

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

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By John-Paul

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POLITICAL

GHANA

Parliament ends special meeting

Accra, May 7, GNA - Parliament on Friday concluded its special sitting with the adoption of loan agreements meant for development projects in the country.

They include the Suppliers Credit Facility Agreement between the governments and the China International Water and Electricity Cooperation for an amount of 81,000,000.00 to finance the National Electrification project in the Upper West region.

Another credit agreement between government and the China EXIM bank for an amount of 102,000,000.00 for the financing of the National Electrification scheme for the Northern regional electrification project was adopted.

Mr. James Klutse Avedzi, Ketu North, Chairman of the Finance Committee's had read the committee's report before the house. Also included is the credit agreement between government and STX Engineering and Construction Ghana Limited for an amount of 1,525,443,468 for the construction of 30,000 units of houses under the security services housing projects.

The internal revenue bill was also read the third time due to the urgency of the bill, as well as the Centre for Urban Transport Bill, 2009 which was also read the third time. Mr. Alowe Leo Kabah, Member for Chiana Paga, in support of the electrification projects appealed to government to consider extending the project also to the Upper East region because most villages there were still without electricity. Though most members were not present in the house today the business of the house was conducted. The Speaker, Mrs Joyce Bamford Addo, said the house was expected to rise sine die and resume on the 26 May 2010 to continue with business.

Zongo Caucus of NDC strategies for Election 2012

Accra, May 7, GNA - The Zongo Caucus of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) has mapped-out schemes to expand and solidify its dominance in the Muslim communities nation-wide to boost the party's chances of retaining power in Election 2012.

The scheme includes educational campaigns to plug all loopholes for alleged rigging and cheating at the polling stations, empowerment of women and youth from the Zongo communities and special means to make the NDC attractive especially within their communities. Speaking at a strategic meeting with the Zongo Caucus Women's Wing in Accra on Friday, Mahmend Yusif Captain, National Coordinator of Zongo Caucus, said the strategies were indicative of the seriousness attached to Election 2012.

"The NDC is growing with confidence and would work hard even in government to increase its electoral margin in both the Parliamentary and Presidential elections...we would expand our frontiers within the Zongo communities".

According to Mr. Captain, the caucus will "solidify our front against infiltrators and expose the anti-NDC propaganda of our opponents to discredit the ruling party for electoral gains" He said NDC Zongo Caucus would not allow the opposition parties especially the New Patriotic Party (NPP) to dictate the "pace of political campaigns this time...therefore, the Zongo Caucus would tailor its campaign to set the agenda, intensify door to door, house to house and village to village campaigns".

He said leadership of the party was not crumbling, as some people would like to believe adding, "the NDC is still bound together by the same principles and policies, since 1992". Mr. Mahamend Captain, who is also the NDC Greater Accra Regional Vice Chairman, cautioned detractors of the party to "put off fires at their own backyard instead of moving around in an attempt to set fires in other peoples peaceful communities".

Hajia Amina Seidu, National Women's Organiser of Zongo Caucus said the NDC remained a true national party that would continue to use collective efforts to develop the country. The NDC, she said, stood for hard work, unity and stability and urged its members to be alert to acts by detractors of the party to sow seeds of disunity among them.

Hajia Seidu assured women and the youth that the ruling party would continue to tap the experience of every Ghanaian, irrespective of ethnic, religious or political differences, in the country's development process. "NDC is for everybody, the common man, and there is nothing like a big man or a small man when it comes to working together for a common purpose", she added.

She urged the people, especially NDC members to inculcate the spirit of hard work, nationalism in the new members adding, "We should all have the burning desire to move the country forward". Hajia Seidu said NDC was the only force to reckon with and urged members to work hard to enable it achieve success again in the next elections, stressing "the party's doors are open to all disenchanted opposition members, as well as floating voters".

"There is the need to reach out to all of them with the message of togetherness, unity and peace for a common purpose", she added. Alhaji Alhasan Bene, National Secretary of Zongo Caucus, emphasised that the ruling party's main concern now was to develop potentials of the country and not any particular interest.

He said the caucus would soon initiate nation-wide organisation leading to a national delegates' conference by the end of the year and challenged its members to start mass mobilisation across the country. Alhaji Bene advised Muslim youth against acts of hooliganism and other unproductive ventures; "our youth should direct their energies towards the development of the northern parts of the country". He called for total support for President John Evans Atta Mills and Vice President John Dramani Mahama as they work towards the Better Ghana Agenda.

Amend constitution for FWSC to fix President's salary - Participants

Participants at a review meeting in Ho on the 1992 Constitution has called for an amendment of Article 71 (1) to allow the Fair Wages and Salary Commission (FWSC) to determine the salary and allowances of the President of Ghana.

They said the amendment should enable the Commission to also determine the salaries and allowances of the Speaker of Parliament, Members of Parliament and officials mentioned in Article 71 of the Constitution. They argued at the meeting on Wednesday that the current provision, which conferred on the President the power to determine the salaries and allowances of the Speaker and MPs, raised suspicion of favouritism in the matter.

"It becomes a game of wash my hand and I wash your hand", one of the participants said.

The meeting also upheld the proposal that an independent National Prosecution Service should be established in order to de-politicize the prosecution of political office holders. The meeting, however, objected to the proposal to allow chiefs to engage in partisan politics because such a dispensation would be a recipe for conflicts and loss of dignity for the chieftaincy institution. It was argued, however, that chiefs like any other citizens with expertise could be asked by any government to offer such expertise in the national interest, which was not the same as partisanship. A participant argued that it was not

necessary to make any provision to deal with a situation in which a sitting President leaves the party on whose ticket he was voted into power. In his view, once elected, the President becomes a national rather than a partisan figure and must therefore pursue the national interest and be guided by the Directive Principles of State policy rather than the party's interest.

Others, however, argued for a provision to compel the President to resign from office once he resigned from his party while in office. In their view the President was voted on a platform of his party's manifesto and could therefore not qualify to remain President on resigning from his party.

A counter argument was whether a President elected as an independent candidate but decided to join a political party while in office should be made to resign as President.

The meeting was also divided on other issues including whether there should be a ceiling for the number of judges to be appointed to the Supreme Court.

Those, who argued for a ceiling, said apart from saving the country huge financial burdens on the national purse given the conditions attached to the offices of such judges, a ceiling would erase allegations of executive manipulation of the Supreme Court.

The pro-ceiling advocates said their position would strengthen the independence of the judiciary and public confidence in it. Those who were for a non-ceiling, argued that the government in power would be assured of a corps of Supreme Court Judges that would be amenable to its cause.

On death penalty, some called for its retention in the constitution as punishment for those, who have been proven to have committed murder and high treason.

Others, however, argued that because death could not be reversed it would smack of injustice to those who might be killed only for fresh evidence to show later that they were innocent of the charges for which they have been sentenced to death. The meeting was however unanimous on the retention of the indemnity provision in the constitution as well as the tenure of the President.

District Assemblies Act to be Reviewed - Deputy Minister

Ajumako (C/R), May 3, GNA - The Deputy Minister for Local Government and Rural Development, Mr. Evils Afriyie Ankrah, at the weekend urged Assembly members to look at issues rationally and logically instead of viewing them with partisan lenses. He said the District Assemblies were originally meant to operate on non-partisan basis, with issues handled dispassionately "but today we cannot act as ostriches to pretend that there is no party affiliation in the Assemblies".

Mr. Ankrah said these when he addressed the fourth session of the Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam District Assembly at Ajumako in the Central Region. He said while the Assembly system had worked well, certain issues had come up strong as defects of the concept. Another issue which confronts participatory democracy at the grassroots is the involvement of chiefs, he observed. "Traditional authorities have been conspicuously left out in the Assembly concept even though they are perceived to be major stakeholder at the local level". He said it was as a result of such defects that the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development initiated the process of reviewing the Local Government Act, ACT 462, which the District Assemblies had been operating since 1993.

Mr. Ankrah said the committee had done consultations throughout the country, and received memoranda from various stakeholders. "It is expected that by the time the review is over some of these grey areas in the District Assembly concept would be addressed and the rough edges would be smoothed so that participation would be enhanced," Mr. Ankrah said.

He said the current Assembly members would complete their term of office by the end of August 2010 and, therefore, urged all District Chief Executives (DCEs) to begin to think about the issue of *ex-gratia* to Assembly members so that they are not overtaken by events. The Deputy Minister appealed to Assembly Members to help address some of the chieftaincy disputes in their respective areas since the trend retarded progress and cost government millions of Ghana Cedis in peacekeeping efforts. He also urged them to be vigilant in performing their monitoring and oversight roles to ensure efficient use of the assembly's resources. The DCE for the area, Mr. Peter Light Koomson, said as part of government Policy to create employment for the youth through an afforestation programme, the Assembly was collaborating with the chiefs and people of the district and the forestry Commission to acquire large plots of land for the programme.

LIBERIA

Supreme Court Places Stay Order on Threshold Bill

The Supreme Court of Liberia has placed a stay order on the passage of the population Threshold Bill currently before the Liberian Senate and cited all parties to the bill to a conference on Wednesday with the Justice in Chamber, Kabina Jan'eh.

The Liberian Senate on Tuesday could not concord with the House of Representative on the controversial population Threshold Bill currently before it due to the current stay order placed on the bill.

In a communication to the Liberian Senate, the Supreme Court cited concerns raised by a youth group through its board chairman, James Davis, (petitioner) verses the Liberia Institute for Statistic and Geo-Information Services, (LISGIS), National Election Commission (NEC), the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives, the Senate Pro-Tempore and members of the Liberian Senate (respondents), on a writ of Prohibition.

The communication to the Senate sparked up heated debates across the floor of the Senate with some Senators accusing members of the ruling Unity Party (UP) of stalling the passage of the bill. In a very harsh tone, Grand Cape Mount County Senior Senator, Abel Massalay accused Maryland County Junior Senator, Gloria Scott of being one of those behind the delay in the passage of the bill.

Senator Scott in response to Senator Massalay's accusation said she "takes a face" to the senator accusation and that all Liberians are under duty to obey the court order.

The uncontrollable debate which lasted for couple of minutes also brought about contrary views from some senators. At one point, Senator Joseph Nagbe of Sinoe County and Senator Nathaniel Innis of Grand Bassa County argued that the Senate and the House acted in error to pass the bill at 54.500 and 46.000 respectively, amidst the stay order by the Supreme Court.

The letter from the Supreme Court was however read, opened for discussion and subsequently voted upon. In a vote taken as to weather to obey the highest court in the land or go on to pass the Threshold Bill, 14 Senators voted to respect the court order, one voted to disrespect the order and one abstained.

On a concern raised by Bong County Senior Senator Jewel H. Taylor as to weather the Supreme Court has the right to stop the lawmakers from carrying out its constitutional functions, Senator Joseph Nagba of Sinoe County and a Councilor-At- Law said the "Supreme Court or any court of competence jurisdiction has the right to stop any person(s) or institution(s) on any matter within the borders of Liberia."

Meanwhile, Senator Abel Massalay has said that the Supreme Court must reframe from interfering in sensitive political matters and matters that it cannot impose it ruling on. The Grand Cape Mount County lawmaker was called to order on grounds that he deviated from the matter under discussion.

The Threshold Bill has spent a little over two years at the National Legislature, without its final passage. The delay in passage of the bill has raised concerns from many Liberians and foreign nations. They fear that any delay could cause a setback in the conduct of the 2011 General and Presidential Elections.

President Ellen Johnson Veto the bill twice on political and economic grounds, but said that the Executive Branch, is working with the Legislative Branch, on the final passage of the bill.

Ellen Makes Several Appointments in Government

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has made new appointments in Government, subject, where applicable, to confirmation by the Senate, according to the Executive Mansion.

Those appointed are Mr. Thomas Romeo Quioh (Deputy Executive Director, Environmental Protection Agency), Dr. Charles McClain (Deputy Minister/Administration, Ministry of Agriculture), Mr. Sizi Zubahyea Subah (Deputy Minister/Technical Services, Ministry of Agriculture), Mrs. Yah Kallain (Commissioner, UNESCO, and Ministry of Education) and Mr. Paul Jallah (Assistant Minister/Regional Development, Research and Extension, Ministry of Agriculture).

Others include Mr. Robert Duo (District Commissioner, Yarwin Mehsonnoh District, Nimba Co.), Mr. Tennyson Falkornia (Statutory District, Superintendent, Foya District, Lofa County), Ms. Shirley Brown (District Commissioner, Bain/Garr District, Nimba Co.), Mr. Emmanuel N. Kar (District Commissioner, Kpablee District, Nimba Co.), and Mr. John P. Thompson (Statutory District Superintendent, Sanniquillie Mahn District, Nimba Co.).

Other local government officials appointed include Mrs. Beatrice Moore Kieh (Mayor, Greenville City, Sinoe County), Mr. Bedjue McCauley (Statutory Superintendent, Jedepo Statutory District, Sinoe County), Ms. Konwhloh Wesseh (District Commissioner, Kpanyan County District, Sinoe County), Mr. Ralph Wilson (District Commissioner, Payne Town County District, Sinoe Co.),

Mr. Junior Jargbah (Mayor Plandialebo City, Tarjuowon Statutory District, Sinoe County) and Mr. Hamilton Saydee (Relieving Commissioner, Sinoe County).

Ellen Defies E-Mail Scandal Report

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has challenged the Dunn Commission's report on the e-mail scandal linking her and some family members with the alleged transfer of US\$600,000 from Cellcom, which the her brother-in-law, Cllr. Estrada Bernard is a member of the Board of Directors.

"I defied them. Because I have been working too long, I do not have to steal; not at all," President Sirleaf told members of the Friend of Friends Hathaï Association recently on Carey street here.

But the President, whose home computer was used to send out an email regarding the money, has repeatedly said her friend and fellow Ivy Leaguer, Ms. Finda Koroma used her PC to email the receiver of the US\$600,000.

However, responding to questions from Hatai drinkers about the e-mail scandal, Mrs. Sirleaf said: I became president to restore the past bad records of the country," adding, "I want to straighten up this place and that's what I will do."

She said, "in order to clean up a country that once had a damaged record, one has to have a clean hand. And to set up a place you have got to be clean yourself."

"I say please this thing has got to come to an end because I know I can stand up anywhere; nobody can say they gave me something or I have got dealing with them," she added.

On the status of the report, the president said Solicitor General Micah Wright has appointed Theophilus Gould to head a committee that is examining the case.

President Sirleaf explained that investigation into the case has been delayed because several lawyers she contacted had declined on grounds that they want cases that will give them money.

"Every time I tell them about the case, they do not want to touch it. They will say no, no, no, I am not even going that far. I want something that will give me more money," President Sirleaf added.

Ms. Finda Koroma admitted sending out an email to alert her Freetown banker, Ecobank about the transfer, saying the email regarding her wired transfer was sent from Houston, TX.

The President's in-law and legal advisor, Cllr. Estrada Bernard and his wife Jennie Sirleaf (the President's older sister) have both denied playing any part to either the money or the email. They both lived in the same house as the computer at the time of the alleged scandal.

Ms. Finda Koroma, an in-law to Sierra Leone's President (Ernest Bai Koroma) and friend of President Sirleaf, denies she sent the email from the computer in question.

TOGO

Togolese Government resigns

Togolese Prime Minister Gilbert Houngbo on Wednesday tendered resignation of his government to make way for the formation of a new governing team following the presidential inauguration.

According to an official communiqué, President Faure Gnassingbe, who won the March 4 elections and were recently sworn in, praised Houngbo for the "immense work he has accomplished at the head of the government."

President Gnassingbe also asked Houngbo to "ensure the expedition of current affairs until the nomination of a new prime minister."

US greets country

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton congratulated the people of Togo on its 50th independence anniversary.

"On this historic occasion, we join you in celebrating the progress that Togo has made and looking forward to the promise of the years to come. Holding presidential elections on March 4 was an important step towards democracy and good governance.

Staying on this path and implementing necessary democratic and economic reforms will allow Togo to emerge as an increasingly stable, democratic, and peaceful country," she said, adding that the United States believes in Togo's potential and is committed to Togo's future.

GUINEA

Country's Transitional Authorities Assure UN That June Vote Will Be Held on Schedule

Guinea's interim President Sékouba Konaté has reassured the United Nations and its African partners that presidential elections will be held as scheduled on 27 June following recent reports of tension among the West African country's transitional authorities over the electoral process.

A joint delegation of the UN, the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) conferred with the president, Prime Minister Jean Marie Doré and other transitional and electoral officials during a visit to Conakry, the Guinean capital, on 29 and 30 April.

The impoverished country was gripped by unrest after the forces of Moussa Dadis Camara, who seized power in a coup in 2008 following the death of long-time president Lansana Conté, opened fire on unarmed protesters at a rally last year, killing at least 150 people.

In December, Mr. Camara was wounded in an assassination attempt. In January, after mediation by President Blaise Compaoré of nearby Burkina Faso and others, an agreement was signed setting up a Government of national unity and calling for elections within six months.

"The interim Guinean President, General Sékouba Konaté, reaffirmed that all measures will be taken to ensure that presidential elections are held on 27 June 2010," a communiqué issued by the delegation said.

"The delegation's objective was to confer with the Guinean authorities and encourage them to pursue their efforts in accordance with the joint declaration of Ouagadougou [Burkina Faso's capital where the January agreement was signed]."

Composed of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Representative for West Africa Said Djinnit, AU Special Envoy for Guinea Ibrahima Fall and ECOWAS Commission President Victor Gbeho, the delegation urged the transitional authorities to ensure strict respect for the electoral calendar and take all necessary measures, including adoption of a proposed constitution and electoral code.

"The delegation reiterated the international community's resolve to support Guinea's transition process in conformity with the joint declaration of Ouagadougou," the communiqué said. "The delegation calls on the Guinean people to seize the unique opportunity it now has to participate actively in the country's democratic restoration and emergence from crisis.

"It urges citizens to maintain a climate of peace, security and social cohesion in the greater interests of the Guinean nation."

ECONOMY

GHANA

Oil Is Ready: Kwame Nkrumah Heads For Ghana Next Week

The Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) and its partners in the Jubilee Oil Field have accomplished with verve and surprising goodwill what other oil explorers and producers around world have failed to achieve with grim determination.

The Jubilee partners, which includes, GNPC, Tullow Ghana Ltd, Anardarko Petroleum, Kosmos Energy, Sabre Oil and controversial EO Group have broken industry record which usually pegs the period between oil discovery and production at seven years.

In the case of Ghana's Jubilee Field, the period between oil discovery and first oil is within a three years threshold. Ghana discovered oil in commercial quantities in 2007 and within this period, the infrastructure requirement for oil production is in its final stages.

On the pristine dock of Jurong Shipyard in far away Singapore, an eight-Decker vessel which floats on the belly of the sea, with capacity to produce store and offload crude oil, has been completed in record time at a cost of between USD\$800-\$900 million.

Next week, the Floating, production, Storage and Offloading (FPSO) vessel will begin an epic six week journey to Ghana where it will be deployed to the Jubilee Field, where the subsea infrastructure which is necessary for first oil production is almost completed.

According to officials of MODEC, the company which was responsible for the building the FPSO, the FPSO will this week begin sea trials, where they will "test drive the vessel" ahead of its voyage to Ghana. The company has also been contracted by Tullow to operate the FPSO on its behalf.

The FPSO, was named "FPSO Kwame Nkrumah" at a glamorous naming ceremony in Singapore, officiated by Ghana's First Lady, Ernestina Naadu Mills but put together by Tullow Oil, operators of Jubilee Field on behalf of all the partners.

According to statistics, The FPSO has an oil processing capacity of 120,000 barrels of oil per day, a storage capacity of 1.6 million barrels of crude oil with reserved ability to produce 160,000 million standard of gas per day. Besides the above, the FPSO also has the capacity to concurrently store and inject 230,000 barrels of processed water.

Ghana's FPSO, which spots some of the industry's biggest oil processor known as "turret" is 60 meters wide and 330 meters in length. It weighs approximately 12,500 tons and has its own water treatment plant, electricity generation and accommodation unit of 120 rooms.

GUNNING FOR GOOD LUCK

Ghana's First Lady, Ernestina Naadu Mills, was chosen as the special guest of honor for a special ceremony in Jurong Shipyard in Singapore, to name the FPSO. It is called "FPSO Kwame Nkrumah" named after Ghana's illustrious first President who initiated Ghana's first investment in oil exploration.

According to Aiden Heavey, CEO of Tullow, the First Lady was chosen to chair the naming ceremony because there is a tradition in the oil industry to allow women to name oil vessels because of the superstitious belief that women are luckier.

Speaking at the naming ceremony, Ghana's first lady, said "Ghana is on the verge of becoming an oil producing country sometime in the last quarter of 2010 when under the phase 1 of the Jubilee Field project, 120,000 barrels of oil a day and 120 million standard of cubic feet of dry gas per day will be produced"

The first lady who stunned onlookers by climbing the 8 storey vessel after she refused to be lifted by a crane inspected all facilities onboard the vessel and said "I now name this vessel FPSO Kwame Nkrumah. May all who work on her be blessed to bring prosperity to Ghana"

She told the gathering that the government is conscious of the fact that the oil and gas find is an opportunity to enhance the country's development and has as a step taken very important initiatives to make the Jubilee project happen and in a manner that will ensure maximum benefits to all major stakeholders in Ghana's oil.

"The government will not allow its emerging oil and gas industry to become a curse to the country. Consequently, fresh legislation and policies have been developed to ensure transparency and accountability in the industry.

"The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is to be extended to the oil and gas industry. Public consultation has begun on two bills ahead of submission to Parliament" she said.

She also noted that one of the bills will amend the Petroleum Act whilst the other, the Revenue Management Bill, will set up an independent body to direct effective administration of oil revenues adding that a "comprehensive draft Oil and Gas Local Content and Participation Policy Framework has been developed and is being discussed by stakeholders before it is submitted to Parliament for enactment to law.

The first Lady highlighted the local content policy as including "participation of Ghanaian citizens in the equity holdings in the exploration and production, use of goods and services produced by or provided in Ghana for operations in the oil and gas industry in the preference to foreign goods and services"

The policy she said included “submission of plans and programmes by operator for training of Ghanaians in all job classifications and all aspects of petroleum activities as well as support local training/technical institutions by both Government and petroleum operators to develop the requisite capacity to international standards in all aspects of the petroleum industry”

She noted that in spite of the laudable effort of the government in positioning the nation ahead of the oil production, “our detractors will not acknowledge these laudable efforts. This morning’s ceremony is yet another milestone in Ghana’s journey to pumping first oil”

She noted that it was assuring that the FPSO was named after Kwame Nkrumah, a man whose greatest ambition, the first lady said “was to move the wheels of progress in Ghana to the level of other developed nations worldwide”

The first lady also congratulated the jubilee partners, Tullow Oil, Andarko Petroleum, Kosmos Energy, Sabre Oil and Gas and EO Group for their untiring efforts and financial contributions to the jubilee project and delivering one of the most cost effective operations in West Africa.

LIBERIA

Govt. Pleads With World Bank

As a strategic partner of Liberia’s post-war development goals, the Liberian Government has made series of pleas with the World Bank to step up and consolidate its efforts toward the country’s infrastructure and social services.

A high level Liberian Government delegation which was in Washington, D.C., recently to participate in the Spring Meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Washington pleaded with the World Bank to renew and consolidate its efforts in the areas of infrastructure and social services, especially roads, electricity and education.

The revelation was made by Finance Minister Augustine Ngafuan, a member of the high level government delegation, at a news conference he addressed yesterday at the Finance Ministry.

Other members of the delegation included Central Bank Governor, J. Mills Jones, Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs, Amara Konneh, Minister of State, O, Natty B. Davis and the Minister of Post & Telecommunication, Jeremiah C. Sulunteh

During the meeting which focused on wide range of issues affecting the world’s financial and economic advancement and the roles of the two institutions to working with

countries make amends, Minister Ngafuan noted that the delegation used the opportunity provided by the meetings to discuss the bilateral and multilateral agencies' development portfolios and their engagement in the country in Liberia and their engagement in the country.

Also, he said, they requested the World Bank to renew and consolidate its efforts in the areas of infrastructure and social services, especially roads, electricity and education.

As a result of their pleas with officials of the World Bank, the minister said the delegation received assurances that the Monrovia-Buchanan Highway will continue uninterrupted and be completed on schedule

Most importantly, the minister said "Accordingly, the World Bank has decided to provide an additional US\$20 million in the project thereby ensuring that the full US\$50 million for the project is now assured."

Thought the World Bank has given its backings to providing the needed financial resources to some of the projects concentrated during the meetings, it did not give an overall approbation to the issue of the Monrovia-Gbarnga and Gbarnga-Ganta Highway projects, the minister said.

He rather noted: "We also agreed with the World Bank team that the Monrovia-Gbarnga and Gbarnga-Ganta Highway projects will not be part on the backburner as the contract award process for these projects is already on course."

Another important the delegation raised with the World Bank is electricity, as it needed to pay attention to the rehabilitation of the power sector.

Provided as reasons for calling the attention of the World Bank to this, the minister quoted the delegation as saying "Inadequate power supply is a significant obstacle to development and urban and rural electrification is a key objective of the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy."

More besides, the delegation observed that power shortage is also one of the main impediments to private sector development and foreign investment, noting "and as the power supply progressively increases over the coming years, it will diminish the cost of doing business, stimulate the local economy and attract foreign investors."

Following the delegation's position, the World Bank, according to Minister Ngafuan expressed its commitment to assist in financing of power supply in the country.

"We also urged the Bank to approve Liberia's application for financing of a US\$40 million grant from the Catalytic Growth Fund to finance education in Liberia over a three year period and got assurances from the Vice President of the World Bank, Mrs. Ezekwesili," the minister indicated.

Meanwhile, the dice is cast and the fog is evaporating faster away and it is just a matter of few weeks that Liberia gets to the 'Promised Land' it had been denied due to years of economic collapse attributable to the civil conflict.

As of June this year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which has been monitoring Liberia's compliance with set goals, benchmarks and conditions to reach the Heavily Poor Countries (HIPC) Completion Point, will announce the country out the snag, which burdened it for so long.

Sounding hilarious as he broke the news at yesterday's press conference intended to acquaint the people of Liberia with the latest developments in management of the nation's finances and the evolving process of public financial management reform and policies, Minister Ngafuan said this: "The most important outcome from these meetings was the confirmation that Liberia would reach the HIPC Completion Point in June of this year, making it the fastest HIPC reformist since the launch of the initiative in the 1990s. It will have taken us two years whereas the average for most countries has been six years."

The reasons behind this rapid success, he said, include the government's commitment to reforms and the will to take the necessary actions to ensure that those reforms take firm roots, adding "Our partners take great pride in what we have achieved amidst very challenging circumstances."

It may be recalled that the IMF following its assessment mission to Liberia last month issued a statement expressing satisfaction with Liberia's performance thus far.

"Performance under the Fund supported economic program has been strong Fiscal and monetary objectives through end - December 2009 have been achieved.Significant progress was achieved in advancing structural reforms critical to the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) program and the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative including completion of a second round of audits of the key government ministries, passage of a new Investment Act that removes discretionary investment incentives, and, completion of the first annual progress report of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), Implementation of the 2009 Public Financial Management Act has progressed including through preparation of the FY11 budget, adoption of a new chart of accounts, establishment of a debt management committee, and unification of the accounting function in the Ministry of Finance."

Ministry of Public Works (MPW) Tops Proposed 2010/11 Budget

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has submitted the proposed national budget for fiscal year 2010/2011 to the National Legislature depicting a decreased difference of

US\$24,802,799.00 as compared to that of fiscal 2009/2010 that was later plagued by a staggering deficit of US\$68 million.

The 2010/2011 proposed budget is US\$347,106,000 as compared to that of 2009/2010, which amounted to US\$371,908,799. The lion's share in the new budget is earmarked for the Ministry of public works instead of the Ministry of Education as expressed in the previous budget.

ENERGY

GHANA

Ghana strikes oil deal with Equatorial Guinea

Ghana has struck a deal with Equatorial Guinea for the supply of one million barrels of oil a year, Ghana's deputy minister of energy, Inusah Fuseini, has announced.

The state-owned Ghanaian Times newspaper quoted him on Thursday as saying the supply would continue until Ghana secures adequate supplies with the commercial production of its own oil fields offshore the Western Region.

Fuseini told reporters on Wednesday before President John Evans Atta Mills flew to Malabo to sign the agreement with the Equatorial Guinea president, Theodore Nguema Mbasogo, that the deal is exciting because it provides a certainty of delivery.

In addition, the deal under the Ghana-Equatorial Guinea Cooperative Agreement is flexible since the payment structure is concessionary, he said.

The deal marks the end of months of negotiations between the two governments for a comprehensive collaboration in the oil sector.

Ghana has had problems with the supply of oil because of financial reasons. Ghana's main crude oil supplier is Nigeria.

Meanwhile, the government has terminated the appointment of the acting managing director of the sole refinery, Tema Oil Refinery (TOR), Dr Kwame Ampofo.

No reasons were given in a government statement, but there has been a lot of agitation by workers of the refinery who say they are being elbowed out of business by not being allowed to buy their own crude oil.

IMMIGRATION/ REFUGEE/ IDPs

GHANA

Two UK citizens of Ghanaian origin win seats in UK elections

Two newly elected MP's for the Conservative Party in the UK, are of Ghanaian origin.

They are 33-year-old former businessman Sam Gyimah (pictured) who secured over 31,000 votes to win the East Surrey seat, while 34-year-old Kwasi Kwarteng an Eton College and Cambridge University graduate and former journalist, polled over 22,000 vote to win the Spelthorne seat.

Speaking after he was announced as the new MP, Mr. Gyimah said: "It's been an incredible campaign, saying he has worked very hard."

Meanwhile Mr. Kwasi Kwarteng's victory speech was marred by shouts of 'scumbag' from Lib Dem campaigners when he paid tribute to former MP David Wilshire.

The newly elected Conservative MP was met with heckles after his victory was announced at Spelthorne Leisure Centre, in Knowle Green, in the early hours of Friday morning.

Mr. Kwarteng went on to accuse the Lib Dem's of running a scurrilous campaign but kept a calm demeanour.

Mr. Kwarteng, said: "I wasn't going to mention the Liberal Democrats but the sort of campaign they were running was scurrilous."

Voters made Spelthorne history by voting Mr. Kwarteng in as the first black MP in the borough.

Mr. Kwarteng takes over from David Wilshire who had held the Conservative seat in the borough for 22 years before stepping down last year.

HEALTH

BURKINA FASO

Community Organizations Key to Fighting HIV/Aids

On the last day of her official visit to Burkina Faso, UNDP Administrator Helen Clark visited one of 176 UNDP supported community HIV/AIDS associations and spoke with sex workers about their concerns for the future.

"With HIV/AIDS you can never be complacent," said Helen Clark. "Burkina Faso has a very large young population, and young populations need to hear the messages about how to prevent HIV/AIDS. So the objective for the future must be no new infections, no mother to child transmission, and support to those who are living with HIV/AIDS."

The youth volunteer organization ATUJB (Association Trait d'Union des Jeunes Burkinabé) in Ouagadougou provides voluntary testing and counseling, psychosocial support, and income generating activities to people living with HIV/AIDS. One of their main target groups are sex workers, among them Jennifer from Nigeria. She was only 16 years when poverty forced her out of her native Nigeria, leaving a family and many young sisters behind. She thought she was heading for a better future as a house maid in Europe but ended up in Ouagadougou where she has been a sex worker the last nine years.

"This is not something you want to do for a living. We all want to leave this profession," she said.

Jennifer is now a peer educator and talks to other girls about how to avoid getting infected and the importance of using condoms. Thanks to a micro credit given by the association, she has set up a hair salon.

"We have been talking to them about the possibility of providing micro-credit to enable them to start their own small business activities," said Helen Clark.

The prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in Burkina Faso has dropped from 7 percent in 2002 to 1.6% in 2008, one of the lowest rates in West Africa. Despite this progress, the country still faces an epidemic affecting women between 15 and 24 years old.

UNDP supports civil society organisations like ATUJB through the National Assistance programme to Communities and Associations in HIV/AIDS launched by UNDP in 2003 after a request by the National Aids Council. This programme provides training to civil society workers, and through its 182 associations it has reached out with prevention activities to 3 million people during the last five years. 80 percent of all HIV test are today conducted by civil society organisation and nearly 36,000 people living with HIV get regular support by through home visits, common meals, and support to set up their own small scale enterprises.

HUMAN RIGHTS/ GENDER/ SOCIAL ISSUES

GHANA

MIDA spends \$401.94 million on contracts

Accra, May 6, GNA - The Millennium Development Authority (MiDA), has committed \$401.94 million in various contracts as at the end of April 2010, Mr. Martin Eson-Benjamin, the Chief Executive Officer of MiDA said on Thursday.

Speaking at the Meet-the-Press-Series on Thursday, Mr. Eson-Benjamin said the five-year programme was on course and the expectation was that the Programme budget would be fully utilized within the period.

"MiDA's only prayer is that all contractors, who have been engaged on the projects, will work diligently to meet their contractual obligations," he said.

Mr. Eson-Benjamin also asked all project affected persons to move off the road corridors to allow work to progress without any hindrance.

So far, MiDA had negotiated and compensated over 7,000 project-affected persons, he said. The goal of the 547 million Compact programme, signed three years ago, is to reduce poverty through the promotion of sustainable economic growth. The programme, which is currently being run in 30 districts and municipal assemblies in three intervention zones, aims to raise farmer incomes through a private sector-led development and transformation of agribusiness. It will enhance the production and productivity of high-value cash and food staple crops and enhance the competitiveness of Ghana's agricultural products in regional and global markets.

Mr. Eson-Benjamin said the initial procurement challenges that slowed project activities had all been resolved adding, however that government would need to provide some funding to support additional investments under the utilities relocation and resettlement of project-affected persons. Programme under the compact consists of three projects namely agriculture, transportation and rural services. Under the agricultural projects, the Chief Executive Officer said over 1,200 Farmer-Based Organisations (FBOs) is covered. Besides, the Commercial Development of Farmer-Based Organisation programme, MiDA is also assisting poor rural farmers to confidently participate in local and international markets through an investment worth \$214 million.

The aim is to diversify, intensify or expand agricultural practices and outputs and improve the quality of the produce, among other things. On land cases, Mr. Eson-Benjamin said MiDA was currently working with the Judicial Service and had already funded and completed a review of the backlog of land cases pending in courts all over the country. "We are standing by with funds to provide essential Information Technology infrastructure to assist in the complete rehabilitation and modernization of ten circuit

courts," he said.

Mr. Eson-Benjamin added that the selected courts would handle and clear the backlog and any new land cases. On agricultural credit, he said over GH¢26.3 million had been disbursed to over 9,600 individual farmers as seasonal and working capital loans as well as for the purchase of capital items.

Over 2000 employees to lose jobs

Accra, May 3, 2010 - The Ghana Ports and Harbour Authority (GPHA) has allegedly refused to renew the operating license of four (4) stevedoring companies at the Tema and Takoradi Ports and Harbour without stating any specific reasons. The news has left many officials and workers of the affected companies very agitated.

Over a total of 2000 employees stand to lose their jobs. The non renewal of license will deny spouses and children (over 4400) of redundant staff health care. The economy will suffer millions of Cedis. The aggrieved stevedoring companies made up of Carl Tiedemann Stevedoring (GH) Ltd (CTS), Dashwood, Odart and Fountain View Stevedoring Companies have appealed to the GPHA for immediate renewal of their licenses in order to prevent these and many more unpleasant implications especially at a crucial time like this when efforts from all sectors are being harmonized to curb the issue of unemployment in the country. According to the officials of the affected companies, they were given very short notices to meet new requirements for the renewal. They said they have in the past always adhered to the hitherto simple and well-understood processes and requirements for the renewal of their annual operating licenses. Despite the late communication of the new process which requested them to provide among other things a detailed business plan within five working days, they managed to meet the deadline provided by the GPHA only to receive a letter with the sour news. The companies received with shock letters from GPHA informing them that their company licenses have been extinguished without stating any reason for the extinguishment.

Officials of the affected stevedoring companies further explained that because of huge capital outlay, their business requires stable and predictable environment to encourage entrepreneurs to invest into it. The stevedore business is highly capital intensive and a long-term investment, requiring not less than \$5m to invest into equipment, vehicles, office set-up, manpower etc. to start operations. Issues such as delays in renewal of licenses do not therefore auger well for their operation.

The companies and workers have vehemently protested against the decision of GPHA stating that the GPHA did not communicate any intention of changing the renewal requirements and that most of them have good past records over the years for being good business entities or citizens which gives the GPHA no cause to complain about their performance.

Stevedoring is a capital intensive business and the companies claim to have already

invested so much in equipment and human capital. They appeal to government and the GPHA to address the situation to restore a healthy climate for business.

Govt. to pass of information law

Accra, May 3, GNA – Mr. John Tia Akologu, Minister of Information, on Monday assured Ghanaians of government's commitment to passing the Information Bill into law and said an information law will encourage democratic participation in the national development process. He said: "The Right to Information represents an important instrument for the public to hold government and other actors accountable, while strengthening citizens' trust in those who govern." The Information Minister made this known at this year's celebration of World Press Freedom Day and Flag-Raising Ceremony by the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) on the theme: "Freedom of Information: the Right to Know."

World Press Freedom Day is celebrated every May 3rd to remind government, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as civil society of the role a free press plays in strengthening democracy and fostering development around the world. Mr. Akologu therefore urged the Ghanaian media to use the occasion for sober reflections about the issues of press freedom and professional ethics.

"President Mills' administration is convinced that a good Right to Information Law will be a critical tool that enhances media professionalism and ethical journalism, that ultimately will strengthen the role of the media in promoting transparency and accountability," he said.

He expressed the hope that when the bill is passed into law, it will inspire media practitioners to qualitative journalism and spur the media in Ghana to even greater heights that promote truth, good governance, freedom, justice, peace and democracy. Mr. Ransford Tetteh, President of the GJA, said the Association religiously commemorates World Press Freedom Day because its ideals are in tune with Chapter 12 of the Ghanaian Constitution on the freedom and independence of the media. He said the GJA believes that a credible Freedom of Information Law and Broadcasting Law which takes cognisance of best practices in the world would compel the Ghanaian media to ensure quality in their education and information dissemination. Mr. Tetteh therefore appealed to parliament not to rush into passing the Bill in its current state but to engage civil society a bit more on the issues to ensure that the law is in accord with international standards and helps promote transparency and accountability.

Mr. Ismail Omer, who read a statement on behalf of Mr. Ban Ki Moon, United Nations Secretary General, called on governments, civil society and all people around the world to recognize the important work of the media and to stand up for freedom of information. Adding his voice to the statement of the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Omer said a strong and a free press was indispensable to people-centered development.

Mr. Danaa Nantogmah, Programmes Coordinator of Friedrich Ebert Foundation, urged the public including the media to submit their concerns and proposals to Parliament for consideration before the bill is passed into law.

Professor Kwame Karikari, Executive Director of the Media Foundation for West Africa and a member of an advocacy committee for a broadcasting law, called on government to enact a broadcasting law in Ghana since it was necessary to maintain order on the airwaves. Mr. Kabral Blay-Amihere, Chairman of the National Media Commission who chaired the function expressed concern about media standards and urged businesses to support media growth. The Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana (PRINPAG), the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA), Network of Community Radio Stations, Institute of Public Relations, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and the Coalition on Right to Information all in their solidarity messages expressed support for the bill to be passed into law.

Firm setting up \$30m Islamic university in Ghana

Doha-based Ghanim Bin Saad Al Saad & Sons Group is setting up the first Islamic university in Ghana at an estimated cost of \$30mn.

“It is not a joint venture. We are setting up the university on our own. A few days ago we met our consultants to finalise the Ghana project,” Chairman and CEO Ghanim bin Saad al-Saad told Gulf Times. He said the company was in the process of setting up many schools in Qatar, which follow the American, Canadian, British and Arabic streams of education.

LIBERIA

NPFL Rebels Did Not Mistreat Civilians in State, Witness Says

Reports that Liberian rebel forces loyal to Charles Taylor mistreated civilians during the country's civil conflict are wrong, said a defense witness for the former Liberian president today at the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Karnah Eward Mineh, a former Liberian rebel commander, said his country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report, released in December 2009, incorrectly attributed the highest number of crimes during Liberia's civil conflict to Mr. Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebel group. Instead, the NPFL treated civilians well in the areas it controlled, and other fighting factions could have been responsible for atrocities attributed to the rebel group, Mr. Mineh said today.

"Yes, we saved the civilians, we welcomed them to our controlled area," Mr. Mineh said.

"The records of abuses by the NPFL were really very high during the period that they reigned as a revolutionary group, isn't that so?" prosecution lawyer, Mohamed Bangura asked the witness, referencing the Liberian TRC report.

"No, it never happened," the witness responded. "If it did happen, I cannot remember. There were several groups so I cannot give account of all of the groups."

Prosecutors argue that Mr. Taylor condoned crimes committed by his rebel group in Liberia. Similarly, they argue, Mr. Taylor knew and approved of atrocities committed by Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels – a group which Mr. Taylor is on trial for allegedly supporting during Sierra Leone's 11 years civil conflict. Mr. Taylor has denied these allegations.

Mr. Mineh also denied reports that Mr. Taylor executed his own NPFL commanders who opposed his reign as NPFL leader. Anthony Menkunagbe, Oliver Varney, Sam Lato and Degbeyee Debon were executed without due process, prosecutors say. Mr. Taylor has denied these claims, saying that these NPFL members conspired to commit treason, were investigated, tried and sentenced to be executed according to the code of military conduct. Today, Mr. Mineh corroborated Mr. Taylor's account.

"They executed them. After they have investigated them and found guilty, then the tribunal chairman gave an order. He said because they plotted, because they wanted to do evil, so after they were found guilty, they executed them," Mr. Mineh explained.

Mr. Mineh, who has been testifying in a Liberian traditional language Gio with the use of English translators, finished his testimony today. Defense lawyers indicated they were not prepared to present another witness and would need an adjournment until Thursday when the next witness would be able to testify. The judges granted the defense request.

No proceedings will take place tomorrow and the trial of Mr. Taylor will resume Thursday.

Former LNP Col. Slapped with Raping 12-Yr Old

A former colonel in the Liberia National Police (LNP) Kollie Boway, appeared in Criminal Court 'E' Wednesday on charges of allegedly raping a 12 yr-old girl.

The former police high ranking officer was indicted for allegedly raping the girl in the Pipeline Community, Paynersville on March 2, 2009.

Former Col. Boway earlier appeared in court Tuesday but his trial failed to start due to another rape case that was ongoing in the same court. He is being defended in court by the Public Defenders while prosecution team is led by Cllr. Amara Sheriff.

Meanwhile, Mr. Caesar Freeman the government official charged with gang-rape, kidnapping and rape, is expected appear in Criminal Court 'E' tomorrow to hear the court's response to a motion filed by his lawyers for a speedy trial after being detained for three weeks at the Monrovia central prison since his arrest.

The Court earlier denied defendant Freeman bail bond on ground that it is not a bail able offense under the new penal code and said the motion requesting for speedy trial will be argued tomorrow, Friday May 7.

Double Pay for Single Job

The Ministry of Finance has confirmed that a select group of cabinet ministers and other top officials are benefiting from a dual remuneration scheme wherein they are paid lucrative sums - from both government and the United Nations Development Program's capacity development fund.

Reacting to a newspaper publication, which showed Minister Augustine Ngafuan's mansion currently under construction, the ministry's public affairs unit revealed in a statement that the minister is amongst few cabinet officials benefiting from the UNDP's capacity funding scheme.

It says the minister receives US\$3,000 monthly from the UNDP scheme, arguing that such earning and those from government are the sources of funding enabling the construction of his palace.

This means that the minister and others are being paid twice for a single job.

The statement: "Members of Cabinet earn US\$3,000.00 per month and Hon. Ngafuan has been a member of Cabinet since January 2006. Additionally, his earnings from government are topped up by an additional US\$3,000 per month through the Liberia Emergency Capacity Building Support (LECBS) program under which the salaries of some key officials and employees of government are supplemented through funding from external partners to the LECBS."

The UNDP's implemented TOKTEN program (Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals) is a mechanism used to identify and recruit qualified expatriate nationals from the Diaspora as well as local professionals to serve in key capacities in government.

However, this capacity building fund is being used selectively on political appointees - cabinet officials' monthly allowances, besides the already fabulous earnings from government.

The ministry's confirmation comes after those benefiting from the scheme collectively declared silence on the matter when this paper contacted them earlier.

Civil Service Director General, Dr. C. William Allen declined earlier this year after been contacted to provide clarification on the double allowance scheme.

However, he categorically stated in a communication addressed to the Auditor General on 8 October 2009 that those being paid from the capacity building fund are not entitled to receive additional benefits from government.

"To be clear, government employees paid under the TOKTEN and the SES are not entitled to receive additional monthly salaries and monetary allowances," portion of the letter, obtained from CSA sources indicated.

But the prevailing reality is contrary to Dr. Allen's statement because those cabinet officials are fully being remunerated monthly from government's coffers.

Moreover, the current situation brings to light the "inequities" in government's salary policy, which is being overwhelmingly decried.

GUNIEA

New UN Human Rights Office to Open to Help Prevent Abuses

The United Nations is setting up a human rights office in Guinea to help the Government prevent abuses such as last year's violent suppression by the then military junta of mass protests in which 156 people were killed, women raped, political opponents arrested and their homes looted.

"The new office will boost the UN's ability to cooperate with the Government in its efforts to promote and protect the human rights of all Guineans," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said in Geneva yesterday after signing a host country agreement with Guinean Foreign Minister Bakary Fofana. "It is a clear indication of the current Government's commitment to draw a line under the country's troubled history."

An International Commission of Inquiry mandated by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to investigate last September's violence recommended that the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Right (OHCHR) set up a country office in Conakry, the capital. Since then a transitional government has been established to oversee democratic elections on 27 June.

"The office's key objectives are to support the Government's efforts to protect human rights, to fight against impunity, which has bedevilled Guinea for decades, and to

empower the Guinean people in the realization of all their rights, including economic, social and cultural rights," Ms. Pillay said.

One of its first tasks will be to monitor the human rights situation before and during the elections. Generally, it will assist the Government in reporting on compliance with international human rights treaties. It will also advise on establishing a National Human Rights Institution and on judicial reforms, help combat impunity for human rights violations including sexual and gender-based violence, and promote social and economic rights.

The Government has already taken steps to implement other recommendations of the International Commission by starting work with the UN and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to reform the security sector. It has also pledged its cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC) in assessing whether perpetrators of the September human rights violations can be tried in the country.

At the UN Human Rights Council's universal periodic review process in Geneva yesterday, Guinea's record was examined and Mr. Fofana stressed that the transitional bodies had taken up institutional transformation to consolidate the State's capacity to prevent and address human rights violations. "It is evident that this will be a long road strewn with multiple challenges," he said. "The Government will have to overcome them by working with political parties, civil society and with the help of the international community," he said.

Meanwhile in Conakry, Mr. Ban's Special Representative for West Africa Said Djinnit yesterday handed over to interim President Sékouba Konaté a joint assessment by the UN, African Union (AU) and ECOWAS of the security sector, including security and defence forces, judiciary, customs and finance, civilian control and dialogue between civilian and military elements.

Mr. Djinnit noted that the authorities had clearly expressed the political will to do their utmost to ensure in-depth implementation of reform. He praised Mr. Konaté's courage for his continuing commitment, which will contribute to democracy and a return to constitutional order.

BURKINA FASO

UN-Backed Project Boosts Education, Health Care for Women Farmers.

Supplies of Electric Generators

A United Nations-backed pilot programme that supplies electric generators to rural women farmers in Burkina Faso, freeing them from lengthy chores so that they can

devote more time to education, childcare and health care, is to be adopted on a national scale.

"I think this technology makes a huge difference to women's lives," UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Helen Clark told beneficiaries yesterday in Kienfangué, a town of 2,500 inhabitants near Ouagadougou, the capital of the poor West African country. "Pounding rice by hand is very hard and it takes a long time, but the generator can do it quickly."

The energy and food processing programme, which is turning the women into entrepreneurs while promoting local access to energy, has helped to install 441 diesel-run generators mounted on a chassis to which a variety of processing equipment can be attached, including mills, alternators and battery chargers.

"By easing some of the women's most difficult and time-consuming chores, such as fetching water, grinding and milling, the scheme has helped to free up a daily average of two to four hours for these women, which they have been able to spend on education, childcare, improving their health and generating additional sources of revenue," UNDP said in a news release issued today.

By reducing the time required for processing agricultural outputs, women farmers also have less need for their daughters to help with household tasks, leading to increased school attendance. An evaluation conducted in 14 villages in the Eastern region of Burkina Faso shows that literacy has raised from an average of 29 per cent to 39 per cent after the installation of the generators.

Recognizing these results, the Government has already signed on to scale up to national level a programme that is also under way in Mali and Senegal. Six other countries in West Africa - Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger and Togo - have introduced their own pilot versions of the programme.

"Having tools like this right across the villages of Burkina Faso would make a huge difference," Miss Clark said. "The women are able to get into business activities, they have more time. I understand that more women are learning to read because they have more time. It has many, many benefits."

In Kienfangué, the technology is used by 30 women who have created a cooperative called Association Faso Solidarité. They use the generator to grind cereal, pound rice, and charge dozens of batteries as well as generating electricity for several buildings. They thus have raised additional revenue, most of them by selling increased quantities of rice.

"I used to have trouble selling my rice because it would take me a whole day to pound it by hand and the result was of poor quality," Maminatou Tassebédou said. "A 50-kilogram sack of rice could stay with me for two weeks without being sold and I would only make \$1.47 per sack. Now it only takes me 30 minutes to pound the rice and I can sell two sacks in a single day, coming home with \$4.90. With this money I can buy millet

to eat at home and soap. I can also pay for my children's schooling and even place some of my money in a savings fund."

Miss Clark, on a four-country visit to Africa which began in Mali earlier this week and will also take her to Tanzania and South Africa, also said she had seen huge progress in combating HIV and AIDS in Burkina Faso, in bringing clean drinking water to people, and in education.

GEO- STRATEGIC ISSUES

GHANA

Ghana will walk with you Zimbabwe -John Mahama

Accra, May 7, GNA - The Government would offer all the necessary support to Zimbabwe to politically stabilize for economic prosperity and freedom to all its citizens, Vice President John Dramani Mahama has pledged. "Ghana as the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence from our colonial masters also offered assistance to other African countries including Zimbabwe and in the same vain we shall do our best to ensure that Zimbabwe regained the political image that she created for herself in the past decades."

Vice President Mahama made this pledge when a 13-member women empowerment group from Zimbabwe paid him a courtesy call in his office as part of their week-long official visit to Ghana. The women who also visited Makola Market, GRATIS FOUNDATION and Parliament are in the country to learn and adopt some of the women empowerment programmes that Ghana had pursued over the years. They are also to understudy Ghana's Parliament, the role of women in the socio-economic development of the country and how such policies could be replicated in their country on their return. The Vice President told the delegation that government had over the years designed various loan schemes for women because of their loyalty in repayment, thereby making loan recovery among them easier than their men counterparts.

"While men sometimes commit some of their loans to the payments of school fees of relatives among other issues, women are always meticulous and ready to pay back all their loans on time."

He called on politicians in Zimbabwe to tolerate each other for the stability and peace of the country and shelve their political colours from issues that could unite them with inherent development and prosperity. Madam Thokozani Khupe, a Deputy Prime Minister of Zimbabwe and leader of the delegation, said they were satisfied with the manner in which Banks and other financial institutions were willingly releasing loans to women to undertake income generating activities and on their arrival would impress upon

those institutions in their country to support women programmes. She stated that Ghana was one of the best in the African continent, not because of her democratic credentials, but because of the economic stability it had gained over the years and promised to encourage other sectors in the country to visit Ghana to study programmes for their development in Zimbabwe.

Also at the Castle on Friday were Actors and Actresses who presented their trophies they won recently at the recently held Movie Academy Awards in Nigeria to him at his office.

Miss Judith Kuwornu, leader of the delegation, said Ghana won a total of eight awards, six at the category level and two other special awards and called for support to enable them to win more laurels in the coming years. The Vice President said under the Private Sector Development phase II programme of government, Creative Industry would be given special attention to adequately cater for the artistes and create numerous jobs for people to unearth their talents.

LIBERIA

Country Will Seek Diplomatic Solution to Boundary Dispute

A potential boundary dispute is looming within the Mano River Union basin as Liberia alarms that Guinea is encroaching on its territory.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has confirmed that Guinea has grasped portion of Liberian territory along Liberia's northern border with neighboring Guinea.

Guinea is said to have moved beyond the boundary separating the two countries, and hoisted its flag deep inside Liberia's territory.

"We saw the flag on our side [Liberian soil.] We have to take this up with Guinea," President Sirleaf said during a visit to Liberia's northern Lofa County, adding that she will pursue a "diplomatic solution to the matter".

Liberia first suffered territorial encroachment when British and French colonial rulers in the 1880s seized vast portions of its territory and annexed same to their respective colonies - Guinea, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire, all members of the Mano River Union along with Liberia.