



Heavy rains flood several hostels at KNUST amid mid-semester exam

Page 3

K.T. Hammond dismisses cement manufacturers' demands, pushes for price regulation without stakeholder talks

Page 4



Parliament approves mining agreement for Ghana Bauxite Company in Awaso

Page 11

You must engage all presidential aspirants to ensure a peaceful 2024 elections - Peace Council to EC

Page 2



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General News

You are the brain behind state capture under your govt - Ablakwa to Akufo-Addo

Member of Parliament for North Tongu, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, has accused President Akufo-Addo of leveraging his authority to control key state institutions, processes, and resources for personal benefit.

Ablakwa's allegations arise from President Akufo-Addo's alleged inaction regarding the sale of hotels owned by the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) to Agriculture Minister Bryan Acheampong.

In a recent statement, Ablakwa, who organized the "Hands off our Hotels Demonstration," criticized President Akufo-Addo for failing to halt the sale despite opposition from organized labor and public dissent.

Ablakwa asserted that President Akufo-Addo's failure to intervene signifies his role in orchestrating systemic state capture in Ghana.

"President Akufo-Addo refused to stop the sale of our SSNIT hotels when he met organized labour yesterday [Tuesday, June 25]. Akufo-Addo's appointed SSNIT board chair, Elizabeth Ohene is also boldly justifying the stinky deal despite overwhelming opposition from Ghanaians and the protest of labour representatives on her board.

"It's now confirmed beyond any scintilla of doubt — President Akufo-Addo is the chief-architect of all the putrefying State Capture. It's time to declare our own version of what just happened in Kenya. Watch out for the big announcement soon."

SSNIT Board Chair Elizabeth Ohene responded to the controversy, acknowledging the heightened political sensitivity due to Bryan Acheampong's dual roles as a government official and businessman.

She defended the transparency of the sales process, highlighting that it was publicly advertised in major newspapers.

Ablakwa further questioned the suitability of Bryan Acheampong as a buyer, pointing to alleged financial troubles at his Rock City Hotels. Acheampong challenged Ablakwa to substantiate these claims and offered to surrender properties if evidence of financial instability could be proven.

The dispute escalated with Ablakwa claiming to possess

documents from the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) indicating financial challenges at Rock City Hotel, which Acheampong vehemently denied, citing pending tax filings as proof of ongoing financial review.

Throughout the exchange, Ablakwa reiterated his commitment to accountability, emphasizing that his oversight responsibilities as a legislator were driven by public interest rather than personal gain.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe.M.Doku



President Akufo-Addo (L) and Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa (R)

You must engage all presidential aspirants to ensure a peaceful 2024 elections - Peace Council to EC

The Chairman of Ghana's National Peace Council (NPC), Rev Dr Ernest Adu-Gyamfi, has advocated for a crucial meeting between the Electoral Commission (EC) and all presidential candidates ahead of the upcoming December elections.

This proposal aims to provide a platform for candidates to express their concerns and ensure a peaceful electoral process.

In an interview with the media,

Rev Dr Adu-Gyamfi emphasized the necessity of fostering peace among candidates during their campaigns and beyond.

He stressed that electoral campaigns should focus not only on policies but also on upholding democratic values and respecting electoral outcomes.

"Elections are won at the polling stations, and violence should have no place in our democratic

- continued on page 3



Peace council meets EC

General News

You must engage all presidential aspirants to ensure a peaceful 2024 elections - Peace Council to EC

- Continued from page 2

process," stated Dr Adu-Gyamfi, highlighting the importance of peaceful conduct by political parties and their supporters.

Already, Ghana's major political parties, including the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), have confirmed their flagbearers for the 2024 elections. Former

President John Mahama will represent the NDC, while Vice President Dr Mahamudu Bawumia will lead the NPP's campaign.

In addition to the main parties, other contenders have declared their intentions to vie for the presidency. John Kwadwo Kyerematen, leader of the Movement for Change, and Nana

Kwame Bediako, heading The New Force political movement, are among those aspiring to contest.

However, the Convention People's Party (CPP) is facing internal challenges that may prevent them from fielding a presidential candidate this election cycle.

Sylvester Sarpong-Soprano, CPP's

Director of Communications, revealed in an interview with Asaase Radio that ongoing internal disputes and legal issues have hampered the party's ability to organize effectively and conduct primaries.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

Heavy rains flood several hostels at KNUST amid mid-semester exam

Hheavy rains on Wednesday, June 26, led to severe flooding in several off-campus hostels near Ayeduase at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST).

The prolonged rainfall caused significant water accumulation, severely disrupting the lives of students living in these hostels.

The flooding affected numerous buildings, with water seeping into rooms and damaging personal belongings, electronics, and study materials.

The extent of the flooding varied across different hostels, forcing students to quickly secure their possessions and navigate through rising water levels.

The timing of the floods coincided with mid-semester exams, adding to the challenges faced by the students.

Despite the adverse conditions, many students had to wade through the water to reach their examination halls.

Affected students voiced their

frustration and concerns, sharing images and videos of the flooded hostels on social media. They called for immediate action from hostel management and local authorities to address drainage issues and prevent future flooding.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe.M.Doku



Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)

General News

K.T. Hammond dismisses cement manufacturers' demands, pushes for price regulation without stakeholder talks

Trade Minister Kobina Tahir Hammond has dismissed calls from cement manufacturers for stakeholder discussions before presenting a legislative instrument (L.I.) aimed at regulating cement prices to Parliament.

Speaking on JoyNews' PM Express, Hammond explained that although manufacturers were not consulted during the drafting of the L.I., he had ongoing conversations with them about pricing transparency.

"I didn't have to consult them in drafting the L.I. I warned them consistently that they couldn't do what they're doing [raising prices]. I consulted with them several times in my office, I told them what I wanted. I wanted them to be transparent, there to be a reduction, I wanted us to understand the basis and the publication," he said.

Hammond stated that he had urged cement manufacturers to self-regulate their pricing to

prevent prices from skyrocketing, but his efforts were ignored. He believes the proposed L.I. will push manufacturers to be transparent about production costs and create a beneficial price ceiling.

"The reality is very clear, the cedi hasn't been performing greatly of late, we accept that there is a difficulty. But, let's understand the pricing mechanism just as the petroleum sector is regulated by the NPA, so everyone knows the basis," he explained.

Mr Hammond added that the price ceiling would be determined after considering all factors, including production costs, profit margins, and currency depreciation. He emphasized the need for the L.I. to prevent the exploitation of the public by cement manufacturers.

This move follows a petition by the Chamber of Cement Manufacturers to Parliament, rejecting the proposed L.I. due to a lack of prior consultation with key stakeholders. They argued

that addressing the issues behind cement price hikes requires a collaborative effort from all relevant parties.

"We firmly believe that the issues leading to the escalation of cement prices are complex and multifaceted, primarily driven by the rapid and consistent depreciation of the Ghanaian cedi against the US dollar. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive understanding and collaborative effort from all relevant parties," their letter stated.

Background

In May 2024, Hammond instructed the Cement Manufacturing Development Committee (CMDC) to reverse the recent price hikes. However, the Cement Manufacturers Association (CMA) rejected this directive, citing production costs and free market principles.

On June 25, Hammond presented the L.I. titled 'The Ghana Standard

Authority Pricing of Cement Regulations 2024' to Parliament, facing fierce opposition. NDC MPs demanded that the L.I. undergo pre-laying procedures before being formally presented.

Under the proposed L.I., cement manufacturers could face up to three years in jail for violating price regulations. The document sets a maximum allowable retail price for cement and imposes stiff penalties on violators, including corporate directors and officers.

"In the case of a body corporate, every director and officer of that body corporate is deemed to have committed that offence," Hammond explained.

"If you violate this, and you sell above the price ceiling, the directors of the company, the officers of that body corporate will be thrown into jail if indeed you're found guilty up to three years in jail."

Source: The Independent Ghana



Kobina Tahir Hammond, Minister for Trade and Industry



General News

Deputy AG calls for unified effort against human trafficking

Deputy Attorney General Diana Asonaba Dapaah has bemoaned the existence of human traffickers in the country despite efforts by the state to nib their activities in the bud.

Poverty, limited education, and influence from individuals in prominent positions such as traditional leaders and politicians have been pinpointed as significant obstacles in Ghana's battle against human trafficking.

Deputy Attorney General Diana Asonaba Dapaah highlighted that despite governmental initiatives, including the enactment of pertinent legislation, these challenges persistently impede her office's prosecution efforts against perpetrators of this crime.

"Some of the problems we encounter when we are prosecuting some of these perpetrators is for members within the community to purport to interfere in the prosecution either through lobbying or luring or through threats of death and other things," she said.

She addressed attendees at the National Justice Conference of the International Justice Mission in Accra.

Madam Dapaah emphasized that while the government has laws in place to combat trafficking, much

more needs to be accomplished.

She therefore has called on all Ghanaians to rally their support behind the government by providing intel on suspicious activities and

the hideouts of individuals involved in human trafficking to the security agencies.

"It is a whole community responsibility. So as a government,

we are doing our bid but we relish the continuous support of all of us," she said.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Amanda Cartey



Diana Asonaba Dapaah, Deputy Attorney General

Alcohol abuse led to over 3,000 mental health cases in 2023 - MHA

The Mental Health Authority of Ghana (MHA) has raised an alarm regarding the growing prevalence of mental health disorders associated with alcohol and psychoactive substance abuse.

In their latest report released on June 26, coinciding with the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, the authority highlighted troubling statistics.

In 2023, there were 3,765 reported cases of mental disorders linked to alcohol use, alongside an additional 5,554 cases related to

other psychoactive substances.

These figures reveal an alarming trend over the past five years, indicating an increase in mental health challenges stemming from substance abuse.

According to data from the District Health Information Management System (DHIMS), cases have steadily risen from 4,155 in 2019 to 5,554 in 2023, predominantly affecting individuals aged 20-34 years. Shockingly, even children aged 10-14 years are exhibiting signs of mental health issues associated with drug use.

- continued on page 6



File photo

General News

Alcohol abuse led to over 3,000 mental health cases in 2023 - MHA

- Continued from page 5

This year's theme, 'Evidence is clear: Invest in prevention,' underscores the authority's commitment to addressing Ghana's widespread drug abuse issue.

They have expressed deep concern over this trend and are actively collaborating with stakeholders to combat it through education, awareness campaigns, and policy advocacy. There is an urgent call for increased investment

in prevention strategies and evidence-based interventions.

The DHIMS consistently identifies mental disorders linked to alcohol and psychoactive substances as one of the top ten reasons for outpatient mental health visits.

The authority continues to stress the critical need for comprehensive approaches to effectively address these issues and minimize their impact on public health and well-being.

"Data from the District Health Information Management System (DHIMS) has consistently captured mental disorders due to alcohol and other psychoactive disorders among the top ten (10) causes of mental health outpatient (OPD) attendance.

"In 2023, a total of 3,765 cases of mental disorders due to alcohol use were attended to, and 5,554 cases with respect to other psychoactive substance use.

"The 5-year trend of mental disorders due to psychoactive substance use has shown a steady rise in the number of cases from 4,155 in 2019 to 5,554 cases in 2023, with the age range most affected being 20–34 years. It must be noted that children as young as 10–14 years are also presenting with conditions stemming from drug use."

Source: The Independent Ghana / Phoebe.M.Doku

Ablakwa to replicate Kenya's protest in Ghana over sale of SSNIT hotels

Member of Parliament for North Tongu, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, is calling for mass demonstrations in Ghana over the sale of SSNIT hotels, drawing inspiration from the recent youth-led protests in Kenya.

The recent protests in Kenya have successfully pressured the government to withdraw a controversial finance bill that proposed significant tax increases.

Referencing these events, Mr. Ablakwa criticized President Akufo-Addo for his unwavering support of the sale of four SSNIT Hotels to Rock City, a company owned by the Minister of Food and Agriculture, Bryan Acheampong, despite criticism from the public.

In a social media post on Wednesday, June 26, 2024, Mr. Ablakwa highlighted that despite a meeting with organized labour earlier in the week and a demonstration dubbed 'Hands Off Our Hotels,' the President has maintained his stance on the sale.

Mr. Ablakwa also accused the SSNIT board chair, Elizabeth Ohene, who was appointed by President Akufo-Addo, of defending the deal despite widespread opposition from Ghanaians and protests from labour representatives on the board.

He therefore labelled President Akufo-Addo as the "chief architect" of what he describes

as a controversial and unpopular deal, declaring that it is time for Ghanaians to mobilize and launch their own version of Kenya's protests.

"President Akufo-Addo refused to stop the sale of our SSNIT hotels when he met organized labour yesterday [Tuesday]," Mr. Ablakwa stated.

"Akufo-Addo's appointed SSNIT board chair, Elizabeth Ohene, is also boldly justifying the stinky deal despite overwhelming

opposition from Ghanaians and the protest of labour reps on her board."

He urged citizens to stay tuned for a major announcement regarding plans for a significant demonstration.

"It's now confirmed beyond any scintilla of doubt — President Akufo-Addo is the chief architect of all the putrefying State Capture. It's time to declare our own version of what just happened in Kenya," he posted.

The recent Kenyan protests escalated dramatically, leading to the burning of cars and part of the parliament building on Tuesday, June 25, 2024.

Tragically, several protestors lost their lives, allegedly due to police actions, with many others injured. Facing intense pressure, Kenyan President William Ruto ultimately reversed his stance and withdrew the tax plan.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tetty



Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, Member of Parliament for North Tongu



General News

Defence Ministry's letter on Jakpa's dismissal from Ghana Army admitted in evidence by court

Letters from the Ministry of Defence detailing the dismissal of the third accused, Richard Jakpa, in the ongoing ambulance procurement trial, from the Ghana Armed Forces have been admitted into evidence by the court.

The documents outline the reasons for Jakpa's sacking, shedding light on his history of misconduct and insubordination.

During court proceedings on Tuesday, June 18, Jakpa openly acknowledged his dismissal from the Armed Forces, attributing it to allegations of insubordination and repeated failures in mandatory intelligence exams.

Jakpa, who was commissioned into the Armed Forces in 1998, was dismissed in 2007. He cited his failure to pass intelligence exams five times between 2000 and 2007 as the key reason for his dismissal.

"Jakpa confirmed that he was commissioned in the Armed Forces

in 1998 and got dismissed in 2007 for misconduct/insubordination and failure to pass the required intelligence exams five times within seven years. He failed in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2006, and 2007," the prosecution revealed.

Jakpa defended himself, asserting that his dismissal was a result of victimization by senior officers who were envious of his exemplary performance as a soldier. He maintained that his dismissal was unjust and that he was targeted due to jealousy.

The prosecution, led by the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP), conducted a thorough cross-examination, uncovering significant revelations about Jakpa's past. The letters from the Ministry of Defence provided detailed accounts of the reasons for Jakpa's dismissal, adding weight to the prosecution's case.

Additionally, Jakpa admitted that the conversation between himself

and the Attorney-General (AG), presented in court as Exhibit 10 by the defence, did not encompass the entire dialogue. He claimed that only portions favorable to their defence were included in the submission.

"Jakpa confirmed in open court that the conversation between him and the AG that is in circulation and which was tendered in court by the accused persons as Exhibit 10 is actually not the full conversation. They only presented the aspects of the conversation that will help their case," the prosecution stated.

In court on Thursday, June 27, the Ministry's Letter of dismissal showed that Jakpa was dismissed from the Ghana Army in November 2007 for "unsatisfactory conduct marked by fraudulent conduct abrasiveness, general indiscipline" and that he belongs to a world incompatible with decent and gentlemanly composure.

The Ministry of Defence further

stated that Jakpa "is a bad example by all standards, and his continued retention in the Service is likely to cause more harm to the Service and to himself".

The Ministry further noted that, per Jakpa's records, he should have made the rank of Captain by August 2002 but consistently failed his promotion examinations and lagged far behind his mates in rank. Jakpa was therefore released for inefficiency.

The trial, which has attracted significant public interest, involves the current Minority Leader in Parliament, Dr. Cassiel Ato Forson, and businessman Richard Jakpa.

They face allegations of deliberately causing financial loss to the state amounting to 2.37 million euros through the procurement of ambulances. Both Dr. Ato Forson and Jakpa have pleaded not guilty and are currently standing trial.

Source: The Independent Ghana



Cassiel Ato Baah Forson (L) and Richard Jakpa (R)

General News

Prison inmates to register for 2024 elections from August 1-3 - EC

The Electoral Commission (EC) has announced its cooperation with the Ghana Prisons Service to enrol eligible inmates in preparation for the 2024 general election.

During the upcoming supplementary registration exercise from August 1 to August 3, 2024, eligible prison inmates will have the opportunity to enrol at all district offices of the Commission.

This announcement was made during a press briefing following the EC's meeting with the National Peace Council in Accra on Wednesday, June 26.

The objective of the meeting was to inform key stakeholders about the election timetable and seek their input

to ensure trustworthy, equitable, and transparent elections in 2024.

The Peace Council encouraged the EC to foster confidence among political parties and the public by maintaining ongoing communication with relevant stakeholders to enhance openness and responsibility in its activities.

Chairperson of the EC, Mrs Jean Mensa, affirmed the Commission's commitment to conducting transparent, unrestricted, and trustworthy elections, highlighting the significance of its discussions with the Peace Council.

"We have had useful deliberations. The purpose was to brief the Council, receive feedback, and address some of the concerns that you have. We are going away with some useful nuggets

that we believe will strengthen our work," she said.

Mrs. Mensa restated the Commission's dedication to facilitating the participation of Guan Constituency residents in the upcoming elections.

She also confirmed that no new Constitutional Instrument would be introduced for the December 7 polls and assured the use of indelible ink during the process.

Addressing the registration of prison inmates, the EC Chairperson mentioned that the Commission was acquiring data from the Prisons Service to inform its preparations.

Reverend Dr. Ernest Adu-Gyamfi, Chairman of the National Peace Council, highlighted that the meeting covered topics such as fostering trust

between the EC, political parties, and the public, and the importance of consistently clarifying matters to all stakeholders.

"It's been a very fruitful meeting," he said and expressed delight that the people of the Guan Constituency would be participating in the upcoming elections.

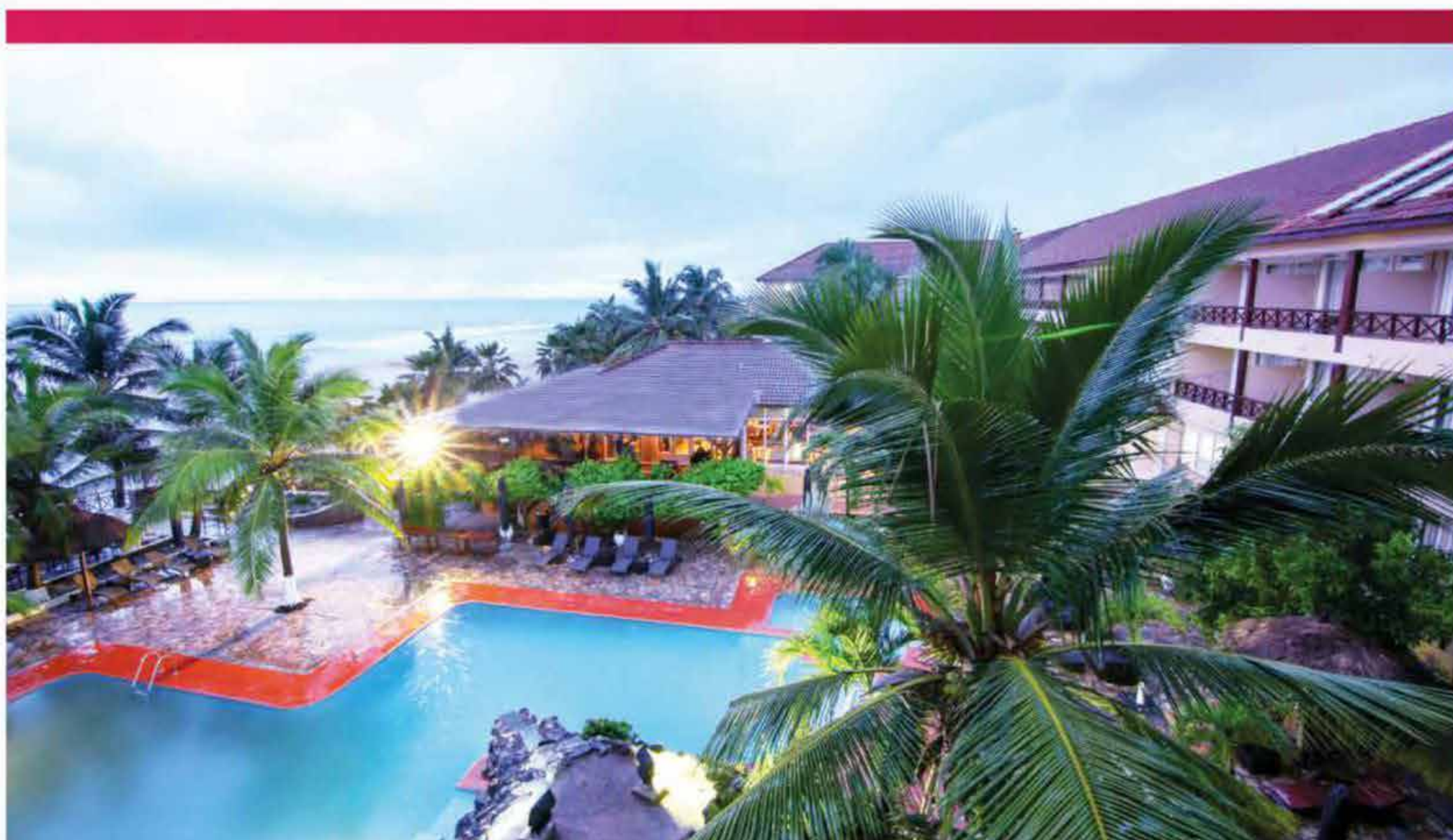
From May 7 to May 29, 2024, the EC carried out a voter registration drive, followed by a nationwide effort to replace lost voter ID cards starting May 30, 2024.

Additionally, the EC has finished the voter transfer process, ensuring all necessary updates are completed.

Source: *The Independent Ghana / Amanda Cartey*



Ghana prison inmates



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Business

5% tax on locally manufactured plastics will collapse 30,000 jobs - Gov't told

The Ghana Plastic Manufacturers Association (GPMA) has raised alarm over the potential impact of a planned 5% excise tax on locally manufactured plastics, warning that over 30,000 workers in the sector could face layoffs if the tax is implemented.

President of the GPMA, Ebo Botchwey, expressed grave concerns about the detrimental effects of the proposed tax, emphasizing that it could lead to the shutdown of production plants and significantly increase prices of essential products such as medicines, beverages, and sachet water.

Mr Botchwey argued that the timing of the tax implementation is, particularly amid economic challenges exacerbated by exchange rate fluctuations.

He criticized the government for imposing additional taxes without adequate consultation with industry stakeholders, noting that many businesses are already struggling to cope with existing tax burdens.

"We have been burdened with numerous taxes, and imposing another one now shows a disregard for the growth of businesses," Botchwey lamented. He highlighted the trend of companies relocating from Ghana due to high operating costs, which threatens the country's competitiveness in the region.

The Association of Sachet and Packaged Water Producers also expressed solidarity with GPMA's stance, warning that they would be forced to halt production for a week if the tax is enforced.

Magnus Nunnoo, President of

the association, emphasized the impracticality of packaging water in alternative materials like paper, underscoring the essential role of plastics in their operations.

Mr Nunnoo called for immediate suspension of the tax and urged comprehensive stakeholder consultations before any such measures are implemented. He appealed to Vice President Dr. Bawumia to intervene, highlighting the potential hardship the tax could impose on consumers, especially the economically vulnerable segments of society.

President of the Ghana Union Traders Association (GUTA), Joseph Obeng, echoed these concerns, warning of severe supply chain disruptions if plastic manufacturers cease operations.

He emphasized the critical role of plastics in packaging materials,

essential for products like bottled and sachet water.

"We cannot package water in paper; we still have to use plastic materials," Obeng stressed, highlighting the domino effect that a shutdown of plastic manufacturing could have on various sectors reliant on plastic packaging.

The stakeholders have given the Ministry of Finance a one-week ultimatum to respond to their concerns, threatening collective action if their demands are not met. They called on the government to halt harassment of plastic manufacturers and prioritize policies that support economic growth and job creation.

Source: The Independent Ghana / Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey



Ghana Plastic Manufacturers Association (GPMA)



Business

Parliament approves mining agreement for Ghana Bauxite Company in Awaso

Parliament has unanimously approved the mining lease granted to the Ghana Bauxite Company for bauxite extraction in Awaso, located within the Bibiani Anhwiaso Bekwai Municipality of the Western North Region.

This decision followed the presentation of a joint report by the Parliamentary Committees on Mines and Energy, and Lands and Forestry on Wednesday, June 26, 2024.

The Awaso bauxite mine plays a crucial role in the government's strategy to develop a comprehensive aluminium industry in Ghana. The Ghana Integrated Aluminium Development Corporation (GIADEC), tasked with advancing this sector, has identified the mine as a key project.

GIADEC is collaborating with strategic investors to expand the mine and establish a refinery for processing bauxite extracted from the region.

The Ghana Bauxite Company, operational for over 80 years, is the sole producer of bauxite in the country, having undergone various phases since its establishment in the 1940s.

Originally owned by the British Aluminium Company Ltd, the government acquired a 55% stake in 1972 under the Mining Operations (Government Participation) Decree, 1972 (NRCD 132), aligning with the policy of the National Redemption Council to assert control over key economic sectors.

Subsequently, production challenges led to a decline from 407,000 tonnes in 1974 to 64,000 tonnes by 1982. In response, the government divested its stake, with Alcan, a Canadian firm, acquiring an 80% share in 1997, leaving the remaining 20% in government hands.

Later, Rio Tinto, a British-

Australian multinational, acquired Alcan's interest before transferring it to the Bosai Minerals Group in 2010.

However, in 2022, Ofori-Poku Company Limited (OPCL), a wholly Ghanaian-owned entity, acquired the 80% stake previously held by Bosai, marking the first time in its history that the company became entirely Ghanaian-owned.

Established in 1990, OPCL has extensive experience in the mining sector, providing various services such as haulage, transportation, and climate change solutions.

Following the expiration of its previous lease, the company secured a new lease on May 3, 2024, covering the Kanayerebo, Subri, Nchiniso, Afumba, and Bokahirri Hills in Awaso.

Earlier this month, Samuel A. Jinapor, MP and Minister for Lands and Natural Resources, presented the lease to Parliament for ratification under Article 268(1) of the 1992 Constitution. It was subsequently referred to the Joint Committee on Mines and Energy

and Lands and Forestry.

Presenting the committee's findings to Parliament, Samuel Atta Akyea, Chairman of the Mines and Energy Committee, affirmed the constitutional requirement for parliamentary oversight in managing and utilizing the nation's natural resources.

He emphasized that the lease aligns with constitutional provisions and national laws, highlighting its potential to deliver significant benefits to the government and promote socio-economic progress in the region.

The committee expressed confidence in the company's financial and technical capabilities to fulfill its obligations under the lease, thereby endorsing its ratification.

Members of Parliament commended Minister Samuel A. Jinapor for seeking parliamentary ratification of the lease, noting past lapses in adherence to this constitutional requirement since 1992. They praised the government for securing Ghanaian investment in the critical mine and

ensuring complete ownership by Ghanaians.

MPs also welcomed plans for a refinery in the agreement, aimed at adding value to the mined minerals, and expressed optimism about the benefits for all Ghanaians.

In response, Minister Samuel A. Jinapor thanked Parliament and the committee members for their diligence and unanimous support in ratifying the mining lease.

He reiterated the government's commitment to enhancing Ghanaian participation throughout the mining value chain and emphasized its goal of localizing the mining sector.

The ratification of the mining lease grants the company full operational rights, securing jobs for hundreds of mine-dependent individuals and contributing to the socio-economic development of the community and the nation as a whole.

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



Dr. Mohammed Amin Adam, Minister for Finance

International

Bolivian police arrest leader of apparent coup attempt

Bolivian police have arrested the leader of an apparent attempted coup, hours after the presidential palace in La Paz was stormed by soldiers.

Hundreds of troops and armoured vehicles had taken up position on Murillo Square where key government buildings are located. One armoured vehicle attempted to smash down the entrance to the presidential palace. Soldiers later withdrew from the South American city.

The military leader in charge, Gen Juan José Zúñiga, had said he wanted to “restructure democracy” and that while he respected President Luis Arce “for now”, there would be a change of government.

He was later arrested, seconds after telling reporters the military had staged the intervention at the president’s request.

Gen Zúñiga, who was first appointed commander of the Bolivian Army in 2022, was removed from his role on Tuesday, after he made inflammatory comments about the country’s former president, Evo Morales, during an interview the previous day.

In dramatic footage seemingly filmed inside the presidential palace as the coup unfolded, President Arce could be seen confronting Gen Zúñiga, ordering him to stand down and asking him to vacate his role.

Loud bangs could be heard in background, as the two men - surrounded by aides, journalists and armoured police officers - spoke face-to-face.

Earlier, the left-wing leader condemned the coup attempt, calling on the public to “organise and mobilise... in favour of democracy”.

“We cannot allow once again coup attempts to take Bolivian lives,” he said in a televised message to the country from inside the presidential palace.

His words clearly resonated, with pro-democracy demonstrators taking to the streets in support of the government.

He also announced he was appointing new military commanders, confirming reports that Gen Zúñiga had been

dismissed after openly criticising Mr Morales.

Mr Morales, who also condemned the coup attempt, called for criminal charges to be brought against Gen Zúñiga and his “accomplices”.

The public prosecutor’s office has opened a criminal investigation, and head of the Bolivian Navy, Vice-Adm Juan Arnez Salvador, has also been arrested.

Gen Zúñiga’s exact motivations for launching the coup remain unclear. On Monday he vowed to arrest Mr Morales if he ran for office again next year, despite the former president being barred from doing so.

Mr Morales was forced out of office in 2019 by military chiefs who said he was trying to manipulate the result of a presidential election, sending him into exile in Mexico.

Speaking from Murillo Square after it was taken by troops, Gen Zúñiga accused an “elite” of taking “over the country, vandals who have destroyed the country.”

But moments before his arrest, the general told reporters that the president had instructed him to get out the “blindados” (armoured vehicles), in a bid to improve his waning popularity. He was bundled into a waiting police van seconds later.

Andrea Barrientos - a leading opposition senator - echoed his claims, suggesting that an economic and judicial crisis had prompted Mr Arce to launch a “self-coup”.

Bolivia is currently experiencing significant cost of living pressures, as it struggles to manage a US dollar shortage.

“I will say that the government has a lot of questions to answer to the people of Bolivia, and they need to explain this situation very well,” Ms Barrientos added. “We will say that we need a deep investigation about this situation.”

Nonetheless, it is increasingly clear that Wednesday’s move this was a short-lived and ill-judged military uprising rather than any wider unravelling of power.

Certainly, the government now looks more vulnerable, and others may try to dislodge Mr Arce’s administration - albeit through politics rather than via the military.

As troops occupied La Paz, Mr Morales called on his supporters, particularly in the country’s indigenous coca-growers movement, to take to the streets to demand an end to the attempt coup.

That display of popular power may well have helped strengthen the resolve against Gen Zúñiga’s plans,

which also included freeing “political prisoners” including former leader Jeanine Áñez.

Both Mr Arce and his predecessor belong to the same political party, despite internal political feuds. Their rivalry has led some Bolivians, including Gen Zúñiga, to worry that Mr Morales might seek another term in office.

Concerns come after he tried to bypass the constitution and seek a fourth term in 2019. Mr Morales went on to win the vote, but he was forced to resign and flee the country after violent protests.

The centre-right Jeanine Áñez was the country’s interim leader between 2019-20, but was sentenced to 10 years in jail over what prosecutors say was a coup to oust her predecessor Mr Morales. The incumbent president, Mr Arce, went on to win a re-run vote in 2020.

Formerly allies, Mr Arce and Mr Morales have not seen eye to eye on much recently, but they were united in their condemnation of the use of troops to force political change in Bolivia.

Before Mr Morales took power in 2005, Bolivia was one of the most politically volatile nations in the Americas. His time in power brought much-needed

- *continued on page 13*



Gen Juan José Zúñiga after his arrest



International

Bolivian police arrest leader of apparent coup attempt

- Continued from page 12

stability to the Andean nation, at least until its ignominious end.

For his part, Mr Arce - who was elected after a period of instability following the 2019 election - will have been heartened by the speed of the regional response.

Close allies like the left-wing governments in Venezuela and Colombia were quick to condemn what was happening and call for democracy to prevail. Washington also called for calm.

In Paraguay, centre-right President Santiago Peña also condemned the attempted coup.

Even those Bolivians who opposed his socialist rule will not want to see a return to a dark time in South America where militaries with terrible human rights records often pushed out the country's democratically elected leaders at the barrel of a gun.

But Jhanisse Vaca Daza - a human rights activist - said she feared Mr Arce could use the apparent coup as a reason to crack down on his opponents.

"It will legitimise and give (President) Arce's government more power to arrest new members of the opposition who they deem may be a threat to

their governance," she said.

"The fear for many people that are currently Legislative Assembly members is that this could also lead to either closing the Legislative Assembly or arresting members that may be suspected to have collaborated with the military."

Political analyst Carlos Toranzo told BBC Mundo there was "a lack of clarity" on whether what happened on Wednesday was a coup d'état attempt or "lamentably, a show orchestrated by the government itself".

"It's strange," Mr Toranzo said as he recalled the chain of events leading

up to the military presence at Murillo Square, adding that there was a "total tranquillity from the president and his cabinet".

"In all coup d'états communications to the palace are cut off," the analyst explained, but in this instance the military left communication channels at the palace, and the official broadcasters untouched.

Asked if there was anything to be gained by orchestrating an attempted coup, Mr Toranzo replied: "[President] Arce is winning. The whole country defended democracy."

Source: BBC

West Africa's ECOWAS bloc needs up to \$2.6 billion a year for security force

West Africa's regional bloc needs up to \$2.6 billion annually to establish a 5,000-strong security force to combat terrorism, according to one of the options being considered by defence officials at a meeting on Thursday.

Defence and finance ministers from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) were meeting in the Nigerian capital Abuja to decide on the size of a potential force and how much would be required to fund it.

Coup-hit West Africa is grappling with a raft of political crises that have hurt regional cooperation. In January, military-ruled Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali decided to exit the 15-member union.

Since 2020, soldiers in the three countries have carried out coups blaming civilian leaders for allowing Islamist militants to gain ground. Once in power, juntas have torn up defence agreements with the U.S., French and U.N. forces and invited Russians to take their place.

Nigerian Defence Minister Mohammed Badaru Abubakar told the meeting that there were two options for a regional force: One which would cost \$2.6 billion annually for a brigade of 5,000 and another that would cost \$481 million for 1,500 troops.

"These figures underscore the gravity of the task before us," Abubakar said. "It is therefore imperative that

we critically review the options considering the current challenges confronting our region and the financial concerns facing our various members states."

Abubakar added that the regional force would not be used to reverse coups but limited to fighting terrorism.

Each member state would be expected to contribute a quota, he said.

ECOWAS commission president Omar Touray said members under suspension would not be excluded from the regional force.

"It is believed we cannot fight terrorism alone while others are not

participating," Touray said.

"Although, other countries might be under suspension but they should be allowed to take part in meetings related to security, that is why we have invited all 15 member states to attend this crucial meeting."

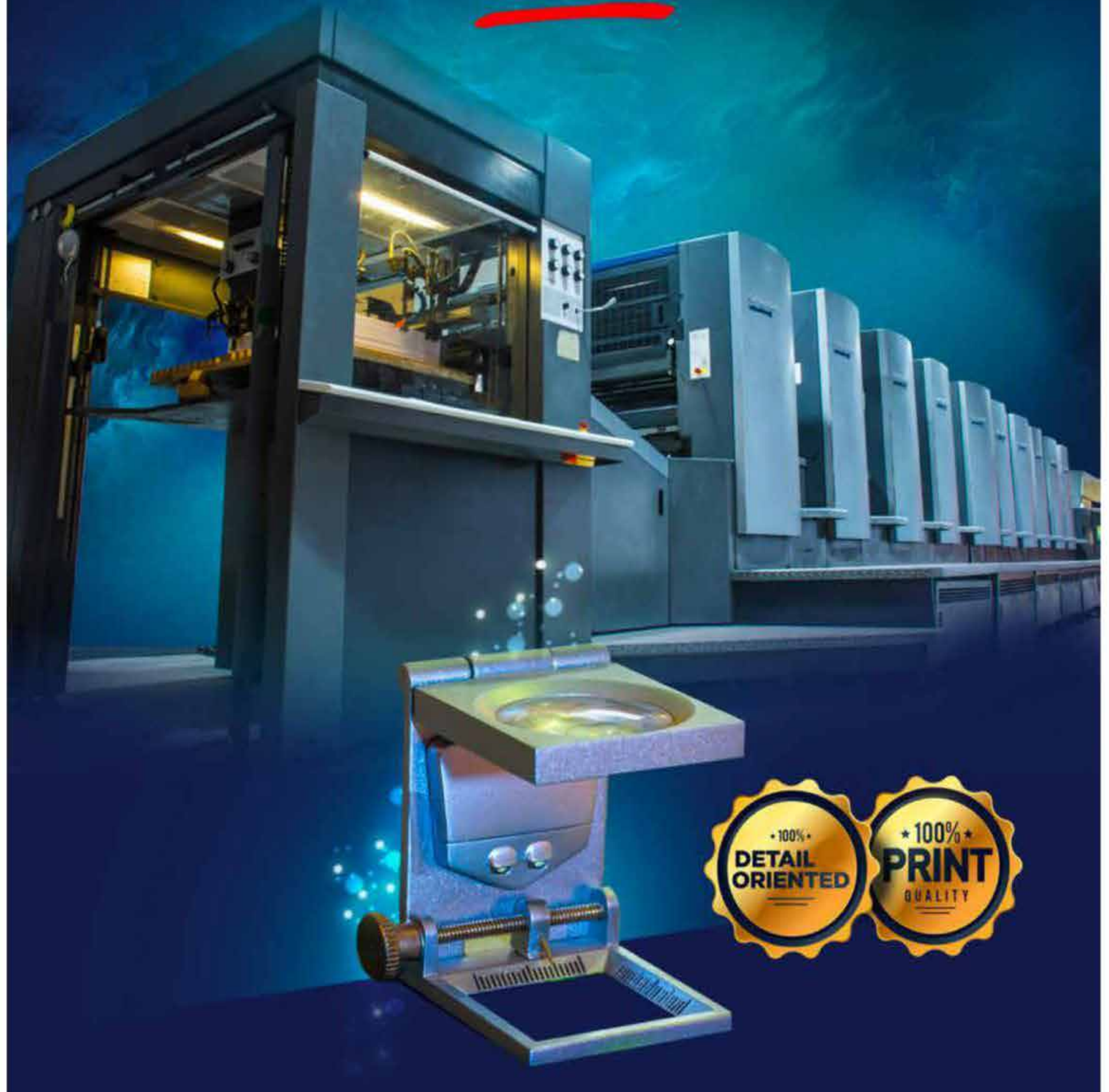
Source: Reuters



Gen Juan José Zúñiga after his arrest

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