Irolo, 26, told the BBC in the capital, while holding a

pad, which is among the items affected by the proposed tax rises.

Fifty-six-year-old Mumbi Muturi said she had come to support her daughter and niece, both 25, who were protesting.

"We [her generation] did not come out to protest when we should have. I am not worried about these ones. They are securing their future. I am here to support them," she said.

Unlike in the past, the current protests are being driven by young people rather than politicians and have mostly been peaceful.

There have been intense rallying calls on social media using the hashtag #OccupyParliament and #RejectFinanceBill2024, urging Kenyans to keep vigil as members of parliament debate the bill.

It has also involved young professionals including doctors and lawyers, who are offering services to the protesters.

"My younger Gen Z colleagues here getting ready for dispatch to attend to any protester in need of medical attention in Nairobi," Mercy Korir, a medical doctor, posted on X, formerly Twitter.

In Eldoret, the home area of Mr Ruto, hundreds of protesters brought the city to a standstill as they marched through the

streets, some waving placards.

There were protests in some other towns across the country - with the anger over additional taxes uniting many Kenyans beyond their ethnicity and party.

In the central town of Nyeri, protesters chanted: "Ruto must go! and "It's all possible without Ruto".

"We are tired," other protesters said in the western town of Kisii. Since becoming president in 2022, Mr Ruto has introduced several new and unpopular taxes, which critics say stifle economic growth and lead to job losses.

The government has often defended the tax measures as necessary to reduce the

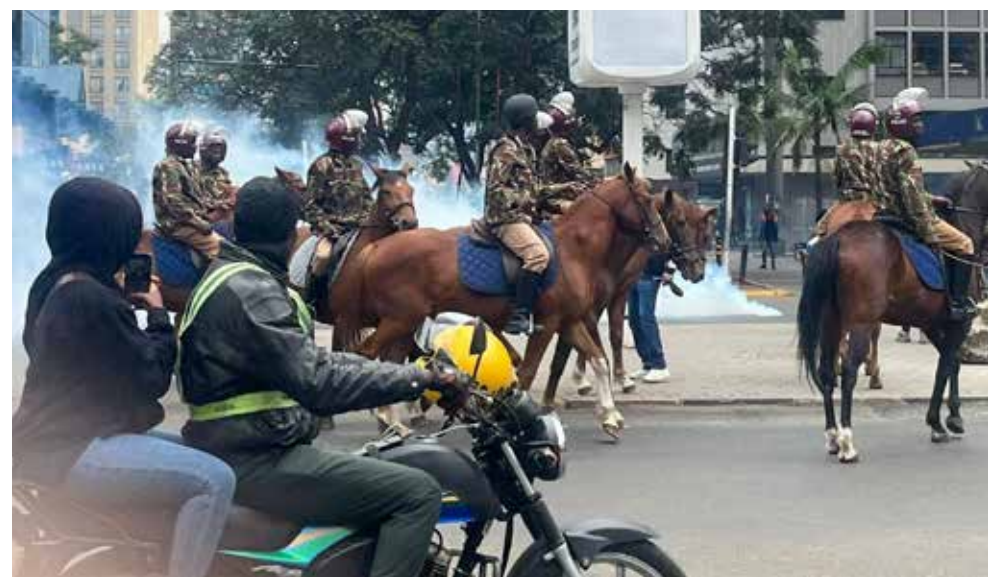
country's national debt of nearly \$80bn (£63bn).

On Wednesday the president said protests were a democratic right but maintained that they would not cripple the government's decision-making process.

Lawyers and rights groups have condemned the police for using excessive force against peaceful protesters, with hundreds of people arrested earlier this week.

Rights groups including Amnesty International jointly said on Thursday they had deployed observers nationwide while warning against use of such force.

**Source: BBC**



**Anti-tax protesters in the capital**

## Nigeria oil licence auction attracts huge interest, regulator says

**N**igeria is expanding the number of oil blocks slated for auction in its 2024 licensing round as well as extending the deadline for ending the exercise amid keen interest in the offer, the oil regulator told Reuters on Thursday.

Nigeria opened a licensing round in April offering a total of 19 onshore and deepwater oil blocks to investors.

This has now been expanded to include an additional 17 deep offshore blocks to the 2024 licensing round.

"We have undertaken more exploratory activities and as a result acquired more data to expand the offer and extend the deadline. This has given rise to tremendous interest from investors," Gbenga Komolafe, head of Nigerian Upstream Regulatory Commission (NUPRC) said.

Komolafe said that registration, which had been slated to close on June 25, has been extended by 10 days. Bid submissions would open on July 8 and close on Nov. 29.

The oil regulator is seeking to deepen exploitation of the country's estimated 37.5 billion barrels of crude oil and 209.26 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves.

It has tried to sweeten the offer by cutting entry fees called signature bonus from around \$200 million per field to \$10 million, promised a fair and transparent process and allowed online submissions through its website. Bidders also have the option to lease single units of oil blocks or in clusters.

Nigeria is seeking to halt the flow of investments to African rivals Angola

and Namibia by improving the ease of acquiring oil blocks.

Nigeria, a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), has seen its oil production decline from around 2 million barrels a decade ago to just over 1.4 million barrels per day.

Oil majors are leaving onshore fields - prone to sabotage and frequent claims to compensation for spills - to focus on deepwater fields where disruptions are less common.

**Source: Reuters**



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