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General News

Chinese miners open fire on Sekyere Krobo youth, injuring two in clash over galamsey

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

Two locals at Sekyere Krobo in Wassa East District of the Western Region have been hospitalised following a fierce confrontation between the town's youth and a group of suspected illegal miners comprising Ghanaian and Chinese nationals in the area.

Reports reveal that the youth in the area mobilized to halt the miners' operations and upon reaching the site, confronted the group of miners, who were using heavy equipment such as excavators on the Bonsa River.

Tension escalated when the miners resisted the youth's attempt to stop their operations and apprehend them. This led to the Chinese miners opening fire on the youth, injuring two, who are receiving treatment at Ahmadiyya Hospital in Daboase.

There are allegations that the Chinese miners had received permission to mine on the Bonsa

River from local chiefs who had initially invited the foreigners to the area.

The miners were reportedly arrested by the Wassa East District Assembly and police, but the matter is said to have been resolved by the chiefs, leading to friction between local authorities.

In response to the recent violence, the Wassa East District Police Command has apprehended the miners and investigations into the incident are underway.

The incident comes after the China government encouraged the government of Ghana to take legal action against any of its citizens who violate the country's laws.

Chinese Ambassador to Ghana, Tong Defa during a press conference acknowledged that some Chinese nationals are involved in illegal mining and emphasised the Chinese government's strong opposition to such activities.

"I know there are some Chinese involved in this illegal mining but we discourage them. We always request Chinese citizens here to do things legally, to do things according to laws and regulations and even traditional customs. I know there are some Chinese involved in illegal mining but we discourage them. Our president has told President Akufo-Addo to deal with any Chinese official

who commits illegal sins in Ghana should be dealt with according to the law," Mr Tong stated.

Ambassador Tong Defa highlighted a 2018 agreement between President Akufo-Addo and the Chinese President, which established that any Chinese nationals involved in illegal activities in Ghana would be held accountable under local laws.



File Photo

Police deny cocoa smuggling accusations after violent Bawku standoff with Military, Customs

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

The Ghana Police Service has firmly rejected claims that its officers were involved in the smuggling of cocoa beans, which led to a violent confrontation with the Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the Ghana Armed Forces.

The incident, which took place on October 9, 2024, at the Missiga security checkpoint in Bawku, escalated into a shootout between security agencies.

According to police statements, the consignment of cocoa beans had been intercepted based on intelligence reports, and officers were escorting the truck to the Bawku Divisional Police Command. Customs officers, however, insisted on further investigating the consignment, which led to tensions and an exchange of gunfire.

The Police Service has since

clarified, "It is untrue that the Police were in any way facilitating the smuggled consignments, as being claimed," noting that the consignment was part of a broader operation that had previously led to multiple interceptions. The smuggled goods had been handed over to the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD), and suspects involved

were being prosecuted.

The confrontation prompted the intervention of military officers, who were called in to de-escalate the standoff. Leadership from the three security agencies quickly convened at the national level to resolve the crisis, restoring cooperation between the parties involved.

The Upper East Regional Security Council (REGSEC), led by the Regional Minister, is also engaged in discussions to maintain harmony among personnel on the ground. The incident raised concerns over coordination among Ghana's security forces in border regions prone to smuggling activities.



File Photo

General News

GACL reinstates staff implicated in cocaine smuggling incident at KIA after investigation

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

Ghana Airports Company Limited (GACL) staff implicated in the recent cocaine smuggling incident at Kotoka International Airport (KIA) have been reinstated.

The incident, which occurred on March 23, 2024, involved the smuggling of 8.5 kilograms of cocaine aboard a Royal Air Maroc flight, allegedly facilitated by a GACL employee.

Following the discovery of the illegal drugs at Brussels Airport in Belgium, GACL suspended the staff involved.

However, during an update presented to the Government Assurances Committee in Parliament, Transport Minister Kwaku Ofori Asiamah revealed that the employees are no longer on interdiction.

“No they are not on interdiction. They have been cleared. Maybe per our code of conduct, per our standards maybe they were not culpable...We did so the report came, and we said that they were not culpable and the fact that they were not culpable does not mean that they slept on their job.”

In April, GACL interdicted all staff linked to the drug smuggling case.

Reports from The Herald Newspaper detailed that the scandal surfaced after a substantial quantity of cocaine was intercepted at Brussels Airport.

The drugs were reportedly smuggled through KIA on a Royal Air Maroc flight, facilitated by a GACL employee.

The Dutch national, Proeger

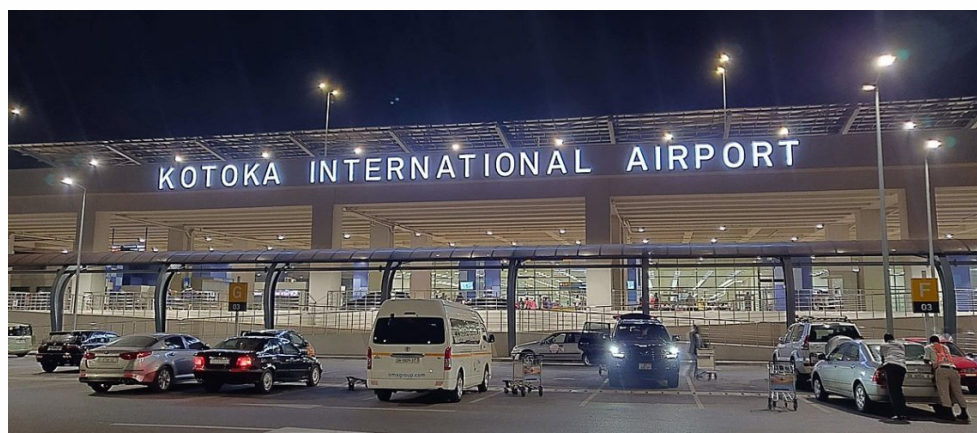
Delgey Bianca, was apprehended in Brussels with 8.5 kilograms of cocaine, allegedly transported through KIA.

A GACL statement on April 10 confirmed the initiation of investigations and the suspension of the implicated staff members.

GACL management also issued a stern reminder to all employees

about the consequences of assisting passengers in illicit activities, warning that violations would lead to severe punishments, including dismissal and prosecution.

GACL reassured the public of its ongoing commitment to airport safety and security, emphasizing its collaboration with key stakeholders to uphold stringent operational standards.



Kotoka International Airport

Mortuary workers to strike again this month after govt's timeline to meet demand elapses

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

The Mortuary Workers Association of Ghana (MOWAG) has announced plans for another strike later this month after the government failed to meet its deadline to address key concerns about working conditions.

MOWAG had initially planned a nationwide strike on September 26, 2024, but this was called off after a meeting with government representatives, including officials from the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission (FWSC) and the Ministry of Finance (MoF).

Following this, the government was given a two-week ultimatum to act on the workers' demands, which expired on October 9.

General Secretary of MOWAG, Richard Kofi Jordan, confirmed that despite the government's promises, little progress has been made, and the workers are now planning to take action within the month.

“We will strike again very soon. I think within this month, you will see us strike again. We want to be

very strategic. The timing for us isn't good. We want our strike to bite so hard to let the government appreciate that we are so important in this country,” Jordan said in a media engagement.

The upcoming strike is aimed at

improving working conditions, which include demands for sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE), clearing salary arrears, and hiring 500 new mortuary workers to meet increasing demands.

Jordan accused the government of lacking commitment to solving their problems, stating, “I think the government is not being faithful to us or has not been very active in solving our problems.”



File Photo

General News

There is adequate LPG to meet national demand - NPA debunks shortage claims

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

The National Petroleum Authority (NPA) has assured Ghanaians that there is sufficient Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) in the country to meet national demand, despite recent reports of a potential shortage.

The NPA explained that the Western and parts of the Central Region receive LPG from the Ghana National Gas Processing Plant in Atuabo, however, a recent power challenge affected the processing of natural gas essential for LPG production, causing supply disruptions.

In response, the Authority directed LPG Marketing Companies (LPGMCs) to source LPG from Tema for their retail outlets in these affected regions. According to the NPA, a check with the Ghana National Gas Company (GNGC) on October 8, 2024, confirmed that

the power issue has been resolved, although the Gas Processing Plant has not yet resumed full production. The plant is expected to return to regular output by October 15, 2024.

The NPA further reassured the public that there is ample LPG in the country, stating, "The opening stock of LPG as of October 9, 2024, was enough to last almost two weeks of national consumption." Additionally, the Sentuo Oil Refinery is producing LPG daily to support the market.

The Authority noted that some LPGMCs' boycott of the Quantum LPG Terminal and Tema Multi-Product Terminal has intensified pressure on the remaining depots in Tema. The refusal of these companies to load from the terminals has restricted the volume of LPG that can be processed daily

from these facilities.

The Authority is actively collaborating with relevant stakeholders to ensure that loading to the Western Region is prioritized to address the current challenges in that area.

Meanwhile, the NPA confirmed its commitment to working closely with the Ghana National

Gas Company to monitor the resumption of regular production at the Gas Processing Plant and promised to keep the public updated on developments.

Also, over 20,000 metric tonnes of LPG are scheduled for delivery between October 21 and 27, 2024, as part of the LPG Tender program.



File Photo

Organised Labour denies bribery claims after cancelling anti-galamsey strike

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

Organised Labour has dismissed allegations of bribery following its decision to cancel a nationwide strike initially set for October 10. The strike was intended to protest the government's handling of illegal mining, also known as galamsey. Critics suggested that the leadership of the union was financially compromised, leading to the suspension of the protest.

President of the Coalition of Concerned Teachers (CCT), King Ali Awudu, strongly refuted these accusations, stating that the union had not been bribed. He explained that the government's agreement to take meaningful action on illegal mining influenced their decision to halt the strike. One of the key victories was the government's commitment to revoke the Legislative Instrument (LI) permitting mining in forest reserves.

"Whenever somebody is of a certain opinion, and another has a dissenting opinion, the easy

thing some people in this country would do is accuse you," Awudu remarked. He emphasized that Organised Labour's involvement in negotiations had produced faster results than previous efforts by other groups, such as the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, which had issued calls for the LI's revocation since December 2023, with no success.

Organised Labour called off the strike after several unions, including those in the health sector, opted out of the demonstration. The Ghana Medical Association (GMA) expressed solidarity with the cause but chose not to participate in the strike itself.

Awudu maintained that the union's goal of pressuring the government to act on illegal mining was being met, and further protest was unnecessary under these circumstances.

This response came as part of a broader national conversation on illegal mining's environmental impact, particularly its toll on Ghana's water bodies and forests. Organised Labour's efforts

have drawn attention to the ongoing battle against galamsey, a deeply entrenched issue with both environmental and socio-economic consequences.

Illegal mining, or galamsey, has long been a thorn in the side of Ghana's efforts to protect its natural resources. Over the years, the practice has destroyed rivers, forests, and farmlands, causing severe environmental damage and threatening water supplies across the country. Calls for decisive government action have been growing, and Organised Labour's planned strike was a response to perceived inaction.

The cancellation of the protest has sparked debate, with some viewing it as a necessary step following the government's concessions, while others question the motivations behind Organised Labour's decision. The union, however, remains firm in its stance that progress is being made, and further strike action is unwarranted.

Government's willingness to revoke the LI allowing mining

in forest reserves is seen as a significant step in combating illegal mining. It marks a victory for environmental advocates and shows the influence of Organised Labour in driving governmental action.

The union's swift success has been contrasted with the limited outcomes from other civil society groups who have long called for stricter measures.

As the fight against galamsey continues, Organised Labour's role in pushing for tangible results has taken centre stage.

Although allegations of bribery continue to circulate, union leaders remain focused on the outcomes they have achieved through negotiations.



King Ali Awudu, President, Coalition of Concerned Teachers (CCT)

General News

The law must deal with the lawless - Kufour on detained Democracy Hub protesters

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

Former President John Agyekum Kufuor has defended the arrests made during a recent anti-galamsey protest, emphasising the need for individuals to face the law when they engage in unlawful activities.

Speaking on October 10, 2024, he stated that while the right to protest is essential, any protest that breaches public order or involves attacks on the police must be handled legally.

"If you attack a police officer or take away their car key, you must face the law or be punished. We can't let them go scot-free," Kufuor remarked, responding to the chaos that erupted during the Democracy Hub-led protest, where demonstrators sought to raise awareness about the devastating effects of illegal mining on Ghana's environment.

The three-day protest led to

several arrests, sparking public criticism. A section of the public have accused the government of making partisan arrests. However, The president Akufo-Addo and several other government officials have dismissed these allegations, insisting that the detentions were based on the protesters' unlawful behaviour rather than political motives.

One of the key incidents involved Oliver Barker-Vormawor, a leader of the protest, who was arrested after he removed the ignition key from a police towing vehicle to prevent it from harming protesters. Since his arrest, Barker-Vormawor has been denied bail three times, with courts citing legal reasons for the refusals.

The protests have gained widespread support, with various individuals and institutions calling for a complete ban on illegal mining.

Unions, such as the Organised Labour, initially planned to stage nationwide protests but withdrew at the last moment after several unions, including the Ghana Medical Association and the Ghana Registered Nurses and Midwives Association, pulled out of the action.

Their concerns over galamsey

remain, but they opted for dialogue with the government rather than taking to the streets.

The former president's remarks add weight to the ongoing national debate about how to balance citizens' right to protest with maintaining law and order, especially in the context of the fight against illegal mining.



John Agyekum Kufuor, Former President of Ghana

EC begins printing of 2024 election ballot papers today

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

The Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana will commence the printing of the Notice of Poll and ballot papers for the upcoming 2024 general elections today, October 11, 2024.

This was communicated in a letter addressed to the General Secretary of the National Democratic Congress (NDC).

The printing will be carried out at eight designated printing houses located across Accra, which include: Secprint Ltd (New Achimota, behind Peace FM), Acts Commercials (Odorkor, behind Hansonic Hotel), Ghana Publishing Company (Accra Central, behind Accra Technical University), Buck Press (Ofankor, Former MVVS Feeding Company), Innolink Limited (North Industrial Area), Fonstat Limited (South Industrial Area, opposite Japan Motors), Check Point Limited (South Industrial Area, adjacent Presby Press) and Yasarko Company

Limited (Laterbiokorshie).

Party agents were requested to report to the Director of Electoral Services at the EC's Corporate Office today at 11:00 am for a brief orientation before the printing begins.

However, the NDC has raised concerns regarding potential irregularities, particularly about the statistics being used for the printing. Dr Tanko Rashid Computer, the NDC's Deputy Director of Elections and IT expressed the party's need for detailed information before the printing process.

He noted, "The Electoral Commission indicated they were going to give us a revised provisional register. But as we speak now, they don't have it. They haven't given us. They have not also given us ballot statistics."

Dr. Rashid Computer questioned how the EC could proceed with

printing without providing the necessary figures, stating, "How come we are going ahead to print ballot papers? On which figures are they going to use to print the ballot papers? We have written back to them, indicating our position on that."

While the NDC does not object to the printing of notices of polls, it insists that the printing of ballot papers should not occur

without the requested data. In a bid to maintain transparency and accountability, the EC has encouraged the NDC to assign party agents to observe the printing process at these locations.

The involvement of party agents is part of the EC's commitment to ensuring openness in the preparation for the 2024 elections.



Jean Mensa, EC Chairperson

General News

Ghana to roll out 5G network nationwide from November 1

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

Ghana will officially roll out its 5G network nationwide starting November 1, 2024, according to Minister of Communications and Digitalisation Ursula Owusu-Ekuful. This major advancement marks a critical step in the country's ongoing digital transformation.

The minister confirmed during an interview that the necessary infrastructure is fully in place to support the 5G launch. "We have all the necessary systems in place to deliver 5G to the people of Ghana," she said, highlighting the government's commitment to enhancing digital connectivity across the nation.

The introduction of 5G technology is expected to significantly improve internet speeds, data capacity, and connection reliability, making it

up to 10 times faster than current 4G Plus systems. This leap will improve digital services in key areas like healthcare, education, and finance, as well as provide faster downloads, lower latency, and more stable connections.

Owusu-Ekuful also announced a collaborative effort between the government and seven major industry players, including companies like Nokia, K-NET, and Telecel Ghana, to build a shared infrastructure. This cooperation aims to ensure that 5G services are accessible and affordable nationwide, promoting digital inclusivity across various sectors.

The government has granted the 5G license to Next Gen InfraCo (NGIC), a state-private partnership that includes Ascend Digital and

Tech Mahindra. These partners will oversee the rollout to ensure efficient and affordable high-speed connectivity for all Ghanaians.

This long-anticipated rollout

is expected to significantly enhance Ghana's digital landscape and position the country at the forefront of technological innovation in Africa.



Ursula Owusu-Ekuful, Minister for Communication and Digitalization

Barker-Vormawor hospitalised again after being denied bail thrice

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

Democracy Hub has raised alarm over the health of its convener, activist Oliver Barker-Vormawor, who was rushed to the Police Hospital earlier on October 10, amid growing concerns about his deteriorating condition.

This marks the second time his health has worsened since his detention by the Ghana Police Service on September 23, 2024, the group indicated in a press statement.

In a statement, Democracy Hub revealed that "Oliver remains in police custody, having been one of the 53 activists unjustly detained during the protests on September 21, 2024. Currently, medical professionals are conducting tests to assess his condition and determine whether hospitalisation is necessary."

Barker-Vormawor's latest health scare follows his prolonged remand, despite appeals made to the Accra High Court and Circuit Court for his release.

On October 8, 2024, he was denied

bail for the third time, with the Attorney General's Department opposing his request. All 52 other activists arrested alongside him were released on bail on October 9, but Barker-Vormawor's pleas have been consistently rejected, leading to widespread concern.

President of IMANI Africa, Franklin Cudjoe, has expressed his dismay over the decision to keep Barker-Vormawor in custody without bail. "It is still unconscionable that someone will be remanded in jail for two weeks without bail for this under the judicial view that it is to prevent him from committing further 'crimes.' Really! Now a judge is now a clairvoyant too?" he questioned in a Facebook post.

Barker-Vormawor's

health concerns first arose on September 25, when he, along with another suspect from the Democracy Hub demonstration case, was taken to the Police Hospital following complaints of ill health. He was later remanded for two weeks, and his condition has since worsened.

The group is calling on the public

to keep Barker-Vormawor in their thoughts and prayers as they continue to monitor his situation closely.

Barker-Vormawor's legal team

has expressed frustration over the repeated bail refusals, and Democracy Hub has vowed to continue fighting for his release



Oliver Barker-Vormawor, Convener, Democracy Hub



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Business

Import duties contribution to tax revenue drops by 5% in 22 years - Finance Ministry

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

The Ministry of Finance has revealed a significant decline in the contribution of import duties to Ghana's total tax revenue over the past two decades.

According to the newly published Survey of the Ghanaian Tax System, the share of import duties in total tax revenue has decreased from 18% in 2000 to 13% in 2022. This 5% drop highlights a broader trend in the country's tax landscape, raising concerns among policymakers and stakeholders about the sustainability of revenue generation from international trade.

The Survey, produced jointly with researchers from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (UK), provides comprehensive insights into Ghana's tax system as of January 2024. It serves as a critical repository of information for researchers, policymakers, and the public. The report highlights several key trends in policy, administration, and revenue collection since the previous edition published in 2021.

Ghana's tax-to-GDP ratio stood at 13.8% in 2022, falling short of the government's target of 18-20% by 2027. Although this figure represents a nearly 6 percentage

point increase since 2000, it has seen minimal gains since 2017 and remains volatile.

The growth in tax revenues since 2000 has primarily been driven by increases in corporate and personal income tax, as well as VAT. However, revenue growth from Personal Income Tax (PIT) and VAT-type taxes has stagnated in recent years. Notably, these three tax types accounted for nearly 70% of total collections in 2022, a significant rise from 57% in 2000.

The importance of tax collections from international trade has diminished. In 2022, taxes collected on imported goods made up only 33% of overall tax revenues, a substantial decrease from 54% in 2000.

As of June 2023, government revenue from import taxes amounted to around 1.14 billion Ghanaian cedis (GHS), corresponding to approximately 94.97 million U.S. dollars. The decline signals a need for a reassessment of the country's tax policy, particularly regarding international trade.

Ghana's 2002 tariff structure for imports establishes various duty rates and exemptions for different goods. The zero rate duty applies to agricultural and industrial

machinery, solar generating sets, certain motor vehicles (ambulances), and educational materials. Imported mosquito nets are also exempt from duties.

The five per cent rate covers interchangeable tools and motor vehicles with a cylinder capacity of up to 1900cc. New duties apply to imported fish and commercial vehicles. Specific raw materials for manufacturing are included under this rate, while fish caught by Ghanaian vessels and from ECOWAS waters remain duty-free.

A ten per cent rate applies to raw materials and includes a concessionary duty for hotels and restaurants on certain items like refrigerators and air conditioners. The standard duty rate for most imports is set at twenty per cent.

Exemptions are provided for charitable gifts for health and education by NGOs, which are exempt from duties. However, other imports may incur duties unless specifically exempted by Parliament.

A one per cent processing fee applies to exempt goods and unaccompanied personal effects, while an examination fee of one per cent is imposed on imported used

vehicles, with some exemptions applicable.

Additional levies include a 0.5 per cent ECOWAS Levy on goods from non-ECOWAS countries and a 0.5 per cent EDIF Levy on non-petroleum products. The import VAT rate is set at 12.5 per cent for all finished pharmaceutical products.

The import excise rate varies for commodities such as tobacco (140 per cent) and beer (50 per cent). Goods without a Tax Clearance Certificate incur a one per cent charge. A ten per cent concessionary duty rate is available for hotels and restaurants, but prior approval is required. This tariff structure aims to balance trade facilitation, revenue generation, and support for key sectors.



Dr. Mohammed Amin Adam, Finance Minister

ECG loses US\$67 million every month - ACEP

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

Policy Lead for Petroleum and Conventional Energy at the Africa Centre for Energy Policy (ACEP), Kodzo Yaotse, has revealed that the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) is losing approximately US\$67 million in revenue each month.

According to Yaotse, this failure to recover revenue is worsening the country's debt burden to Independent Power Producers (IPPs).

He explained that the growing debt is a direct result of ECG's poor revenue collection performance, with the company currently

recovering only 57 per cent of the funds it is owed.

"ECG is making a 43 per cent revenue collection rate. That means there is some 57 per cent that is not collected, which translates into about \$67 million every month. If not paid, this amount would only add to the existing debt owed to the IPPs in terms of legacy debt.

So we have to find a way to ensure optimal revenue collection," he revealed this information on October 10, 2024, during a media capacity-building workshop in Kumasi.

Mr Yaotse also added that the

government owes IPPs an amount of US\$1.2 billion, a staggering figure that has been tagged as "legacy debt" as it accumulates over time.

Despite government efforts to negotiate reductions on the debts owed, Independent Power Producers (IPPs) remain firm in their stance, insisting on full payment. They contend that they are not receiving the payments owed to them for the power they have already supplied.

By 2017, IPPs were providing a substantial portion of Ghana's power capacity, with 1,925 MW of installed capacity compared to

2,456 MW from the state-backed Volta River Authority (VRA).

There are currently nine IPPs in Ghana, including thermal plants, the Bui Dam, and a solar plant.

However, the relationship between the government and IPPs has been challenging due to the government's failure to settle debts owed to these IPPs in a timely manner.



Kodzo Yaotse, Policy Lead, ACEP

International

26 million Africans facing some degree of visual impairment – WHO

Source: *The Independent Ghana*

The World Health Organization (WHO) has revealed that 26 million Africans are currently facing some degree of visual impairment, highlighting the critical eye health challenges across the continent. Africa is home to one in every six blind people worldwide, underscoring the region's struggle to provide adequate eye care services.

Despite some progress in integrating eye health into primary healthcare systems, efforts to combat visual impairment are being undermined by a severe shortage of financial and human resources.

According to WHO, only 14% of Africans in need of cataract surgery receive the procedure, leaving millions without access to treatment. Additionally, over 80% of people with short-sightedness go untreated, a stark contrast to other regions like North America, Western Europe, and the Asia-Pacific, where untreated rates are less than 10%.

Further statistics indicate that just 12% of Africans requiring glasses or surgery for blurred vision receive the necessary care. This lack of treatment comes at a significant economic cost,

with the global annual burden of uncorrected refractive errors and cataracts estimated at US\$14.3 billion.

In addition to existing challenges, new eye health concerns are emerging due to ageing populations, unhealthy lifestyles, and the rise of non-communicable diseases across Africa. While the WHO has reported a decline in vision loss caused by Vitamin A deficiency, onchocerciasis, and trachoma, these emerging issues pose a growing threat to eye health.

Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa, stressed the importance of eye care, stating: "The focus on eye care is critical, given the multiple positive impacts of good vision on all aspects of life, from overall well-being to academic achievements. The contribution to economic growth is also significant, raising the urgency of building on the gains already made while addressing the emerging challenges."

In response to the crisis, WHO is working to integrate eye health services into primary care as part of its broader goal of achieving universal health coverage. However, this approach faces obstacles, including a shortage of human resources and limited

infrastructure. WHO is advocating for innovative solutions, increased community engagement, and collaboration across sectors to address these barriers.

Over the past two years, WHO has provided technical support to six African countries—Ethiopia, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, and Zambia. This support includes conducting national situational analyses, developing strategic plans, monitoring frameworks, and planning for workforce needs. WHO has also helped these countries integrate eye care indicators into their existing health information systems.

To further its mission, WHO launched the SPECS 2030 initiative, which aims to improve access to spectacles for those with refractive errors. The initiative seeks to raise the effective coverage of refractive error (eREC) to 40% by 2030,

with Liberia and Mozambique among the first countries to begin implementation.

In addition to these efforts, WHO has introduced a self-assessment tool called WHOeyes. This tool, available in multiple languages, allows users to check their visual acuity and access educational messages promoting healthy eye habits.

WHO continues to provide resources such as the *World Report on Vision* and the *Eye Care in Health Systems: Guide for Action*, which outline strategic recommendations for implementing integrated, people-centred eye care. These resources serve as blueprints for African countries working to improve eye health services and reduce the growing burden of visual impairment across the continent.



File Photo

WHO Director reveals 1 in 6 working-age adults experience mental health challenges

Source: *The Independent Ghana*

On this year's World Mental Health Day, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, disclosed that one in six working-age adults globally is grappling with mental health challenges.

As millions of individuals navigate the pressures of modern work environments, the WHO is collaborating with partners to emphasize the crucial link between mental health and work, advocating for urgent reforms to ensure that workplaces actively support mental well-being.

"To my colleagues and any employee out there: If you're struggling with your mental health, don't stay silent. It's OK to talk about it and seek help," Dr Tedros posted on X (formerly Twitter), encouraging employees to break the silence on mental health concerns.

With nearly 60% of the global population engaged in work, the WHO is calling for concerted efforts from governments, employers, and stakeholders to foster safe, supportive work environments. Healthy workplaces, according to the WHO, serve as protective factors for mental health, while poor working conditions—such

as harassment, discrimination, and burnout—can significantly affect employees' well-being and productivity.

The WHO stresses that decent work not only offers financial stability but also provides a sense of purpose, belonging, and structure, all of which are beneficial to mental health. However, many workers face risks that threaten their mental well-being, from excessive workloads and long hours to job insecurity and limited career growth opportunities.

These psychosocial risks can hinder individuals from performing their jobs effectively,

affecting attendance, job satisfaction, and even the ability to secure employment in the first place.

For people with existing mental health conditions, the workplace can either contribute to recovery and inclusion or exacerbate challenges. The WHO emphasizes that with the right support, people living with mental health conditions should be empowered to participate fully and thrive in their professional environments.

This support can take many forms, including reasonable accommodations such as flexible working hours, extended

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General News

WHO Director reveals 1 in 6 working-age adults experience mental health challenges

Continued from page 9

deadlines, and phased return-to-work programs after mental health-related absences.

In response to these challenges, the WHO recommends a multi-pronged approach to improve mental health in the workplace. This includes:

Preventing Mental Health Conditions

WHO advises employers to implement organizational interventions aimed at managing workplace stressors and promoting healthier work conditions. For example, allowing flexible work arrangements or establishing protocols to combat violence and harassment can significantly reduce risks to mental health.

Protecting and Promoting Mental Health

Training for managers on recognizing and responding to mental health challenges, along with fostering open communication, can greatly enhance the workplace environment. Additionally, educating workers on mental health literacy can help reduce stigma and improve understanding of mental health issues in the workplace.

Supporting Workers with Mental Health Conditions

Accommodations that cater to the unique needs of workers with mental health conditions are essential. Return-to-work

programs and supported employment initiatives can also help individuals transition back into work while managing their mental health.

Creating an Enabling Environment

The WHO calls on both governments and employers to prioritize mental health at work by integrating mental health policies, ensuring adequate funding for mental health initiatives, and aligning workplace laws with international human rights standards.

The current economic landscape, worsened by crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has also amplified mental health

challenges. Job losses, financial instability, and increased stressors have further highlighted the importance of addressing mental health at work.

For a healthier future, the WHO emphasizes that all stakeholders must collaborate to ensure that work not only prevents risks to mental health but actively promotes and supports mental well-being.

By investing in evidence-based approaches and fostering a culture of care, employers can create environments where everyone feels valued and supported, ultimately improving productivity and quality of life for workers globally.



Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, WHO

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