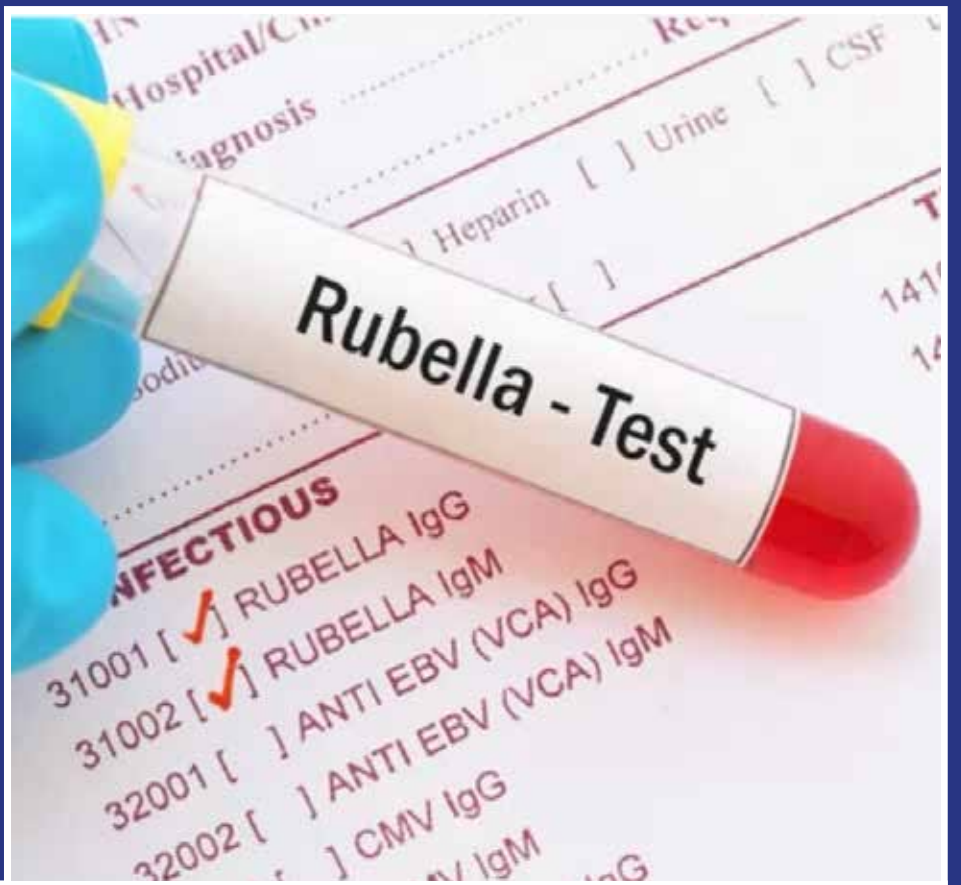




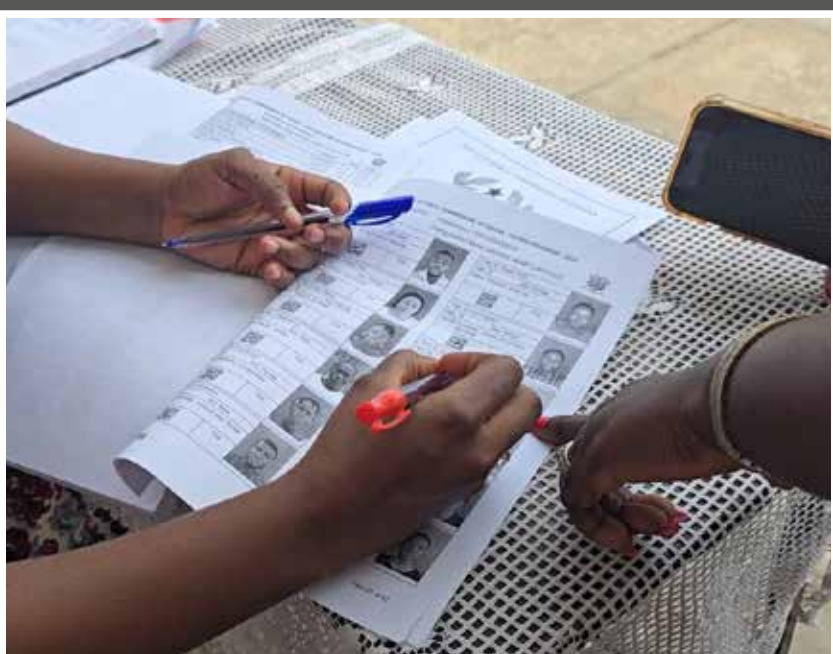
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General News

Contagious Rubella outbreak recorded in the Volta Region

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

The Volta Region is currently facing a concerning rise in Rubella cases, alongside reports of measles outbreaks in several districts.

This surge coincides with a significant number of children—9,495 in the first half of this year—missing their Measles-Rubella vaccinations, heightening public health concerns.

Rubella, a highly contagious viral disease, spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. While most children and adults experience only mild symptoms such as fever and rash, the disease is particularly dangerous for pregnant women.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), if a woman contracts rubella early in her pregnancy, there is a 90% chance that she will pass the virus to her foetus, leading to severe complications.

“Rubella in pregnancy, especially during the first trimester, can result in miscarriage, foetal death, stillbirth, or infants with congenital malformations, known as congenital rubella syndrome (CRS),” the WHO warns.

Symptoms of Rubella

In children, rubella typically causes mild symptoms, including a rash, low fever (below 39°C), nausea, and mild conjunctivitis.

The rash, which appears in 50-80% of cases, usually begins on the face and neck before spreading down the body and lasts 1-3 days. Swollen lymph glands behind the ears and in the neck are the most distinctive signs of the disease. In adults, particularly women, rubella can cause arthritis and painful joints, with symptoms lasting from 3 to 10 days.

After initial infection, the rubella virus spreads throughout the body in about 5-7 days, with symptoms appearing 2-3 weeks after

exposure. The period when an infected person is most contagious is usually 1-5 days after the rash appears.

The rubella vaccine is a live attenuated strain, and a single dose provides more than 95% long-lasting immunity, similar to that induced by natural infection.

Rubella vaccines are available either in monovalent formulation (a vaccine directed at only one pathogen) or more commonly in combinations with other vaccines, such as those against measles (MR), measles and mumps (MMR), or measles, mumps, and varicella (MMRV).

Adverse reactions following vaccination are generally mild and may include pain and redness at the injection site, low-grade fever, rash, and muscle aches.

Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS)

When a pregnant woman contracts rubella, particularly in the early stages of pregnancy, there is a high risk of passing the virus to the foetus, resulting in Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS).

According to the WHO, children born with CRS can suffer from severe health issues such as hearing impairments, eye and heart defects, and other lifelong disabilities like autism, diabetes mellitus, and thyroid dysfunction. Managing these conditions often requires extensive and costly medical care.

Countries where women of childbearing age lack immunity to rubella, either through vaccination or previous infection, face the highest risk of CRS. Before the introduction of the rubella vaccine, up to four out of every 1,000 live births could result in CRS, the WHO adds.

Meanwhile, Dr. Chrysantus Kubio, Regional Director of Health Services for the Volta Region, has called for immediate measures to address gaps in routine immunisation and the uptake of COVID-19 vaccines in the region. Speaking at the Stakeholders' Engagement and Second Quarter Risk Communication Sub-Committee Meeting, Dr. Senanu Dzokoto, the Deputy Regional Director of Health Services, who spoke in the stead of his superior, emphasised the urgent need to

increase demand for vaccines.

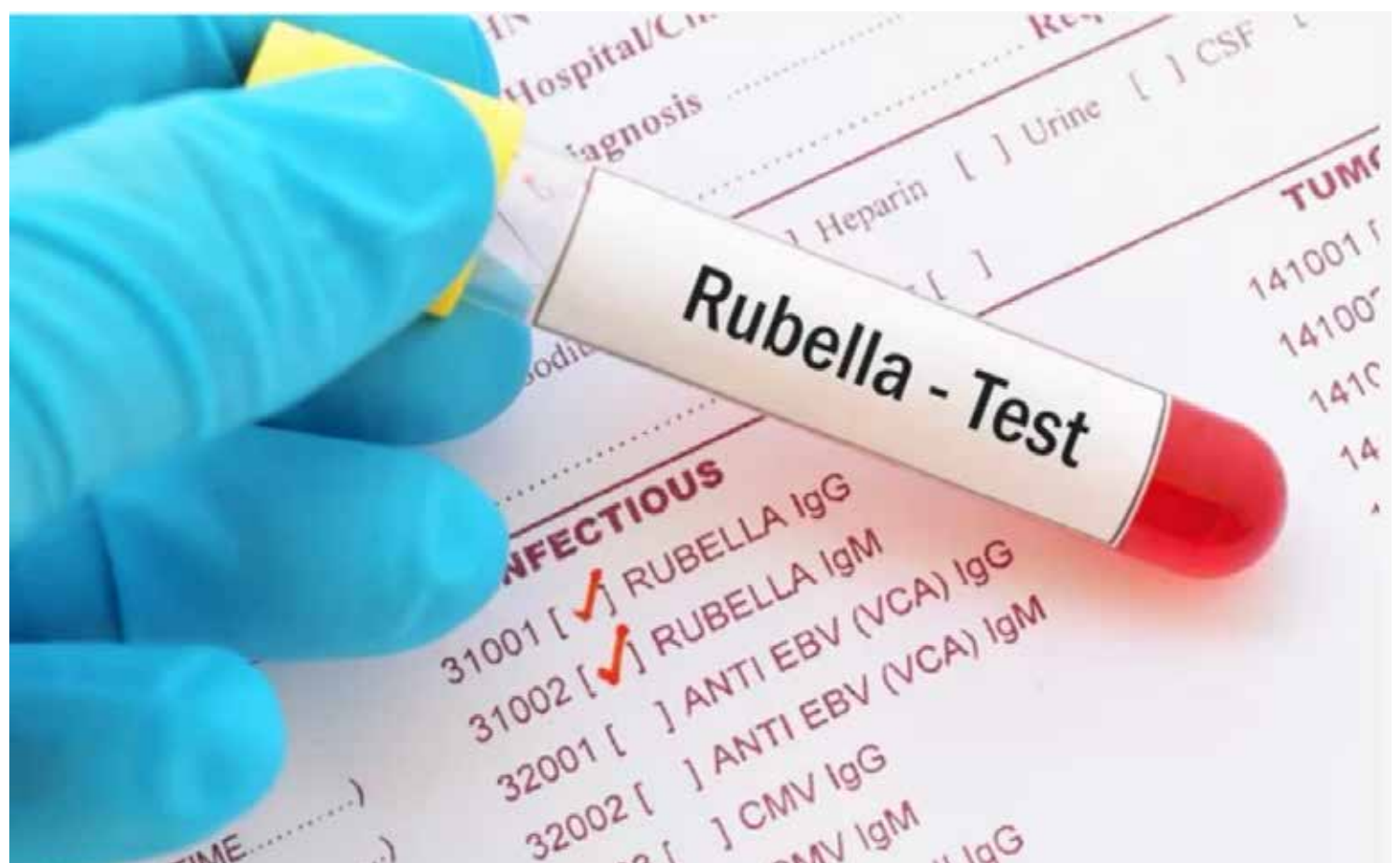
Dr. Senanu Dzokoto also highlighted the significant public health risk posed by failing to vaccinate all eligible children against preventable diseases. To address this, a national mass vaccination campaign is planned from October 2 to October 6, 2024, across all districts in Ghana, including the Volta Region.

National Vaccination Campaigns

The upcoming vaccination campaign aims to stop the spread of rubella and measles and improve overall vaccination coverage in the region.

This initiative follows the 2018 national Measles-Rubella vaccination and Vitamin A supplement campaign, launched by the Ghana Health Service (GHS) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and health partners.

The 2018 campaign, under the theme “Measles-Rubella Kills; Vaccinate Your Child Now for Good Life,” aimed to immunise over four million children aged 9 months to under 5 years across all 216 districts in Ghana.



Rubella test tube

General News

NIA cites 'brain drain' concerns as it shifts to virtual training for staff

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

The National Identification Authority (NIA) is opting for virtual training and pilot registration abroad to avoid losing staff to countries like Canada.

This shift comes as part of a broader strategy to extend its registration services to Ghanaians living overseas and improve the skills of its personnel.

Executive Secretary of the NIA, Professor Kenneth Attafuah, revealed this decision during a session with the Governance and Assurance Committee of Parliament on August 28, 2024.

He explained that the authority's choice of virtual training stems from fears that employees sent to Euro-American countries might

choose to remain there rather than return to Ghana.

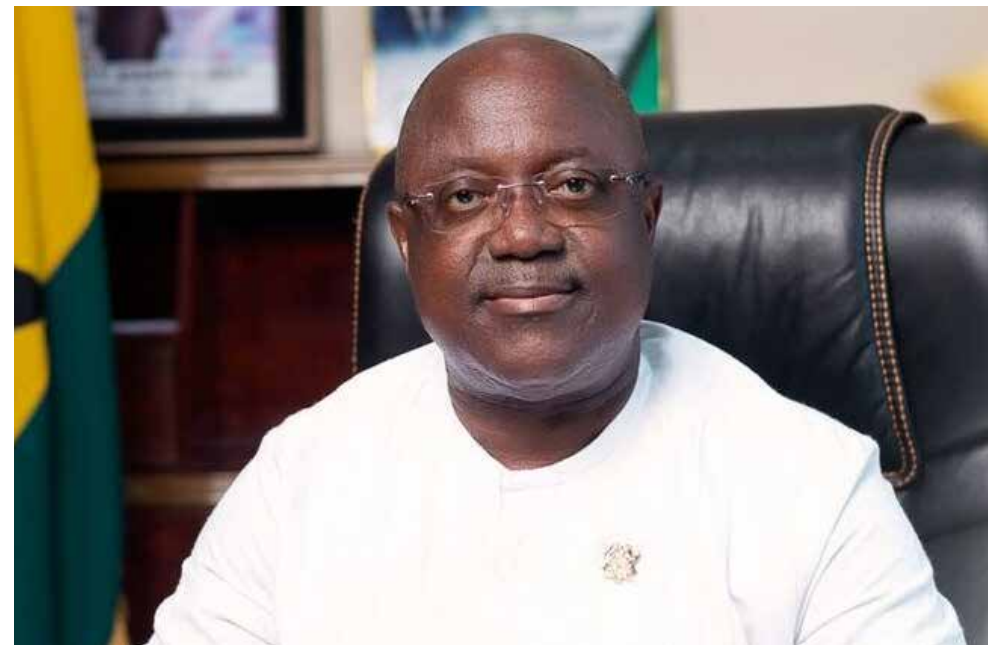
"This was part of the rationale of the background that informed the framers of NIA law to require that it should be Ghanaian missionary staff who should undertake the registration of Ghanaians abroad. We don't want to take people abroad and suffer casualties. Abroad includes Togo, La Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali, and I doubt that we would be losing Ghanaians if we take them there. The risk is those places that we all know of the Euro-American countries," he said.

Professor Kenneth emphasised, that "we intend to be truthful to this country and to help this country to retain its human resource base."

This move comes against a

backdrop of increasing "brain drain," where Ghanaians sent abroad for government-sponsored assignments or studies have opted to stay in those countries for better opportunities. Recently, a video

surfaced of a Ghanaian nurse en route to Barbados, expressing her intent to remain abroad, citing dissatisfaction with conditions back home.



Ken Attafuah, NIA Executive Secretary

BoG, CBL address \$20m cash at KIA

By: Amanda Cartey

The Central Bank of Liberia (CBL) has issued a statement clarifying recent reports concerning a US\$20 million cash importation consigned to the Bank of Ghana (BoG). The CBL emphasized that the transaction is entirely legitimate and part of its routine operations.

CBL explained that the importation of United States dollars is a standard function necessary to meet the economic demands of Liberia, including the withdrawal needs of both the Government of Liberia and commercial banks. The bank highlighted that the transaction in question is consistent with its operational responsibilities.

"CBL and the Bank of Ghana (BoG) have a long-standing Cash Custody Agreement, under which the BoG provides overnight custody for CBL-imported cash when shipped from London by Travelex Currency, an international currency shipment company. These cash shipments are cleared

through customs in both Ghana and Liberia, thereby validating their legitimate sources," the CBL stated in its release on August 28, 2024.

Bank of Ghana's statement

In response to circulating reports on social media, the Bank of Ghana also issued a statement, addressing concerns and clarifying the situation. The BoG noted that certain news items have been circulating with the potential to misinform the public regarding the movement of uncirculated banknotes received by the Bank of Ghana on behalf of the Central Bank of Liberia.

The BoG explained that it has had a currency transfer arrangement with the CBL since 2004. According to this agreement, the BoG receives imported currency on behalf of the CBL for subsequent re-export to Monrovia. The uncirculated banknotes referenced in recent social media discussions are part of this long-standing arrangement.

The BoG further clarified that once all logistical arrangements,

including scheduled flights, are finalized, the cash will be re-exported to the Central Bank of Liberia. The bank emphasized that all relevant stakeholders are formally notified of the entry and exit of consignments as part of standard administrative processes and security protocols. The BoG suggested that there was no valid reason for this matter to have become a public issue unless there

was an intent to create mischief.

Both the CBL and BoG reaffirmed that the transaction is entirely above board, adhering to all necessary legal and procedural protocols. The banks urged the public not to be swayed by misinformation and assured that such currency management activities are routine and essential for the stability and functioning of Liberia's economy.



Central Bank of Liberia (CBL)



General News

Starlink's service plans for Ghanaians range from GHS770 to GHS17,700

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

Starlink, the satellite internet service by SpaceX, has introduced a range of service plans in Ghana, catering to various internet needs from household use to high-demand business operations.

The monthly service plans range from GHC770 to GHC 17,700, offering different levels of service based on speed, data priority, and mobility.

Here's a breakdown of the available service plans:

Standard Plan - GHC770/Month

The Standard plan, priced at GHC770 per month, is designed for household users who require unlimited high-speed, low-latency internet. This plan is ideal for families seeking a reliable internet connection for everyday activities such as streaming, browsing, and online communication.

Priority Plan - GHC1,078/Month

For businesses and high-demand users, the Priority plan offers enhanced features at GHC1,078 per month. This plan includes unlimited standard data, a public

IP address, network priority, and priority support. It also provides an additional 40GB of Priority Data, ensuring that businesses with critical operations maintain a steady and reliable connection.

Mobile Plan - GHC1,540/Month

The Mobile plan, priced at GHC1,540 per month, is tailored for RVs, nomads, and campers. It offers unlimited mobile data inland, with features such as portability and the ability to pause service when not in use. This plan is ideal for users who need consistent internet access while on the move.

Mobile Priority Plan - GHC4,428 to GHC17,710/Month

For users with even higher demands, such as maritime operations, emergency response teams, and mobile businesses, the Mobile Priority plan provides top-tier service. Pricing starts at GHC4,428 per month for 50GB of data and goes up to GHC17,710 per month for 1TB of data. This plan includes unlimited inland data, in-motion and ocean use capabilities, network priority, and priority support, making it the most comprehensive plan offered

by Starlink.

Ghana is set to launch Elon Musk's Starlink internet service by the end of August 2024, according to an announcement by the National Communications Authority (NCA).

The regulatory body has confirmed that all required administrative and licensing formalities have been completed, clearing the path for Starlink to begin delivering its high-speed internet services across the country.

In a statement released on

Thursday, August 22, 2024, the NCA disclosed that Starlink's operations in Ghana would be managed by SpaceX Starlink GH Ltd, a local branch of Musk's SpaceX.

"Starlink will officially commence operations in Ghana by the end of this month. This follows the conclusion of all administrative and licensing procedures with the National Communications Authority (NCA). Starlink will be operated by SpaceX Starlink GH Ltd," the statement confirmed.



John Dramani Mahama, NDC flagbearer

Payroll monitoring saves Ghana over GHS345m in 2023 – Minister

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

The Fair Wages and Salaries Commission (FWSC) recorded savings of GH¢345 million through its oversight and management efforts in 2023.

This was disclosed by the Minister for Employment, Labour Relations, and Pensions, Ignatius Baffour Awuah, during a press briefing on Wednesday, 28th August.

He mentioned that the initiative covered 120 public sector institutions with the aim of reducing the wage bill and enhancing transparency in public sector employment.

According to him, these efforts have decreased the wage bill, resulting in substantial savings for the government.

"Last year, the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission conducted a nationwide payroll monitoring exercise across 120 public sector institutions, including 97 MMDAs, 6 universities, and 17 other entities. Analysis of the 2023 payroll data from the Controller and Accountant General's Department showed a reduction in the wage bill by over GH¢345 million. The payroll monitoring is still ongoing," he said.

- continued on page 5



Ignatius Baffour Awuah, Minister for Employment, Labour Relations

General News

Payroll monitoring saves Ghana over GHS345m in 2023

- Continued from page 4

Mr. Awuah also noted that, over the past seven and a half years, the Ministry of Employment, Labour Relations, and Pensions, with the support of key stakeholders, has resolved all industrial disputes that posed a threat to the country's peace and security.

"Overall, the payroll monitoring exercise has contributed to a more efficient, transparent, and accountable public sector payroll management system," he added.

The Minister announced that a review of key sector legislation, including the Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651), is underway to ensure it meets contemporary workplace needs.

The proposed new Labour Bill features several reforms, such as banning certain practices by private employment agencies, extending maternity leave, and enhancing protections against workplace violence and

harassment.

Mr. Awuah emphasized the government's commitment to ensuring fair income levels for workers and pensioners.

He highlighted the highest adjustment of the Base Pay since the implementation of the Single Spine Pay Policy in 2010 and a 25 percent increase in monthly pensions for SSNIT pensioners as key achievements.

"The Ministry will continue its work to improve the welfare of workers and employers while maintaining a peaceful labour environment," he said.

Additionally, he outlined the Ministry's accomplishments, including strengthening the Labour Department's operational capacity, job creation, and pension management improvements.

Slow adoption to hinder full digitization of banks in 5 years - PwC predicts

By: Amanda Cartey

Professional services firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has projected that Ghanaian banks are unlikely to fully digitize in the next five years, citing slow adoption as the main factor.

The firm asserts that many customers continue to opt for face-to-face interactions with bank staff despite the country's gradual transition into the digital era.

Speaking to the media at a meeting where PwC shared main

results from its Banking Customer Experience (CX) survey and introduced the maiden edition of the Ghana Banking Sentiment Index (GBSI), the firm's Country Senior Partner, Vish Ashiagbor, expressed pessimism about achieving 95 percent of digital transition goals in the short term.

"The demographics of a country like Ghana are such that we have a large population that is still coming to grips with the whole digital narrative," he said after a meeting with stakeholders in the banking sector.

He added that, "Beyond that, the reach of the networks. Let me say, if you look across the country, the networks are concentrated in the urban centre, right? But yet you have banking activity being done, for example, in agriculture or cocoa producing areas, for example, or in mining communities."

"Even those, Sometimes, the connectivity issues are less, but digital relies on a network of some kind of...so between education and infrastructure I think it will be difficult to get to the ninety-ninety five per cent mark."

The survey, which collected inputs from over 4,700 banking customers, showed that banks need to invest in technology to provide 24/7 service and smooth digital experiences, no matter their target market.

It also highlighted the importance of having friendly and helpful staff. The Country Senior Partner for PwC Ghana emphasized that banks should make delivering a great customer experience a top priority in their strategies.



PricewaterhouseCoopers



General News

Ghana needs \$5bn to effectively address flooding – Ghana Hydrological Authority

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

The Ghana Hydrological Authority has revealed that a staggering \$5 billion is required to effectively combat flooding nationwide.

This substantial amount is critical for developing and implementing flood management strategies, upgrading infrastructure, and mitigating the damage caused by frequent floods.

Recent years have seen many regions suffering from severe and sudden flooding, leading to extensive property damage and, in some cases, loss of life.

The government has been working to address the issue, particularly in Accra.

To this end, Works and Housing Minister Kojo Opong-Nkrumah has overseen the reconstruction of the Nima-Paloma storm drain, a key project extending from Asylum

Down to the Odaw Channel.

“This significant milestone is expected to help reduce the perennial flooding challenges in Accra and bring much-needed relief to residents, commuters, traders, and businesses,” he said.

The government has also introduced a new Flood Early Warning System, which is set to be operational before the next rainy season.

In 2023, the Authority received GH¢92 million under the National Flood Control Programme.

However, Dr. John Kissi, the Authority’s Chief Executive Officer, told the Assurances Committee of Parliament on August 28 that this funding is inadequate.

“In 2023, under the National Flood Control Programme, we received about GH¢92 million to undertake flood mitigation works across the country,” Kissi said.

He explained that the proposed \$5 billion is necessary for a comprehensive flood and waste management strategy.

“Based on our assessment of the flood and waste challenges

across the country, we estimate that we need about \$5 billion to comprehensively address these issues. This estimate covers every city and town in every region of the country,” he added.



Flood victims rescue

Bawumia’s gold-for-oil policy keeping dollar below GHC20 - COPEC reveals

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

The seeming stability of the cedi against the dollar is due to the government’s Gold for Oil (G4O) policy, according to the Head of Research at the Chamber of Petroleum Consumers (COPEC), Paul Eric Ofori.

Speaking on Wednesday, August 28, 2024, Mr Ofori explained that without this policy, the cedi could have reached between 20 and 25 cedis to a dollar.

The G4O policy, introduced in 2022, allows Ghana to pay for imported oil using gold instead of foreign currency.

This strategy was aimed at stabilising fuel prices and reducing the strain on the country’s foreign exchange reserves.

“For the avoidance of doubt, I have said it here: yes, it’s done two

things for Ghana—one, some form of stability to the cedi because I have said on this platform that if not for that policy, the cedi should be hovering around 20-25 cedis to a dollar,” Mr Ofori stated.

He added that the policy has also reduced the cost of premiums associated with free on board (FOB) pricing, marking it as a significant benefit for the economy.

Vice President Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, believed to be the architect of the G4O policy, expressed his satisfaction with its impact during a media engagement on August 25, 2024. However, he voiced regret over the delayed implementation of the policy.

“I wish, for example, we had started the gold purchase much earlier. If we had started it earlier during our first term, for example, the buffer in terms of gold would

have been much bigger. A few years ago, we had 8.7 tonnes of gold, and so far, they have bought about 72 tonnes or so. It is something that I wish for when I sit back and look.

I wish we had been able to buy a bit more and start Gold for Oil and reserve much earlier,” Dr Bawumia revealed.



Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, Vice President of Ghana

General News

50,000 ghost voters in EC's 2024 voter register - NDC alleges

By: *Sebastian Akaho-Tay*

Director of Elections for the Opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), Dr. Edward Omane Boamah has raised serious concerns about the accuracy of the current voter register.

Dr Boamah, revealed the startling figure, during a media briefing on August 29, 2024, in Accra, as he emphasised the party's commitment to uncovering and addressing any discrepancies in the register to prevent fraud.

"We have identified approximately 50,000 dead people in the voter register. We will thoroughly investigate and expose all irregularities in the register," Dr. Boamah declared.

Dr. Boamah also highlighted that around 2,000 voter records were moved out of the constituency of Minority Leader, Hon. Ato Forson, while a similar number were added to the area.

This, he said, was discovered through Hon. Forson's record-keeping.

"It was discovered in his constituency that about 2,000 people have been transferred out, and approximately 2,000 to 3,000 have been transferred in. Thanks to Hon. Ato Forson's vigilance, he said, 'Doc, I keep my records, so I have my previous transfers.' Some of these previous transfers are reflected in the current ones.

"How can this be accepted in a democracy when we are just months away from an election? There are also cases where people's polling stations have been changed. If the Electoral Commission had provided the register on time, we could have identified and exposed these changes. We requested the voter register in July, and we are only now receiving it, which is unacceptable," Dr. Boamah added.

The provisional voter register, released by the Electoral Commission (EC) for public review from August 20 to 27, 2024, is designed to allow scrutiny and challenge of questionable voter eligibility.

In response, Dr. Bossman Asare, Deputy Chairman of the EC in charge of Corporate

Services, defended the timing of the register's release.

He noted that, according to Regulation 22 of CI 31, as amended by CI 126, the commission is mandated to provide the provisional register to political parties

within three months of the registration period's end.

Dr. Asare pointed out that the limited registration concluded on May 29, 2024, with a mop-up registration finishing on August 3, 2024.



Voter register

Information Ministry is a "waste pipe"; no matured economy has it – Alan Kyerematen

By: *Amanda Cartey*

Leader of Movement for Change and Independent presidential candidate Alan Kwadwo Kyerematen has questioned the usefulness of the Ministry of Information to Ghana

Mr Kyerematen who described the ministry as an "outdated element" said it is wasteful use of the nation's time, money, and resources, emphasizing that no developed nation includes such a ministry in their government framework.

At a recent media interaction, Mr Kyerematen, was asked why he had chosen to exclude the Ministry of Information from his proposed government restructuring plan. His response was both direct and critical, highlighting what he perceives as the ministry's lack of substantive contribution to governance.

"What does the Ministry of Information do?" Kyerematen questioned rhetorically. "What does it do? A whole ministry dedicated to talking about government projects—what's the point? You look at all the mature economies; do any of them have a Ministry of Information? The answer is no. It's a waste pipe. That ministry does not add anything of value," he stated, reflecting his strong stance on the issue.

Kyerematen's comments come as part of his broader vision for a restructured and

more efficient government that aligns with global best practices. He pointed out that in developed countries, the functions typically assigned to a Ministry of Information are often handled by press offices or communications departments within the executive branch, without the need for a full-fledged ministry. To him, this is a more efficient model that Ghana should adopt.

Additionally, Kyerematen has been vocal about his vision for Ghana's future. On Tuesday, he took to social media to reiterate his commitment to transformative leadership. He stated, "Ghana deserves fresh ideas and bold leadership!" This statement underscores his campaign's focus on innovative solutions and a break from the status quo, which he believes has hampered Ghana's development.

Kyerematen's Movement for Change, which has now evolved into the Alliance for Revolutionary Change, is positioning itself as a beacon of hope for many Ghanaians who are disillusioned with traditional party politics. The alliance comprises various movements and interest groups that have rallied behind Kyerematen's candidacy, supporting his vision for a more accountable, transparent, and efficient government.

As the December elections approach, Kyerematen is urging Ghanaians to

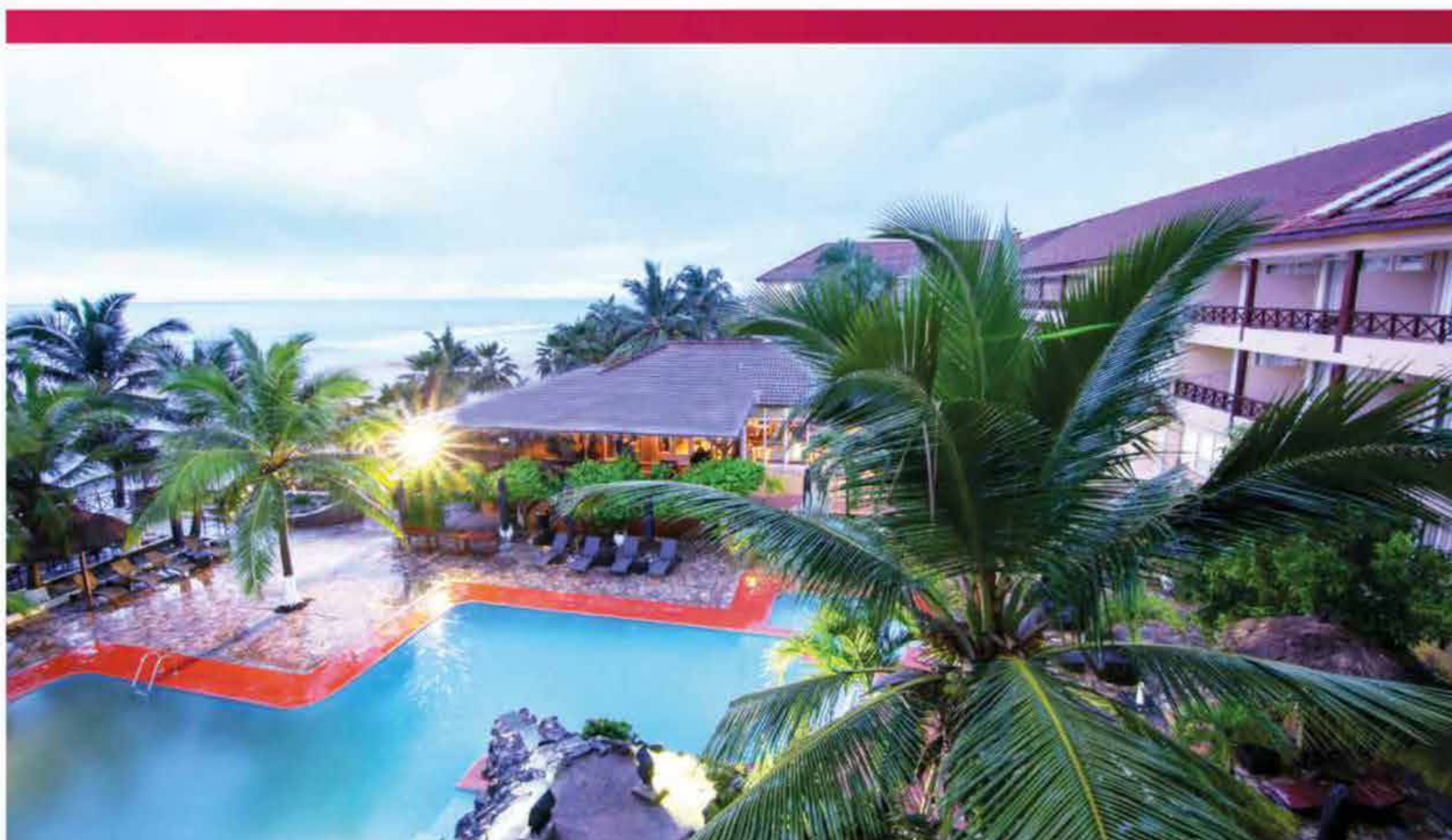
consider the necessity of radical change in the country's governance. He believes that by eliminating redundant ministries like the Ministry of Information and implementing his proposed government restructuring, Ghana can redirect resources towards more critical areas that directly impact the lives of its citizens.

Kyerematen's candidacy represents a significant shift from conventional

political narratives in Ghana. His emphasis on cutting waste and adopting best practices from developed nations reflects his broader goal of positioning Ghana as a leading example of good governance and economic efficiency in Africa. Whether his vision will resonate with the electorate remains to be seen, but his critiques and proposals are certainly stirring discussions about the future of Ghanaian governance.



Alan Kwadwo Kyerematen, Leader of Movement for Change and Independent presidential candidate



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Business

Imported inflation in Ghana declined by 1.9% to 15.6% in July - Finance Minister

By **Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey**

Inflation for imported items in Ghana decreased by 1.9 percentage points, settling at 15.6% in July 2024, down from 17.5% in June 2024, according to the Minister for Finance, Dr. Mohammed Amin Adam.

This was revealed during a press engagement on Thursday, August 29, 2024, where the Minister highlighted the country's economic progress.

Imported inflation refers to the increase in the prices of goods and services brought into the country from abroad.

This form of inflation is influenced by factors such as exchange rates, global market conditions, and tariffs, which can affect the cost of imports.

Overall inflation in Ghana also showed improvement, with the rate declining to 20.9% in July 2024 from 22.8% in June 2024. The month-on-month inflation rate decreased from 2.9% in June to 2.1% in July, largely due to a slowdown in the prices of both food and non-food items.

Dr. Amin Adam noted that food inflation saw a significant drop, declining by 2.5 percentage points to 21.5% in July from 24% in June. Similarly, non-food inflation fell by 1.1 percentage points, from 21.6% in June to 20.5% in July.

In addition to these positive inflation trends, the Ghanaian cedi has shown relative stability against major trading currencies since 2023.

The Finance Minister pointed out that while the cedi experienced some recent pressures, these have since subsided. The depreciation of the cedi against the US dollar improved from 54% in November 2022 to 27.8% in December 2023, compared to 30% in December 2022.

"The year-to-year depreciation of the cedi moderated to 7.7% in the first quarter of 2024, compared to 22.1% in the same period in 2023. The cedi cumulatively depreciated by 18.6% against the US dollar at the end of June 2024, compared to 22% in the same period in 2023," Dr. Amin Adam explained.

As of August 25, 2024, the cedi had

depreciated by 21.5% against the US dollar, slightly better than the 22.1% recorded in the same period in 2023. The Finance Minister expressed optimism about the cedi's future performance, noting that the month-on-month depreciation improved significantly from 6.1% in May 2024 to 3.1% in June 2024, and further to 2.1% in July 2024.

"If this trend continues, I can assure you that our cedi will continue to hold against major currencies," Dr. Amin Adam said.

He attributed the stabilisation of the cedi to several factors, including the

Bank of Ghana's monetary policy, strong fiscal consolidation, the Gold for Oil programme, and the Bank of Ghana's Gold for Reserves programme.

Additional measures include the centralised platform for foreign exchange bureaus, the implementation of the dynamic cash reserve ratio to absorb excess liquidity, and revised regulations on advance payments of imports. Positive market sentiments following the disbursement of the third tranche of the IMF extended credit facility have also played a role in supporting the cedi's stability.



File photo

Petroleum Hub Development project takes shape as CEO announces plan

By **Sebastian Akaho-Tay**

Ghana is on the brink of a significant transformation in its oil industry, with plans to not only produce crude oil but also refine and sell it domestically and internationally.

This initiative, as outlined by Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Petroleum Hub Development Corporation, Charles Owusu marks a strategic shift in the nation's approach to managing its oil resources.

In a recent interview with Accra-based TV GHone, Owusu emphasised the importance of this development for Ghana's oil sector.

"Ghana has been producing crude oil for some time now, but we haven't been refining it ourselves. This new initiative is going to build up our midstream capacity, which has been a missing piece in our oil industry. We

have the upstream, midstream, and downstream sectors, and this move will fill the gap in the midstream," Owusu stated.

The plan to become a vertically integrated oil and gas country means Ghana will be able to explore, produce, refine, and then sell its oil, significantly boosting the country's capabilities in the global oil market.

This move is expected to solidify Ghana's role within the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and strengthen its position as a key player in the export market.

"This feeds into our export strategy within the ECOWAS market and the broader continent. With the African Continental Free Trade Area, Ghana is poised to drive export-led growth by adding value to our resources," Mr Owusu noted.

The Petroleum Hub Development Corporation's strategy aligns with

the AfCFTA's goals, which include promoting economic development, reducing poverty, and increasing Africa's global competitiveness.

Established in 2018, the AfCFTA is the largest free trade area in the world by

number of member states, with 43 parties and 11 signatories.

It aims to remove tariffs on most goods and services, develop regional infrastructure, and create a single, liberalised market.



Charles Owusu, (CEO) of the Petroleum Hub Development Corporation



International

Digging riverbeds in Zimbabwe in desperate search for water

By BBC

One of the worst droughts in living memory is sweeping across southern Africa, leaving close to 70 million people without enough food and water.

In Mudzi district in northern Zimbabwe, a community and their livestock are gathered on a bone-dry riverbed. The Vombozi normally flows throughout the year but right now, it is just beige sand as far as the eye can see.

Armed with shovels and buckets, the men are digging into the river floor, desperately trying to extract the last drops of water from it.

Rivers and dams have dried up in other parts of the district and as a result more and more people are descending on this specific riverbed in Kurima village, putting pressure on the water source.

Along the riverbed are several holes, large enough to fit a single bucket.

Children are bathing, women are doing laundry and giving their bellowing cattle drinks of water.

Gracious Phiri, a mother of five, stands among these women. The 43-year-old tells the BBC she now has to walk further than usual, spending three hours every day travelling to fetch water.

Ms Phiri lowers her bucket into the half-metre (19in) wide hole and draws brown-coloured water. She worries about her family getting sick.

"As you can see, the cattle are drinking from the same pit as us. Their urine is right there... it is not very healthy," she says. "I have never seen anything like this."

Food is also in short supply in Zimbabwe where 7.7 million people face hunger. In Mudzi the number of families who have access to a sufficient amount of affordable, nutritious food has dropped by more than half compared to previous years, the local health authority says.

Children have been particularly impacted - since June hospital admissions for youngsters with moderate to severe malnutrition have doubled.

A village feeding programme is trying to tackle the problem. Once a week

women in the community gather, bringing whatever produce they have in order to contribute to a porridge for under fives.

Ground baobab fruit, peanut butter, milk and leafy green vegetables are stirred into the porridge to add extra nutrients.

But the list of ingredients shrinks every week - cow-peas and beans recently became unavailable because of the poor harvests.

The government, with the support of partners like the UN children's agency, Unicef, devised the village feeding scheme and it used to run at least three times a week.

"But because of the El Niño drought we are now only giving it once a week," explains Kudzai Madamombe, Mudzi district's medical officer.

"Because the rains didn't come, we suffered a 100% loss in terms of all the crop," he adds, saying the programme might be forced to stop altogether in the next month as food stocks dwindle.

Clinics providing Zimbabweans in Mudzi with vital healthcare have also been affected - boreholes that supply a quarter of clinics in the district with water have run dry, Mr Madamombe says. And the major dam in the district has only a month's supply of water left.

As a result vegetable irrigation schemes, including one which

supported 200 local farmers, have been suspended.

The misery is everywhere. Tambudzai Mahachi, 36, says she planted acres of maize, cow-peas and peanuts on her plot.

For all her hard work, she got nothing at all, not even a plate of food. Even her hardy baobab tree produced hardly any fruit.

In a good year Ms Mahachi says she would normally supply markets in the capital, Harare, but she is now among the millions of Zimbabweans relying on handouts.

While the village feeding scheme provides food one day of the week, her children need to eat every day.

Seated in a thatched hut, she boils wheat so she can provide her two children with breakfast. The wheat was supplied by a charitable neighbour.

"We have gone from eating what we want and when we want to limiting meals," Ms Mahachi says.

"The older girl understands that we sometimes can only have porridge. But at times I can see that my youngest is hungry."

The rains failed in most of southern Africa this year, on a continent where most of the agriculture relies on rainfall, rather than irrigation, for water.

The drought has prompted about

a third of the countries in southern African to declare a state of disaster. A massive 68 million people across the region need food aid.

The Southern African Development Community (Sadc) - a grouping of countries in the region - appealed for \$5.5bn (£4bn) in aid to combat the effects of drought in May. So far, only a tiny fraction has been received.

"If you go anywhere in southern Africa, family granaries are empty, and maize, which is the region's most consumed in terms of carbohydrates, is now priced out of many people's hands," Tomson Phiri, southern African spokesperson for the UN World Food Programme (WFP), tells the BBC.

"The situation is only going to get worse." The WFP has only received one fifth of the \$400m its needs for emergency assistance, he says, adding that southern Africa is experiencing its largest deficit in maize in 15 years.

And the hunger and water crisis is yet to peak - October, the hottest and driest month of the year, is still a long way off.

If rain falls in November or December, which is when the rainy season typically starts, farmers will have to wait until March to harvest maize.

It is something Ms Mahachi is acutely aware of as she cracks open some wild fruit to stave off her hunger pangs, unsure about what lies ahead in the coming months for her young family.



Digging riverbeds in Zimbabwe

International

China's lending to Africa rises for first time in seven years, study shows

By Reuters

Chinese lenders approved loans worth \$4.61 billion to Africa last year, marking the first annual increase since 2016, an independent study showed on Thursday.

Africa secured more than \$10 billion in loans a year from China between 2012-2018, thanks to President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), but the lending fell precipitously from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Last year's figure, a more than three-fold increase from 2022, shows China is keen to curb risks associated with highly indebted economies, the study by Boston University's Global Development Policy Centre found.

"Beijing appears to be looking for a more sustainable equilibrium level of lending and experimenting with a (new) strategy," said the university centre, which runs the Chinese Loans

to Africa Database project.

The new data comes as Beijing prepares to host African leaders next week for the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, which takes place every three years.

There were 13 loan deals last year involving eight African countries and two African multilateral lenders, the study found.

Last year's biggest items include a nearly \$1 billion loan from China Development Bank to Nigeria for the Kaduna-to-Kano Railway and similar size liquidity facility by the lender to Egypt's central bank.

China has vaulted to the top bilateral lender for many African nations like Ethiopia in recent years.

It has lent the continent a total of \$182.28 billion between 2000-2023, the Boston University study found, with the bulk of the finances going

to Africa's energy, transport and ICT sectors.

Africa featured prominently in the initial years of BRI, as China sought to recreate the ancient Silk Road and extend its geopolitical and economic influence through a global infrastructure development push.

China, however, started to turn off the cash spigot in 2019, a shift that was accelerated by the pandemic, leaving a series of incomplete projects around the region, including a modern railway meant to link Kenya with its neighbours.

The reduction in loans was caused by China's own domestic pressures and growing debt burdens among African economies. Zambia, Ghana and Ethiopia have gone into protracted debt overhauls since 2021.

More than half of the loans committed last year, or \$2.59 billion, were to regional and national lenders,

underscoring Beijing's new strategy, the study by Boston University found.

"Chinese lenders' focus on African financial institutions most likely represent a risk mitigation strategy that avoids exposure to African countries' debt challenges," it said.

Nearly a tenth of 2023 loans were for three solar and hydropower energy projects, the study found, illustrating a desire by China to move into funding renewable energy instead of coal-fired power plants.

Still, the discernible trends in last year's figures did not offer a clear direction of China's financial engagement with the continent, the study showed, since Chinese institutions also wrote loans to ailing economies like Nigeria and Angola.

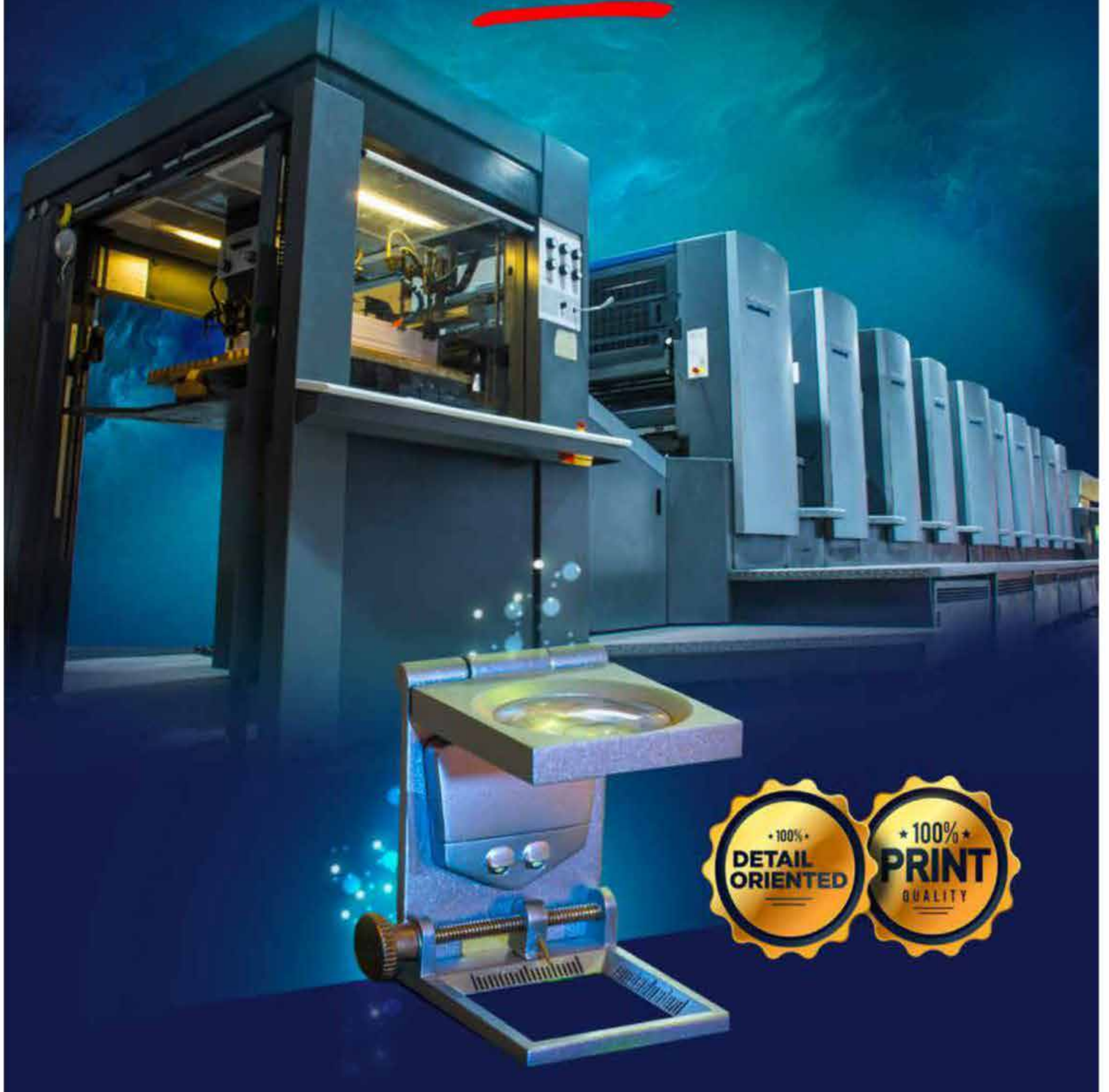
"It remains to be seen whether China's partnerships in Africa will retain their quality," the Global Development Policy Centre said.



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