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General News

Otumfuo strikes again, destools three chiefs involved in illegal mining

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

Overload of the Asante Kingdom, Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II has dismissed three prominent chiefs for their involvement in the illegal mining activities devastating Ghana's forests and water bodies.

The chiefs—Sabronum Gyaasehene Nana Awua Gyau Atuomi, Akyeamehene, and Baamuhene—had their titles revoked during an Asanteman Council meeting at the Manhyia Palace on August 26, 2024.

The decision follows revelations that their actions contributed to the pollution of River Asuonfou, a crucial water source.

The National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) conducted an investigation on the Asantehene's orders. Despite the Gyaasehene's denial of the allegations during the probe, the NIB's findings supported the accusations.

At the meeting, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II announced that the evidence gathered led to the removal of the chiefs from their positions. The Asantehene has also referred the

matter to the police for further legal action.

"If the DCE could not arrest you, be rest assured that after you have left here, if you go and engage in any form of illegal mining, I will ensure you are arrested and prosecuted," Otumfuo Osei Tutu II warned.

This action underscores

the Asantehene's ongoing commitment to combating illegal mining and enforcing strict discipline among traditional authorities to safeguard the environment.

In August last year, the Asantehene removed Nana Saforo Koto from his position as the Chief of Bekwai-

Abodom due to his involvement in illegal mining.

In the interim, Otumfuo Tutu II has appointed the Akwamuhene of Sabronum as caretaker of the area and has supervised the election of a new candidate, Kofi Asante, as part of the process to enstool a new chief.



Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Overload of the Asante Kingdom

Nana Kwame Bediako to unveil '12 Pillars to Economic Freedom' manifesto for The New Force on September 1

By Sebastian Akaho-Tay

Leaders of the New Force Movement, Nana Kwame Bediako, widely recognized as Cheddar is set to announce his "12 Pillars to Economic Freedom" manifesto for the New Force Movement on 1st September 2024.

The manifesto will introduce policies focusing on infrastructure, energy, technology, and the development of local industries.

A central feature of Cheddar's plan is the proposed enhancement of Ghana's manufacturing sector, which he argues could create jobs and position the country as a leader in Africa's industrialisation.

One of his proposals involves dredging the sea to reach Kumasi, the landlocked capital of the Ashanti Region.

This idea was introduced during his campaign as a strategy to boost industrial growth in the region.

Cheddar addressed the feasibility of the project, stating, "Talking about the sea coming to Kumasi, I believe many Ghanaians have travelled and seen the importance of water in major global cities. If you consider the top 50 cities in the world, most of them are built around water. Water is life; it provides irrigation and supports numerous aspects of

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Nana Kwame Bediako, Leader of the New Force Movement



General News

Nana Kwame Bediako to unveil '12 Pillars to Economic Freedom' manifesto for The New Force on September 1

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development.”

The New Force Movement Leader also promised to remove excessive taxes suffocating businesses if elected president in the December 7 elections.

“I can't stand here and say that I'll create free taxes once you start trading, but definitely I'll look into it and make it reasonable overnight.

Because there's no point if that's the only job we have as part of the nation, thus, importing from other countries then at the end of the day, we spend 60 or 70% and by the time we sell, the 30% profit we're supposed to make is gone either by interest from what we borrowed or by just living the hard life.”

This, according to him, would

ensure that the wealth generated remains within Ghana.

“I want to infuse industrialization into trading, so that a lot of things that you go to China to bring would be made here and you would be able to distribute them.

“But before I implement that plan, I'd have to place an embargo for traders by stopping the outsiders

who are invading trading in the country.

“So, I would definitely revise the taxes,” he said.

As 1st September approaches, there is anticipation surrounding Cheddar's policies and their potential impact on Ghana's future.

Korle Bu shuts down surgical ward over lift malfunction

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

The Korle Bu Teaching Hospital (KBTH), has shut down its surgical ward due to lift malfunction.

According to a statement signed by Professor J. E. Mensah of the Surgical Department, the situation has disrupted the movement of patients within the surgical tower,

which is severely affecting their capacity to conduct surgeries.

For this reason, the facility has resorted to suspend activities and relocate to curb emanating challenges.

“Given the current situation, we have decided to suspend all elective surgeries until further notice. During this period, we will

focus solely on emergency cases to ensure that critical care is not compromised.

“To accommodate these changes, emergency surgeries will be carried out at the Ground Floor Surgical (Neuro), Accident Centre, Pediatric and Gynaecology theatres. Patients undergoing these procedures will be admitted to Ward G, Ward N, Ward A, and

Ward B,” part of the statement read.

It added that procurement processes are currently underway to replace the faulty elevators.

KBTH assured that they are doing everything they can to expedite the completion of the work, minimize disruptions, and restore normal operations as soon as possible.



Korle Bu Teaching Hospital (KBTH), Dept of surgery



General News

6 ways Mahama hopes to alleviate hardships in Ghana if elected

By: *Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo*

Ghana has for the past 4 years been facing heightened economic difficulties marked by high living costs and inflation but the former President John Dramani Mahama and leading opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) appears unwavering in tackling the crisis head on.

For the NDC, alleviating the hardship many Ghanaian are faced with is key among their priorities with if the top most.

The former President and the NDC unveiled six significant interventions to be deployed if elected into office in the December 2024 election.

This announcement comes as the country approaches the 2024 elections, with the two leading political parties presenting their solutions to the ongoing economic challenges.

In a tweet on August 27, Mahama outlined his party's proposed measures aimed at alleviating the financial strain on Ghanaians and improving social welfare. Here are the key proposals:

No-Fees-Stress Policy: New students at public universities, colleges of education, and nursing training institutions will not be required to pay academic fees.

Reintroduction of Students Loan Trust Plus: This programme will assist continuing students in public educational institutions with their fees.

Free Tertiary Education for Persons with Disabilities: Tertiary education will be provided at no cost for individuals with disabilities.

Ghana Medical Care Trust [MahamaCares]: This fund will cover healthcare costs for chronic diseases, including kidney failure, cancers, sickle cell disease, diabetes, hypertension, and heart diseases.

Free Sanitary Pads: Female students in basic and secondary schools will receive free sanitary pads.

Free Primary Healthcare: From CHPS clinics to polyclinics, primary healthcare will be provided at no cost.

The NDC's manifesto, launched on August 24, 2024, in Winneba,

also includes commitments to removing certain taxes, such as the betting tax and COVID levy, investing \$10 billion in public housing, and enhancing education.

The party also pledged to investigate corruption under the current New Patriotic Party (NPP) administration and focus on economic revitalisation to address current hardships.



John Dramani Mahama, NDC flagbearer

Fire breaks out at parliament: Key documents, books in Job 600 Block offices damaged

By *Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey*

A fire erupted early Tuesday morning in an office on the second floor of the Job 600 Block at Parliament House, causing partial damage to office documents and books, according to the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS).

The fire, which occurred on August 27, impacted a section of the building that houses parliamentary offices.

The GNFS received a distress call and responded swiftly, arriving at the scene in time to prevent the fire from spreading to other parts

of the building.

The firefighters successfully extinguished the blaze, and no injuries were reported.

Due to the prompt intervention of the fire service, the remaining offices on the affected floor and their contents were saved.

An investigation into the cause of the fire is currently underway as authorities work to determine what triggered the incident.

The Job 600 Block serves as an office space for members of Parliament and their staff, making it a critical part of Parliament House.



Job 600 Block offices



General News

Govt exposed for underfunding Central Gonja district assembly: Workers paid GHC100 monthly until recently

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

The Central Gonja District Assembly in the Savannah Region has been found guilty of paying its contract workers significantly below the legal minimum wage, a revelation brought to light during the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of Parliament's public hearings in Tamale.

The hearings, which began on Monday, are part of a wider examination of the Auditor-General's reports for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2023.

According to the Auditor-General's findings, the Assembly had been paying its contract workers a monthly wage of GHS100, an amount far below the legally mandated minimum wage. The report also uncovered that the Assembly was in arrears for over a year.

PAC Chairman Hon. James Klutse Avedzi, during the hearings,

issued a firm directive, demanding that the Assembly align with legal wage standards.

"Workers must be paid according to the law. The Central Gonja District Assembly must adhere to the minimum wage requirements immediately," Avedzi stated.

In response to the directive, District Chief Executive Hon. Iddrisu Salia confirmed that the Assembly had taken corrective measures. He assured the Committee that the Assembly has now recruited permanent staff and is adhering to the legal minimum wage.

"We have fully complied with the recommendations. All workers are now permanent, and they are paid the legal minimum wage," Salia said.

This adjustment comes in the wake of the National Tripartite Committee's (NTC) recent announcement of the 2024 National Daily Minimum Wage (NDMW) set at GHS18.15, marking

a 22% increase over the 2023 rate.

The new wage rate took effect on January 1, 2024, and organisations across the country are required to comply or face legal consequences.

The PAC's hearings are also scrutinising other violations noted in the Auditor-General's report,

including unearned salaries, unsupported payments, and uncollected rents from institutions such as Senior High Schools, Technical Universities, Colleges of Education, and Polytechnics in the Northern, North East, Upper West, and Upper East Regions.



Hon. James Klutse Avedzi, PAC Chairman

NDC sights 'errors' in Provisional Voter Register, requests meeting with EC

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

The National Democratic Congress (NDC) has called for an emergency meeting with the Electoral Commission (EC) to address critical concerns over discrepancies found in the ongoing 2024 voter exhibition exercise.

In a letter signed by NDC General Secretary Fifi Kwetey, the party highlighted "very serious discrepancies" in the provisional voter register, which they believe require immediate attention to ensure the integrity of the electoral process.

The 2024 voter exhibition exercise, which began on Tuesday, August 20, and is scheduled to conclude on Tuesday, August 27, is a critical step in preparing the final voter register for the upcoming general elections.

As part of this process, political parties and stakeholders are granted access to the provisional voter register to review and address any issues before the final version is produced.

The opposition party is concerned that without swift intervention, these inconsistencies could undermine the credibility of the electoral process.

The EC had earlier announced the release of the 2024 provisional voter register to political parties on August 19, following mounting pressure from various political actors and stakeholders who had insisted on timely access to the document for review.

The exercise is intended to provide an opportunity for corrections, such as name spelling, omissions, and other potential errors before the final voter register is produced.



File photo



General News

Grain export ban sparks 'fear' among peasant farmers over potential low prices

By: Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

Government's recent decision to impose a ban on grain exports has triggered concerns among peasant farmers, who fear that the move could lead to a drastic drop in prices for their produce.

The ban, instituted in response to a severe drought affecting the Northern regions, was announced by the Minister of Agriculture during a press briefing in Accra on 26 August 2024.

The minister explained that the directive, which takes immediate effect, is aimed at ensuring that sufficient crops are available for the domestic market during this challenging period.

However, the Peasant Farmers Association has expressed dissatisfaction with the decision, arguing that the government has not implemented adequate measures to protect farmers from the risk of selling their produce at low prices.

President of the Peasant Farmers Association, Bismark Owusu Nortey, voiced his concerns during a media engagement, criticising

the government's approach as lacking inclusivity.

"If you are announcing a ban, the ideal thing is to put in place local measures that will insulate the farmers from any possible low prices," he stated.

Nortey further emphasised the need for farmers, as key stakeholders in the agricultural sector, to be involved in the decision-making process.

"The first one has to do with the government's resolve to ban the export of grains. I think that this particular approach - is an approach that was not inclusive. They did not take on board the views, the concerns, and the possible challenges that this might have on farmers," he added.

The drought in the Northern regions, which typically receive peak rainfall from June to September, has left 435,872 farmers across 871,745 hectares grappling with significant crop failures. Key crops such as maize, rice, and yam have been particularly hard hit, resulting in estimated losses of GH¢3.5 billion and a potential revenue loss of

GH¢10.4 billion.

The affected area, responsible for 62% of Ghana's annual grain production, now faces the risk of losing 1.8 million hectares of land.

In response to the crisis, the government has announced plans to raise \$500 million, with a portion of the funds earmarked to compensate farmers for their losses. As part of the relief efforts, each affected farmer is set to receive GH¢1,000 (\$64) per hectare to help alleviate the

financial impact of the drought.

The Peasant Farmers Association continues to call for more comprehensive measures to ensure that farmers are not left vulnerable to market fluctuations, especially in the wake of the export ban.

The association urges the government to engage with farmers and other stakeholders to develop sustainable solutions that address the challenges posed by the current agricultural crisis.



Grain

ECG to replace old meters with 250,000 smart units across Greater Accra and Eastern Region

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

The Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) is set to embark on a major overhaul of its metering system, replacing old meters with new Smart MMS-compliant prepaid meters across Greater Accra and the Eastern Region.

The replacement exercise will run from 2nd to 30th September, targeting key areas including Makola, Teshie, Legon, Roman Ridge, Kwabenya, Mampong, Dodowa, and Adentan.

The initiative involves installing 250,000 prepaid meters, which will allow customers to manage

their electricity consumption more flexibly. Customers will be able to top up their credits via the ECG Power App or by using the short code (*226#).

This upgrade forms part of the ECG's Loss Reduction Project (LRP), aimed at reducing technical and commercial losses and improving operational efficiency.

William Boateng, ECG's Director of Communications, explained that the replacement of outdated meters is in response to significant revenue shortfalls.

"These are meters that have run

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File photo



General News

ECG to replace old meters with 250,000 smart units across Greater Accra and Eastern Region

- Continued from page 6

their due course. They were not working accurately and needed to be replaced. Once the replacement was completed, we expect the situation to stabilise, thereby improving the company's revenue fortunes," Mr Boateng said.

He attributed the revenue shortfall experienced in July and August 2024 to issues with old meters failing to communicate correctly with the company's servers.

The initiative, directed by the

Public Utilities and Regulatory Commission (PURC), is expected to address these challenges and enhance service delivery.

Mr Boateng also noted that customers will be able to start

repaying overdue amounts in instalments, as the new meters aim to provide more accurate billing and restore revenue collection to expected levels.

Minority slams Akufo-Addo for cutting sod for \$338m project while GHS15bn owed to contractors

By Amanda Cartey

The Minority in Parliament has criticized President Akufo-Addo's recent sod-cutting ceremony for a \$338 million reconstruction project on the Tema Motorway, questioning the timing and motives behind the initiative.

With only three months remaining in his term, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) MPs view the move as a last-ditch effort to win votes for the New Patriotic Party (NPP) ahead of the 2024 elections.

The NDC MPs argue that the government's focus should be on settling the GH¢15 billion it owes to contractors for completed and certified works, rather than embarking on new projects. "It is propaganda for votes," the Minority declared in a statement, adding, "Ghanaians will not fall for this. NPP, not again."

While the NDC supports the idea of renovating the Tema Motorway, they stress the need for transparency and fiscal responsibility.

"We are not against the project itself; in fact, we support its principles. But it is our responsibility to ensure value for money and hold the government accountable," said Govers Agbodza, the Minority's spokesperson on infrastructure.

Earlier this year, the Ghana Chamber of Construction Industry expressed deep concern over the government's outstanding debt of GH¢15 billion, which has been accruing since 2014.

The Chamber noted that this debt

has caused significant hardships, including the deaths and incapacitation of some members, and has led to legal disputes due to delayed loan repayments.

Although the government claims to have spent approximately GH¢49 billion on contractor payments, Emmanuel Cherry, CEO of the Construction Chamber, denied knowledge of receiving such funds, as reported in a May 27 interview with the Ghana News Agency.

During the sod-cutting event, President Akufo-Addo highlighted the project as Ghana's first Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in road infrastructure.

He emphasized that the collaboration between the public and private sectors, backed by the

Ghana Infrastructure Investment Fund (GIIF), represents a significant step forward. "We are not merely constructing a road; we are building a future," the President stated.

The reconstruction of the Accra-Tema Motorway will be carried out in three phases: from the Accra-Tema Motorway Roundabout to the Tetteh Quarshie Interchange, from the Tetteh Quarshie Interchange to the Apenkwa Interchange, and from the Apenkwa Interchange to the Neoplan Junction on the Accra-Kumasi Road.

President Akufo-Addo used the occasion to reiterate his administration's commitment to modernizing Ghana's infrastructure. He noted that significant progress has already

been made on other key projects, such as the dualization of the Santasi-Ahiakwanta Road and the Adenta-Dodowa Road.

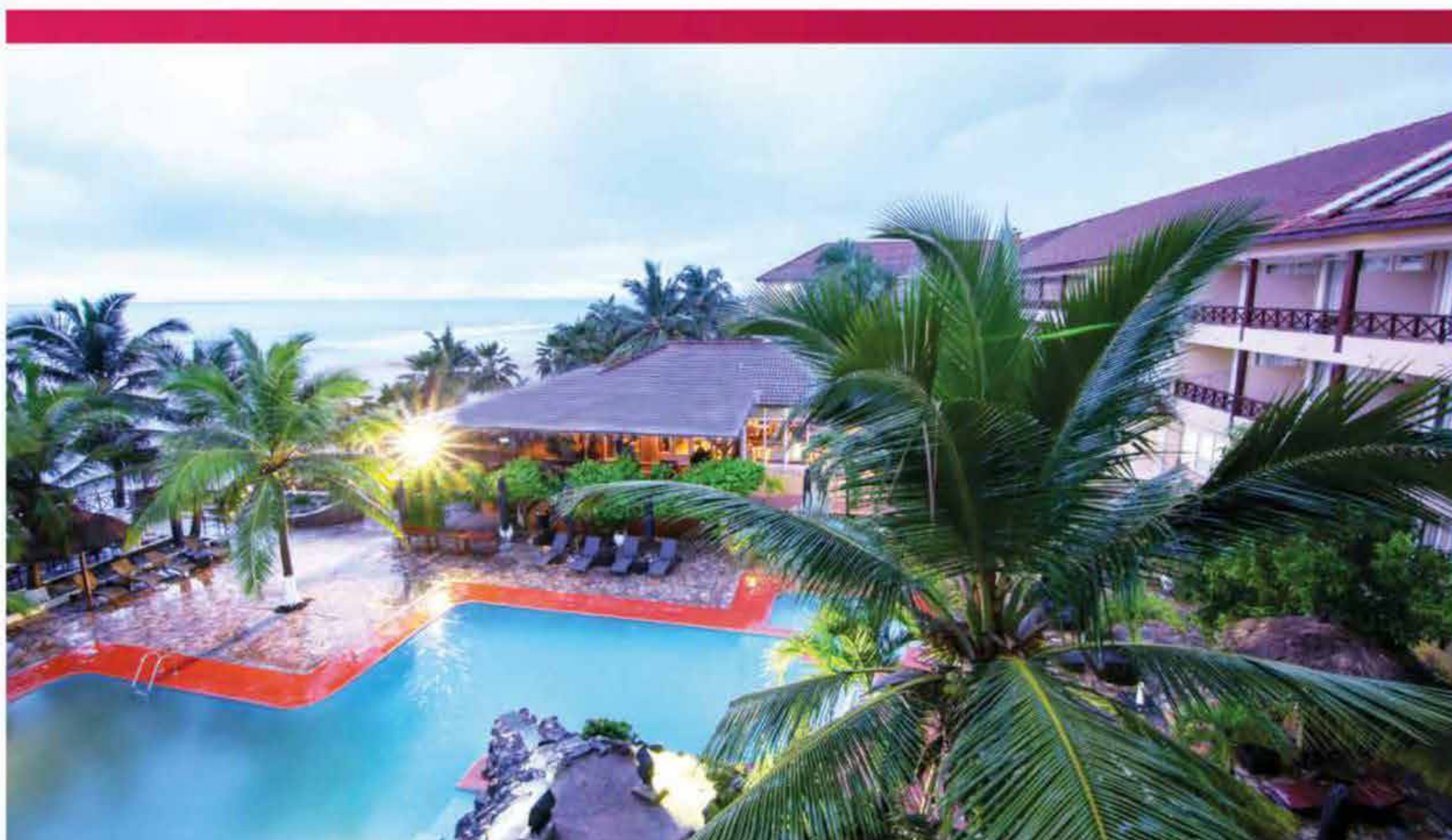
The President also mentioned ongoing work on the Kasoa-Winneba Road and the Takoradi-Agona Junction Road.

Additionally, the President revealed that contractors are being mobilized for the Atsutsuare-Volivo-Aveyime and Dafor-Adidome-Asikuma Roads, which will include an interchange at Asikuma Junction.

Funded by the Government of Ghana and the African Development Bank, these projects aim to improve travel efficiency and reduce vehicle operating costs once completed.



President Akufo-Addo cuts sod for Tema Motorway reconstruction



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Business

Northern drought: Agric Minister fears food import surge amidst high dependency - Finance Minister

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

Finance Minister Dr. Mohammed Amin Adam has expressed concerns that Agriculture Minister Bryan Acheampong may be hesitant to rely on food imports to mitigate the effects of the severe drought currently impacting Northern Ghana.

According to Dr. Amin Adam, this expected reluctance stems from the fact that Ghana already imports a significant portion of its food, which could further strain the economy if additional imports are required.

In 2022, Ghana imported food products and related goods worth an estimated US\$2.6 billion, according to a report by The Conversation.

Speaking at a press conference in Accra on Monday, August 26, Dr. Amin Adam emphasized the potential economic challenges the

country could face if food imports are increased to stabilize markets affected by the drought.

He acknowledged the ongoing efforts to secure the country's food supply but warned that importing food would place additional pressure on the economy, particularly in relation to foreign exchange.

"I'm very optimistic that we will make significant progress, but we also know that our inflation basket is dominated by food inflation," he stated. "When you see food shortages and the effect on prices, you should expect that inflation will respond. And it will respond in a way that you do not want."

He also raised the issue of sourcing food to address the shortfall caused by the drought, noting that the Agriculture Minister had not yet mentioned imports as a solution. "I'm yet to discuss with the minister how we are going to source the food. He may be running

away from mentioning imports. But we already import a lot of our food," Dr. Amin Adam remarked.

He cautioned that increased food imports could put additional pressure on the cedi, as demand for foreign exchange would rise.

"People are complaining the cedi is getting weaker against the dollar, the rate is higher against the dollar. And so, if you are going to bring in more food to support what we already have, you need to back it with forex. And therefore, the demand for the dollar will certainly increase—relative to what we anticipated if we didn't have to meet the additional food requirements. Some of which may come through inputs."

Dr. Amin Adam also noted that the drought's impact would be broad, potentially affecting the economy in various ways. "In different ways, the economy is going to be affected," he added.

Northern Ghana is grappling with a severe drought, disrupting agricultural production and raising

food security concerns. With over two months of no rainfall, farmers are facing stunted crop growth and reduced harvests.

In response, Agriculture Minister Bryan Acheampong has announced financial support of GHS 1,000 per hectare for vulnerable farmers to offset their investment losses. Additionally, the government has allocated GHS 8 billion for relief and mitigation efforts to support affected farmers.

Defense Minister Dominic Nitiwul has assured the public of intensified border security measures to prevent illegal grain exports, aiming to protect the domestic food supply.

The African Union reports that among Ghana's major crops, soybeans achieve the highest yield at 56% of their potential, followed by onions at 53%.

Rice, a staple, achieves 48% of its potential yield, while maize, the most produced cereal, ranks seventh at 36% of its potential yield, indicating significant room for improvement.



Dr. Mohammed Amin Adam, Finance Minister



Business

National security, COCOBOD task force thwart illicit cocoa smuggling operation

By Sebastian Akaho-Tay

A collaborative task force comprising National Security personnel and officials from the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) has intercepted a large consignment of cocoa beans being smuggled out of the country concealed within a fuel tanker.

The operation, details of which emerged through a widely circulated social media video, revealed that the smugglers had ingeniously hidden numerous bags of cocoa beans inside a tanker typically used for transporting fuel.

The attempt aimed to move the valuable commodity from Ghana's Volta Region across the border into neighbouring Togo.

This successful interception underscores the ongoing efforts by Ghanaian authorities to curb the rampant smuggling of cocoa, a practice that has inflicted substantial losses on the nation's economy.

Recent disclosures by the Chief Executive of COCOBOD, Mr Joseph Boahen Aidoo, highlight the gravity of the situation, with Ghana reportedly losing approximately 150,000 tonnes of cocoa beans to

smuggling activities in 2023 alone. Addressing the issue before Parliament's Public Accounts Committee in Accra, Mr Aidoo emphasised the multifaceted challenges contributing to the illicit trade.

He pointed out that significant disparities in producer prices between Ghana and its neighbours serve as a primary incentive for smugglers.

"Producer price variations, which are significantly low in Ghana, are the reason for the continuous smuggling of cocoa to neighbouring countries," Mr Aidoo explained.

He attributed these price differences to Ghana's practice of forward-selling 60 to 65 percent of its cocoa produce at lower rates before harvest, unlike countries like Côte d'Ivoire that engage in spot sales, allowing farmers to secure higher prices for their crops.

Beyond pricing issues, Mr Aidoo highlighted other factors adversely affecting cocoa production, including the devastating impact of the El Niño weather phenomenon and widespread illegal mining activities in cocoa-growing regions.

"Cocoa output for the 2020/2021 season was 1,047,000 tonnes, the

highest in recent years.

However, smuggling, the outbreak of El Niño disease, which compelled us to cut down cocoa trees, as well as illegal mining, have accounted for the drop in production," he noted.

In response to these challenges, COCOBOD has instituted several measures aimed at revitalising the sector and deterring illegal activities.

A specialised task force comprising National Security personnel has been established to conduct regular operations targeting smugglers and recovering stolen produce.

Mr Aidoo recounted a recent operation in the Volta Region that tragically resulted in the deaths of two young individuals, illustrating the high stakes involved in combating these crimes.

To address the price disparity driving much of the smuggling, COCOBOD has developed a new producer pricing structure set to be implemented in the upcoming crop season.

This initiative aims to offer farmers more competitive prices for their cocoa, thereby reducing the incentive to engage in or support smuggling operations.

Efforts are also underway to rehabilitate cocoa farms affected by disease and illegal mining, with expectations that these interventions will significantly boost production in the next four to five years.

"The rehabilitation of cocoa and other policies implemented by COCOBOD will see cocoa production skyrocket within the next four or five years," Mr Aidoo assured.

Regarding the recent approval granted to a company for the importation of cocoa beans, Mr Aidoo clarified that this policy has been longstanding.

"It was to enable companies which manufacture cocoa products to have cocoa from different sources for blending to prepare their recipes," he explained.

The recent seizure of cocoa beans concealed within a fuel tanker serves as a stark reminder of the ongoing battle against smuggling and its detrimental effects on Ghana's economy.

Authorities remain steadfast in their commitment to safeguarding the country's valuable cocoa industry through enhanced security measures, strategic pricing reforms, and sustained rehabilitation efforts.



National Security operatives and the COCOBOD task force have intercepted a fuel tanker smuggling cocoa beans from the Volta Region into neighboring Togo.



International

Spain to donate 500,000 mpox vaccine doses to combat outbreak in Africa

Source: BBC

Spain will donate 500,000 doses of the mpox vaccine, or 20% of its stockpile, to combat an outbreak of the disease in Africa, the Health Ministry said in a statement on Tuesday.

It added that the country had urged the European Commission to propose that all EU member states donate 20% of their respective stock of the vaccine.

"It makes no sense to stockpile vaccines where there is no problem, and now is the time to prove it," the ministry said. Spain's donation consists of 100,000 vials, enough to provide 500,000 doses.

The World Health Organization has declared mpox a global public health emergency, after an outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo spread to neighbouring countries and a new form of the virus, clade Ib, triggered concerns about the speed of transmission.

Last week, Health Minister Monica Garcia said Spain had "a very good stock" of the vaccines. Spain has registered 268 cases of the old strain so far this year, well below 7,500 cases recorded in a global outbreak of 2022. About 40,000 people have taken the vaccine so far.



Internally displaced women listen to Nathalie Kipenzi, a hygiene promoter, during an awareness campaign for Mpox

Doctors strike in Nigeria over kidnapped colleague

Source: BBC

Doctors in Nigerian public hospitals have started a seven-day nationwide strike to demand the release of their colleague, Dr Ganiyat Popoola, who has been held by kidnappers for eight months.

The mother of five was taken from her home in the middle of the night on 27 December alongside her husband and a nephew.

Her husband was released in March after a ransom was reportedly paid but the kidnappers held onto the ophthalmologist and her relative.

The doctors say they will not even provide emergency care during the strike.

They feel that the security agencies are not doing enough to secure Dr Popoola's freedom.

President of the doctors' association Dr Dele Abdullahi told the BBC: "It's been eight months of agony for her, her family, and her colleagues. The life of doctors should matter to Nigerians," adding that if nothing changes, they would declare an indefinite strike.

Her colleague Dr Ibrahim Mohammed Okpanaki said doctors

were "demoralised and terrified. In a country where medical workers are leaving, those that have chosen to stay should be protected."

Should ransom payments be banned?

Inside story of a Nigerian ransom negotiator

Nigeria cost-of-living crisis sparks exodus of doctors

Dr Popoola started working at the National Eye Centre hospital about six years ago, Dr Okpanaki said.

He described her as a very dedicated professional and responsible family woman.

At the time she was kidnapped, she was still breast-feeding her youngest child.

The hospital in Kaduna, north-west Nigeria, is one of the biggest eye hospitals in the country.

Experts say the hospital's location on the outskirts of Kaduna city makes it an easy target for kidnappers.

Her home was within the vicinity of the hospital.

In 2021, dozens of students were taken from the nearby college of forestry.

Dr Popoola's kidnappers are asking for 40m naira (£19,000; \$25,000) for their freedom.

Although a controversial law criminalising ransom payments came into effect in 2022, they are still often paid by relatives desperate to free their loved ones.

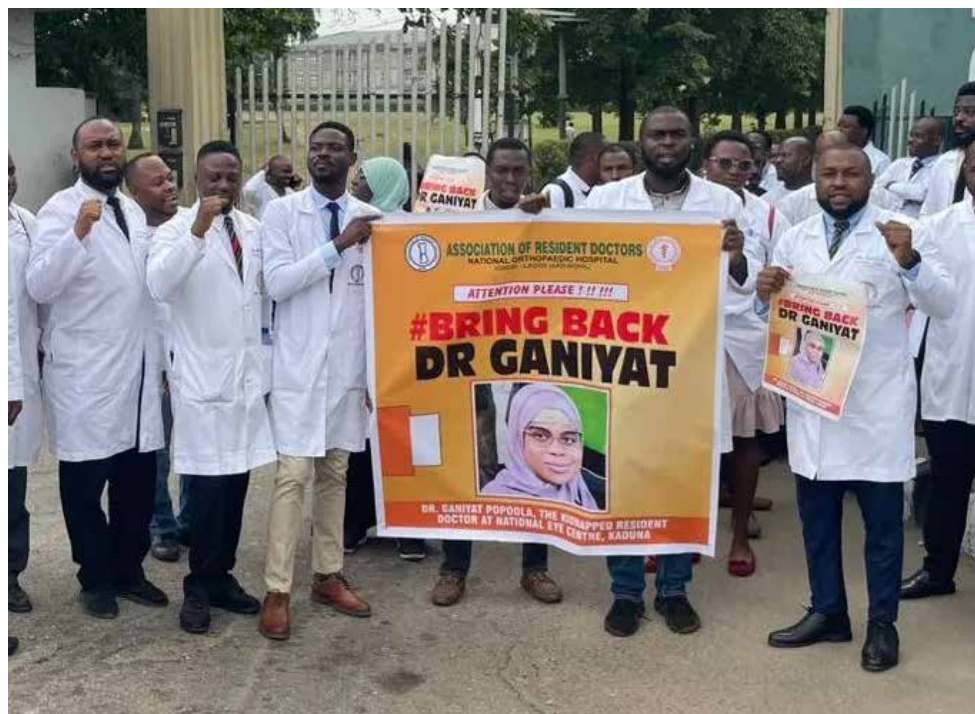
The law carries a jail sentence of at least 15 years for anyone who pays a ransom, although no-one has yet been convicted.

The government is yet to comment on the strike or the doctor's situation.

Dr Popoola's husband has declined requests to talk to the media.

Dr Abdullahi told the BBC that "the family was exploring a diplomatic route initially, but they have now given us the permission to explore other options".

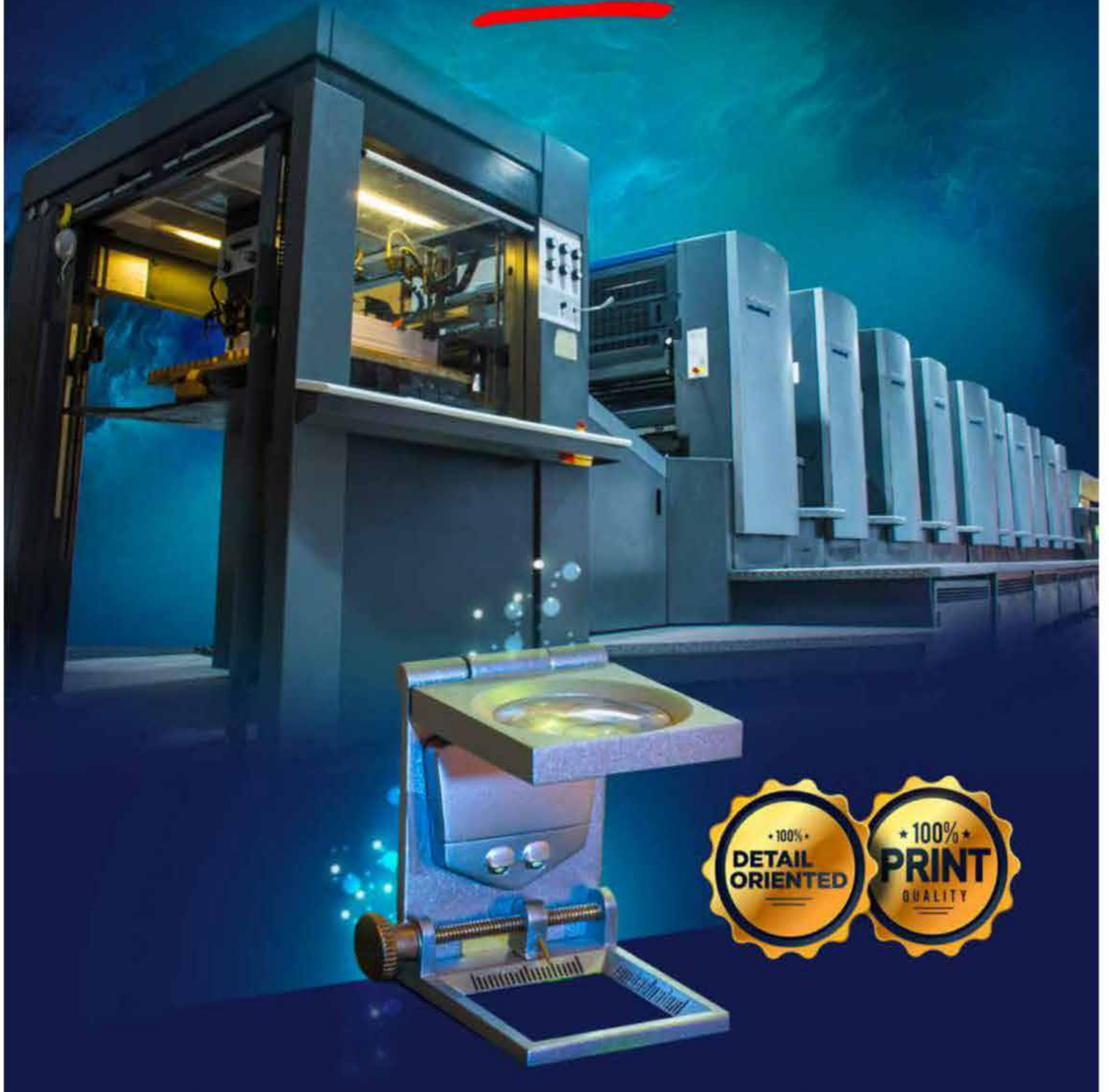
In recent years, kidnapping has become rife in Nigeria, with hundreds of people abducted, largely by criminal gangs who see it as an easy way to make money. It has been particularly bad in the north-west of the country.



Members of the Association of Resident Doctors (ARD), National Orthopaedic Hospital Igbobi, Lagos, demand the release of the abducted doctor

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