

Haruna Iddrisu appointed Education Minister, NDC's Pablo to head Ministry of Youth

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About 80% of Ghanaians between age 27-62 are hypertensive - Report

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General News

Haruna Iddrisu appointed Education Minister, NDC's Pablo to head Ministry of Youth Development

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

President John Dramani Mahama has announced a new set of ministerial nominees, introducing key figures to lead crucial government sectors.

Haruna Iddrisu, a former Minority Leader in Parliament and a seasoned politician, has been nominated as Minister for Education. His appointment is aimed at advancing educational reforms and improving access to quality education across the country.

A new Ministry for Youth Development and Empowerment has also been created, with George Opare Addo, popularly known as Pablo, nominated as its inaugural head. His mandate will focus on youth-centered policies aimed at addressing unemployment and fostering innovation among Ghana's young population.

Governor Kwame Agbodza has been nominated as Minister for Roads and Highways, a sector critical for national infrastructure development. His leadership is expected to prioritize improving road networks and enhancing national connectivity.

In the agricultural sector, Eric Opoku

has been named Minister-designate for Food and Agriculture. Known for his expertise in rural development, he is expected to prioritize food security and champion policies supporting farmers across the country.

Elizabeth Ofosu Agyare has been selected to lead the Ministry for Trade and Agribusiness, where she will focus on strengthening Ghana's trade relations and promoting agribusiness as a pillar of economic growth.

Ahmed Ibrahim has been nominated to head the Ministry of Local Government, Chieftaincy, and Religious Affairs, while Emelia Arthur has been designated for the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

President Mahama has so far submitted a list of 13 regional ministerial nominees. The most recent additions include Wilbert Petty Brentum for Western North Region, Eduamoah Ekow Panyin Okyere for Central Region, and Joseph Nelson for Western Region. These nominations follow the initial submission of 10 nominees for various regional portfolios. They include Ali Adolf John for the Northern Region, John Kwadwo

Gyapong for the Oti Region, James Gunu for the Volta Region, Mrs. Rita Akosua Adjei Awatey for the Eastern Region, Ibrahim Tia for the North-East Region, Dr. Frank Amoakohene for the Ashanti Region, Akamugri Donatus Atanga for the Upper East Region, Charity Gardiner for the Ahafo Region, Salisu Be-Awuribe for the Savannah Region, and Linda Ocloo, MP for the Greater Accra Region.

Earlier, President Mahama had announced three key ministerial nominees, including Dr. Cassiel Ato Forson as Minister-designate for Finance, John Abdulai Jinapor for the Ministry of Energy, and Dr. Dominic Akuritinga Ayine for the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General. These three nominees have already undergone vetting by the Appointments Committee of Parliament.



Haruna Iddrisu, Minister for Education-Designate(L) and George Opare Addo, Minister for Youth, Development and Empowerment (R)

About 80% of Ghanaians between age 27-62 are hypertensive - Report

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

A recent 2024 report by Rivia, a network of tech-driven primary care clinics, reveals approximately 80% of Ghanaians aged between 27 and 62 are battling hypertension — a disturbing trend.

The report, which analyzed data from over 23,000 Ghanaian patients, emphasizes that hypertension is particularly prevalent among men, with 68% of them affected.

"Over 80% of individuals aged 27-62 in research covering over 23,000 patients are hypertensive, with a prevalence of 68% among men," the report states.

In addition to hypertension, the study also highlights a growing concern regarding diabetes. It revealed that 50% of a broader sample of 80,000 individuals are living with undiagnosed or poorly managed diabetes. This indicates a significant gap in effective healthcare management and poses a serious challenge to the nation's public health.

"50% of a sample population of 80,000 has undiagnosed or poorly managed diabetes. Lifestyle factors such as high-salt diets, excessive alcohol consumption, and stimulant misuse are driving rising cases of kidney disease, particularly among

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File photo

General News

About 80% of Ghanaians between age 27-62 are hypertensive - Report

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younger populations," the report further noted.

Hypertension, commonly known as high blood pressure, is a condition where the force of the blood against the walls of the arteries is consistently too high. Over time, this elevated pressure can damage blood vessels and increase the risk of serious health issues such as heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and eye problems.

The report also draws attention to

other "silent" killer diseases that are increasingly burdening the healthcare system. Among the four chronic conditions identified—diabetes, kidney disease, mental health disorders, and cancers—the report warns of the escalating prevalence of these diseases, many of which often progress unnoticed. Alarming, the research points to lifestyle factors such as excessive salt consumption, alcohol misuse, and stimulant abuse as key drivers of the rising cases of kidney disease, particularly among the youth. Today,

23% of young people are affected by kidney-related conditions.

To combat these growing health risks, the report advocates for a comprehensive, multifaceted approach. It calls for strong government intervention, improved workplace health programs, and enhanced preventive healthcare strategies. Among its key recommendations are tax incentives to encourage corporate wellness initiatives and mandatory, subsidized annual health screenings

for employees.

Additionally, the report calls for more stringent food labeling regulations to reduce salt and sugar intake from processed foods. These measures would empower consumers to make healthier dietary choices. Employers are also encouraged to integrate regular health checkups, mental health resources, stress management programs, and physical fitness activities into workplace wellness programs to promote overall well-being.

Protection of State Assets Bill to be re-presented to Parliament to halt 'state capture' - Ablakwa

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

North Tongu Member of Parliament, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, has announced plans to reintroduce the Protection of State Assets Bill to the 9th Parliament as part of efforts to curb the acquisition of state assets by politically exposed individuals and prevent 'state capture.' In a Facebook post on Wednesday, Ablakwa revealed that he had

initiated formal steps to re-present the bill, stating, "Today I initiated formal steps to re-present to the 9th Parliament our Private Member's Bill known as the Protection of State Assets Bill, which seeks to prohibit politicians and politically exposed persons from buying state assets."

The lawmaker underscored his belief that the bill would serve as a lasting solution to the issue, emphasizing, "This bill is definitely

the permanent solution to the deleterious canker of State Capture." Expressing confidence in the success of the proposed legislation, Ablakwa voiced optimism that the 9th Parliament would approve the bill and that it would receive the endorsement of President John Mahama.

"It is most refreshing that we can passionately demonstrate our principled and consistent

position on this matter, whether in government or in opposition," he added.

The draft version of the Public Assets Protection Bill 2024 outlines sanctions and asset forfeiture measures for individuals who unlawfully acquire state assets. It also aims to prevent political appointees, politically exposed persons, and private entities from obtaining state lands, reinforcing the protection of national resources.



Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, North Tongu Member of Parliament (R) and some members of the ORAL term inspecting some State Properties

General News

Mahama Ayariga succeeds Ato Forson as Majority leader

By Amanda Cartey

Member of Parliament for Bawku Central, Mahama Ayariga, is poised to take over as the Majority Leader in Parliament following President John Dramani Mahama's appointment of Dr. Cassiel Ato Forson as the new Minister for Finance.

While the National Democratic Congress (NDC) Caucus has yet to officially communicate this development, congratulatory messages have already begun pouring in.

Joyce Bawah Mogtari, Special Aide to the former president, has fully endorsed Ayariga's nomination, praising the decision as an exceptional one. In a post on X, she expressed her confidence in Ayariga's abilities, stating, "A fantastic choice for the NDC and for the Government. Mr. Mahama Ayariga is sharp, has strong analytical skills, and impressive

oratory. He will undoubtedly be a great Majority Leader. Congratulations, my brother, Godspeed."

Ayariga, with a strong background in governance and lawmaking, is expected to effectively lead the Majority Caucus in Ghana's 9th Parliament. His previous ministerial roles, including Minister for Environment, Science, Technology, and Innovation, as well as Minister for Information, have equipped him with the skills to guide the majority side and further strengthen their legislative influence.

This development has not come as a surprise to the Minority Caucus. Its leader, Alexander Afenyo-Markin, had earlier suggested that Ayariga would assume the role of Majority Leader.

While addressing Parliament on Thursday, January 9, 2025, Afenyo-Markin also revealed that Kweku George Ricketts-Hagan, MP for

Cape Coast South, would replace Emmanuel Armah Kofi-Buah as Deputy Majority Leader. According to Afenyo-Markin, Kofi-Buah is expected to be named Minister for Lands and Natural Resources.

Afenyo-Markin further stated that Rockson-Nelson Dafeamekpor, MP

for South Dayi, would take over as Majority Chief Whip, replacing Kwame Govers Agbodza, who is likely to receive a ministerial nomination. He also indicated that Ahmed Ibrahim, the Deputy Majority Chief Whip, was expected to be appointed Minister for Local Government and Decentralisation.



Mahama Ayariga, Member of Parliament for Bawku Central

Govt to release funds today to feed SHS students for 31 days - CHASS

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

General Secretary of the Conference of Heads of Assisted Senior High Schools (CHASS), Primus Baro, has announced that the government will release funds today, January 17, to cover food expenses for senior high school students for 31 days.

This funding serves as an emergency measure to address the ongoing food shortages affecting various SHSs across the country.

The situation has been particularly severe in the northern regions, where schools have faced unstable food supplies. Mr. Baro clarified, "It was for 31 days as instructed by the president and beyond, and when we are able to deal with the issue as it is now, I believe it would be a clear direction as to what can be done going forward."

Speaking on Joy FM's Morning Show, Mr. Baro revealed that during a meeting with government officials,

it was confirmed that efforts have commenced to send food supplies directly to schools. He noted that former President John Mahama had earlier directed food supplies meant for drought victims in the north to be redirected to schools. These supplies are currently being stored at warehouses in Tema Port.

"At the meeting, it was revealed that out of the 18 food items needed, only two are available at the warehouse. While the supplies are on their way, the Chief of Staff and the President agreed on an immediate decision to provide emergency funds covering 31 days for both day and boarding schools. This will allow schools to mobilize food locally to address the situation quickly," Mr. Baro explained.

He further stated that the government is working to ensure the funds and supplies reach schools by the end of the week. Additionally, he shared that the Chief of Staff, Julius Debrah, has pledged to engage with education stakeholders to find a

lasting solution to the recurring food shortages in senior high schools.

"There was a clear indication that a wider executive education forum will be held to address these issues. While we wait for this consultation, we hope that the government will provide clear interim directions during this one-month relief period. Feeding and funding for schools cannot be delayed further," Mr. Baro

emphasized.

Before the current crisis, CHASS had proposed a rescheduling of the reopening date for senior high schools due to unresolved financial issues, including outstanding debts for food supplies and operational expenses. However, the Ministry of Education, under the leadership of the former government, rejected this proposal and maintained January 3, 2025, as the reopening date.



SHS dining hall

General News

Free university tuition under NDC will not be forced on parents - Apaak

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

Member of Parliament (MP) for Builsa South, Dr. Clement Apaak, has clarified that the National Democratic Congress (NDC) commitment to providing free first-year university tuition will not be mandatory for all students.

Speaking to the media, Dr. Apaak explained that the initiative is designed to allow parents and guardians who wish to pay the tuition fees for their wards to do so without any restrictions. "This is an option, not a compulsion. If there are individuals who feel they don't need it and do not wish to benefit from this arrangement, they are free to opt out. However, as this is a manifesto promise made by John Mahama and the NDC to the people of Ghana, we intend to fulfill it," he added.

The former Deputy Ranking Member of Parliament's Education Committee emphasized the NDC's commitment to delivering on its campaign pledges, highlighting

the strong electoral mandate they received as evidence of public support for these initiatives.

"John Dramani Mahama and the NDC campaigned vigorously, and if nothing else, the magnitude of the NDC's victory, particularly in terms of parliamentary seats and the gap between our candidate, now President, and Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, the former Vice President, should serve as a testament that this, along with many other policies, was a key factor in the overwhelming support we have received," Dr. Apaak stated. "We intend to proceed with the promise made by John Dramani Mahama and the NDC to support students in tertiary institutions with their fees."

During the launch of the Youth Manifesto ahead of the 2024 elections, President Mahama pledged to introduce a tuition-free scheme for first-year students in public universities. He emphasized that the initiative would help expand access to higher education,

particularly for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

"We will implement a 'no-fees stress programme' to reduce the financial burden on parents and students in financing tertiary education. We will enforce a no academic fees policy at the university for Level 100 students," he stated.

However, the proposal has sparked concerns among some Ghanaians, with critics questioning the feasibility and sustainability of the funding for the initiative. In response, the NDC has assured the public that thorough research and careful planning have been conducted to ensure the successful implementation of the policy.



Dr. Clement Apaak, Member of Parliament (MP) for Builsa South

Over 700 petitions submitted for review - ORAL

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

Chairman of the Operation Recover All Loot (ORAL) Committee, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, has revealed that the committee is nearing completion of its comprehensive report, which will soon be presented to President John Dramani Mahama. Ablakwa emphasized that the committee is diligently reviewing over 700 petitions submitted by citizens.

In an interview with the media on Wednesday, the North Tongu MP reiterated that the committee's core mission is to promote transparency and accountability in governance while ensuring that public officials adhere to high ethical standards. "We are still compiling all the cases and will soon present our report to the president. What I can tell you, without going into specifics, is that we have received over 700 petitions. It has been a daunting

task, but there is the political will," Ablakwa stated. "We are passionate about this work. And what excites me is that we now have the opportunity to show the same passion we exhibited in opposition, now that we are in government. We are committed to this mission, and our actions will serve as a deterrent to those entering government in the future," he added.

The committee is also preparing to launch a rigorous verification process to ensure the accuracy of the information it has gathered. Ablakwa further revealed that the committee hopes to conclude its work in the coming weeks.

"We are aiming to wrap up soon. We believe we have gathered enough information. We have nearly finished field validation in the capital, where much of the alleged

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Petition being submitted to the ORAL team

General News

Over 700 petitions submitted for review - ORAL

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looting occurred. However, we have also received reports from other regions, and starting this weekend, we will be visiting those areas to continue the validation process," he explained.

Meanwhile, Daniel Domelevo, former Auditor General and a key member of the ORAL Committee, addressed critics questioning the legality of the committee's actions. In a statement to the media on

Wednesday, Domelevo assured the public that the committee is operating within legal frameworks and urged those with concerns to pursue legal avenues if they believe the committee's work is unlawful.

"Let me be very clear. We are working, and some have claimed we are operating illegally. The courts are still open. If anyone believes our actions are unlawful, they should go to court. If the courts

rule against us, we will comply, but only after presenting our case and arguments," Domelevo said. "If the court tells us that we cannot even collect information from those who come forward, we will respect that ruling and cease operations," he added.

The ORAL Committee, formed on December 18, 2024, is tasked with recovering state assets that have been illicitly taken. Under Ablakwa's

leadership, the committee has encouraged citizens to provide critical information through its hotlines, website, and email.

Despite mounting criticism, Domelevo reiterated that the committee's approach is voluntary, emphasizing that it does not actively seek individuals to come forward. "We are not soliciting information from people. It's entirely their choice to provide it," he clarified.

3 in police grip for attempting to smuggle cocoa beans

By Amanda Cartey

The Police Service has arrested three suspects for allegedly smuggling cocoa beans to neighboring countries, Togo or Burkina Faso.

The suspects include a driver and two assistants who were found transporting 1,473 maxi bags of cocoa beans hidden under lumber. The suspects have been granted bail and are assisting the police

with investigations. Two additional drivers involved in the operation remain at large.

The COCOBOD Anti-Smuggling Task Force intercepted the trucks—bearing registration numbers GR 7237-21, GR 314-24, and AS 5278-23—at Nkrankwanta in the Dormaa West District of the Bono Region. In a media briefing in Sunyani, Mr. Michael P.K. Asumanu, Regional Administrator for the Bono, Bono East, and Ahafo regions of

COCOBOD, explained that the task force is made up of personnel from the Police Service, the National Investigative Bureau, National Security, and COCOBOD itself.

The seized trucks are now secured at the Bono Regional Police Headquarters, while COCOBOD has taken possession of the cocoa beans, as no individual has come forward to claim ownership. Mr. Asumanu emphasized that smuggling causes significant

economic loss to the nation, as cocoa is a major contributor to the economy. He urged the public to support efforts to combat the smuggling of cocoa beans, stating, "We have designed rewards for informants."

In addition, Mr. Emmanuel Ntiako, Acting Regional Manager of the Forestry Commission for the Bono Region, informed the media that the commission was also evaluating the lumber involved in the operation.



Bags of cocoa



General News

Sammy Awuku labels betting tax as counterproductive following resignation

By **Amanda Cartey**

Former Director-General of the National Lottery Authority (NLA) and Member of Parliament for Akuapem North, Sammy Awuku, has commended the Mahama-led administration for its decision to scrap the controversial betting tax. This comes shortly after Awuku resigned from his position as Director-General of the NLA just days ago.

In an interview with Adom News' Parliamentary Correspondent, Ohene Amponsah, Awuku criticized the tax as ineffective, describing it as a "voluntary tax" that failed to achieve its intended objectives.

"I have been consistent in my position, both under the Akufo-Addo government and now Mahama's, that the betting and

lottery tax is counterproductive and will not help the nation. It is a voluntary tax," Awuku remarked.

He urged the government to engage with stakeholders in the gaming industry to establish clear revenue targets, rather than shifting the tax burden onto the players. According to him, this approach risks driving bettors toward illegal operators.

"Government must sit down with stakeholders and set targets for them to pay, rather than passing it on to the player. This tax will make illegal betting operators more attractive to players," Awuku cautioned.

Awuku also advocated for stronger incentives for companies adhering to regulations and called for a review of the laws governing the gaming sector. He stressed the

need for stricter penalties for illegal operators, likening such offenses to financial crimes in other jurisdictions.

"It is considered a financial crime in some jurisdictions, so punishments must not be left to the judge's discretion," he emphasized.

He also disclosed that, during his

tenure at the NLA, the authority was not consulted prior to the implementation of the tax.

In August 2023, the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) introduced a 10% tax on winnings from sports betting and lotteries, which sparked widespread backlash. Many critics blamed the NLA for initiating the policy.



Sammy Awuku, MP for Akuapem North

Kumasi drivers welcome reintroduction of toll

By **Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo**

Drivers in parts of the Ashanti Region have expressed support for the government's decision to reintroduce road tolls, as announced by the Finance Minister-Designate following the scrapping of the Electronic Transaction Levy (E-Levy).

Before the abolition of road tolls in November 2021 by the previous administration, vehicles were charged between GHS1.00 and GHS2.00 per toll booth, while larger vehicles, such as trucks and buses, paid higher rates.

During a media engagement on January 15, several drivers shared their excitement over the reintroduction of the tolls but urged the government to ensure the funds are used for their intended purpose—road development. They expressed hope that the revenue generated would contribute to fixing the poor state of many roads in the region.

"Reintroducing road tolls would be a great idea. Taxes are essential for every country's development, and I fully support it. However, I urge

the government to closely monitor those managing the funds to ensure they are used effectively for the benefit of all citizens," a driver remarked.

Another driver echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing the need for proper fund utilization. "Reintroducing tolls is a good idea if the funds are properly managed. Our roads are in terrible condition. For instance, a journey from Kumasi to Juaboso, which should take three hours, now takes five due to poor roads," he added.

Some drivers also highlighted the fairness of charging foreign nationals who use Ghana's roads. "The return of toll payment will rightfully charge Malians, Nigeriens, and other foreign nationals who ply Ghanaian roads," a driver noted.

Others stressed the global norm of toll payments, comparing Ghana to other countries in the region. "We support the reintroduction of tolls because every country is funded by taxes. When we travel to Mali, Burkina Faso, and even Niger, we pay tolls. We should contribute here as well to help develop our country," another driver added.

While many drivers welcomed the tolls, some expressed concern over fuel prices and called on the government to address the issue. "We are ready to pay the tolls, but the government should work on reducing fuel prices, as that remains a major concern for us. The tolls will also benefit hawkers who sell along the roads," a driver pointed out.

The initial abolition of road tolls by the previous government was met with mixed reactions. Critics argued it led to significant revenue losses for road maintenance, job losses for toll collectors, policy inconsistencies, and the absence of viable alternative revenue sources to replace the funds generated

from toll payments. Regardless, the Akufo-Addo-led government cited the e-levy, which was to generate enough revenue for government, as one of the many reasons for the abolishment.

Meanwhile, Kofi Bentil, Vice President of IMANI Ghana, has recommended an increase in toll rates upon the government's hint of reintroduction. According to Mr. Bentil, toll booths are an inefficient and costly revenue collection method, often leading to long vehicle queues. He suggested increasing toll rates while adopting a modern, electronic toll collection system to reduce congestion and improve efficiency.



Kumasi central market (Kejetia)



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Business

Asante Gold to commence underground mining, targets over 250,000 ounces gold production annually

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

Asante Gold Corporation has announced plans to launch underground mining operations at its Bibiani Gold Mine, with annual gold production projected to exceed 250,000 ounces starting in 2026.

The company recently completed a Definitive Feasibility Study (DFS) confirming the technical and financial viability of extending the mine's lifespan through underground development.

"We are pleased to confirm the potential for an underground mine development with an initial life of seven years at Bibiani. This will incorporate 831,000 ounces of gold produced and an attractive all-in sustaining cost (AISC) of \$1,035 per ounce," said Dave Anthony, CEO of Asante.

He further highlighted, "Since Asante acquired the Bibiani property in 2021, we have revitalized the operation and reshaped the business plan. We are on a path to achieving annual production of more than 250,000 ounces in 2026 and beyond, further supported by commencement of underground mining in Q4 2025 and other growth initiatives that have already advanced. These include the Bibiani-Goaso Highway bypass in June 2024 to facilitate access to additional

mineralized material and completion of the new sulphide treatment plant, which is on track for Q2 2025."

The DFS, prepared by Bara International with contributions from Middindi Consulting and SLR Consulting, focuses on the underground mining potential beneath the existing Bibiani Main and Walsh pits. The study outlines the mining of 11.93 million tonnes of ore at an average grade of 2.36g/t gold, with underground reserves as of December 31, 2023.

The estimated initial capital cost stands at \$116 million, with projected gold production of 798,000 ounces at an AISC of \$1,035 per ounce. The project is expected to generate a post-tax Net Present Value (NPV) of \$516 million, assuming a gold price of \$2,500 per ounce, with an internal rate of return (IRR) of 71%.

Key next steps include finalizing the combined open pit and underground mine plan, selecting a mining contractor by Q3 2025, and commencing underground operations in late 2025. The development will be funded through ongoing open pit mining activities.

The DFS also details the equipment selection and infrastructure required

for the underground expansion. Mining equipment has been chosen to align with the orebody's geometry, minimizing dilution while maximizing productivity. Lessons from Asante's nearby Chirano Gold Mine influenced the selection, ensuring standardization across both sites. The study outlines manpower requirements, remuneration, and cost schedules for development and operational phases.

Ore from the Bibiani underground operations will be processed at the

existing Bibiani Process Plant, which was originally designed by Lycopodium in 1997 and refurbished under Asante's management between 2021 and 2022.

The plant, which includes a gravity concentration circuit and a reconditioned primary gyratory crusher, currently operates at a throughput rate of 2.4 million tonnes per annum (Mtpa). Further upgrades to the sulphide recovery section are scheduled for completion in Q2 2025, ahead of the start of underground mining.



Underground gold mine

Gold prices to rise in 2025 due to US interest rate cuts, others - Databank Research

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

Gold prices are projected to experience a significant surge in 2025, according to the latest projections from Databank Research in its Ghana Market Outlook 2025 report, released in January.

Currently, the price of gold stands at approximately \$2,693.60 per ounce. The anticipated rise in gold prices, according to Databank Research, will be driven by global political tensions and possible interest rate reductions by the US Federal Reserve.

"We believe 2025 will be a promising year for gold. We expect prices to rise between USD 2,500 and USD 3,100, supported by geopolitical tensions and potential interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve," parts of the 37-page report noted.

In light of this, the report advised local investors to diversify their portfolios by considering financial products linked to gold, such as gold-backed securities.

"We recommend that local investors diversify their portfolios into gold-backed

securities to capitalize on this potential price increase and hedge against the local currency depreciation," the document further stated.

The report provides a comprehensive analysis and forecast of Ghana's economic and market conditions for the year, highlighting key trends that could influence the performance of key sectors. A rise in gold prices presents positive prospects for Ghana's economy, given the significant contribution of the mining sector to the nation's revenue. The mining sector remains the largest taxpayer, contributing 22.7% of Ghana's direct taxes. In 2023 alone, the gold mining industry generated GH¢11.55 billion (US\$980 million) in taxes.

Higher gold prices could further strengthen Ghana's currency by increasing export earnings and foreign exchange reserves, as gold mining plays a pivotal role in the country's economy. In 2023, the mining sector accounted for 47.4% of Ghana's nominal GDP and 17.1% of its real GDP. Gold exports alone made up 62.1% of the country's total export income.



Gold

International

Tanzania denies suspected outbreak of deadly Marburg virus

Tanzania on Thursday denied reports of a suspected outbreak of the deadly Marburg disease in the northwest of the country.

The World Health Organization on Tuesday said nine possible cases were reported last week in the remote Kagera region, adding that eight of those infected had died. At the time, residents said they were adapting their behaviour as a result of the news.

"We have refrained from greeting each other by shaking hands, as was the custom in the past," said local man, Finton Ishengoma. "Instead, we greet from a distance while continuing to follow the

guidance of health experts on how to protect ourselves from this disease."

But Tanzania's Health Minister, Jenista Mhagama, said after samples were tested, all suspected cases were found to be negative for the Ebola-like virus.

She said the country has strengthened its surveillance systems and disease monitoring as a precaution. News of the suspected cases came weeks after an outbreak of the disease in neighbouring Rwanda was declared over.

Marburg has a fatality rate of as high as 88 per cent. The WHO had cautioned that the risk of the suspected virus spreading

in the region was "high" as Kagera is a transit hub to several countries.

Like Ebola, the Marburg virus originates in fruit bats. It spreads between people through close contact with the bodily fluids of infected individuals or with surfaces, such as contaminated bed sheets.

Symptoms include fever, muscle pains, diarrhoea, vomiting, and in some cases death from extreme blood loss. There is no authorised vaccine or treatment for Marburg.

Source: Africanews



Marburg Virus

87 miners dead in South Africa standoff amid Police tactics outrage

The death toll in a monthslong standoff between police and miners trapped while working illegally in an abandoned gold mine in South Africa has risen to at least 87, police said Thursday.

Authorities faced growing anger and a possible investigation over their initial refusal to help the miners and instead "smoke them out" by cutting off their food supplies.

National police spokesperson Athlenda Mathe said that 78 bodies were retrieved in a court-ordered rescue operation, with 246 survivors also pulled out from deep underground since the operation began on Monday. Mathe said nine other bodies had been recovered before the rescue operation, without giving details.

Community groups launched their own rescue attempts when authorities said last year they would not help the hundreds of miners because they were "criminals."

The miners are suspected to have died of starvation and dehydration, although no causes of death have been released.

South African authorities have been fiercely criticized for cutting off food and supplies to the miners in the Buffelsfontein Gold Mine last year. That tactic to "smoke them out," as described by a prominent Cabinet minister, was condemned by one of South Africa's biggest trade unions.

Police and the mine owners were also accused of taking away ropes and dismantling a pulley system the miners used to enter the mine and send supplies down from the surface.

A court ordered authorities last year to

allow food and water to be sent down to the miners, while another court ruling last week forced them to launch a rescue operation.

Many say the unfolding disaster underground was clear weeks ago, when community members sporadically pulled decomposing bodies out of the mine, some with notes attached pleading for food to be sent down.

"If the police had acted earlier, we would not be in this situation, with bodies piling up," said Johannes Qankase, a local community leader. "It is a disgrace for a constitutional democracy like ours. Somebody needs to account for what has happened here."

South Africa's second biggest political party, which is part of a government coalition, called for President Cyril Ramaphosa to establish an independent inquiry to find out "why the situation was allowed to get so badly out of hand."

"The scale of the disaster underground at Buffelsfontein is rapidly proving to be as bad as feared," the Democratic Alliance party said.

Authorities now believe that nearly 2,000 miners were working illegally in the mine near the town of Stilfontein, southwest of Johannesburg, since August last year. Many of them resurfaced on their own over the last few months, police said, and all the survivors have been arrested, even as some emerged this week badly emaciated and barely able to walk to waiting ambulances.

A convoy of mortuary vans arrived at the mine to carry away the bodies. Mathe said at least 13 children had also come out of the mine before the official rescue operation.

Police announced Wednesday that they were ending that operation after three days and said they believed no one else was underground. A camera was sent down on Thursday in a cage that was used to pull out survivors and bodies to ensure no one was left behind, Mathe said.

The mine is one of the deepest in South Africa and is a maze of tunnels and levels and has several shafts leading into it. The miners were working up to 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) underground in different groups.

Police have maintained that the miners were able to come out through several shafts but refused out of fear of being arrested. That's been disputed by groups representing the miners, who say hundreds were trapped and left starving in dark and damp conditions with decomposing bodies around them.

The initial police operation last year to force the miners to come out and give themselves up for arrest was part of a larger nationwide clampdown on illegal mining called Vala Umgodi, or Close the Hole. Illegal mining is often in the news in South Africa and a major problem for authorities as large groups go into mines that have been shut down to extract any leftover deposits.

Gold-rich South Africa has an estimated 6,000 abandoned or closed mines.

The illicit miners, known as "zama zamas" — "hustlers" or "chancers" in the Zulu language — are usually armed and part of criminal syndicates, the government says, and they rob South Africa of more than \$1 billion a year in gold deposits. They are often undocumented foreign nationals and authorities said that the vast majority who came out of the Buffelsfontein mine were from Mozambique, Zimbabwe

and Lesotho who were in South Africa illegally.

Police said they seized gold, explosives, firearms and more than \$2 million in cash from the miners and have defended their hardline approach.

"By providing food, water and necessities to these illegal miners, it would be the police entertaining and allowing criminality to thrive," Mathe said Wednesday.

But the South African Federation of Trade Unions questioned the government's humanity and how it could "allow anyone — be they citizens or undocumented immigrants — to starve to death in the depths of the earth."

While civic groups have condemned the police operation, the disaster hasn't provoked a strong outpouring of anger across South Africa, where the mostly foreign zama zamas have long been considered unwelcome in a country that already struggles with high rates of violent crime.

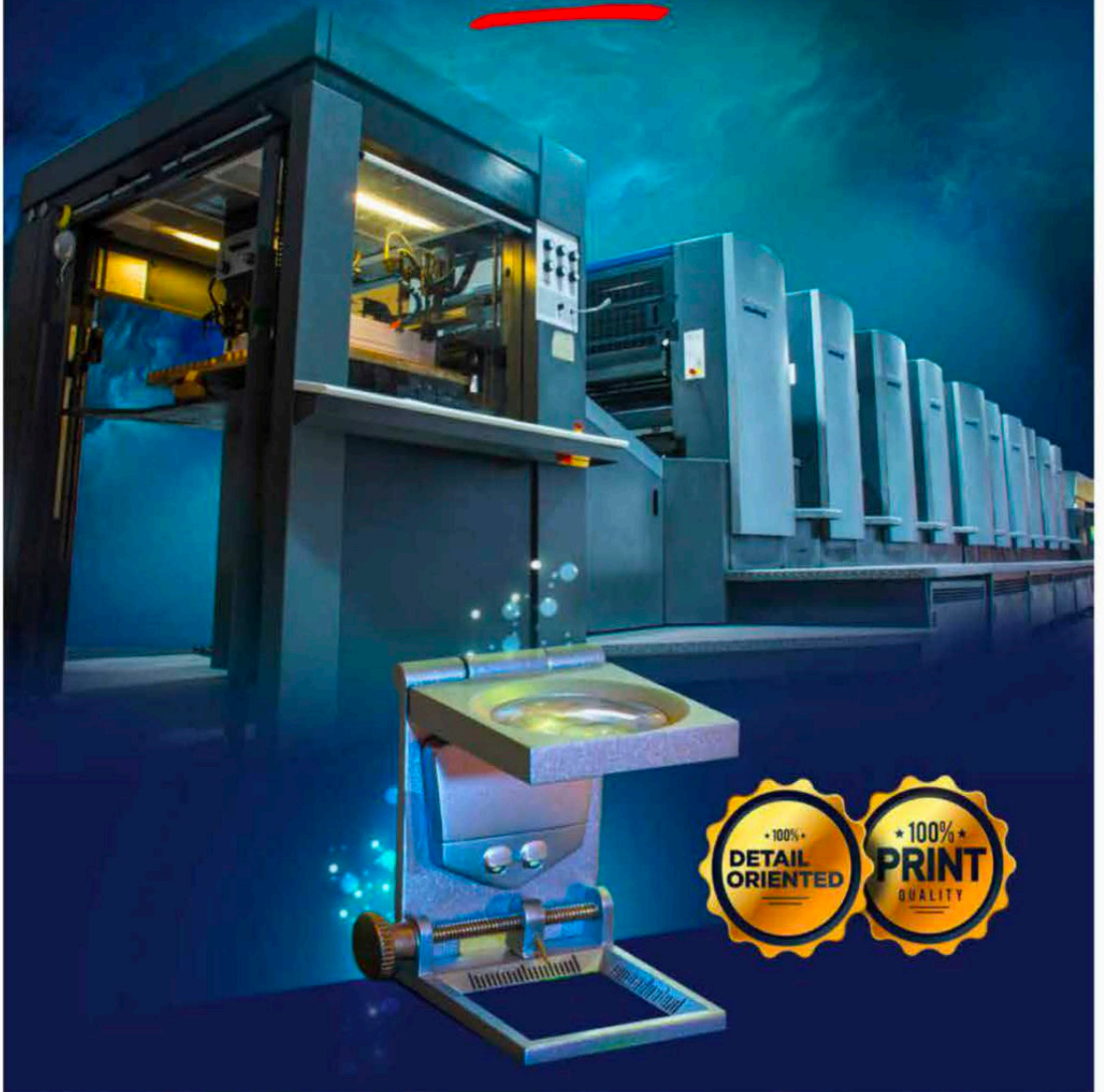
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A victim being transported by rescue workers

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