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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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THE
PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF GHANA

[THE SPEAKER IN THE CHAIR]

[PRAYERS]

FIRST MEETING, 2025

Thursday, 27th February, 2025

The House met at 10.01 a.m.

The Speaker: Hon Members, before we proceed, I would want to read two communications from His Excellency the President. We have one dated 10th February, 2025 which reads:



REPUBLIC OF GHANA

Jubilee House



The President

10th February, 2025

Rt. Hon. Speaker,

**NOMINATION OF ACTING ADMINISTRATOR
OF DISTRICT ASSEMBLY COMMON FUND**

In accordance with Article 252(4) of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992, I submit through you, to Parliament for approval the appointment of Mr. Michael Harry Yamson as the Acting Administrator of the District Assembly Common Fund.

The nominee's credentials and records of service demonstrates his competences to support the government's agenda and serve the people of Ghana effectively.

Attached is a copy of his curriculum vitae.

Accept, Mr. Speaker, the assurances of my highest consideration.


JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA

**RT. HON. SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENT OF GHANA
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
ACCRA**

cc:

The Vice President
Jubilee House
Accra

The Chief of Staff
Jubilee House
Accra

The Secretary to Cabinet
Cabinet Office
Jubilee House
Accra

The Speaker: The Second one is dated 11th February, 2025, and it reads:

Jubilee House



The President

11th February, 2025

Rt. Hon. Speaker,

MINISTERS OF STATE OF THE CABINET

In accordance with Article 76(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992, I am submitting herewith for your attention the attached list of names of Ministers of State of the Cabinet.

Accept, Mr. Speaker, the assurances of my highest consideration.



JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA

**RT. HON. SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENT OF GHANA
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
ACCRA**

cc:

The Vice President
Jubilee House
Accra

The Chief of Staff
Jubilee House
Accra

The Secretary to Cabinet
Cabinet Office
Jubilee House
Accra

THE CABINET

	DESIGNATION	NAME
1.	Minister for Finance	Dr. Cassiel Ato Forson, MP
2.	Minister for the Interior	Muntaka Mohammed-Mubarak, MP
3.	Minister for Health	Kwabena Mintah Akandoh, MP
4.	Minister for Defence	Dr. Edward Kofi Omane Boamah
5.	Attorney-General and Minister for Justice	Dr. Dominic Akuritinga, MP
6.	Minister for Energy and Green Transition	John Abdulai Jinapor, MP
7.	Minister for Education	Haruna Iddrisu, MP
8.	Minister for Trade, Agribusiness and Industry	Elizabeth Ofosu-Adjare, MP
9.	Minister for Lands and Natural Resources	Emmanuel Armah-Kofi Buah, MP
10.	Minister for Foreign Affairs	Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, MP
11.	Minister for Food and Agriculture	Eric Opoku, MP
12.	Minister for Communication, Digital Technology and Innovations	Samuel Nartey George, MP
13.	Minister of Roads and Highways	Kwame Govers Agbodza, MP
14.	Minister for Environment, Science and Technology	Ibrahim Murtala Muhammed, MP
15.	Minister for Works, Housing and Water Resource	Adjei Kenneth Gilbert
16.	Minister for Local Government, Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs	Ahmed Ibrahim, MP
17.	Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection	Agnes Naa Momo Lartey, MP
18.	Minister for Transport	Joseph Bukari Nikpe, MP
19.	Minister of Labour, Jobs and Employment	Abdul-Rashid H. Pelpuo, MP

10.10 a.m.

The Speaker: Hon Members, may I now invite the Hon Majority Leader and the Hon Minority Leader to join me to receive His Excellency the President and the Vice President. *[Hear! Hear!]*

[The Speaker, the Majority and Minority Leaders proceeded to the Central Lobby to receive His Excellency the President and Her Excellency the Vice President and conducted them into the Chamber.]

10.31 a.m.

[The National Anthem was played]

The Speaker: Hon Members, the House is extremely privileged to have the presence of H.E. John Dramani Mahama—*[Hear! Hear!]*—President of the Republic of Ghana and Commander-in-Chief of the Ghana Armed Forces in this august Chamber—*[Hear! Hear!]*—

His Excellency the President is here in accordance with Article 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana to deliver a message on the state of the nation to this honourable House. On behalf of Leadership and Hon Members, it is my privilege and singular honour to welcome His Excellency the President of the Republic to this august House.

Hon Members, before I invite His Excellency the President to deliver a message on the state of the nation, I shall recognise the presence of the following distinguished personalities in this Chamber. *[Pause]*

We have the following distinguished dignitaries with us. Definitely, after welcoming His Excellency the President, he is not here alone. He is present here with his spouse, H. E. Lordina Mahama—*[Hear! Hear!]*—We have the Vice President, H.E. Prof Naana Jane Opoku Agyemang—*[Hear! Hear!]*—We have the Chief Justice, Her Ladyship Gertrude Torkornoo—*[Hear! Hear!]*—We also have the spouse of the Chief Justice, Mr Francis Torkornoo and definitely, the spouse of the Speaker, Mad Linda Ofosua Oboh. —*[Hear! Hear!]*—We have the Chief of Staff, Hon Julius Debrah and we have a number of our Lordship, the Justices of the Superior Courts of Judicature with us here. We also have the Chairman of the Council of State, our former Speaker, Rt Hon Edward Doe Adjaho—*[Hear! Hear!]*—and we have the former President, always present, H.E. John Agyekum Kufuor—*[Hear! Hear!]*—

Hon Members, Order! Hon Members, we are recognising those present. Hon Members, we also have the former First Lady, the evergreen, ever present, H. E. Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings.

10.42 a.m.

We have the General Secretary of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), Mr Fifi Fiavi Kwetey *[Hear! Hear!]*—We have the General Secretary of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), Mr Justin Kodua Frimpong. As usual, we have our Excellencies, the Diplomatic Corps of the various countries in Ghana—*[Hear! Hear!]*. As usual, you can see that they have come in their numbers. We are

extremely grateful for your presence. We have the *capos* and heads of the various security services with us, and we have our revered chiefs, queens and queen mothers with us here, and the various heads of all the religious bodies we have in this country. We also have the former Clerk to Parliament, Mr Emmanuel Anyimadu and the recently outgone former Clerk to Parliament, Mr Cyril Kwabena Oteng Nsiah—*[Hear! Hear!]*—Hon Members, in the meantime, this is the list of the dignitaries who are present here with us that I have.

Hon Members, may I now, on your behalf and with the greatest pleasure, invite His Excellency the President to deliver his Message—*[Hear! Hear!]*—Your Excellency, you may do so now.

MESSAGE ON THE STATE OF THE NATION, 2025

His Excellency the President (Mr John Dramani Mahama): Thank you very much.

Rt Hon Speaker, Your Excellency the Vice President, Your Excellency the First Lady, Your Ladyship the Chief Justice, Hon Members of Parliament, Hon members of the Judiciary, distinguished leaders of our security forces, Excellencies, members of the Diplomatic Corps, our revered Niime, Naamei, chiefs, traditional rulers and religious leaders, the national chairmen of political parties, executives of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), and the good people of Ghana, I wish you a very good morning.

Mr Speaker, Article 67 of the 1992 Constitution requires that the President address the people of Ghana, in whom sovereignty resides, on the state of the nation. About 30 years ago, in 1996, I took my first steps in public service when I was elected to this august House as the Member of Parliament (MP) for the Bole Bamboi Constituency. For 12 memorable years, I forged many enduring friendships and alliances while working with Colleagues from both Sides of the House to shape Ghana's legislative agenda and advance the development of our beloved country, Ghana. It has also been nearly a decade since I said goodbye to this House after delivering what many, including myself, thought, at the time, would be my final address to Parliament. God Almighty, providence and the unpredictability of life have summoned me here once again—*[Hear! Hear!]*—On the back of a historic electoral mandate from the people of Ghana, to deliver a Message on the State of the Nation, that mandate came with an unprecedented Majority in Parliament—*[Hear! Hear!]*—And here I am, once again, to deliver a Message on the real State of the Nation.

Mr Speaker, I wish to convey my heartfelt gratitude to Parliament for the prompt vetting and approval of my Nominees for Ministerial positions. This efficiency is unmatched in the history of the Fourth Republic, demonstrating the strides we can make when we come together in our dedication to serve the people of our great country—*[Hear! Hear!]*—I believe that a similar dispatch will be applied to the approval processes for my Deputy Ministerial Nominees.

This will enable them to promptly assume office and assist their Ministers in delivering on our noble vision of Resetting Ghana, our dear nation.

In making the nominations and considering the numbers involved, I considered the long-expressed sentiments of the Ghanaian people about the sheer size of previous Administrations and the associated cost implications. I trust that this significant reduction to 60 Ministers and Deputy Ministers, including Regional Ministers, will set the stage for further reductions in the size of future governments—[*Hear! Hear!*]

With the inauguration of the Council of State, we can begin appointing staff for the presidency. I intend to significantly reduce the number of staff compared to what existed under the previous Administrations—[*Hear! Hear!*]*—All this is aimed at leading by example in cutting down government expenditures and reducing the budget deficit.*

Mr Speaker, let me begin, by invoking the timeless words of hymnist Johnson Oatman Junior, who encourages us to count our blessings and name them one by one. Yes, we are a nation troubled on many fronts, but we have many blessings, among which is a now firmly established democracy that, for all its imperfections, has enabled four peaceful transfers of power in our land. Nestled in a sub-region that is often plagued by strife and political instability, there is good reason to take sober satisfaction that these successive peaceful power transfers have become a routine.

Mr Speaker, 50 days ago, I took the solemn oath to assume leadership of this country and serve with truth and humility. This was preceded a month earlier by watershed elections that promised to revive our nation's fortunes and give us a new lease on life. The election result gave us an important opportunity to change course and move off the slippery slopes our country had been descending that had caused so much economic pain, suffering and grief to our people. In their collective wisdom and with resounding clarity, the Ghanaian people chose to chart a new path to reset the country's economy. Through their votes, they made it clear that they would, henceforth, demand the highest standards of governance from those they put in positions of leadership.

The good people of Ghana elected me to Office, with a historic electoral margin of nearly 1.7 million votes, separating me from my next opponent, giving Ghanaians the first female Vice President, Prof Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang—[*Hear! Hear!*]*—For the National Democratic Congress (NDC), that resounding victory is a selfless call to duty from a people who are tired and weary of years of economic hardships and poor governance. That call, therefore, places an obligation on us and all who serve with, including legislators from both Sides of the House, to do our utmost with decency and humility to change the circumstances and state of our country.*

Mr Speaker, as I stated earlier, Article 67 of the 1992 Constitution requires that I give an account of the State of our

Nation to Parliament. I am sad to report that the state of our nation is not good—**[Some Members of the Majority: Oh!]**—Our economy is in crisis, and our people are suffering unprecedented hardships.

Mr Speaker, we will host a National Economic Dialogue on 3rd and 4th March, 2025. On 11th March, 2025, the Minister for Finance, on my behalf, will present the budget estimates for the financial year, 2025 to this august House. These two events will allow us to present the real state of Ghana's economic crisis to the people.

10.51 a.m.

Mr Speaker, it is not my style to lament and shift blame when confronted with challenges, as others often do. My approach is to accept challenges and work hard to resolve them — **[Hear! Hear!]**.

Indeed, that is precisely what the people of Ghana elected me to do. I have therefore not come here to lament on the state of our country, though there is much to lament about. I understand why I was elected with such high voter confidence and that is to solve Ghana's problems — **[Hear! Hear!]**.

Mr Speaker, with your permission and within the constraints of time, I will take the liberty to elaborate on how we intend to address the problems. Yesterday, 26th February, 2025, marked exactly ten years since I stood in this Chamber, at this very spot, to declare my determination to fix *Dumsor*, a legacy

problem of power shortages and Mr Speaker, I fixed it—**[Hear! Hear!]**

Yes, I promised to fix it, and I did! I wish to place firmly on record that from January 2016 until I handed over the administration of this country on 7th January, 2017, there was no power rationing or load management in Ghana — **[Some Hon Members: Eii]**.

Mr Speaker, today, inspired by the almighty God and propelled by the massive mandate given to me by the good people of Ghana, I am moved to make a similar purposeful and bold declaration. That, I, John Dramani Mahama, will fix the economic crisis confronting our country and reset it on a path of growth and prosperity—**[Hear! Hear!]**

My government, working with you and every Ghanaian, will solve the challenges because we have developed a plan with our people's support. When I decided to run for President again, I did so because of what I knew about the state of our country. I was aware that huge problems awaited me upon my assumption of office but nothing could prepare anyone for the reality of the depths to which our economy and governance have sunk. Our elders say that a frog's true length can be ascertained only after it has died, *Apɔtrɔ wu a na ye hu ne tenten*, and how right they were.

Mr Speaker, it is common knowledge that our economy is in dire straits, which is putting it mildly because, after an initial assessment of the books, we have

discovered that our economic problems are much deeper than was previously known. We have inherited a country that is broken on many fronts. The profundities of the challenges confronting us are staggering. We are saddled with staggering debts and glaring signs of almost deliberate and, in some cases, reckless mismanagement of our resources.

Mr Speaker, not even the restraints of an (International Monetary Fund) IMF programme was enough for the previous economic managers to exercise prudence in managing our finances. After setting an inflation target of 18 per cent by the end of 2024, the actual rate was 23.8 per cent, significantly higher than the threshold agreed with the IMF. The Ghana cedi continued its downward slide, losing 19 of its value against the dollar in 2024. It had already in the previous year lost 27.8 per cent of its value. In addition to the public debt, which amounts to a staggering GH¢721 billion — [**Some Hon Members:** Eii] — several State-Owned Enterprises are also in debt, including the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG), which owes GH¢68 billion. [**Some Hon Members:** Eii]. Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD), the hope of cocoa farmers is also highly indebted. Its balance sheet indicates a total debt of GH¢32.5 billion, of which GH¢9.7 billion is due to be paid at the end of September 2025.

In the 2023/2024 crop season, COCOBOD was unable to supply three hundred and thirty-three thousand seven hundred and sixty-seven (333,767) metric tonnes of cocoa, which it sold at

US\$2,600 per tonne. As a result, the then management of COCOBOD rolled over these contracts into the 2024/2025 season.

Mr Speaker, this implies that for every tonne of cocoa delivered this year in fulfilment of the rolled-over contracts, COCOBOD and the Ghanaian farmer would lose US\$ 4,000 in revenue.

Mr Speaker, as I address this honourable House, COCOBOD has supplied 210,000 tonnes out of the rolled-over contract, resulting in a revenue loss of US\$840 million for both COCOBOD and the Ghanaian farmer.

Mr Speaker, COCOBOD and the Ghanaian farmer will lose another US\$495 million by the time the Board finishes supplying the remaining rolled-over contracts. Additionally, cocoa road commitments alone total GH¢21.7 billion, of which only GH¢ 4.4 billion is included in the total debt of GH¢32.5 billion. This debt has arisen mainly because of the decision in 2019 and 2020 to award road contracts worth over US\$1 billion because of the election.

Mr Speaker, the energy sector faces significant financial challenges primarily due to collection and system losses, non-compliance with the Cash Waterfall Mechanism, and legacy debts. The financing shortfall has risen considerably to approximately US\$2.2 billion or GH¢34 billion for 2025, and urgent measures will be needed to reduce it to sustainable levels and ultimately eliminate it.

Mr Speaker, the financial sector continues to struggle despite the reportedly spending of GH¢29.9 billion on the financial sector clean-up exercise to date. Scant reserves were also left for debt servicing despite implementing what may be considered the most severe and distressing economic policy in the annals of the Fourth Republic, if not in the entirety of our nation's history and I am referring to the Domestic Debt Exchange Programme.

This is in stark contrast to our actions in 2017, before we left office, when we allocated US\$250 million to the Sinking Fund handed over to the incoming government to service Ghana's debt. Mr Speaker, there have been claims that buffers were left for debt repayment—oncoming debt repayment this year.

Mr Speaker and Hon Members, let me give you the statement of accounts for the Debt Service Reserve Account, which is also popularly referred to as the Sinking Fund. This fund shows a balance of only \$64,000 — [**Some Hon Members:** Oh!]
—in the dollar account and GH¢143 million in the Ghana cedi account. The repercussions of the accumulation of debt and economic mismanagement will require extensive work and sacrifice to repair.

Mr Speaker, to put things in context for you, in the next four years, our debt servicing will amount to GH¢280 billion, comprising GH¢150 billion for domestic debt and GH¢130 billion in external debt servicing. Our catastrophic debt position has also severely impacted infrastructure projects that should have been completed.

11.01 a.m.

Currently, there are fifty-five (55) stalled projects due to the default of debt and subsequent restructuring, with a total amount of US\$2.95 billion not disbursed. The stalling of these projects is expected to result in a cost overrun of about GH¢15 billion.

Mr Speaker, notwithstanding this gloomy background, I remain committed to leading this Government; taking every necessary step to reset our economy; getting things back on track, and working with the good people of our country to build the Ghana we want.
[*Hear! Hear!*]

We are doubling our efforts to complete all outstanding structural reforms. Through the budget, we will implement corrective measures to restore fiscal discipline and debt sustainability. We are also working towards completing the upcoming fourth review of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) supported programme. The review is scheduled from 2nd April to 15th April, 2025, and the IMF Executive Board is expected to approve it in June, 2025.

As we have done previously, we are also building buffers in the Sinking Fund and adopting prudent debt management practices to ensure prompt repayment of upcoming domestic and external debt maturities.

In this respect, the Government successfully honoured the matured coupon payment of GH¢6.081 billion (in cash) and GH¢3.46 billion (in kind) due

in February, 2025 to all Domestic Debt Exchange Programme (DDEP) bondholders, fully paid. [*Hear! Hear!*]

Mr Speaker, the good news is that, we have also built additional buffers in the Sinking Fund to honour the maturing DDEP bonds due in July and August and so, bond holders can be rest assured that they would be paid to the last pesewa whatever is owed them. [*Hear! Hear!*]

With the transparent and prudent measures, we have implemented since taking over the administration of this country, I urge my countrymen and women, business owners, and foreign investors to trust our competence in turning our economic fortunes around.

Mr Speaker, since we took office on 7th January, 2025, we have upheld our commitment to a fiscal consolidation agenda with a streamlined Government. We have eliminated unnecessary expenditures and reduced our reliance on borrowing. Our prudent debt management practices have led to a substantial reduction in interest rates.

The 91-day treasury bill rate, which was 28.51 per cent on 6th January, 2025, has decreased to 24.48 per cent as of 24th February, 2025. Similarly, the 182-day treasury bill rate, which was 29.07 per cent as of 6th January, 2025, has decreased to 25.388 per cent.

Mr Speaker, the 364-day treasury bill rate has also moved from 30.41 per cent to 27.30 per cent in the same period. We signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with our Official Creditor

Committee (OCC) to formalise the debt treatment agreed upon with official creditors. This marks a crucial step toward Ghana's restoration of long-term debt sustainability. The agreement will enable financial resources to support and strengthen economic recovery.

Mr Speaker, on 20th February, 2025, the National Tripartite Committee (NTC) and the Public Services Joint Standing Negotiating Committee (PSJSNC) concluded negotiations on the 2025 minimum wage and base pay for the Single Spine Salary Structure (SSSS), respectively.

I want to use this opportunity to reiterate my sincere gratitude to Organised Labour and the Ghana Employers Association for their understanding and cooperation in reaching this agreement on the minimum wage and base pay.

On the final day of negotiations, I enjoyed the privilege of joining my comrades, the leaders of Organised Labour, for the concluding discussions. I am confident that the sacrifices we all have to make this year will significantly benefit our economy's health in the future. We look forward to a positive economic outlook as we restore macroeconomic stability, encourage exports, activate the 24-Hour Economy policy—[*Hear! Hear!*—implement the US\$10 billion 'Big Push' policy for swift infrastructure development, rationalise taxes, and foster inclusive growth. The goal is prosperity for all, which must be shared, not the prerogative of a select few.

Mr Speaker, in fulfilment of our 120-day social contract with the Ghanaian people, we have put in place the planning committee to host the National Economic Dialogue. This dialogue is expected to discuss the state of the economy and reach a consensus on the key policies needed to address the devastating economic crisis confronting us. It will support the development of a home-grown fiscal consolidation programme and highlight key structural reforms and policy priorities essential for resetting the economy and creating prosperity for all.

I believe there is absolute wisdom in what our elders say: that two heads are better than one. *Ti korɔ nkɔ agyina.—[Hear! Hear!]*—Consultation and consensus building have always proven to be better than unilateral decision making. It is my hope that our Colleagues on the other Side of the divide will display love of country and participate in this national dialogue unlike their boycott of the Senchi Forum in 2014.

I humbly choose a different path of accommodation and cooperation with all stakeholders. We will continuously engage on important issues so that together, as a nation, we can reset our country and focus on sustainable development. Mr Speaker, Hon Members, together, we shall build the Ghana we all want. *[Hear! Hear!]*

Mr Speaker, my administration inherited an energy sector on the brink of collapse, which was weighed down by unsustainable debts. This unfortunate

situation has led to many Independent Power Producers (IPPs) and fuel suppliers threatening to cease their operations.

Mr Speaker, despite collecting over GH¢45 billion in Energy Sector Levies (ESLA) over the last eight years, the outgone NPP administration has left the Ghanaian people an energy sector burdened with a staggering GH¢70 billion debt as of December 2024.

It is of deep concern that several State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in the energy sector are struggling to stay afloat, and unless urgent interventions are made, many of them will go under.

Financial distress in the energy sector remains a significant obstacle to delivering consistent and affordable electricity to Ghanaians and poses an existential threat to the economy in general.

Mr Speaker, compounding these challenges, critical maintenance activities such as the scheduled pigging of the West African Gas Pipeline Company Limited (WAPCo) were postponed from 2024 to 2025 without sufficient contingency measures for alternative fuel supply. As a result, my administration has had to swiftly mobilise resources to secure emergency fuel supplies, ensuring that electricity generation continues despite the closure of the West African Gas Pipeline.

I have been informed that the pigging exercise will be completed in the first weeks of March. Once additional gas

will flow from Nigeria. We anticipate a marked improvement in the power situation once this begins.

While the current state of the energy sector poses grave concerns, we must remain resolute in our commitment to restoring stability. I have directed the Minister for Energy and Green Transitions to implement far-reaching reforms, including enforcing a single revenue collection account, strictly adhering to the Cash Waterfall Mechanism (CWM), and eliminating wasteful expenditures by the state utility.

11.11 a.m.

Mr Speaker, the Minister, following my directive has set up an advisory committee to guide the participation of the private sector in metering and billing in order to improve efficiency in revenue collection and reduce the high commercial and technical losses that are threatening to drown the state-owned utility company.

A pilot partnership between the Electricity Company of Ghana Limited (ECG) and Enclave Power Company has proved highly successful and provides us with a workable framework. ECG provides bulk supply of power to Enclave Power Limited; this is an organisation in Ghana. Enclave Power Limited provides meters and bills to all companies operating in the Free Zones Enclave with 99 per cent revenue collection and nearly 100 per cent uptime in power supply. This is being done here in Ghana. We can use it to cover the rest of the nation to ensure that we get

revenue compliance and be able to bring down tariffs for our people. [*Hear! Hear!*]

Mr Speaker, I am still getting used to being President; that is why I said “Mr President”—[*Laughter*—Mr Speaker, reduction in commercial and technical losses will lead to affordable tariffs for everyone and bring relief to all users of electric power. We also aim, in the medium term, to achieve 100 per cent gas utilisation for power production and to eliminate completely the use of crude oil and fossil fuels. This will save Ghana hundreds of millions of dollars spent on the importation of fuel oils for power production.

With regard to renewable energy, this Administration will soon operationalise a Renewable Energy and Green Transition Fund to enhance efficiency and accelerate Ghana’s transition to renewable energy. This initiative will drive investment in sustainable energy solutions, including solar street lights, rooftop solar installations, off-grid solar systems, electric vehicle charging stations, and chargeable outboard motors. These measures will reduce dependence on the national grid and position Ghana as a leader in Africa’s green energy transition.

Mr Speaker, Ghana’s petroleum sector has witnessed a precipitous decline, with crude oil production sinking by more than 32 per cent. This has resulted from high opacity levels, a hostile business climate, and excessive political interference in the sector, culminating in most major oil companies

exiting and stalling all upstream activities.

The decline in upstream activity is obvious to any person familiar with the twin cities of Sekondi-Takoradi. Just under a decade ago, these twin cities were the bustling epicentre of fabrication, logistics, and service activity associated with the upstream oil and gas sector. Unfortunately, my recent visit reveals many shut down facilities and many businesses that have packed and left the shores of our country. Hundreds of workers have been laid off and left unemployed. I wish to assure the good people of Sekondi-Takoradi and, indeed, the whole Western Region that we will breathe life back into their area. [*Hear! Hear!*]

Mr Speaker, we have already commenced revitalisation of our upstream petroleum sector by creating a business-friendly and congenial environment for our partners and other prospective investors who wish to come in. My meetings with the players in the upstream sector have been extremely positive and we have been assured of substantial investments running into billions of dollars in the very near future.

Mr Speaker, the Minister for Energy and Green Transitions gave the directive for the removal of the unitisation based on the arbitration that took place. We believe that this would open the way for an amicable resolution of the issues between the Springfield Group and ENI Ghana Exploration and Production Limited, and this should make our oil

and gas prospects more attractive to investors going forward.

Mr Speaker, Ghana has fertile lands, abundant water, and human resources. Yet, we face a paradox. Our food import bill continues to soar, reaching alarming levels of over US\$2 billion annually. In addition, rising food inflation is burdening households and threatening livelihoods. To address this, we are implementing several well-considered policies to grow the agricultural sector, including agro-processing. This will be backed by a reliable power supply, to meet our country's needs while advancing exports to earn foreign exchange and strengthen our economy.

Mr Speaker, the Agriculture for Economic Transformation Agenda (AETA) will modernise agriculture, enhance agribusiness, ensure food security, lower food inflation, boost exports, and create sustainable jobs. The Feed Ghana Programme will increase food production and reduce prices through projects like the Grains Development Project, focusing on rice, maize, and soybean production. The Vegetable Development Project will target crops such as tomatoes, onions, and pepper.

Our Poultry Farm-to-table project will eliminate poultry imports and increase local production. Ghana imports 95 per cent of its poultry needs, which costs over US\$300 million annually. To reverse this trend, Government plans to revamp the poultry sector by investing in hatcheries, feed mills, processing, distribution, and working toward

eliminating poultry imports. And this is the good one, the Nkokɔ Nketenkete Project—[*Yay!*]*—Will cover 55,000 households producing eggs and fresh poultry for the market and help reduce the US\$300 million we spend on importing chicken annually. [Hear! Hear!]*

Mr Speaker, to strengthen the connection between agriculture and industry, we will prioritise value addition, processing, and distribution. This will position agriculture as a profitable and appealing activity, making it more attractive to our young people. We will implement an AgriNext Programme to facilitate access to land banks by young farmers, connect graduates with opportunities in the agricultural value chain, and promote greenhouse agriculture among the youth. This initiative will benefit approximately 30,000 young people.

Mr Speaker, the Livestock Development Project will address Ghana's reliance on imported meat by restocking breeder farms and increasing local livestock production, thereby creating jobs and boosting self-sufficiency. For years, access to mechanisation, quality seeds, fertilisers, and extension services has been a major challenge for farmers. To address this, Government will establish our flagship Farmer Service Centres in every agricultural district, ensuring farmers receive essential resources to improve productivity and efficiency.

In the fisheries sector, we will implement strategic interventions to

enhance productivity and sustainability. Key among these initiatives is the continued enforcement of measures to curb illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which threatens marine biodiversity and the livelihoods of our hardworking fisherfolk. We have intensified surveillance and monitoring operations, bolstered by the deployment of modern technology and strengthened collaboration with key stakeholders.

In the last month, we have expanded the supply of subsidised premix fuel to support artisanal and industrial fishers, ensuring affordability and availability. We will also invest further in modern fish landing sites and cold storage facilities to improve post-harvest handling, reduce losses, and enhance the quality of fish products. Aquaculture development is a key focus of our Administration. We will provide financial and technical support to fish farmers, increasing local fish production and reducing our dependence on fish imports.

To increase value addition in this sector, we will encourage the establishment of fish processing facilities, create more jobs and boost exports. Our commitment to supporting women in fisheries remains steadfast as we implement programmes to empower female fish processors and traders with financial resources and capacity-building initiatives.

While we work hard to fix the economy, and provide job opportunities

in all sectors, including agribusiness, one of the biggest crisis we face is youth unemployment. Youth unemployment has led to despair and frustration. The latest estimates show that up to two million youth are unemployed. This poses a major security risk for our country and requires urgent attention...

11.21 p.m.

The latest estimates show that up to two million youth are unemployed. This poses a major security risk for our country and requires urgent attention. To bring much-needed focus to the desperate and widely scattered youth employment programmes and ensure stricter accountability in their implementation, I have set up the Ministry for Youth Development and Empowerment in furtherance of my campaign promise.

The Ministry of Youth Development and Empowerment is mandated to formulate, coordinate and monitor policies and programmes to promote youth development and empowerment in the country.

Mr Speaker, as part of our Operation Recover All Loot (ORAL) Policy—*[Interruption]*—I have already tasked our investigative bodies to bring the culprits of the National Service ghost names scandal to justice. Such brazen theft of public funds must be stopped and not go unpunished. It is estimated that the criminal addition of some more than 80,000 ghost names could have yielded the suspects over GHC50 million every month. Unfortunately, some of these

suspects are believed to have absconded from the country. I have directed that they be declared wanted and their assets traced and frozen until investigations are completed.

To achieve a legally robust regime to govern National Service, I have also tasked the Minister for Youth Development and Empowerment to coordinate and present to Parliament a Legislative Instrument (L. I.) to support the implementation of the newly passed National Service Authority Act, 2024 (Act 1119). We will introduce short military training as part of our national service scheme—*[Hear! Hear!]*—This will instill a sense of fitness and discipline into our youth.

The administration of scholarships is another challenge. It has been fraught with many challenges. The poor who genuinely need scholarships are unable to access them because the rich always crowd them out. To fulfil my Government's vision of promoting transparency, equity, and sustainability in the scholarship scheme, we shall streamline the award process to ensure that only deserving youth benefit from the system. We shall introduce increased transparency, including publishing the list of beneficiaries every year.

Mr Speaker, job creation is one of the main pillars of my government's promise to the youth of Ghana. To help actualise this promise, we will roll out the Adwumawura Programme. This initiative will create, track, and mentor young businesses annually, with a special focus on young people. For the

first phase, the top two thousand implementable business proposals will be supported with business development training, mentorship, access to startup capital, market and networking to operationalise their innovations and business ideas.

Government will also launch our flagship National Apprenticeship Programme to equip ten thousand young people in the informal sector with employable skills, including providing apprenticeship fees and start-up kits when they have completed. The Ministry of Youth Development and Empowerment and the Ministry of the Interior will facilitate training for young people in the *okada* business—[**Some Hon Members:** Eii!]*—*in areas such as road safety regulations, financial literacy and digital skills, as well as facilitate the acquisition of motorbikes. We will introduce electric motorcycles on a hire purchase scheme to eliminate the use of petrol and make the business more profitable—[*Hear! Hear!*]*—*

Mr Speaker, Her Excellency the Vice-President's Empowerment for Women and Persons with Disability Programme will also be launched this year. The programme will target women, persons with disability and other vulnerable groups to build their capacity and offer them access to finance to create jobs.

Mr Speaker, the Ministry of Communications, Digital Technology, and Innovations will also focus on developing youth Information Technology Skills (IT) skills and fostering innovation. Under the 'One Million

Coders Programme', young people will receive training in coding, web app development, digital marketing, and other digital skills. This initiative aims to equip them with the necessary skills for employability in the digital ecosystem. We must provide meaningful and relevant education to prepare our youth for today's technology-driven job market. Despite various reforms, issues related to low learning outcomes persist within Ghana's educational system. I am committed to ensuring that quality education remains a top priority—[*Hear! Hear!*]

The system we inherited is outdated in many ways and must be realigned to meet the needs of the 21st century and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Recognising the urgent need for national dialogue on education and in the spirit of inclusive governance, I launched the National Education Consultative Forum on 18th February, in Ho. I look forward to the recommendations, which we will incorporate into our sectoral policies.

Mr Speaker, even though Article 38 of the Constitution guarantees equitable access to education across Ghana, 30 years after the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) Programme, its full objectives remain unmet. To tackle this issue, government will redefine the scope of basic education and introduce the "Zero to Hero" initiative to enhance foundational literacy and numeracy.

Additionally, Information Communication Technology (ICT) training will be integrated into early childhood education

at the basic level. Over the next three years, it will be expanded to cover 300 classrooms, 30 centres of excellence, 1,000 teachers, and District Teacher Support Teams (DTSTs) focusing on mathematics and literacy.

This year, the Ministry of Education will fully implement a new curriculum for Senior High Technical Schools and STEM Schools, introduce a standardised National Sign Language for hearing-impaired learners from Kindergarten to SHS, and review the Kindergarten and Primary School curriculums.

To increase access to quality education, we will scale up social intervention programmes like Capitation Grants, Feeding Grants for Special Schools, and the Government's Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) registration initiative.

Mr Speaker, to promote inclusion and equity, the Government will enhance and resource the Islamic Education Unit to recruit more Islamic and Arabic tutors for English-Arabic Schools. We would establish STEM and Technical Vocational Educational Training (TVET) schools in underserved peri-urban communities. We would provide scholarships to brilliant but needy students in deprived communities, especially for law, medicine, and engineering. We would support Islamic Colleges of Education with infrastructure and logistics. We would enroll youth in Zongo and deprived urban areas in the National Apprenticeship Programme and offer free technical and vocational training.

Mr Speaker, it is important to continue to retain and motivate teachers in all schools, especially in rural and underserved areas. Government will begin plans for the implementation of the 20 per cent allowance for teachers who agree to serve in rural schools—*[Hear! Hear!]*—District Assemblies would be involved in this Scheme, to ensure that the teachers are present and teaching in the schools that are selected. This scheme will reward such teachers for their sacrifice and ensuring quality education nationwide and only in urban centres.

Mr Speaker, as part of our Teacher Dabr3 Initiative, the construction of teacher accommodation units to improve welfare and attract teachers to rural areas will commence this year—*[Hear! Hear!]*

11.31 a.m.

Mr Speaker, no new school will be built in this country without teachers' accommodation. *[Hear! Hear!]*

Mr Speaker, once again, for emphasis and for the record, I, John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana, will not cancel the free SHS programme—*[Hear! Hear!]*—I am determined to make it better by improving its implementation. Also, for the record, students who have benefitted from the free SHS since its inception are about 3.4 million. The figure of 5.1 million beneficiaries, as previously put out by the previous Administration was an exaggerated and false narrative calculated to achieve political credit—**[Some Hon Members of the Majority: Oh!]**

Mr Speaker, while the free SHS programme has improved access, the implementation of the programme leaves much to be desired. The outcomes of the ongoing National Education Forum will guide our reform efforts in this sector.

Mr Speaker, in line with our promise, the Minister for Education has announced the restoration of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in the running of schools. It is important for parents and communities to participate in the administration of their schools. The Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service (GES) will, however, ensure that PTAs do not impose unbearable financial burdens on parents and students who cannot afford them.

Mr Speaker, the double-track system remains a challenge, and we are committed to eliminating it by accelerating school infrastructure expansion and completing stalled educational projects. To fund this, the Ministries of Education and Finance are working to uncap the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund), so that we can accelerate projects in secondary schools. As promised, we have begun improving secondary school feeding, and the children are getting better quality food, as I address you. [*Hear! Hear!*]

Mr Speaker, efforts to decentralise school feeding and food management include strengthening procurement and store management capacity. Once completed, food procurement and management will be fully handed over to the secondary schools to do their own food procurement.

Mr Speaker, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) are central to national development. We will, therefore, expand STEM programmes at all levels to equip all students for the global economy. We do not believe in building single stand-alone STEM schools; we believe that STEM must be part of the curriculum of every secondary school. [*Hear! Hear!*]

Mr Speaker, regional TVET centres of excellence will be established to provide practical skills; every region will get a TVET centre of excellence to expand technical and vocational education training. Mr Speaker, Hon Members, Ghana has consistently missed its Gross Tertiary Enrolment targets, with the rate below 22 per cent, far from the 40 per cent goal that has been set by 2030. Despite over 460,000 secondary graduates coming out annually, 55 per cent qualify for tertiary education, and only 35 per cent (161,000 of the 460,000) enrol in tertiary education, leaving over 300,000 without access. To address this, Government is introducing a No-Fee Stress policy to eliminate tertiary admission fees, which currently serve as a barrier to higher education for some students. [*Hear! Hear!*]

This will be supported by an enhanced Student Loan Scheme, which is called the Student Loan Plus. The No-Fee Stress policy will also cover all Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), and, for emphasis, Persons with Disabilities will pay no fees for tertiary education throughout their study—[*Hear! Hear!*]*—*So, PwDs who gain admission to tertiary institutions will pay no fees.

Additionally, TVET enrolment will be increased from 11 per cent to 20 per cent to boost employment.

Mr Speaker, rising enrolment has strained university infrastructure, causing overcrowding and inadequate accommodation. We are determined to expand access, improve quality, and align tertiary education with national goals, particularly in STEM. Feasibility studies for new public universities or campuses of existing universities to be established in the six new regions will commence this year—*[Hear! Hear!]*—Seed funding for these projects will come from the GETFund to enhance nationwide access.

Government will, this year, engage with the existing public universities to identify suitable sites on their campuses and acquired lands for the implementation of the private sector participation in the provision of hostel projects. This is a partnership between Government, universities and private investors to expand hostel capacity on campuses. This will allow more students to be accommodated on the campuses to allow for a better learning environment.

Mr Speaker, academic freedom will be upheld; we will not interfere in the administration of our tertiary universities, and our hope is that the institutions will be required to ensure good governance.

Mr Speaker, next, our health sector faces significant challenges that jeopardise the very foundation of our health system. The Ministry of Health

has a total liability of nearly GH¢15 billion when co-financing obligations, judgment debts, and payments to clear medical commodities at the ports are all put together. The last major hospital equipment replacement programme was undertaken in 2014 when I was President. Since then, most hospital equipment in Ghana Health Service (GHS) facilities have deteriorated or broken down—**[Some Members of the Majority: Oh!]**

Mr Speaker, the Agenda 111 programme which was started as a knee-jerk reaction during the COVID-19 pandemic when the Ghanaian public began to appreciate the significant investment the previous NDC Administration had made in health facilities and began to lament the many hospital projects that had stalled under the previous Administration, a promise was to build 111 hospitals. Mr Speaker, I am sad to note that there is no dedicated funding source for such a gargantuan project—**[Some Members of the Majority: Oh!]**—There is no dedicated funding source for this gargantuan project.

Mr Speaker, for the record, as I speak, not a single Agenda 111 hospital is operational in any part of Ghana—**[Some Members of the Minority: Ei!]**—I challenge you: not one is operational, and it is worth disclosing that US\$400 million has already been disbursed under the Agenda 111 project—**[Some Members of the Majority: Ei!]** Mr Speaker, at a rate of approximately US\$18 million per hospital, this US\$ 400 million spent

could have completed and made operational, at least, 22 of those hospitals—[**Some Members of the Majority:** Oh!]/—I believe that the money should have been focused on completing a number of hospitals and making them operational, instead of spreading it over the current 111 hospitals. As I speak, some are at the foundation level and not a single one is operational.

I have directed the Minister for Health to present us with a plan on the way forward for this programme.

11.41 a.m.

Let me add that we are open to public-private partnerships and franchising to complete and operationalise these hospitals.

Mr Speaker, one of the most pressing issues confronting our health sector today is the USAID's sudden 90-day pause in services without prior notice and the looming threat of complete withdrawal of programmes that do not align with the USA's strategic interests.

Programmes that this will affect include the delivery of medical commodities to regional medical stores and health facilities in the Upper West, Upper East, Northern, and Savannah Regions. USAID's support for the National HIV/AIDS Control Programme which includes the supply of antiretroviral therapies (ARTs) in the Western, Western North, and Ahafo Regions is also affected.

This withdrawal puts at risk approximately US\$78 million in earmarked funds for malaria, maternal and child health, nutrition, and HIV/AIDS programmes. It also covers some programmes being run at the Noguchi Memorial Institute in Research.

The impact will be devastating without urgent intervention. I have therefore directed the Minister for Finance to make immediate financial arrangements to mitigate this loss, and I expect that this will be reflected in his budget, which will be presented to this House next month on March 11, 2025.

Working with the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA), we will revive the ONUADOR mobile healthcare vans—[*Hear! Hear!*]. These vans will provide OPD, ophthalmology, dental, ENT, cancer screening and care in remote and most vulnerable communities. An earlier attempt to provide mobile healthcare facilities was abandoned after the change of Government in 2017.

Mr Speaker, public health experts are grappling with the conundrum of new diseases and the re-emergence of old diseases. The unpredictable nature of disease outbreaks suggests we must make our health system resilient to shocks.

Since October last year, Ghana has faced a severe cholera outbreak. As of February 17, 2025, I am sad to report 6,300 suspected cases, 545 confirmed cases, and unfortunately, we lost 49 of our compatriots.

The outbreak has affected 118 districts across Greater Accra, Central, Western, Ashanti, and Eastern Regions. To control the situation, we have launched an aggressive vaccination and public education campaign, among other interventions.

Mr Speaker, sanitation within the context of infectious disease outbreaks, personal hygiene and environmental sanitation must be a major priority. Our cities and towns must be cleaner than what is being delivered so far. We commit to right the wrongs to keep our communities and cities clean through appropriate investments, supervision, and performance tracking in the sanitation sector.

Mr Speaker, as I speak, the Upper West Region is facing a severe meningitis outbreak and I know Mr Speaker, you have made an important contribution to ameliorate the situation in your Region and I commend you for that—*[Hear! Hear!]*. As of February 17, 2025, 135 suspected cases, 22 confirmed cases, and unfortunately 16 deaths had been reported across ten (10) districts. We have instituted free treatment for affected persons and deployed a strong national team of health experts to encourage early reporting to health facilities of suspected meningitis.

Mr Speaker, as outlined in the 2024 Manifesto of the NDC, my administration is actively developing the framework for the rollout of the Free Primary Healthcare Programme. When fully implemented, this initiative will mark a significant step towards Ghana

achieving Goal 3.8 (Universal Health Coverage) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by eliminating financial barriers to basic healthcare access.

Also, in line with our 120-day manifesto commitment, the composition of the technical committee is far advanced, with plans to establish the Ghana Medical Trust Fund (MahamaCares) in the coming weeks—*[Laughter]*—

Mr Speaker, Hon Members, this fund will be dedicated to financing the treatment of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which have seen a significant rise over the past decade. As part of this initiative, the Government is committed to allocating financial resources towards this project in 2025, with further support to be mobilised from private sector partners to ensure the sustainability of the fund. Once operational, the Ghana Medical Trust Fund, otherwise known as MahamaCares will directly address the financial burden of patients requiring dialysis treatment, cancer care, and other critical NCD-related interventions.

Together, the Free Primary Healthcare Programme which will focus on prevention, early detection, and treatment and the Ghana Medical Trust Fund which will focus on relieving the financial burden of treating Non-Communicable Diseases, will help revolutionise Ghana's healthcare system by improving healthcare accessibility and outcomes and enhancing productivity and well-being across the country.

Mr Speaker, Ghana will become the pharmaceutical manufacturing hub of West Africa—*[Hear! Hear!]*—And my previous record in Government speaks for itself, when I injected funds into Ghanaian-owned pharmaceutical companies to expand their production capacities.

Mr Speaker, as this exciting phase unfolds under the 24-Hour Economy initiative—*[Hear! Hear!]*—We must strengthen every aspect of our pharmaceutical industry and this includes the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) and the Customs and Security Agencies in order to avert the use of fake drugs and the importation of illicit drugs into our country.

We await thorough and unbiased investigation into the alleged opioid pill importation into Ghana and other West African countries. The outcome will be shared and I can assure you necessary action will be taken.

Mr Speaker as a Social Democrat, I am resolutely committed to eradicating all forms of discrimination in our society. Our vision is to foster fairness and cultivate an inclusive environment where everyone can engage fully and equally in their social, economic, and political life.

With my Vice President, the history-making Prof Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, —*[Hear! Hear!]*—We will engage with all stakeholders, including our development partners and civil society organisations, to prioritise gender equality, equity, and social

justice. We will establish strong social protection mechanisms and enhance legal safeguards for women, girls, and other vulnerable groups. Our initiatives will include enacting comprehensive laws and policies designed to dismantle harmful social norms, enhance access to crucial resources and opportunities particularly for young women and reduce overall vulnerability within our society.

Mr Speaker, I would like to take a moment to commend you and this House for your unwavering support and guidance, which were instrumental in passing the Affirmative Action Act, 2024 (Act 1121) during the 8th Parliament of the Fourth Republic.

My Government is dedicated to successfully implementing the Affirmative Action Act of 2024 (Act 1121) to ensure gender equity across political, social, economic, educational, and cultural spheres. The Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection is actively collaborating with relevant stakeholders to guarantee that this Act is fully operational, including attaining the 30 per cent target quota for women in political appointments.

I am pleased to report that women currently make up 23.21 per cent of all appointments—*[Hear! Hear!]*—, and we are diligently working towards reaching the target set forth in Act 1121.

I am concerned about achieving gender balance, especially at the Local Government level. Very few women have mustered the courage to apply for

the position of Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executive (MMDCE) and unfortunately the few who have courageously applied have been edged out on very flimsy and parochial grounds. It is my hope that the National Constitution Review Conference will clear a pathway for the election of District Chief Executives (DCEs). The Gender Ministry will have the obligation to encourage and support more women to apply and stand for these elective positions.

In our pursuit of empowering women, Mr Speaker, we will establish the Women's Development Bank—*[Hear! Hear!]*—.

11.51 p.m.

Mr Speaker, we will establish the Women's Development Bank, a specialised financial institution designed to support businesses owned and led by women through the provision of low-interest loans and tailored financial services offered under flexible terms.

Consultative processes are underway to ensure the successful launch of this bank. As part of our 120-day social contract, the Minister for Finance will allocate initial funding for the Women's Development Bank in the upcoming Budget presentation—*[Hear! Hear!]*

We are also implementing measures to expand the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) Programme under our "Big LEAP" initiative. As we work towards completing the Ghana National Household Data Census by this

year, 2025, we will reassess the status of LEAP beneficiary households to facilitate the enrolment of new beneficiaries.

Mr Speaker, we are committed to enhancing the legal framework surrounding disability rights by passing the Persons with Disability (Amendment) Bill. Additionally, we will introduce a Legislative Instrument to strengthen further the provisions of the Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715). We reiterate our commitment to ensuring that individuals with disabilities have access to free tertiary education and equal opportunities to pursue their academic and professional ambitions.

The Government intends to ensure the implementation of the legislation that enjoins public and private employers to reserve 5 per cent of their employment for persons with disability. I am aware that a private Member was shepherding this Bill. Government is going to support that Motion in order for 5 per cent of all employment to be reserved for persons with disability.

Mr Speaker, Ghana's sports sector, once a shining example of excellence within Africa, now finds itself at a critical juncture. Historically, our nation has celebrated remarkable achievements in boxing, football, and athletics. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case. However, recent years have unveiled pressing structural deficiencies in administration, funding, infrastructure, and talent development.

Immediate and comprehensive reforms are imperative to reclaim our rightful place on the global sports stage. We will develop a comprehensive National Sports Policy to align with international norms. This policy will be accompanied by an exhaustive review of the Sports Act, 2016 (Act 934) and the rigorous enforcement of the Sports Regulations 2023 (LI 2477).

Infrastructure development remains paramount in our strategy. The Government is committed to refurbishing existing national stadia, completing youth resource centres, and constructing new sports facilities in the new regions. We will also prioritise community recreational facilities to foster greater participation in sports at the grassroots level.

Mr Speaker, recognising the critical role of youth development, we are implementing a significant overhaul of grassroots sports with the establishment of the School Sports Authority. This body will oversee structured inter-school competitions and talent identification initiatives essential for nurturing future sporting champions. Over 60 per cent of Ghana's elite athletes have emerged from these school sports programmes.

The Ministry has now been renamed the Ministry of Sports and Recreation. To acknowledge the significance of recreation, we will launch a National Recreation Day. This will be a monthly initiative centred on community engagement, alongside an annual National Recreation Festival. These initiatives will encourage keep-fit

activities and promote active lifestyles, promote traditional games, and strengthen community bonds.

Next month, the senior national team, the Black Stars which is now a pale shadow of its former glory, will play two World Cup qualifying matches. I have instructed my Office and the Minister for Sports and Recreation to hold the Ghana Football Association accountable to the people of Ghana as we prepare for these games, especially, regarding the budget the Football Association (FA) has presented for the two matches.

Mr Speaker, there will be no secrecy in how much the Government spends on the national teams. The budgets presented by the FA and other sports associations must be known by the public. After all, it is the taxpayer's funds that are used to fund these activities. The reduction in Government expenditure and waste reduction apply to all sectors of the economy, including the Ministry of Sports and Recreation.

Mr Speaker, Tourism, Culture, and Creative Arts remain vital cornerstones of our national development strategy, playing a significant role in job creation, cultural exchange, and economic growth. In recent years, the Ministry has launched transformative initiatives to position Ghana as a premier global destination and this is positive. These positive initiatives aim to harness the country's rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and dynamic creative sector.

Our flagship initiative, "The Black Star Experience", aims to establish

Ghana as the gateway to Africa for the global diaspora, featuring thoughtfully curated cultural, historical, and creative arts experiences in collaboration with the private sector, diplomatic missions, ministries, departments, and agencies. Our aim is to position the Black Star Experience as a uniquely Ghanaian tourism brand.

The Pan African Month will be a part of the Black Star Experience. It will include street carnivals, a film week, a fashion festival, a food fair, theatrical and drama performances, concert party competitions, and monthly domestic tourism destinations. We will strategically promote Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism to diversify our tourism offerings.

Mr Speaker, Ghana's peaceful and democratic environment positions us as an attractive hub for international summits, business conventions, and high-profile gatherings. We must capitalise on this unique advantage to maximise our benefits and strengthen our reputation as the country that is closest to the centre of the world.

We are also committed to revitalising the Accra Marine Drive Project, a significant urban redevelopment initiative which was designed to transform approximately 241 acres of Accra's coastline into a vibrant tourism and economic hub.

Although the Cabinet approval for this vital project was achieved during my presidency in 2016, progress stalled

under the previous administration. We will reassess the work completed and take decisive action to bring this all-important project back on track.

We will develop the Osu Castle, the former seat of Government, and the area surrounding it as a tourist attraction. It will have a pedestrian precinct, with arts and craft markets, and a jewellery and gold market. This approximately 22-acre land will become a destination for tourism.

Mr Speaker, our road network is the cornerstone of our nation's infrastructure, facilitating over 90 per cent of the transportation of goods and services across the country. This vital network is critical in supporting agricultural growth by linking farmers to markets, lowering transportation costs and ensuring quicker access to essential supplies and services. The resulting interconnected benefits foster a vibrant economy and enhance the livelihoods of countless Ghanaians.

Mr Speaker, while the previous government has made lofty claims about achieving "unprecedented milestones" in the road sector, available evidence does not support its assertion that it constructed over 13,000 kilometres of new roads. Instead, it has perpetuated a narrative that presents road maintenance and rehabilitation efforts as new construction projects, misleading the public about its accomplishments.

The proportion of poor roads has increased, especially in urban centres, where the number of roads in disrepair

surged from 46 per cent in 2015 to almost 60 per cent by 2021. Therefore, Mr Speaker, our road sector is in crisis, mainly due to years of mismanagement. As many as 85 per cent of awarded contracts in the road sector have been stalled, and contractors have stopped work due to non-payment and most of them have packed their equipment off site.

12.01 p.m.

Mr Speaker, as of December 2024, unpaid bills owed to contractors exceeded GHC20 billion for work that had been carried out between 2018 and 2024. For instance, the Ghana Road Fund obtained a loan of GHC600 million in March 2018 to refinance outstanding debts and borrowed an additional GHC1.2 billion from a syndicate of banks in November 2019.

Alarming, upon assuming office, the Ghana Road Fund still had outstanding payments, including some as low as GHC2,000, dating back to 2018. Current commitments for road projects that are unpaid currently stand at an astonishing GHC105 billion.

Despite these considerable challenges, this Government remains steadfast in its commitment to prioritise vital infrastructure projects that address the pressing backlog of poor roads. Our strategy will be anchored in executing our flagship initiative under the “Big Push” Programme. The Big Push Programme would see major rehabilitation of many key roads in the feeder roads, urban roads and highway

sectors. We will also undertake the following key initiatives to revitalise the road sector.

We would reintroduce road tolls using modern technology—[*Hear! Hear!*]—We would rationalise the Road Sector Portfolio to focus on high-impact initiatives. We would un-cap the Road Fund—[*Hear! Hear!*]—in order that it can accumulate more money to pay for road maintenance. We would minimise sole-source procurements to encourage competition, competitive bidding and enhance public transparency in procurement processes.

Mr Speaker, the District Road Improvement Programme (DRIP) equipment which was acquired at the last moment as a knee-jerk reaction for electioneering purposes will be reorganised into regional mobile maintenance units, to provide emergency road works in the regions.

Mr Speaker, I have realigned the Ministry of Transport to oversee four modes of transportation: aviation, maritime and inland water transport, road transport, and railways. The Government will commission a feasibility study to develop coastal water transport services. This initiative aims to promote alternative modes of transport and ensure their integration with existing systems under the National Transport Policy. It also aims to enhance tourism, reduce road traffic and mitigate environmental pollution.

Motorcycles and tricycles, commonly known as *okada*, hold significant

potential as a more convenient, timely, safe, and cost-effective mode of transportation. Currently, the Road Traffic Regulations, 2012 (L. I. 2180) prohibit licensing motorcycles and tricycles for fare-paying passengers. As part of our Government Policy, the Ministry will amend the regulatory framework to regularise the use of motorcycles and tricycles for commercial passenger transport. [*Hear! Hear!*]

In our ongoing efforts to revitalise the Ho Airport, the Government will facilitate the establishment of a state-of-the-art pilot training academy and a Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facility. The Volta Region will become a centre of excellence for aviation training and aircraft maintenance. This project will create significant employment opportunities, stimulate economic growth, and bolster tourism in Ho and the surrounding communities. I have directed the Ghana Airports Company Limited (GACL) to release 10 acres of land at the Ho Airport for this purpose.

Mr Speaker, with the completion of the Tema-Mpakadan rail line, the Government will launch passenger services between Tema and Adome. We will also begin developing the necessary infrastructure on the Volta Lake to facilitate freight transport between the Tema Port and Buiepe as part of our Eastern Corridor multi-modal transport system. The Western Railway Line will continue to be modernised in partnership with the private sector. This initiative aims to support the efficient transport of

bulk cargo and minerals from the mines in Nsuta, Awaso, and Nyinahin to the Takoradi Port while providing passenger transport along the Western corridor.

Mr Speaker, the last attempt by the previous administration to re-establish a national airline has failed. We will reopen a transparent process that will receive expressions of interest to invite competent, established partners to work with us to establish a national airline. We believe that an efficient national carrier can help reduce fares on routes where external carriers are currently enjoying monopoly.

Mr Speaker, our Communications and Digital Technology initiatives focus on expanding our national digital infrastructure to stimulate innovation and enhance public service delivery. We are also dedicated to improving access to information and communication technologies, promoting the digital economy, and ensuring inclusive and equitable growth across all sectors.

Nevertheless, the sector faces several significant challenges that hinder our progress. These include insufficient infrastructure for delivering weather and climate services across all time zones, fragmented and uncoordinated databases, outdated legislation and policies that do not keep pace with this rapidly evolving sector, a lack of adequate technology to effectively detect, prevent and respond to cybersecurity incidents and a daunting debt burden exceeding GHC2 billion.

Mr Speaker, to revitalise this Sector, my Government is committed to

reviewing existing laws and policies to better align them with emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), big data, the internet of things, and machine learning.

Additionally, we will develop and expedite the enactment of the Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT (KACE) Bill. This legislation will establish the necessary framework for the centre to concentrate on research and development, consultancy services, and capacity building.

Mr Speaker, access to safe and reliable water and affordable housing significantly enhances the well-being and quality of life of our people. These elements are integral to our reset agenda and fundamental to our vision to build the Ghana we want for a prosperous future. However, the water sector in Ghana faces considerable challenges, particularly from illegal mining activities that contaminate freshwater sources, rendering them unsafe for drinking and agriculture.

This alarming situation highlights the critical need for a decisive and ongoing effort to combat illegal mining to save our environment and public health. Government will prioritise completing new and ongoing water projects to improve access to safe drinking water. This commitment should be good news for communities in Keta, Adaklu, Wenchi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Asankragwa, Sefwi Wiawso, Duadaso, Kweiman, Danfa, Goaso, Juaben, Aveyime, and Adu Bamso. We will also tackle critical water projects in Damongo, Tamale,

Yendi, Sunyani, Techiman, and Tarkwa to ensure broader access to potable water nationwide.

Mr Speaker, Ghana has a coastline stretches approximately 550 kilometres. Two-thirds of it is threatened by tidal wave erosion, which impacts nearly 30 per cent of Ghana's population. Rising sea levels have exacerbated vulnerabilities in coastal areas, leading to wetland flooding, habitat loss and community displacement. Consequently, coastal protection has emerged as a critical national priority. So, for communities that are currently threatened by flood, we would prioritise building sea defence to be able to protect you. [*Hear! Hear!*]

Flooding has become an all-too-frequent occurrence in many urban centres across the country, resulting in tragic losses of life, livelihoods, and property. This scenario underscores the urgent need for sustainable solutions to address these pressing developmental challenges. Many of our drainage systems are inadequate, worsened by careless waterway construction and obstruction, and the relentless encroachment on wetlands and floodplains. To tackle these issues, we will explore alternative funding sources to support essential drainage works, desilting, flood control, and coastal protection initiatives.

Mr Speaker, the quality of life in any nation relies significantly on a well-regulated and efficient housing market that guarantees access to decent homes.

12.11 p.m.

The housing deficit is estimated at 1.8 million units and this situation has loomed large over us for years...

High costs associated with land, construction materials, and financing have made homeownership unattainable for many, primarily affecting vulnerable populations and contributing to the rise of slums.

My government is steadfast in its commitment to completing all ongoing housing initiatives, beginning with the Saglemi Affordable Housing Project. We will also implement a low-cost Social Housing Project supported by a District Housing Scheme. This project aims to remove the financial barriers to home ownership. Workers in the formal sector, public or private, with 15 to 20 years before retirement can purchase and own a house in cedis and have the cost deducted monthly from their salaries until it is fully paid up.

Mr Speaker, illegal mining, commonly known as *Galamsey*, has inflicted tremendous harm on our forests, leading to significant land degradation and the pollution of vital water sources. This reckless activity threatens Ghana's environment and public health. Presently, 44 of the country's 288 forest reserves have been impacted, an area that is alarmingly equivalent to approximately 7,504 football pitches. The pollution levels in major rivers within the Southwestern Basin are critically high, with turbidity levels far exceeding permissible limits.

Mr Speaker, to combat this urgent crisis, we are implementing a proactive approach that includes robust and impartial law enforcement, meaningful stakeholder engagement, and the creation of alternative livelihood programmes.

We are expanding the Minerals Commission's regional offices to strengthen their regulatory oversight. We would establish a framework that categorises mining activities into small, medium, and large-scale, each with its tailored regulations.

Mr Speaker, we would establish a Gold Board and we are in the process of doing it. Legislation would come to this House shortly. This Gold Board would ensure effective governance of the gold industry. At the same time, we wish to take advantage of Ghana's salt production capacity to place it as a central export commodity under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). We would also seize the opportunities presented by the global shift towards net-zero emissions to craft policies related to critical minerals such as lithium. The anticipated development of the integrated aluminium and iron industries will significantly increase the value of Ghana's natural resources.

Mr Speaker, in our commitment to restoring degraded forests, we will launch the "Tree for Life" restoration policy and the Blue Water Initiative, which will transform mined-out areas into ecological recovery zones. This ambitious afforestation programme aims to establish more than 50,000 hectares of

new plantations and undertake 5,000 hectares of enrichment planting annually. We will also implement public sensitisation campaigns to foster sustainable forest management practices and uphold the Wildlife Resources Management Act.

We are going to involve school children and the general public in tree planting and tree growing.

Mr Speaker, comprehensive reforms will be introduced to enhance transparency and efficiency while ensuring tenure security in land administration. Climate change remains a pressing concern for Ghana and the global community. To meet our climate mitigation targets, Ghana has allocated 24 million metric tonnes of its carbon budget, totalling 64 million metric tonnes of carbon for authorisation under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

We have successfully authorised three projects which are poised to reduce 5.2 million tonnes of our carbon emissions. In line with our Manifesto, we are committed to strengthening institutional and human capacity through necessary adaptation and mitigation measures to bolster resilience in critical sectors such as agriculture, forestry, energy, and water resources.

Mr Speaker, we also pledge to align our national policies with international efforts to limit global warming to 1.5°C by 2050 and promote a fair and just transition to renewable energy sources.

Mr Speaker, we stand on the cusp of making history—The history of a country that prioritises transparency and accountability as key elements of governance. During my campaign for President, I pledged, as captured by the National Democratic Congress' (NDC) 2024 Manifesto, to take a strong stance against corruption.

Mr Speaker, we must end state capture and the purchase of state and public assets such as lands and other immovable assets by members of the political class —*[Hear! Hear!]*.

Mr Speaker, I pledged to fight corruption head-on by implementing Operation Recover All Loot (ORAL)—*[Uproar]*—In that regard, Mr Speaker, one of the first committees I established even before my investiture as President, was to establish the ORAL committee on the sidelines of the transition. It is instructive to announce that the committee received over two thousand (2,000) complaints from the public and has since handed over a comprehensive report. This report has been given to the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice for further review, thorough investigation, and eventual prosecution.

Mr Speaker, the recent arrests related to the unwarranted payment of US\$2 million of Ghanaian taxpayers' money in the Skytrain saga and then also the National Service ghost names scandal mark only the beginning of a comprehensive response based on the ORAL Committee's findings.

Mr Speaker, let me state that my commitment to fighting corruption will continue with the establishment of a unit at the Presidency and the maintenance of the hotline where complaints and reports regarding graft and corruption will continue to be received and transferred to the Office of the Attorney-General.

Mr Speaker, we would shortly submit for consideration, a Bill to regulate and restrict the sale or disposal of public and state assets.

Mr Speaker, as soon as the 2025 Budget is approved, government will immediately take steps to reform the existing anti-corruption agencies, increase funding and improving transparency and accountability.

Mr Speaker, Ghanaians voted largely and overwhelmingly and endorsed the NDC because we demonstrated a strong commitment and abhorrence for corruption. We pledged to fight corruption and implement far-reaching reforms that will eventually achieve a sustainable zero-tolerance policy against corruption.

Mr Speaker, the Justice and Legal sectors play pivotal roles in ensuring accountability and fostering the fair, equitable treatment of all our citizens by the State and its agencies. Delays and uncertainties have plagued justice delivery in Ghana, leading many Ghanaians to perceive a politicisation of the judicial process. The public trust in the Judiciary's independence is alarmingly low. We must work together to restore confidence in the judiciary. My

government will uphold the Judiciary's independence and work with the Judicial Council and services to depoliticise justice delivery and collaborate closely with the Chief Justice to combat corruption effectively.

Mr Speaker, in line with our manifesto promise to reform and expand legal education, we have developed a Legal Education Reform Bill, ready to be presented to Cabinet for approval and laying before Parliament.

Mr Speaker, on January 30, 2025, I inaugurated the Constitution Review Committee to undertake a comprehensive review of our fundamental law and ensure that it reflects the hopes and aspirations of our citizens. The committee is composed of distinguished scholars, jurists, and professionals who have made significant contributions to our nation in both the public and private sectors. They would engage Ghanaians and consult with relevant stakeholders and experts over the next six months.

Their findings will ultimately be presented to the public for approval followed by submission to Parliament for enactment into law and referendums would be held where necessary.

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to report that Ghana's internal security remains stable despite developments primarily rooted in chieftaincy disputes.

12.21 p.m.

We firmly believe that, even amidst conflict, it is essential for our citizens to

coexist peacefully and seek amicable resolution to these disputes. We will initiate comprehensive reforms across all security agencies to strengthen our national safety and security.

One area that has garnered significant public scrutiny is the recruitment process within our security forces. Accusations of politicisation, favouritism, protocol and selectivity have been prevalent. Let me assure you that we are committed to changing that narrative and fostering a more transparent and equitable recruitment policy, so that all our young people who wish to serve in these services have an opportunity to do so.

We are dedicated to enhancing the capabilities of the Ghana Police Service, the Ghana Prisons Service, the Ghana National Fire Service, the Ghana Immigration Service, the Narcotics Control Commission, the Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority, and all investigative bodies operating under the Ministry for the Interior. By motivating and re-equipping these agencies, we aim to effectively maintain internal peace and security.

Mr Speaker, I want to reaffirm this Government's unwavering commitment to prioritising the welfare and well-being of our brave men and women in uniform who sacrifice daily to uphold law and order and secure our nation's peace. We will invest in adequate equipment and suitable accommodation for our security personnel.

As Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, I want to emphasise our

determination to strengthen our democracy. This is particularly true given the troubling proliferation of military-grade weapons that have fallen into unauthorised hands under the previous Administration. These weapons pose a significant threat to our national security and constitutional democracy, endangering the safety of all Ghanaians and potentially exacerbating existing conflicts, such as chieftaincy disputes, and in many cases, fall into the hands of armed robbers.

Since taking office, we have pursued a responsible approach to account for these unregistered weapons while maintaining stability within the security apparatus. I am pleased to report that we have made substantial progress and are committed to ensuring that those responsible for this situation are brought to book.

In our efforts to safeguard our citizens, territory, and democracy, we remain vigilant against the threats of violent extremism and terrorism. Therefore, we are resolute in enhancing our defence mechanisms through diplomacy, counter-intelligence, information sharing, infrastructure development, and acquisition of appropriate and specialised technologies.

Achieving a stable and secure nation necessitates the motivation of our uniformed personnel. Currently, the Ghana Armed Forces face a housing shortfall of over 17,000 units, and we recognise that the inadequate state of barrack accommodation needs be addressed promptly. In addition to

housing, we will prioritise improvements to ration and fuel supplies for our security forces.

Quality healthcare is another critical aspect of motivating our Armed Forces. As we work to expand and improve facilities at the 37 Military Hospital, complemented by the recently restored Oxygen Plant, we remain committed to finishing the delayed Kumasi Afari Military Hospital, which is still a top priority for my Government—*[Hear! Hear!]*—The goal is to complete and operationalise this facility before the end of this year.

Mr Speaker, like many other state institutions under the previous Administration, the Ministry of Defence is burdened with approximately GHC3.7 billion in debt, a figure that continues to grow as new and undisclosed debts are uncovered.

However, the demands of our Army, Navy, and Air Force continue to rise, necessitating the need for modern platforms for effective operations. Despite these financial challenges, I am confident that the Ghana Armed Forces possesses the human resources necessary to revitalise the Defence Industries Holding Company (DIHOC), which can support the Government's efforts in this regard.

DIHOC, which began under the late President John Atta Mills of blessed memory during my tenure as the Chair of the Armed Forces Council, is essential for fuelling Ghana's industrialisation drive, which is aligned with our 24-Hour

Economy Initiative—*[Hear! Hear!]*—Although DIHOC has expanded, it has yet to be fully optimised to deliver the returns needed for the Ghana Armed Forces and our nation. I have tasked the Minister for Defence, with incorporating innovation and significant private sector participation into DIHOC's operations, to harness its considerable potential for economic growth.

Mr Speaker, Ghana's strong international reputation was reaffirmed by the historic participation of foreign leaders during the swearing-in of myself as the President—*[Laughter]*—And Vice President Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang on 7th January, 2025.

Mr Speaker, it reflects the confidence our country's stability and democratic progress has engendered in the international community. Ghana remains committed to its Pan-Africanist ideals, non-alignment, democracy, and global cooperation, and the rule of multilateralism, embracing a policy of "friends to all and enemies to none" policy. We will continue to cultivate diplomatic ties based on mutual respect and shared values.

Mr Speaker, Ghana is open for business. Our policy on economic diplomacy focuses on export diversification, foreign investment, and job creation. A new blueprint and delivery unit at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be launched soon, to ensure foreign engagements yield tangible benefits for our people.

Because of emerging security threats, especially on our borders, Ghana is committed to security initiatives, particularly in the Sahel region. We will maintain a continuous engagement with our Sahelian neighbours and continue to work with them to resolve the difficult situation they are confronted with. I have appointed a Special Envoy to help sustain diplomatic relations with our Sahelian neighbours, aiming to achieve their reintegration, if possible, into the regional bloc.

Mr Speaker, we will expand passport application centres nationwide to reduce processing times to seven days. We wish that a passport will be delivered within seven days from the date application is submitted—*[Hear! Hear!]*—These comprehensive reforms at the Passport Office will align with the vision of a 24-Hour Economy. The Passport Office is going to work 24 hours to process passports that have been applied for.

Mr Speaker, as we reset Ghana to serve Ghanaians better, the Government will also revamp the labour administration institutions in the country. We will promote social dialogue and foster harmonious industrial relations among stakeholders. In the coming months, the National Tripartite Committee, led by the sector Minister, will organise a National Labour Conference to discuss pertinent issues affecting labour and employers. The recommendations are expected to influence and shape the Government's policies and programmes in this sector.

Mr Speaker we will launch the Ghana Labour Export Programme which will allow Ghanaians to go abroad and work with countries that we have signed agreements in specialised areas like engineering, technology, wildering, carpentry, masonry, nursing, teaching and so many and so forth.

The Government will maintain strict fiduciary responsibility for the operations of the National Pensions Regulatory Authority (NPRA), and the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT). This year, the NPRA will fully automate its internal operations, and the pension industry will be regulated. This is critical to safeguarding the growing pension fund assets.

As part of measures to increase pension coverage in the informal sector, which currently stands at 11 per cent, the Government will implement an Informal Sector Pension Inclusion Initiative to increase participation in micro pension schemes.

Decentralisation has been at the heart of our governance system, yet key players in the process such as assembly men and women often face neglect and inadequate compensation. Mr Speaker, I promised to pay modest allowances to our Assemblymen and women, and I am committed to keeping this promise—*[Hear! Hear!]*—The Hon Minister for Finance, when he presents the Budget Statement to this House, will have a provision for allowances for assembly members—*[Hear! Hear!]*.

Mr Speaker, I have just unveiled the state of the nation as I came to meet it. I have also disclosed several measures that I intend to take to address the challenges we have inherited.

12.31 p.m.

Nonetheless, no matter how well-intentioned our efforts to reset our economy are, they would not yield the desired outcome without the support of the people of Ghana. To my dear countrymen and women, you have clearly and unmistakably expressed your displeasure with the previous Government's poor governance and corruption that has existed in the past.

Mr Speaker, some of our compatriots did so even at the peril of their lives, just as our 28th February Crossroads Shooting National Heroes did in the Gold Coast. May all such martyrs of democracy, those who have died in the process of elections, and in the process of just exercising their civil rights, rest peacefully in the bosom of the Lord as we celebrate our February 28 fallen heroes, tomorrow.

Mr Speaker, as I promised, we would investigate these deaths and would provide appropriate compensation to the families of those who died during the elections. My Brothers and Sisters, you gave me a compelling mandate that leaves no one in doubt about your expectations of me and my Government. You embraced the vision to generate new and well-paying jobs through the 24-Hour Economy initiative. The arrogance of power that you so much abhor will be

a thing of the past — [*Hear! Hear!*]— I will enforce and demand the highest standards of performance from those I have chosen to work with me to improve the circumstances of our country. I would publish a code of conduct that they would be strictly made to abide by.

Mr Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not admit that the entire economic value chain is indeed in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), as I recall mentioning a few years ago when we were still in opposition. The economy is even worse than we envisaged, but this gives us ample opportunity to be innovative in our efforts to resuscitate it.

What are the takeaways from me for the people of Ghana?

1. That we shall fight corruption effectively.
2. That we shall run a lean Government of not more than 60 Ministers.
3. That we shall realign the ministries, agencies and departments to eliminate duplication.
4. That we will introduce austerity, reduce wasteful expenditure and spending, and improve tax collections.
5. That we shall widen Ghana's tax net, reform tax waivers, especially on investments and return to our homegrown solutions.

6. That we will grow what we eat and reduce imports of food and goods that can easily be produced here in Ghana.

Your voice and contributions will prove invaluable on this journey of national reset, and I encourage you to make your voices heard. I commit to the judicious use of your resources and eschewing waste and ostentation. We will always endeavour to make the most of the little we have so that together, we can guarantee a brighter future for our children and our children's children. Though the State of our nation now may appear bleak and the task of addressing it may seem daunting, nothing should stop us from achieving our goals once we set our minds to them. In one collective push, we can resolve to make this great nation bequeathed to us by our forebears and see it come to fruition.

Mr Speaker, Ghana's economic challenges are not insurmountable; they present the Government and everyone else the opportunity to innovate, Reflect, Review and Reset, which is the theme for the commemoration of our 68th Independence Anniversary. —[Uproar]—

Mr Speaker, it is said that there is strength in unity. Ghana's greatest strength lies in its people; its young and energetic youth. If we stand united, we can be more resilient and build together the power of collective action to overcome economic and social challenges. Every Ghanaian, regardless of political affiliation, background, or status, has a responsibility to play a key role in nation-building, and work towards a complete reset of our country.

Mr Speaker, let me assure you that we are leaving no one behind as we reset to rebuild the Ghana we want. We would rebuild a Ghana that works for all of us and not just a few. We shall live the dreams of our forebears in our lifetime. And so, my countrymen and women, where despair once existed, let hope radiate, and where the sun appeared to set on our bright prospect as a nation, let a new dawn of enthusiasm and renewal supplant it, so that when next I stand before you to present a message on the State of our nation, it will be one brimming with evidence of progress. —[Hear! Hear!]

Mr Speaker, I thank you very much for this opportunity and thank Hon Members for their kind attention.

May God Bless Our Homeland, Ghana.

[Some Hon Members on the Majority Side sang]

The Speaker: Hon Members, please resume your seats. Hon Members, Order! Order!

[Some Hon Members on the Minority Side sang]

The Speaker: Order! Order!

Hon Members, let me assure you, I have the full support of parents to discipline the students —[Uproar]—

12.41 p.m.

Hon Members, let me assure you, I have the full support of parents to discipline the students— [**Some Hon Members:** Eii!]

[Some Members of the Minority sang]

The Speaker: I will not accept any apologies again—[**Some Hon Members:** Eii!]

Hon Members, in accordance with Standing Order 72 (4), I convey to His Excellency the President, the gratitude of the House for the address. Hon Members, again, in accordance with the practice of this House, a formal communication would be forwarded to His Excellency the President after the House has thoroughly debated this address. So, Members would soon have their say.

In accordance with the Standing Orders of the House, I want to know from the Majority Leader if there is any indication regarding the adjournment of the House? In other words, Hon Majority Leader, can you move for an adjournment?

Majority Leader (Mr Mahama Ayariga): Mr Speaker, thank you very much.

Rt Hon Speaker, we wish to thank His Excellency the President for fulfilling his constitutional obligations under Article 67, and duly presenting to us, the Message on the State of the Nation.

Mr Speaker, things are clearly bleak. I see on the Minority Side of the House that my Colleagues are in black outfits—*[Interruption]*—It is obvious that they left this economy in a miserable state. The attire that they adorned today, says it all. On our Side, we are in white attires because, we knew very well that His Excellency the President was bringing to us a message of hope. *[Hear! Hear!]*—Our elders have cautioned that one does not leave their kraal in the hands of a hyena as a caretaker when they are travelling. One should not be surprised when one comes back to meet the carcasses of all their livestock.

Mr Speaker, what has happened to our economy and to our country, the presentation that has been made says it all. It is sad and unfortunate. But His Excellency the President has brought us hope: hope for the youth; hope for the women; hope for the *okada* riders; hope for the private sector; hope for students; and hope for the ordinary Ghanaian of this country who did everything to bring him to Office with such an overwhelming number—*Hear! Hear!*—We have no doubt that everything outlined here gives hope.

This House would support His Excellency to deliver on his commitment. But more importantly, this House would support His Excellency to deliver on the promise of accountability. Those who so damaged our economy must be held accountable—*[Hear! Hear!]*—and we would support him to deliver on the commitment to accountability.

Mr Speaker, on that note, I move that this House be adjourned to tomorrow 10 o'clock in the forenoon—[*Hear! Hear!*]

Mr Speaker, thank you very much.

The Speaker: Yes, Minority Leader?

Minority Leader (Osahen Alexander Kwamena Afenyo-Markin): Mr Speaker, first, let me on behalf of the Minority Caucus, congratulate His Excellency the President on his election. This is the first time after the elections that he has been to this Chamber, to deliver a Message on the State of the Nation. Our Side take this opportunity to congratulate him and wish him well.

Second, on the 21st February, 2013, Mr President notably said, “Mr Speaker, the meat is now down to the bones”. This was on the occasion of Mr President’s address to Parliament and that is what he said. This was at the time that he was President of Ghana, and he had served as the Chair of the Economic Management Team of his own Government. Yet, when he came to this House, he lamented on the same state of the economy that he had presided, and reechoed the point that, “we are left with just the bones”.

Mr Speaker, the President again says that he has delivered less Ministers. But it is clear that his strategy is, “if less, more divide”. He has appointed few Ministers but more presidential staffers and more committees

Mr Speaker, the President again—[*Interruption*]—

The Speaker: Hon Members, please—

12.51 p.m.

The Speaker: Hon Members, please.

Osahen Afenyo-Markin: Mr Speaker, the President again came to this House with a familiar story, the usual lamentations. He packaged it in a language as though we have a new beginning.

Mr Speaker, if the President has any concerns, his duty is to fix it. His Excellency the President has announced to us a Cabinet of 19, with only two women. The daughter of the founder of this NDC, Zanetor Agyeman-Rawlings, is missing—[*Uproar*]—Hajia Laadi is missing; Helen Ntoso is missing—[*Uproar*]—Where are the women in this Government? The Vice President—[*Uproar*]—

The Speaker: Hon Members, please, Order!

[*Uproar*] [*Pause*]

Osahen Afenyo-Markin: The Vice President is part of the government and we are seeing only two women in Cabinet and the Vice President is sitting there. In percentage terms, we have only 10 per cent of women in Cabinet.

Mr Speaker, the President, again, as part of his lamentations, is telling the nation that through some arrangements, they have been able to do two things: pay domestic bonds that matured and they

have successfully done some financial engineering to pay some energy sector debts to keep our lights on. My question is, Mr Speaker, has the President any budget? This is the budget and revenues he inherited that he has used for this purpose. The same Government he is condemning.

Mr Speaker, he has today told us that we have 2.2 million Ghanaians unemployed. But what he has forgotten is that in his Administration, in less than 100 days, all we hear is “sack them”. Dismissal!

[Some Hon Members of the Minority Side chanted “sack them!”]

Osahen Afenyo-Markin: Mr Speaker, on the streets of Accra today, the youth of the country are saying that Mahama *baako*, termination *bebre*. We are happy to hear from the President that he is going to launch the *Nkoko Nketenket* Programme—*[Hear! Hear!]*—We are happy to hear this, but we are curious because only yesterday, we heard of *akonfem*—*[Laughter]* —*[Uproar]*

Mr Speaker, the President talked about the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP), and in his submission on the GSFP and the status of it, he said that they are now feeding the children well. What he did not say was that at the time he assumed office, the previous Government had paid every single one of the caterers. What he failed to tell Ghanaians was that President John Agyekum Kufuor, who is seated in this

Chamber, was the one who initiated the School Feeding Programme. He did not acknowledge him.

Mr Speaker, what are we seeing in this Government? The same old stock; there is nothing new. There is nothing like transformation. Only yesterday, the youth of the NDC besieged the headquarters of the NDC demanding for jobs. Where are the jobs?

Mr Speaker, today, we are seeing the 183 or so filling this Chamber, plus independent MPs who have caucused with the NDC. Today, this House is full, but Mr President must know that the Majority is frustrated; they do not come to the Chamber because there are no jobs for them—*[Uproar]*—

The Speaker: Hon Members, please.

Hon Minority Leader, you have one more minute—*[Uproar]*

Osahen Afenyo-Markin: Mr Speaker, when Akufo-Addo was here for his last Message on the State of the Nation, he had patience for Emmanuel Armah-Kofi Buah to speak. Mr Speaker, there must be patience for the Minority Side; I cannot be limited, let me finish.

1.01 p.m.

Mr Speaker, what we have heard today fails to acknowledge the strides made in the last eight years. The President failed to acknowledge that he came to meet a peaceful and a stable country. Two, the President failed to tell

us that he came to meet a public and civil service that the Government, in spite of all challenges, was able to pay consistently. Mr Speaker, the President failed to tell us that in spite of all the crises, consistently, the Akufo-Addo Government was able to increase wages, and the minimum we did was 11 per cent as compared to his 10 per cent.

The Speaker: Hon Minority Leader, your time is up. [*Uproar*]

Osahen Afenyo-Markin: Mr Speaker, to conclude—

The Speaker: Hon Members, my attention has been drawn to the presence of more distinguished members and I want to draw your attention to them. Hon Members, we have with us in the Chamber, Hon Bernard Anbataayela Mornah, the People's National Convention (PNC) presidential candidate for 2024.

[Some Members from the Minority Side chanted a portion of the national anthem— “And help us to resist oppressor’s rule with all our will and might forever more”]

Also, Hon Members, we have the All People's Congress (APC) presidential candidate, Mr Hassan Abdulai Ayariga. We also have the national chairman of the PNC, Mr Asaki Samson Awingobit, and we have the PNC vice presidential candidate in the person of Madam Joycelyn Akorfa Ochlich-Dotse. [*Pause*]

Hon Members, the Motion for adjournment has been moved and seconded.

Question put and Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The House was accordingly adjourned at 1.05 p.m. till Friday 28th February, 2025, at 10.00 a.m.

Editor's Note

This *Official Report* was corrected by the House on 13th March, 2025 as follows:

- a) Column 8, paragraph 1, last line “Kufour” was corrected to “Kufuor”
- b) Column 8, paragraph 3, line 5, “Frimpong and Kodua” was transposed to “Kodua Frimpong”
- c) Column 7, paragraph 5, line 1 “the” before “his” was deleted.