



STATE
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NATION
ADDRESS

FEBRUARY, 26 2015

STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

Presented by

H.E. JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA,

President of the Republic of Ghana &
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces

At the Third Session of the Sixth Parliament
of the 4th Republic on Thursday February 26, 2015.

Rt. Hon. Speaker
Your Excellency, the Vice President
Your Ladyship, the Chief Justice
Honourable Members of Parliament

I feel honoured to stand once again before this August house, pursuant to Article 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, to present to you a message on the State of the Nation.

Mr. Speaker,

As I enter the 3rd year of my first term in office, I give praise to the Almighty God for continuing to preserve and pour his bountiful favour on our nation. I also express my endless thanks to the people of Ghana for giving me the opportunity to serve. This is a sacred honour and trust that I swore in my oath as President, to always uphold.

Next week will mark our country's 58th anniversary as an independent nation. The story of our nation, since its proclamation at the stroke of midnight 6th March 1957, by our nation's founder, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, is a story of resilience. That night, the euphoria in the air was palpable. And as Dr. Nkrumah uttered those famous words, "At long last the battle is ended, and thus our beloved country Ghana, is free forever", our fathers and mothers faced the future with joy and excitement.

Some of us were not born yet but we are able to capture the mood of the moment both through the narrations given us by our elders and in the history books we have studied growing up. As Nkrumah said, "seek ye first the political kingdom, and all other things shall be added unto thee". All other things meant prosperity, a quality life, happiness and even wealth.

Fifty-eight long years later, we know that the reality of life is one of challenges. We have been in the pits together, at times in the past when our neighbours described us as the nation where people queued for toilet paper. In the early 80s hunger stalked our land and we were compelled to take raw kenkey home to cook ourselves because we were afraid we would lose out if we allowed the seller to cook it.

We have also celebrated many victories together.

The story of Ghana is illustrated by a quote of the great African, Nelson Mandela. He said, "the greatest glory of living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."

We have gone through many challenges as a nation, but our defining spirit as Ghanaians is that we have picked ourselves up each time we have fallen and continued to walk on. In our journey towards creating a prosperous and dignified life for our people, we may find ourselves sometimes in the wilderness. We may not agree on the destination. There are many who would complain of the hardships on this journey.

There are even others who would suggest that life in bondage was far better. But as long as we believe, work together and hold on to our faith, we would create the country of prosperity that our people deserve. Nobody ever said it would be easy! And as has been said, we climb

the greatest hill only to realize that there are many more hills to climb. Even the centuries old, most advanced nations continue to climb their own hills. Challenges would come our way, but believing in ourselves and working together, we shall overcome them.

We have climbed many hills together and we shall conquer many more in our journey of progress.

Mr. Speaker,

As I present this State of the Nation Address, our nation is confronted with one of such hill; the challenge of providing adequate electricity to power industry, business and for residential consumption. The effects and frustrations posed by the power deficit are clearly felt in our work places, our homes, schools and hospitals. The storage of food, academic activity, and artisans such as barbers, hairdressers, welders, and health care providers are all feeling the pinch of the power shortage.

Big businesses and industries are also suffering and threatening to lay off workers. As leader of this nation by the grace of God, I more than anyone else understand the adverse impact of this energy shortfall on the growth of our economy.

We have been here before. In 1983, 1998 and 2006/7 we suffered a similar occurrence. In the past what we have done has been to manage the situation. I do not intend to manage the situation as has been done in the past. I intend to fix it! I owe it to the Ghanaian people. I, John Dramani Mahama, will fix this energy challenge.

Perhaps the impact of the energy shortage is felt much greater today not only because of the growth of our economy, but also because many more people have access to electricity than in the past. Access to electricity in Ghana is 76% and ranked 2nd only to South Africa in sub-Saharan Africa.

Furthermore changes in the architectural design of many homes and offices, has resulted in a situation which requires the use of more air-conditioning to maintain a bearable temperature through most times of the year. Our rapidly growing population is also driving increasing demand for power supply. All these together with other structural and generational issues have contributed to an electricity supply gap that has oscillated between 300 and 600 MW. The lessons we must learn from all this is to plan better for the future.

Firstly, our demand for power is estimated to be growing in excess of 10% per annum. It means that conservatively, we would have to double our electricity supply capacity every 8 years if we are to keep up with demand.

Following power purchase agreements entered into with several Independent Power Producers (IPPs) and plants that VRA is currently working on, we expect, starting from this year and over the next 5 years to inject 3,665 MW of power into our power transmission grid. The breakdown is as follows:

Sunon Asogli (Phase II)	-	360MW
Sunon Asogli (Coal fired)	-	750MW
CenPower	-	350MW

Jacobsen	-	360MW
Amandi	-	240MW
GE	-	1000MW
VRA (T4)	-	185MW
VRA (KTPP)	-	220MW

Additionally, completion of planned steam generation units on some current single cycle plants, namely TT1, CENIT and KTPP would add another 330 MW to our generation. When this planned addition of 3,800 MW to our generation is realized, it will assure our energy security into the future.

Secondly, since 1965, we have relied principally on Hydro sources for our power supply. Our base load generation must now be shifted from hydro to thermal. Hydropower must become supplementary. In the last 2 years, because of low rainfall in the catchment area of the Volta, the level of the Akosombo reservoir has fallen to a critical level.

Challenges with thermal generation, has also meant that we have had to run our hydro plants at nearly full capacity thereby drawing down more water from the lake. The result is that today, Akosombo with installed capacity of 1,020 MW is currently supplying only at about 50%. The Kpong hydro power station has installed capacity of 160 MW and is currently operating at about 70%. The 400 MW Bui hydro plant is at about 58% during our peak consumption period.

Thirdly, if we are to achieve energy security into the future, we must complete the reform of our power sector. The new Ministry of power is working urgently on proposals to restructure the power sector beginning with the Volta River Authority (VRA) and the Bui Power Authority (BPA). The intention would be to bring the management of our hydro plants under one entity.

This will lead to a consolidation of our thermal resources in partnership with pension fund managers like SSNIT and other institutional investors. I believe this will allow for focus and specialization in these 2 critical power sectors of hydro and thermal. If our plans for energy security are to succeed, radical restructuring of the downstream distribution sector must occur.

Under the new Millennium Challenge Compact we have an opportunity to review, restructure and totally refocus the operations of, especially, the ECG. I can guarantee to Ghanaians that we will transform the ECG into what we will all come to call a truly customer-responsive, efficient and profitable organization. Admittedly, part of ECG's problems is the creation of Government institutions that believe that they are entitled to use power without paying for it.

That was possible in the days of cheap power from Akosombo. Today, with the entry of the private sector and IPPs into the upstream generating sector, government cannot continue to subsidize power.

In November last year, I carved out a new Ministry of Power from the former Ministry of Energy and Petroleum. This was meant to give a sharper focus and effort to the resolution of the present energy shortfall. As an immediate measure to resolve the current crisis, I have

authorized the Ministry of Power to procure and feed into the system, 1,000MW of emergency power. Guarantees are currently being agreed for the following:

Karpower ship (Turkey)	450MW
APR (UAE)	250MW
GE	300MW

The Ministry of Power estimates that this emergency power can be rolled out in months to bring relief to the system while the more permanent plants mentioned previously are being worked on. I would hold the Minister to his publicly stated commitment to resolve the electricity supply deficit by the end of this year.

Mr. Speaker,

The prospects of gas fired thermal generation look very bright. The Ghana Gas Plant at Atuabo is going through its commissioning phase and is currently supplying about 60 mscf of gas to the Aboadze enclave of thermal plants. As VRA and partners put their thermal plants in Aboadze in a better shape to take up more of the gas, the Atuabo Gas Plant would rump up production to 120 mscf. We are also retrieving large quantities of LPG and other valuable liquids as by-products of gas production.

Gas supplies are expected to rise in 2016 when production begins in the TEN field. Just 3weeks ago I witnessed the sign of an agreement to begin work on the ENI/Vitol Sankofa field into operation. This investment is worth \$7 billion and is reportedly the single biggest investment signed in recent history. The operationalization of TEN and Sankofa will bring Ghana's gas production to above 300 mscf daily.

Mr. Speaker,

As part of our commitment to fully incorporate renewable energy into our supply mix, a number of solar, wind, tidal wave and biomass projects are being pursued. The African Plantations Limited project under which thousands of hectares of eucalyptus trees are being planted as fuel would eventually generate one hundred and twenty megawatts of power. It will also provide employment opportunities for our farmers and technician.

We would be rolling out this year, new initiatives on solar energy. A prepaid solar meter scheme that would enable residents of remote off-grid communities own and enjoy solar lighting would be launched as a private sector activity facilitated by government. We are also working on a proposal that would make solar power available for micro enterprises operated by barbers, hairdressers, dressmakers and other such micro entrepreneurs whose businesses have been hit by the present power challenges.

The solution will also be available for residential consumers. We estimate that 200,000 rooftop solar systems will save the country about 200MW of power daily. It is proposed to fund this with an adjustment of the Energy Fund Levy on Petroleum Products from Gp0.05 to Gp1.0, part of which will be used to establish the Renewable Energy Fund. We also propose to introduce an ancillary service charge of Gp1.0 per kWh of electricity transmitted, part of which will be used to support the solar photovoltaic system.

Mr. Speaker,

While we work on the generation side we must also look at the issue of power conservation. By following the simple tips published by the Energy Commission and the PURC, we can lower our electricity bills significantly.

I commend the Energy Commission for the successful start of the Refrigerator Energy Efficiency Project under which the Commission is replacing old refrigerators with new energy efficient ones for households at a discount. In Ghana, on average, refrigerators consume more than one thousand, two hundred (1,200) kWh/year. If you consider that almost 30% of households in Ghana have a minimum of two refrigerators, then a lot of energy can be saved.

We have also started the conversion of CFL bulbs to LED bulbs. In many areas, solar powered LED street lights have been installed. This has the potential to reduce consumption of power by lighted bulbs by up to 60%. In addition, the LED bulbs last longer, in some cases up to 15 years.

AGENDA FOR TRANSFORMATION

Mr. Speaker,

The agenda to transform the structure of the economy and position it as an export-driven rather than an import-focused economy is on course. United as one people and with determined commitment to its attainment, we shall transform the structure of this economy.

As President, I am required by the provisions of Article 36, Clause 5 of our Constitution to present to Parliament, a Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies, including agricultural and industrial programmes at all levels and in all regions of Ghana within two years of assuming office. I have accordingly submitted to the 6th Parliament of the 4th Republic of Ghana, The Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies 2014-2020, An Agenda for Transformation.

Mr. Speaker,

The Programme forms the core of my vision to transform, and covers a broad range of issues in the areas of social and economic development, infrastructure and institutional development. It also highlights a number of priority programmes and initiatives that Government will be pursuing in the short to medium term. I look forward, Mr. Speaker, to the debate of the Programme, which will feed into the preparation of a long-term national development plan by the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC).

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Mr. Speaker,

Education remains the surest path to victory over ignorance, poverty and inequality. This is self-evident in the bold initiatives we continue to take to improve access, affordability, quality and relevance at all levels.

BASIC EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker,

A decade and a half into the new millennium, we are providing, through our Basic Education Programme, equitable access to good quality, child-friendly Universal Basic Education. Through improvements in infrastructure and quality of teaching, provision of teaching and learning materials, management and supervision of schools, quality and access to basic education is being enhanced.

To provide opportunities for those who are unsuccessful in their Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), we have for the first time, introduced a re-sit policy at the basic education level. The policy was given true meaning when one thousand one hundred and eighty-one (1,181) candidates last week had the chance to re-sit their BECE as private candidates. These are persons who, but for this golden opportunity, would have otherwise had their education terminated at the JHS level.

Mr. Speaker,

The story of a 46-year-old prisoner, Alexander Dorbaareh, and four other inmates who took part in the re-sit in Wa in the Upper West Region reflects how golden and important the re-sit policy is. The story of Alex Dorbaareh is similar to that of many others, aged between 16 and 56 years, who took advantage of this unique opportunity to better their grades with the hope of furthering their education.

As a nation, we must and we are creating the necessary opportunities for all children of school going age to have access to quality education. We will continue to deliver social intervention programmes that will sustain access and reduce the cost of education to parents. This year, we will start with the distribution of ten thousand (10,000) locally produced made-in-Ghana school sandals to pupils in selected deprived districts.

- Six million (6,000,000) textbooks,
- Five hundred thousand (500,000) pieces of school uniforms,
- Fifteen million (15,000,000) exercise books, and
- Thirty thousand (30,000) computers will also be distributed to schools across the country.

I am convinced we have enough capacity locally to print this material. I have asked the Minister for Education to ensure that domestic printing houses are involved in fulfilling this huge order.

Mr. Speaker,

There are more children in school now than ever before. At the close of the 2013/14 academic year, over 5.4 million children were enrolled at the basic education level. This compares to a total enrolment figure of 4.6 million in the 2008/2009 academic year.

To consolidate our attainment of Universal Basic Education, twenty-four thousand, one hundred and seventeen (24,117) out-of-school children were enrolled into school under the Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programme, which began in 2014. Through this, more of our rural poor were offered opportunities to be educated in 4 regions- Northern, Upper East, Upper West and Brong Ahafo. One hundred thousand (100,000) out-of-school children are being recruited this year to expand the programme to cover the remaining six regions.

Mr. Speaker,

Our focus on quality education requires the enhancement of teaching skills. To that end, about one hundred and sixty thousand (160,000) teachers, representing 56% of teachers at the basic education level received career development training. Another one thousand (1,000) teachers have also undergone In-Service Training in line with the objective of improving the teaching of mathematics and science. We shall continue with our interventions to improve the teaching and learning of Mathematics and Science across the country.

We envisage that this will help us meet the target of 60:40 in favour of the sciences as against humanities at the tertiary level. This is in line with our national development objectives.

Mr. Speaker,

As this House is aware, gender parity at the basic level remains a major priority in our education policy. We have attained a 1:1 Gender parity ratio. Over ninety-two thousand (92,000) girls have benefitted from the take-home ration programme in the Upper East, Upper West and Northern Regions.

Under the Global Partnership for Education Programme, fifty-five thousand (55,000) girls in Junior High School will also receive scholarships, school uniforms, sandals, bags and stationery.

I am pleased to report, **Mr. Speaker**, that the school shift system, through which pupils run shifts due to lack of adequate classrooms, has now been eliminated in many of our districts. In Wa, Sunyani Municipal, Tarkwa, Dansoman, Krachi Ntsumuru in the Volta Region and many other areas, school children can no longer skip school to play truant hiding behind the excuse of the shift system.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker,

Enrolment at the second cycle level has increased by about 10% between 2013 and 2014. This is the direct result of the general improvement in teaching and learning and provision of critical infrastructure. More than a 1000 different projects, ranging from dormitories, classrooms, dining halls, auditoriums and administration blocks have been executed in secondary schools across the country.

In fulfillment of my vision to expand access to quality education, construction work is ongoing on the initial 73 Community Day Senior High Schools. Work will begin this year in 50 other locations. This year, we shall also commence the implementation of a number of interventions under a US\$156 million Secondary Education Improvement Programme. The interventions include:

- Improving facilities and quality of education in 125 existing Secondary Schools
- Providing ten thousand, four hundred (10,400) needy students with scholarships
- Building the capacity of six thousand, five hundred (6,500) Mathematics, Science and ICT Teachers and
- Providing leadership training for heads of second cycle schools

Mr. Speaker,

The last phase of our Science Resource Centre project, which will benefit one hundred (100) Senior High Schools will commence this year.

As I announced in my last State of the Nation Address, Government will begin the implementation of the Progressively Free Secondary Education Programme at the start of the 2015/2016 academic year in September. This will benefit an estimated three hundred and sixty-seven thousand, five hundred and sixty-five (367,565) day students.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of this August House have approved adequate financing for this programme in the 2015 budget.

Mr. Speaker,

My resolve to expand access, improve quality and to ensure affordability was accentuated when we analysed the results of the WASSCE over the years. Between 2006, when the WASSCE began, and 2014, the best performance indexed on students who attained grades A1 to C6 was in the year 2012. The worst performance was recorded in 2007.

In 2012, 31.19% of the students attained grades A1-C6. In the worst performing year, 2007 only 10.58% made grades A1-C6. This is followed closely by 12.95% in 2008. This shows progress. These statistics demonstrate modest gains but there is more room for improvement. I will continue to work with all stakeholders to achieve measurable improvements in the results over the next few years. I call on all parents and opinion leaders to join me to ensure that our students commit much more time, than ever before to their studies.

TERTIARY

Mr. Speaker,

Our policy thrust at the tertiary education level remains the maintenance of high standards, achieving equity and ensuring relevance within the context of producing high caliber manpower able to fit into the world of work and lead our transformation agenda. In the 2013/2014 academic year, enrolment into Universities increased by 7.1%, 3.4% for Polytechnics and 63.8% at the Colleges of Education.

Work on the main campus of the University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS), located at Sokode Lokoe near Ho is almost complete. The University has also admitted its first batch of medical students. At the University of Energy and National Resources, the first batch of agriculture students has been admitted to the Dormaa campus. Expansion works will continue at the main campus in Sunyani.

In line with our policy to establish a public university in each region, Government has presented to parliament, a bill for the establishment of a University for Environment and Sustainable Development in the Eastern Region. Preparatory works for the construction of a main campus for the University will commence this year.

Mr. Speaker,

I have received an interim report on the possible conversion of some campuses of the University for Development Studies (UDS) into autonomous institutions. Further to that, Government will, explore the processes towards converting the Wa and Navrongo Campuses of the UDS into autonomous Universities in the Upper West and Upper East Regions.

Mr. Speaker,

I am impressed with the progress of work on two historic projects- a new office complex for the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences and a new Secretariat for the Association of African Universities.

Government is also working towards the vision to improve access to quality education at the tertiary level, through the deployment of ICT in distance learning. In this regard, a US\$37.5 million Distance Education ICT facility has been established, linking all the 10 regional distance education centres of the University of Ghana.

The facility includes three thousand (3,000) Internet-ready tablets for students, video conferencing facilities and smart lecture theatres.

Mr. Speaker,

In my address last year, I called for support from Honourable Members and the Academic fraternity for our decision to establish a National Research Fund. A draft bill for the establishment of the fund is currently undergoing stakeholders' consultation and review. We need the cooperation of all stakeholders to operationalize the fund.

Work on the conversion of Polytechnics to Technical Universities will progress with the expected passage of the Technical Universities Bill this year. Conversion of each Polytechnic will be assessed based on equipment, faculty and strong collaboration with industry. The take-off date is September 2016. In preparation for the conversion, Government will scale up our interventions in the nation's Polytechnics, including a rigorous staff development programme to meet our policy objectives. I am encouraged by the overwhelming endorsement of the conversion by faculty, students, industry and alumni of the Polytechnics.

Mr. Speaker,

Under the Skills Development Fund of the COTVET, which is developing skills and promoting technical and vocational training, over GH¢150 million in grants have been provided to five hundred and ten (510) grantees made up of institutions, businesses and associations. Some of the beneficiaries are the KNUST Jewellery Design and Technology Centre, Progressive Electronic Technicians Association of Ghana, Ghana National Association of Garages, Ghana National Association of Poultry Farmers and the Ghana Association of Electrical Contractors.

This year, grants totaling GH¢65million have been earmarked to be disbursed to an estimated 100 private sector firms. Through these interventions, technical and vocational education graduates are being offered expanded opportunities to translate their knowledge and skills into the creation of more jobs while at the same time transferring their skills to others.

Mr. Speaker,

The implementation of these vital programmes and projects have been prioritized and adequately budgeted for. Indeed the 2015 budget allocates to the education sector about 6.7 billion Ghana Cedis.

HEALTH

Mr. Speaker,

And still talking about budgetary allocations, we will this year spend over 3 billion Ghana Cedis on the health sector. This huge allocation confirms our view that a good economy resides in the health of our people. In the last few years, Government has pumped billions of Ghana Cedis into the provision of modern hospitals and the upgrading of facilities to facilitate speedy healthcare delivery. There are currently several major hospital projects under construction, which when completed will collectively deliver approximately six thousand (6,000) new hospital beds to facilitate access to improved health care by 2017.

The hospitals include:

1. A 617-bed University of Ghana Teaching Hospital
2. The 420-bed Ridge Hospital Expansion Project
3. A 104-bed Police Hospital Project
4. The 500-bed Military Hospital Project in Kumasi
5. The Second phase of the Tamale Teaching Hospital Expansion Project which will add another 400 beds to the existing 400 beds
6. A 160-bed Upper West Regional Hospital
7. A 130-bed Maritime Hospital, Tema
8. The 295-bed Bolgatanga Regional Hospital

Mr. Speaker,

Additionally, work is at various stages of completion on 13 district hospitals to bring health services closer to our people. These include 120-bed facilities at Dodowa, Fomena, Kumawu, Abetifi, Garu-Tempene, Sekondi and in Takoradi where the old European hospital is being refurbished. We are also constructing 60-bed hospitals at Tapa, Nsawkaw, Konongo, Madina, Salaga and Twifo-Praso.

We have also completed and commissioned for use, three district hospitals in Edjumako, Essam and Zabzugu, and 19 Health Centres at the following locations- Amasaman, Doffor, Pokukrom, New Jejeti, Paakro, Gwollu, Funsu, Sang, Northern Buipe, Manso Nkwanta, Abuakwa, Mase Sosekpe, Kedzi, Adamso, Kayoro, Timonde, Bonsu Nkwanta and Dadieso.

This year, we shall commence the construction of 15 polyclinics, 10 in the Central Region. These will be located at Besease, Gomoa Dawurampong, Biriwa, Etsii Sunkwa and Esikuma Gyamera. The rest are Agona Duakwa, Bimpong Akunfude, Ekumfi Naakwa, Twifo Atimokwa and Gomoa Postin. The remaining 5 polyclinics to be constructed in the Greater Accra Region will be located at Adentan, Ashiaman, Bortianor, Oduman and Sege.

Mr. Speaker,

The provision of modern diagnostic and treatment equipment under the National Medical Equipment Replacement Programme has been expanded to cover 150 hospitals across the country.

All Teaching Hospitals, all Regional Hospitals, 125 District Hospitals, 14 Health Centers and 8 mobile clinics have benefited from the programme. The equipment received by the institutions vary from new Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), Computerized Tomography (CT) Scan, Fluoroscopy, X-ray and Digital Mammography machines, Oxygen Plants, and Ambulances.

Under this programme, the nation's foremost teaching hospital at Korle Bu, the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital received significant resources to respectively replace and rehabilitate obsolete equipment and theatres.

Mr Speaker,

The Pediatric Surgery Theatre, which remained closed for almost eight years, the General Surgery Theatre, the Neo-natal Intensive Care and the Babies' Units have all been refurbished and currently operational.

The St. Joseph Hospital in Nkwanta, the Adidome Hospital, the Dodo Pepesu Hospital and the Jasikan Government Hospital, all in the Volta Region have also benefitted from the National Medical Equipment Replacement Programme.

Mr. Speaker,

Outpatient utilization of the National Health Insurance Scheme went up to twenty- seven million, four hundred thousand (27.4 million) in 2014. That is a sure sign of the benefits of the Scheme to many of our citizenry.

We will strengthen the fraud detection capacity of the scheme in order to eliminate detect and sanction facilities and personnel who take advantage of the system. This week, a portion of outstanding claims is being disbursed to health providers. Government will work to review the scheme to ensure its sustainability.

Mr. Speaker,

In January this year, the nation's health delivery effort was severely threatened by a fire outbreak at the Central Medical Stores, which resulted in the loss of medicines and equipment estimated at GH¢356 million. The cause of the fire is currently under investigation. Short-term measures have been put in place to mitigate the impact of the fire including the ordering of very critical medicines to mitigate any risk of widespread shortages. The Ministry of Health is reviewing the Health Sector Supply Chain Master Plan with a view to improving the system of procurement.

The new Health Commodity Supply Chain system will undertake procurements through framework contracts and use the economies of scale so derived to drive down prices to impact positively on health commodity security and the sustainability of the NHIS. This improved supply chain would also cover all other health facilities including the Central Pharmacy of the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital.

We have made significant progress in reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS and are on track to achieve virtual elimination of mother to child transmission. We are also working with local pharmaceutical companies to expand domestic supply of anti-retroviral drugs.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Mr. Speaker,

As part of our commitment to the protection of the vulnerable, over ten thousand (10,000) senior citizens are being provided free NHIS subscription in the Greater Accra, Central and Eastern regions. Our senior citizens in communities such as La, Chorkor, Akoto Lante, Madina, Teshie, Ashaiman, Nima and Nungua are benefitting from this package, and we will be extending the exercise to other parts of the country.

Very often orphans and abandoned children find themselves in situations that leave them homeless and vulnerable to the activities of social miscreants. **Mr. Speaker,** This is unacceptable, and in line with our social protection policy, eight hundred (800) orphans have been removed from previously inhumane environments and provided with shelter and care. Another one thousand, four hundred (1,400) caregivers were trained in all regions to support our social welfare programmes.

To protect abandoned children and orphans against exploitation and maltreatment, 62 orphanages whose operations fell below accepted standards have been closed down.

Mr. Speaker,

In fulfillment of our manifesto promise, we have launched the Eban Elderly Welfare Card, a priority identity card that enables our senior citizens, 65 years and above, to travel at half fare on Metro Mass Transit buses across the country. The Eban card also allows our aged priority access to banks, hospitals among others. So far one thousand, two hundred (1,200) senior citizens have been registered and received their Eban cards and are enjoying the benefits.

This year, 150,000 of the poorest households are to benefit from the LEAP programme.

Mr. Speaker,

As we work to meet the needs of people who live with disabilities through insistence on the provision of access to new and existing infrastructure, the provision of teaching and learning aids among others, Government is in discussions with the leadership of the Federation for Persons with Disability to roll out this year, a new and suitable Youth Employment Model for five thousand (5000) persons with disability.

SPORTS

Mr. Speaker,

Government will this year, put a desirable focus on other sporting disciplines other than football, in order to contribute to their growth and the winning of more international medals and competitions.

In athletics for example, consistent planning and the personal motivation of our young athletes earned Ghana our first Olympic Gold Medal in any sport, at any level. 17-year old Martha Bissah from Kumasi who was among 12 other athletes, who won medals at the African Championships in Morocco, went on to the Youth Olympic in China and snatched the gold medal. Young Martha and her family were filled with joy and energy when I hosted them at the Flagstaff House last year.

Mr. Speaker,

I agree with managers of our lesser-known sports that we can win more international medals. Accordingly, Martha will be afforded an opportunity to join other young athletes on scholarship in US Colleges where she can develop into senior level athletics. Government will also partner with corporate Ghana to support the programmes of the various sporting associations this year including the Swimming Association, which is producing very brilliant and fast swimmers winning medals in international competitions.

Mr. Speaker,

I wish to once again congratulate the senior national team, the Black Stars for their performance at the 2015 Africa Cup of Nations Tournament. Many Ghanaians lost hope in the Black Stars ahead of the tournament in Equatorial Guinea. They gathered themselves together, rose from the ashes of Brazil 2014 and proved themselves.

It is not the first silver medal for the Black Stars, but the developments from Brazil is what changed the dynamics. Let me urge the Ghana Football Association to put a lot more focus on the other national teams just like it does for the senior team, in order to adequately prepare them for their international competitions as well. Also, the seeming total neglect of the local football league is a matter of concern to all. I wish to urge the FA to turn its attention to improving the quality of the local league and work towards making it attractive, exciting and worth following.

On the development of sporting infrastructure, work is progressing speedily on the Cape Coast Stadium and is expected to be completed this year.

BUILDING A STRONG AND RESILIENT ECONOMY

Mr. Speaker,

A year ago, I shared with this august House my vision to transform the structure of the Ghanaian economy- transformation through diversification, value addition to our primary products, the promotion and patronage of locally manufactured goods and services. This is intended to make us self-reliant and position the country as an export-led economy to create decent jobs.

The economic benefits of a diversified and transformed economy are enormous. As a people we must make a conscious effort to eat what we grow, and add value to our primary raw materials. This will support a stable economy and job creation, improved GDP per capita and enhanced standards of living for the people.

Mr. Speaker,

The initiatives introduced last have already started bearing fruit. In the area of rice cultivation, for example, local production increased by 60%. According to the latest statistics from the Bank of Ghana, our rice import bill fell by a whopping 41 percent, reducing from US\$467.2 million in 2013 to US\$275.1 million in 2014.

On my fraternal visits as ECOWAS Chair to our sister countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, at the height of the Ebola crisis, I donated 100 tons of food products to the 3 countries. Prominent among these products was a long-grain Made in Ghana rice brand called "Pride" – a clear evidence of the pride I felt in presenting our own homegrown variety to our neighbours in their time of difficulty. It is expected that as the Transformation Agenda gains traction, we would be able to reduce our import bill on other commodities and indeed be able to export some of the surplus.

Mr. Speaker,

Two weeks ago, I constituted a task force chaired by a former Deputy Governor of the Bank of Ghana to work on the modalities for the establishment of a Ghana Export and Import (EXIM) Bank that will consolidate all past efforts and become the key engine of the development of Ghana's exports. The Ghana EXIM Bank will act as an intermediary between government and exporters, and assist our exporters to compete internationally by providing insurance and finance facilities to support their overseas contracts.

Mr. Speaker,

In Komenda, in the Central Region, a new sugar factory is under construction. When completed, we will be reducing significantly, the over US\$300 million we spend annually on sugar imports. We will also be able to support local industries, such as beverage and ice cream manufacturers, who require large amounts of sugar for their products. Ghana imports, on average, three hundred and seventy-five thousand (375,000) metric tons of sugar annually.

In addition to the Komenda factory, discussions have been concluded for another sugar estate and factory in the Northern Region. Put together, the two plants should be able to reduce by more than 80% the import of sugar in the coming years. The establishment of these sugar plants will also create employment opportunities, especially for the youth, in their host communities. The Komenda Sugar Factory alone will create seven thousand, three hundred (7,300) direct and indirect jobs in addition to the savings on foreign exchange.

Mr. Speaker,

The poultry industry is one of the sub-sectors receiving major government attention and benefiting from a policy to invest in strategic sectors to produce locally some of the products on which we are currently expending a huge amount of foreign exchange. One year on, we have launched a 20 million Broiler Project with a target to reduce the importation of poultry by 40% by the end of next year, 2016 and save this economy about US\$150 million. Indeed latest statistics show that we have achieved a drop of 30% in poultry imports from \$208.7 million to \$149 million.

Our poultry farmers are already reaping the benefits associated with the increased demand for their products on the domestic market as a result of this policy. The financial support to poultry farmers from the Export Development and Agricultural Investment Fund is helping

them re-organize their businesses and produce to meet local demand. This year, an additional 200 poultry farmers will receive financial support as part of the broiler project.

Mr. Speaker,

Government has also extended support of GH¢51 million, to a number of local pharmaceutical companies to expand their operations, retool their factories and obtain critical certification to enable them meet international export standards. My working visits to Ernest Chemist and Tobinco Pharmaceuticals reaffirmed my belief in what Ghanaian industries can do when given the needed support. I am proud of the dominant role of indigenous Ghanaian entrepreneurs in this particular sector of industry. This healthy partnership with our pharmaceutical companies, including Dannex and DanAdams, will continue and will be extended to other sectors to generate more decent work for the youth of Ghana.

Mr. Speaker,

These successes have been attained within the context of a transition to a lower middle-income country status and its attendant challenges, which include dwindling access to grants and concessionary financing from our development partners, and a growing demand for essential social services, by a growing and affluent middle class.

Notwithstanding the recent macroeconomic challenges, investor confidence in Ghana continues to grow as a result of measures introduced to stabilize the economy. Last year, inflows from foreign direct investment stood at US\$3.57 billion from 184 projects.

The oversubscription of the 2014 US\$1billion Eurobond as well as the US\$1.7billion syndicated loan for cocoa purchases is a further testimony of investor confidence in our economy. Our subsequent market activities will target the development of infrastructure and refinancing of the 2007 Eurobond.

The US\$7 billion agreement for the development of the Sankofa field is easily the single largest investment made in our petroleum sector.

SECURING OUR BRIGHT MEDIUM TERM PROSPECTS

Mr. Speaker,

In order to achieve policy certainty and attain broad support for our Home Grown Economic Policies, we decided in August 2014 to open discussions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a three year Extended Credit Facility programme. As I address you this morning negotiations are being concluded with an IMF mission team here in Accra and later this afternoon I expect an announcement of a positive outcome of these discussions.

We have come this far as a result of the very fruitful stakeholder consultations during the National Economic Forum held at Senchi, in the Eastern Region, in May of 2014. This forum gave valuable input into government's fiscal consolidation policy which proved very useful in our negotiations with the IMF.

I wish to express the nation's gratitude to all those who made the Forum possible. Among many others may I express the nation's gratitude to Her Ladyship the Chief Justice, former President Jerry John Rawlings, Secretary General of the TUC, President of the Association of

Ghana Industries, Mr. Kwame Pianim, Dr. Kwesi Botchwey, Dr. Patrick Awuah, and the late Sir Engineer Paul Victor Obeng, who regrettably passed on only a day after the Senchi consensus was reached. May his soul rest in peace.

I also wish to commend the members of my Presidential Advisory Group on the Economy (PAGE) Mr. Kwame Pianim, Nana Oye Mansa, Dr. K.Y. Amoako, Dr. Kwesi Botchwey, Governor Kofi Wampah, Seth Terkper and of course my Vice President Kwesi Bekoe Amissah-Arthur. I have really benefitted and continue to benefit from their tireless efforts and invaluable advice.

Mr. Speaker,

May I at this point commend our tripartite partners - Organised Labour and Employers- for the understanding and sacrifice that culminated in an early conclusion of this year's wage negotiations. And in particular for keeping the wage level within budget limits. It demonstrates a commitment by the social partners to work collectively to improve the economy for our common good.

Collaboration with our social partners has seen a decline of the public sector wage bill as a percentage of tax revenues from a high of 73% in 2012 to 49% at end of 2014. We still have some way to go if we are to hit the recommended ECOWAS benchmark of 35%. Meanwhile, the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission is expected to finalise work on the Category 2 and 3 allowances.

Aggressive work is continuing on cleaning the payroll and ridding it of ghosts. Cabinet approved the recommendations of the inter-ministerial sub-committee and would work with the private sector and our development partners to achieve a HRMIS and a pay roll that is decentralized and has integrity.

Cabinet approved additional measures in order to make adjustments to the budget following the dramatic decline in crude oil prices. It is estimated that Ghana stands to lose about \$700 million from oil exports if the price remains at current levels. I have asked the Minister for Finance to engage with you Honourable members on the new measures.

Mr. Speaker,

As we did with the Sankofa (ENI-Vitol) Gas agreement, other critical projects such as the GE Ghana 1000 project will be supported by Partial Risk Guarantees approved by Cabinet and Parliament. The World Bank and the African Development Bank will issue these alternative guarantee instruments.

Mr. Speaker,

Government is working to strengthen the National Pensions Regulatory Authority (NPRA) to give it a greater degree of autonomy and decentralise its operations in the regions. A Strategic Plan for the NPRA will be launched this year. I am confident the unresolved issues such as the Unification and Past Credit and governance structure to manage Tier Two Pensions will be addressed this year to the satisfaction of all parties.

I wish to assure all Pensioners of the safety OF and better investment returns ON their pension funds. I advocate an enhanced relationship of trust with Ghanaian workers, a

partnership and collective action anchored in the national interest. On our part, we pledge to continue to work to achieve the strictest discipline in government expenditure.

In this regard, new initiatives would be rolled out this year to prevent the misuse of fuel, telephone, electricity and water in public establishments.

REAL SECTOR PERFORMANCE – AGRIBUSINESS, TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Mr. Speaker,

In 2014, agriculture, industry and the services sectors continued on the trajectory of positive growth with significant outputs in the fisheries, livestock and the construction sub-sectors. It is worth noting that manufacturing has been identified as a major area where critical attention is needed.

I am as a strategy, positioning Ghana to attract investors in the light industry, who are currently looking for new destinations away from the increasing costly centres of China and other parts of South East Asia.

Mr. Speaker,

To ensure food security and to assure our hardworking farmers of appreciable returns on their investments, government will distribute 180,000 metric tonnes of fertilizer and continue with the agriculture mechanization programme to make available in the districts more than 1,000 tractors and other implements including harvesters, threshers, planters and sprayers for use by farmers. More than GH¢120 million has been made available to the rice, poultry, shea, cashew and other agro-processing sub-sectors to boost production. Out of this, the rice production sub-sector alone received GH¢22 million.

Mr. Speaker,

Over 60% of animal protein in the diets of Ghanaians is fish. Indeed, annual fish consumption in Ghana is about 24kg per person, which is well above the world average of about 16.7kg per person.

Our demand for fish outstrips supply by 50%. Government is determined to bridge the 50% deficit through aquaculture development and the expansion of family fish farming across the entire coast and inland water communities. Government aims to reduce the importation of fish by at least 20% in the short term. Among other measures, Government will, this year, facilitate the acquisition of three thousand (3,000) outboard motors for our fishermen.

Mr. Speaker,

A new fisheries cold store has also been completed in New Takoradi for the storage and preservation of fish. Work is also progressing on the Fish Processing Factory at Elmina. I have asked MASLOC to put together a revolving fund for the benefit our fishmongers along the fishing communities. When I announced a GH¢10 million fund for the Youth Enterprise Support (YES) Initiative, I assured the youth that the Initiative will be administered in a fair and non-partisan manner. Since its launch in August 2014, the Secretariat has received a total of two thousand and forty-eight (2,048) applications.

Mr. Speaker,

Forty-five percent (45%) of the applications are for business start-ups in Agriculture and Agribusiness and 24% to set-up Cottage Industries. Thirty-one percent (31%) of the applications are however focused on the Services sector. This is an indication of the enthusiasm of the youth to take advantage of government's initiative to go into entrepreneurship. The applications are currently been assessed.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me thank this Honourable House for the debate, the amendments and the inputs that went into the passage of the Youth Employment Agency Bill, which is envisaged to employ one hundred thousand (100,000) of our youth. This forms part of Government's efforts to create more jobs for the youth.

COCOA

Mr. Speaker,

The cocoa industry continues to play a pivotal role in our economy. The producer price of cocoa has gone up by 62.74%, i.e. from three thousand, three hundred and ninety-two Ghana Cedis (GH¢3,392.00) per tonne to five thousand, five hundred and twenty Ghana Cedis (GHC 5,520.00) per tonne.

For the 2014/2015 cocoa season, the Ghana Cocoa Board will continue the free fertilizer application (Hi-tech) programme for cocoa farms. The Board is also distributing a total of fifty million (50,000,000) improved cocoa seedlings free of charge to farmers. Ahead of that, it has recruited four thousand (4,000) people in 87 cocoa growing communities who have planted and are nursing the seedlings.

Mr. Speaker,

On the occasion of the second anniversary of my administration last month, I spent the day in the cocoa growing community of Assin Senchem in the Central Region. I was on the farm of a young cocoa farmer, Samuel Torbi, and his enthusiastic young friends who have all taken to cocoa farming. I felt encouraged that there is an emerging young generation of cocoa farmers who will take over from the older generation. I invited Mr. Torbi and his friends to be my guest at this State of the Nation event and I presume he should be in the gallery somewhere.

Mr. Speaker,

I have requested Cocobod to unveil a programme to acquire land to engage more young people in cocoa farming.

Mr. Speaker,

Markets play an important role in the socio-economic development of our people. Markets support our women empowerment agenda, revenue mobilization efforts of the MMDAs and provide direct or indirect employment for a substantial proportion of the active labour force.

Historically, many of our important settlements including Kumasi and Cape Coast owe their rapid expansion to commerce. I am happy to report to the House that reconstruction work

on the new Kotukuraba in Cape Coast and Aboabo in Tamale are progressing steadily. Work on the Ho Central Market is ongoing and construction of the new Kumasi Central Market will begin soon.

Mr. Speaker,

Tourism continues to be a major foreign exchange earner after gold, cocoa and foreign remittances. In 2014 a total of 319,000 direct and indirect jobs were created. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts will continue to promote festivals and events such as the Homowo festival, Emancipation Day, Okwahuman Paragliding, National Chocolate Day among others.

We shall continue to strengthen the linkages between hotels, catering and tourism by building capacity through the Hotel Catering and Tourism Training Institute (HOTCATT).

Through these efforts the Creative Arts industry will be offered enhanced outlets for the industry to flourish. I look forward to an enhanced and mutually beneficial partnership between the creative arts industry and Government in the coming months.

EXPANDING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR GROWTH

Mr. Speaker,

While we continue to build more hospitals and schools, other critical sectors such as water, roads, transport, ICT and Telecommunication sectors continue to engage our attention. Development of key infrastructure is not only for job creation but also for general socio-economic transformation.

It is estimated that Ghana suffers an infrastructural funding gap of about US\$1.5 billion a year. While creating a conducive environment for the private sector to participate in infrastructure development, government in 2014 took a decisive step and started the process for the establishment of a Ghana Infrastructure Investment Fund (GIIF).

The Fund, which is financed by receipts from a VAT levy and contributions from tax, which has a funding mechanism already approved by Parliament, 2.5% of VAT receipts, The GIIF will serve as a vehicle to mobilize resources to scale-up the development of critical infrastructure in the country. It will also help in implementation of a more sustainable debt management strategy, which focuses on viable commercial projects with appreciable return on investment and repayment mechanisms through escrows and debt service accounts.

Mr. Speaker,

With the GIIF, we should reduce the funding gap for infrastructure projects considerably and execute projects needed to help drive our desired growth as a lower middle-income country.

WATER

Mr. Speaker,

We have spent in excess of US\$1.1 billion on the construction of new water systems, and expansion of some existing ones across the country. Water is a basic necessity of life, yet for many decades, vast sections of our people had no access to it, contributing to the spread of water-related diseases. Today, thanks to massive improvements in potable water supply, the World Health Organisation (WHO) after evaluating Ghana last year, revealed that we have successfully eradicated the Guineaworm disease. We are awaiting the appropriate certification to that effect

We have over the last two years reversed significantly the unacceptable hardship many of our women and children, especially, go through in their search for water. Across the length and breadth of the country, various water projects are ongoing and others are at various stages of completion. At the end of this year, 2015, we will be covering 76% of the entire country, both rural and urban areas with good drinking water.

This is in fulfillment of the prescriptions of the National Water Policy and the work programme of the 2012 Manifesto of the NDC, which seeks to achieve 100% water coverage for our people by 2025.

Mr. Speaker,

In fulfillment of the pledge I made during my address last year to complete and deliver a number of major water projects, I am happy to report that on the eve of last year's Christmas, I recently commissioned Kpong Water Expansion Project and opened the valve to commence the flow of 20 million gallons of water to households and businesses in the northeastern part of Accra. An additional 20 million gallons is available and scheduled to start flowing at end of this month to achieve the set daily capacity of the plant, which is 40 million gallons of water per day.

For the over seven hundred thousand (700,000) residents whose taps were running for the first time in almost 2 decades and over, it was a pleasant Christmas Bonus. These residents include those living in Adenta, Adjiriganor, Ashaley Botwe, North, East and West Legon, Madina, Haatso and their environs.

Mr. Speaker,

Last year, in July, we completed work on the Kpong Intake Rehabilitation Project, which is currently contributing 3.3 million gallons of water per day to the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area Water System. Beneficiary communities include Dodowa, Ningo, Prampram all in the Greater Accra Region and the Akuapem Ridge in the Eastern Region.

Still on the water sector, we also completed the Accra-Tema Metropolitan Area Water Supply Project, which has added nine million two hundred thousand (9.2 million) gallons per day to water supply in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area. This has improved water supply to an estimated quarter of a million inhabitants.

Mr. Speaker,

The beneficiary communities include:

1. Michel Camp, Afienya and surrounding areas
2. Ayitepa, Kponguno, Omankope, Doyumu and surrounding areas
3. Bawalashie, Oyibi, Amanfro and surrounding areas

4. Fafraha, Ayikuma, Abokobi, Pantang and surrounding areas
5. Aperade, Adukrom, Awukugua, Dawu and surrounding areas
7. Akropong, Mamfe, Amanokrom, Tutu and surrounding areas
7. New Senchi, Akrade, Senchi and surrounding areas

Mr. Speaker,

We have also introduced into our water production mix, a Desalination Water Project, which is the first ever, desalination plant in this country. The Teshie-Nungua plant is currently supplying 13.2 million gallons of water per day to about half a million people in Teshie, Nungua, the Teshie military barracks, Batsoona, Sakumono and parts of La-Dadekotopon.

Total water supply to the capital, Accra, has therefore increased by more than 65.7 million gallons of water per day. Through these investments we have therefore outstripped the demand for water in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area by 2.7 million gallons per day.

Mr. Speaker,

The vision to end totally the problems of water shortages has not been limited to the urban parts of the country or to Accra alone. New water systems have been completed and commissioned at Anyinam, Kibi, Osenase, Apedwa and Kwabeng. The Asante Mampong Water Supply Project is also now supplying the inhabitants of Damang, Daaho, Basafour, Besease, Kyeremfaso, Krobo, Mpenya, Dadease, Bonkron, Nsuta, and Beposo with water.

The Nsawam Water Supply Project and the Essakyir Water Project have also been completed. From the Upper East and Upper West Regions through Sunyani in the Brong Ahafo Region down to Accra, many more projects are at various stages of completion to bring relief to our people.

Mr. Speaker,

We have already set in motion the processes to meet future demand in view of population growth. Plans are being finalized to undertake the following projects to ensure reliability and sustainability of water supply from 2015 to the year 2030. These include the Kpong Water Supply Expansion Phase 2, Weija Water Supply Expansion and the Asutsuare Water Supply Projects.

Mr. Speaker,

One other critical area of focus for Government is housing. The estimated housing deficit for Ghana is 1.7 million. Projects targeting the middle to lower income bracket and giving them an opportunity to own decent homes are being rolled out.

Largely focused in the towns and cities, include:

- A five thousand (5000) affordable housing project, which is underway at Saglemi in the Ningo District of the Greater Accra Region. The first 200 houses should be ready for occupancy by the close of this year.
- 168 housing units with related infrastructure has been completed and handed over to the security services. Work on an additional three hundred and sixty-eight (368) housing units under the second phase of this project has also started.

- Another five thousand (5,000) affordable housing units, branded 'Nyame Dua estates, also in Kpone, is almost 70% complete.
- We have also made considerable progress towards completing a total of four thousand, seven hundred and twenty (4,720) affordable housing units in five regions of the country. These were started in 2006 in the Greater Accra, Ashanti, Northern, Upper West and Eastern regions.

Mr. Speaker,

To further consolidate the gains, we are developing the following:

- A National Housing Policy
- A Ghana Building Code and Review of Building Regulations
- Legislation on Condominium Properties and the
- Establishment of a Regulatory agency for the Real Estate sector.

ROADS

Mr. Speaker,

We are working on many road projects to open up the country to reduce road traffic accidents, boost economic activities, and bring foodstuffs to the market centres with ease.

Despite the large number of road projects underway, there still remains a lot to be done in the sector. There is however considerable evidence to show that no effort is being spared to fix the country's roads. This year we are beginning what would be the single largest intervention in the road sector in this country.

The project would see investments of about GH¢1 billion in roads commencing this year and ending in 2019 during my second term in office. These projects will be funded with a mix of Cocoa infrastructure fund financing and Government of Ghana budgetary support.

Mr. Speaker,

In the Western Region work is progressing steadily on the 110km Agona Junction- Elubo road, the 94km Tarkwa-Bogoso-Ayamfuri road and the 52km Ayamfuri- Asawinso roads.

Other roads works in the region that will see intensified work include Sefwi-Bekwai-Eshiem, Sefwi Wiawso-Akontombra, Prestea- Samreboi, Benchema-Oseikojokrom and the Juabeso-Bodi- Akontombra roads.

In the Sekondi- Takoradi Municipality, 20 kilometres of the town roads have been asphalted while work is about to start on another 25 kilometres. Construction work is also ongoing on the Kansaworodo bypass, Fijai bypass and Ntankofo link to help improve access within the twin city.

Mr. Speaker,

Work has resumed on lots 2 and 4 of the Eastern Corridor Road in the Volta Region. These are the Asikuma Junction-Kpeve, Dodo Pepesu- Nkwanta, Nkwanta-Oti Damanko stretches.

A number of roads have meanwhile been completed in the region and others ongoing. These are: the Sogakope-Battor, Juapong-Fodzoku- Torgome, Kete Krachi-Buya, Ho-Fume, Worawora- Dambai, Bame- Dzolokpuita-Kpedze, Ho-Adidome, Adutor-Akutukope, among others.

The others are, Metrikasa-Havedzi, Golokwati-Wli-Hohoe roads, Tadzewu town roads, and the Hohoe town roads.

Mr. Speaker,

Here in the capital, the various road projects are visible to all regular users of our roads. The East Legon enclave roads have been resurfaced and others constructed. The Kwame Nkrumah Interchange is changing the landscape of the centre of Accra while the works on the Giffard (El Wak) Road is progressing smoothly. Even before it is opened fully to traffic, the benefits of the 37 – La Palm junction road are been felt.

The Awoshie- Pokuase Road has been opened to traffic pending the final completion of works and other ancillary social intervention projects like markets, a hospital, schools and a lorry park. Also ongoing in Accra are the Burma Camp Road Phase 1 and 2, the Spintex Road bypass, the Nungua-Sakumono Beach Road and the Ashaiman Highway Road.

This year, we will commence work on the redevelopment of the Accra-Tema Motorway into a six-lane highway with interchanges. Resurfacing works will also take place on roads in North and South Kanda, James Town, Adabraka, Mamprobi, Chorkor, Adenta and Madina.

Mr. Speaker,

The 147-kilometre Fufulso-Sawla Road in the Northern Region is almost complete while the Buipe-Tamale road asphalt overlay has been completed. The Nakpanduri-Oti Damanko portion of the Eastern Corridor and I will join the people in that section of the road to cut the sod for commencement of road works.

In the Central Region, work on the Kasoa Interchange, which comes with a major community-upgrading component involving the construction of schools, hospitals and water projects would commence in the coming weeks. This project will remove one of the most frustrating bottlenecks in the country's road network.

The Kasoa bypass, Mankessim-Abura Dunkwa, Assin-Twifo Praso, Essiam Town roads and the Breaman Asikuma-Amanfopong road are but a few of the ongoing works to improve roads in the Region.

Mr. Speaker,

In the Eastern region, work has resumed on the Kwafokrom- Apedwa road and will be completed in 12 months. Also to receive renewed attention this year are the Nsawam-Apedwa road, Nsawam-Aburi, the Suhum-Asamankese and Nkawkaw- Atibie roads. The Oterkpolu- Odumase road has also been awarded on contract.

Mr. Speaker,

In Ashanti Region, work on the Sofoline Interchange would be completed this year. Last year I commissioned the Assin Praso- Bekwai Road, which came with a two-lane bridge over the Pra River. I also inspected some 20km of Kumasi town roads, which have been upgraded.

Another 40km of Kumasi roads will be upgraded this year. Other major projects ongoing in the region include Bomfa Junction- Asiwa-Bekwai, Bekwai-Ampaha-Asiwa, Kumawu-Timaate-Drobonso and Agyenkwaso-Anomabu-Gyadem roads.

Mr. Speaker,

In the Brong Ahafo Region, the Nsawkaw-Namase section of the Wenchi-Sampa Road, Berekum-Sampa, Atebubu-KwameDanso-Kwadwokrom, Goaso-Kukuom Junction, Prang-Kintampo, Kintampo- Abease and Dormaa Ahenkro-Nkrankwanta roads are receiving attention.

In the Upper East Region, the Navrongo-Tumu, Navrongo-Tono, Bolgatanga-Bongo and Wikongo-Tongo Roads as well as the Bolga-Bawku, Misiga-Kulungugu and Sandema-Wiesi roads are going to receive aggressive attention.

In the Upper West Region, the Nadowli-Lawra-Hamile, Wa-Bulenga and Wa-Dorimon, Wa-Han, Tumu-Han and Navrongo-Tumu roads together with the construction of steel bridges on the Yala-Sombisi, Tantale-Tuvuu, Tuvuu-Lzabisi and Wa-Walewale Roads demonstrate our commitment to giving the people of the region motorable roads.

Under the Cocoa Roads Project, a number of feeder, urban and highway roads are earmarked for construction.

Under the Feeder roads, we have the following:

ASHANTI REGION

Bitumen Surfacing of Ataase Nkwanta-Owusukrom Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Manfo-Subriso-Fanti Feeeder Road

CENTRAL REGION

Bitumen Surfacing Of Camp-Adjoum Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing Of Brofuyedur-Odoo Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing Of Nkwanta – Mempesem Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing Jamra – Adandan Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing Of Ekwamoase – Ofabil Feeder Road

EASTERN REGION

Bitume Surfacing Of Noyem – Winso – Amuana –Praso Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing Of Mangoase – Kukua Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing Of Chia-Brenase-Ofoase Feeder Road

WESTERN REGION

Bitumen Surfacing Of Akim Sekyere – Abekoase Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Juaboso-Dadieso Feeder Road

Bitumen Surfacing of Anto Dompem-Daboase Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Edwenase – Atobiase

VOLTA REGION

Bitumen surfacing of Dapaa Jn.- Pampawie-Ahamansu Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Lekanti-Nanankor Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Aburubuwa-Obanda Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Dodi Papaase-Mensahkrom-Asuboi Feeder Road

BRONG AHAFO REGION

Bitumen Surfacing of Dadiesoaba-Twabidi Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Dormaa Ahenkro-Baabianiha Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing AND Rehabilitation of Antwirifo-Danyame Feeder Road
Rehabilitation of Asuadei Jn. -Asuadei Feeder Road

Under Urban Roads, the following roads have been earmarked.

ASHANTI REGION

Rehabilitation of Selected Roads in New Edubiase
Rehabilitation of Bekwai Town Roads

BRONG AHAFO REGION

Rehabilitation of Dormaa Ahenkro Town Roads
Construction of Goaso Town Roads

CENTRAL REGION

Rehabilitation of Dunkwa Town Roads

WESTERN REGION

Rehabilitation of Sefwi Wiawso Town Roads
Rehabilitation of Daboase Town Roads

EASTERN REGION

Rehabilitation of Suhum Town Roads
Partial Construction of Kyebi Town Roads
Construction of Selected Roads in Asamankese

The following highways are to be constructed under the cocoa roads.

ASHANTI REGION

Upgrading of New Edubiase - Anomabo Road
Upgrading of Amantia - Obuasewa Road
Partial Reconstruction of Obuasi Jn - Dunkwa - Ayanfuri Road

BRONG AHAFO REGION

Upgrading of Gambia No.2 - Kyeremasu

Partial Reconstruction of Tapa Jn. - Goaso Road
Upgrading of Kofibadukrom Junction - Kofibadukrom

CENTRAL REGION

Upgrading of Dunkwa - Twifo Praso - Assin Fosu

WESTERN REGION

Upgrading of Akontombra - Sefwi Wiawso
Upgrading of Daboase - Atieku Road
Upgrading of Enchi - Dadieso Road
Upgrading of Akontombra - Bodi Road
Rehabilitation of Anyinabrem - Sui - Bodi Junction Road
Upgrading of Adwofua - Oseikojokrom Road

VOLTA REGION

Upgrading of Kete - Krachi - Buya
Upgrading of Shia Honuta Kpedze Road

EASTERN REGION

Partial Reconstruction of Suhum-Asamankese
Partial Reconstruction of Adieso - Asamankese
Partial Reconstruction of Nsawam (Adieso) - Asamankese
Partial Reconstruction of Osenase - Akwatia
Partial Reconstruction of Apedwa - Kyebi - Bunso
Partial Reconstruction of Koforidua - Bunso

Mr. Speaker, a number of feeder roads have been selected under the second phase of the cocoa roads. Under this phase, the following will be constructed.

ASHANTI

Bitumen Surfacing of Dawusaso-Ayiem-Dawenase Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Abodom-Dotom-Subriso Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Subriso Jn.-Subriso Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Amanchia-Tetrem Feeder Road
Rehabilitation of Nfensi-Asakraka-Nkontomire-Nerebehi Feeder Road Phase 1
Bitumen Surfacing of Anyinasuso-Abonsuaso-Nyameadom-Danyame Feeder Road Phase 1

EASTERN

Rehabilitation of Anyinabrem-Amagyei Jn. Feeder Road
Rehabilitation of Railway Station-Subresu Feeder Road
Spot Improvement of Moffram-Apinto Feeder Road
Spot Improvement of Atiakwama Nkwanta-Camp Nkwanta Feeder Road
Spot Improvement of Odumasi-Ayirebi Feeder Road
Rehabilitation of Akoase-Subriso-Ntronang Feeder Road
Rehabilitation of Larbikrom-Badukrom Feeder Road
Rehabilitation of Tweapease-Behenese Jn. Feeder Road
Spot Improvement Kwaboanta Jn-Amarko Brekumanso Jn. Feeder Road

Bitumen Surfacing of Akoase-Akadewaso Feeder Road
Improvement of Anwiaso-Congo-Adeikrom-Akim Manso Feeder Road
Rehabilitation of Anfaso-K Anumah Feeder Road

WESTERN

Bitumen Surfacing of Georgekrom Jn.-Georgekrom-New Brekum Feeder Road
Spot Improvement of Kakabo Jn.-Kakabo Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Juaboso Nkwanta-Bonsu Nkwanta Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Adabokrom-Camp 15 Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing Asawinso-Mile 81 Feeder Road
Rehabilitation of Anyinase-Kwesikrom Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Owusukrom Jn.-Owusukrom Feeder Road
Rehabilitation of Kwasuo-Gyankufa Feeder Road and Others
Rehabilitation of JohnKrom-Attakrom Feeder Road and Others

BRONG AHAFO

Rehabilitation Akrodei Kanchiamoa Feeder Road
Rehabilitation of Asumura Tipokrom Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Bopa Fordjourkrom Feeder Road Phase 1
Upgrading of Yamfo-Asuadei-Ansin Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Sankore-Abuom-Nankete Feeder Road

CENTRAL

Bitumen Surfacing of Afranse-Nyarkrom Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Buabin-Brentuokrom-Bretuokrom Jn.Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing Nyarkrom-Bobikuma Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Diaso-Asamang Feeder Road
Bitumen Surfacing of Nkwantanum-Asaman Feeder Road

Phase II of the Highways and Urban roads would also be awarded by April this year.

TRANSPORT

Mr. Speaker,

Government has embarked on a programme to expand facilities and address the growing needs of our maritime business community and neighbouring landlocked countries.

We have already completed, under phase one of the Takoradi Port Expansion Programme, the construction of 1.18km of breakwater into the sea. Currently ongoing is the dredging and reclaiming of the sea to construct the leeside breakwater to create berthing facilities for direct loading and unloading of bauxite and manganese exports as well as clinker and limestone imports.

The Ghana Ports & Harbours Authority and the Meridian Port Services are collaborating to expand the Tema Port to create several hectares of port operational area including deep draft berths for vessels drawing 15m of water or more. The total investment is estimated a

above \$1.5bn. The first berth under this project should be completed by October 2016. In all, there will be 4 berths of 1400 quay length that will have capacity of almost 3million TEUs. In addition a 450m jetty is currently under construction inside Tema to allow for the fast discharge of bulk cargo in particular cement and clinker. This project should be ready for use by the first quarter of 2016.

Mr. Speaker,

The Ghana Maritime Authority has installed a Vessel Traffic Management Information System (VTMIS), while work is also almost complete on the development of the Takoradi Logistics Platform to provide warehousing facilities for the oil and gas industry.

To improve transportation on the Volta Lake, 3 units of 50-seater high-speed passenger ferries have been procured and delivered to Akosombo for assembling while the construction of a 1-unit modular passenger/cargo ferry has also been completed and ready for shipment. The ferries will be in operation by the second quarter of next year.

Mr. Speaker,

Massive investment continues to be made to further develop and upgrade the country's aviation infrastructure. Increasing volumes of passengers and cargo, have exacted a toll on the country's only international airport, the Kotoka International Airport and stretched it to its limit. Last year over forty thousand flights were recorded at our airports. In the same period total passenger throughput stood at over 2.5 million compared with a little over 1.3 million in 2009. This represents an almost 100% increase.

The arrival Hall expansion project in terminal II is nearing completion. Parts of the new arrival hall have in fact been opened for use. It will be fully completed this year. Work will also start by the second quarter of this year on an ultra-modern International Terminal to be known as Terminal 3.

Mr. Speaker,

In July last year, work begun on the Tamale International Airport project. The first phase of the project will be completed by the end of the year. Phase two will see the construction of a modern terminal and a dedicated Hajj terminal for Muslims embarking on the Holy Pilgrimage to Mecca.

Mr. Speaker,

The first Phase of the Kumasi International Airport project involving the modernization of the runway, installation of critical Aeronautical Ground Lighting (AGL) system and Instrument Landing Systems among other equipment has been completed. Night operations into Kumasi have indeed commenced. I hear the night flights are very popular with members of this house whose constituencies are in Ashanti because they are able to finish their work in this August house and catch the night flight to arrive in Kumasi while the fufu and akraintie is still hot.

Phase two of the project will involve an ultra-modern terminal building and further extension of the runway to accommodate bigger aircrafts.

Mr. Speaker,

Government is committed to the redevelopment of the railway industry in line with the recently completed Ghana Railway Master Plan. The plan entails the reconstruction and modernization of the existing rail network to be followed by the extension of rail lines to other regions.

Suburban rail services will start on the Takoradi to Sekondi line, via Kojokrom in the third quarter to ease the ever-increasing road congestion and reduce travel time between the twin cities. The Ghana Railway Company will be deploying new air-conditioned diesel multiple train units on the line.

Other projects that are being developed by the Ghana Railway Development Authority include the reconstruction of the Accra to Nsawam and the Kumasi – Ejisu suburban rail lines. The construction of these lines is strategic since they form sections of the main lines while their completion in the interim will help reduce the road congestion.

As part of the eastern railway line redevelopment plan, a rail link between the Tema Port and the Boankra Inland port will be developed to improve the operational efficiency of the Tema port and make it a preferred port especially for the shippers of our landlocked countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

Mr. Speaker,

To provide the Ghanaian public with greater options and flexibility in road transport, public transportation is being improved through the acquisition of a total of four hundred and ninety (490) buses to strengthen the operations of two public transport companies namely the Metro Mass Transit and the Intercity STC and the implementation of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project. Some of these buses have been designed to allow for easy access by persons with disability.

Mr. Speaker,

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) has since September last year commenced the enforcement of non-registration of vehicles without seat belts and compulsory installation of same. This is a key step towards ensuring the safety of passengers and the reduction in casualties during road accidents.

This has become even more necessary in view of the road accident statistics gathered between January and September 2014, which showed that 10,061 road traffic crashes were recorded in the country involving 15,600 vehicles. A staggering 1,441 deaths and 8,802 injuries were recorded.

ICT AND TELECOMMUNICATION

Mr. Speaker,

Last year I promised to complete the Eastern corridor fibre optic project, which will serve over 120 communities along the route from Ho to Bawku with a link from Yendi to Tamale. I wish to report that the project has been completed. The overall optic fibre installation is over eight hundred kilometres (800km). The fibre has also been extended to the University of Health and Allied Sciences.

The project will open up the Eastern Corridor to the information superhighway and offer not only teaching and learning opportunities but also bring the digital economy closer to the area.

Mr. Speaker,

A growing telecommunications industry requires a dynamic regulatory framework, which ensures customer satisfaction, good return on investment and adequate participation of Ghanaians in the sector.

To this end in August 2014 Cabinet approved four policies: The Mobile Virtual Network Operating License; The Interconnect Clearing House License, The International Wholesale Carrier License and the Unified Telecom License. It is expected that unimpeded implementation of these policies will inure to the benefit of all stakeholders.

GIRLS IN ICT

Mr. Speaker,

I want more females to venture into the ICT and Telecommunication sector. Ms. Farida Bedwei's service to the nation on the Board of the National Communications Authority serves as encouragement to many girls who are thinking of venturing into ICT and Telecommunications. Farida, who is also with us this morning, I am informed, has distinguished herself creditably.

To encourage more girls to develop interest in ICT and Telecommunications, Ghana has been observing the Girls in ICT Day. As part of the celebration of the day, girls from public schools are brought together, tutored and mentored to develop interest in the study and use of ICTs. Madam Eva Lokko and her team are championing this initiative with the support of the Ministry of Communications.

Last year 411 girls from 48 public schools participated in the programme in the Eastern Region. These promising young girls were trained using the Community Information Centres being constructed across the country.

Mr. Speaker,

In furtherance of the commitment of Government to use the medium of ICT to promote an all-inclusive information and knowledge society to benefit underserved and un-served communities, Government continued to promote the Community Information Centre concept.

In 2014 utilizing part of the savings from a Value-for-Money Audit of the e-Government Platform Project, we commenced the construction of 20 enhanced Community Information Centres in all the ten regions.

The centres are located in Keta, Battor, Techiman Krobo, Twifo Atti-Morkwa, Bodi, Effiduase, Glefe, Pantang Presby Cluster of Schools, Drobonso, Asuogyaman, Lambussie, Nandom, Welembelle, Sagnarigu, Pusiga, Nalerigu, Kpetoe, Talensi, Ofoase, Lassia-Tuolu. Ten (10) of these have been completed and ready for commissioning.

TRANSPARENT & ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE

Mr. Speaker,

Good governance, transparency and the fight against corruption form an integral part of the Agenda for Transformation. The country's progress in this area has been commendable. Ghana ranks high in all major governance indicators, human rights, transparency and rule of law assessments. We have a vibrant civil society and media, which operate in a very free and open environment.

Mr. Speaker,

I have remained resolute to the key principles of good governance as enshrined in our Constitution because it is the right thing to do. Indeed, citizen involvement and participation in the development process are important ingredients in realizing our development aspirations.

I will continue to engage our people through regular interaction with our chiefs, workers, religious leaders, farmers, students, the business community, market women and all other sections of the populace. In the last year, our engagement and interaction with the citizenry was enhanced with the introduction of the Government for the People (G4P) forums.

The G4P forum provided a good platform for government to explain the benefits of our policies, and offer the people an opportunity to give feedback. We must make every effort to sustain the achievements we have made over the years in promoting good governance, enhancing accountability and combating corruption.

DECENTRALIZATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Mr. Speaker,

Ghana has made significant progress towards achieving full decentralization, despite the challenges with fiscal decentralization. Last year, the internally generated funds of Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) increased as a result of the different programmes in place to achieve full fiscal decentralization.

My resolve to address the sanitation challenge facing us has led to the creation of a comprehensive environmental sanitation programme, which has three components—National Sanitation Day, Composting and Recycling and Waste Separation.

So far we have successfully marked a number of National Sanitation Days aimed at mobilizing all of us to clean our environments. Currently, the National Service Scheme is supporting the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development by deploying trained national service personnel to gather data on household disposal to serve as a basis for distribution of waste bins to households that currently have none.

The primary objective of these collaborative efforts is to arrest waste at the point of production and minimize our current environmental sanitation challenges. Ultimately, the

national sanitation day initiative must be augmented with behavioural change, proper waste disposal and waste management systems. Let us all commit to this.

DISTRICT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Mr. Speaker,

District Assembly elections are scheduled to take place next week. It is yet again an illustration of how far we have come as a nation in our quest to build an open, democratic, tolerant and responsible society. Permit me to urge all Ghanaians to return to their respective polling stations to exercise their rights to choose the people they want to represent them in the local governance decision-making process.

Mr. Speaker,

This is the final major election to be undertaken by the Electoral Commission under the leadership of Dr. Kwadwo Afari Djan before he attains his statutory retirement age. There certainly will be an opportunity for a grateful nation to express its gratitude to an illustrious son of the land, who has led a team of dedicated, and hardworking men and women over the last 23 years to guide our nation in one of the most delicate aspects of modern democracy- elections.

As President of the Republic, let me on behalf of the people of Ghana express our respect for the dedication to work shown by Dr. Afari Djan. I have no doubt that his place in Ghana's history is assured and he will be dearly missed when he finally retires this year.

PARLIAMENT

Mr. Speaker,

May I take this opportunity to congratulate the Parliament of the Republic of Ghana for the manner you went about your work in the last year and for your collaboration with the executive in exercising oversight. The chamber has been reconfigured and equipped with modern communication gadgets to adequately accommodate all 275 MPs for the efficient and effective discharge of your legislative functions.

Mr. Speaker,

I am happy to note that finally, Members of Parliament are sure of their office accommodation. The long awaited Job 600 building is almost ready for occupation by MPs. We will this year start work on the e-Parliament component of the US\$97million e-Transform Ghana project. This allows for a paperless flow of information and will enhance the operations and activities of the House. I am particularly excited about the prospects of an improved citizen participation in governance under the e-Parliament project.

Mr. Speaker,

May I also commend you in particular and Honourable members for working to review the standing orders of the House to improve and ensure increased efficiency of the House in performing your legislative functions. You are responding to changing trends of legislative practice and procedures.

ENHANCING RULE OF LAW AND JUSTICE

Mr. Speaker,

We remain committed to a free and independent Judiciary and we continue to support measures aimed at ensuring efficient and speedy administration of justice. The new court complex that will house 34 courts initiated by our late President Prof. John Atta Mills is nearing completion. Government has also provided three video-conferencing and tele-presence equipment to enable the Judicial Service conduct face-to-face interaction with judges in Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi.

In the next 18 months we will disburse US\$5million for the e-Justice project with the sole objective of assisting in the speedy and efficient delivery of justice. This project also covers the Attorney General's Department.

COMBATING CORRUPTION

Mr. Speaker,

Corruption is a canker that continues to plague our society. Former President Kufuor once said, "Government pretends to pay workers, and workers pretend to work". This statement was made at a time public sector pay was abysmal.

It is obvious at the time that many public sector workers made up their paltry incomes by taking illegal "tips" and "charges" from members of the public. With the significant improvement in salaries occasioned by the SSSS, there can be no justification for the continued bribes demanded from members of the public before they access social services, or the wanton misappropriation and theft of public resources.

In every facet of life we encounter corruption, at the ports when business people under declare the value of goods to avoid paying the right duties to the state, draining fuel from Government vehicles, some officers taking bribes from motorists for traffic infractions, and I could go on with several other examples.

Yet at every level there are responsible officers who are to exercise oversight of the activities in the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies. If these were our private businesses we surely would not accept the conduct that we see exhibited in the public service and that are continuously exposed in the reports of the Auditor General on an annual basis.

Ghana is bleeding from all of these acts of mismanagement and malfeasance and leadership at all levels should take responsibility for their areas of oversight and will be made to do so. We must all support the fight against corruption.

Recently there are reports of a spate of suspicious fires that have gutted records or warehouses that were subjected to audit or about to be subjected to audit. Our directors, inspectors and all heads of institutions must sit up.

Mr. Speaker,

Parliament in July 2014 adopted the National Anti-corruption Action Plan and Strategy. It is the overarching plan to combat corruption in the country and must be implemented.

In December 2014, I established a High Level Implementation Committee to be responsible for the implementation of NACAP. This High Level Committee will provide strategic policy guidance from the highest level of government to MDAs and other implementing partners as well as assist CHRAJ and the NDPC in monitoring the implementation of NACAP.

The process of investigation and prosecution of allegations of corruption, economic crimes and mismanagement by the EOCO and the AG's Department have been subject to delay and have been unable to fulfill their mandate.

The institutions of State that are responsible for the task of investigating corruption must be strengthened legally and institutionally and I would like to invite Parliament to review the legal and institutional framework that supports the work of the investigative and prosecutorial agencies in order to enable them to live up to the expectations of an expectant and exasperated nation.

I have as President made strenuous efforts to expose, investigate and deal with matters of corruption within the constraints of the law. Our efforts at exposing corruption may result in an erroneous belief that the practice is more pervasive now than before when in fact the reverse is the case as evidenced in our performance in recent TI reports.

Let me take the opportunity again to urge all anti-graft institutions to promptly investigate allegations and take swift actions to protect the public purse. As President, I will continue to lend every support to these important institutions to ensure total victory in the war against malfeasance. As we play our part, I urge other arms of Government to support me to make corruption a high-risk activity.

Mr. Speaker,

Let us make our institutions work and let us work together to create the framework to deal with this menace swiftly, impartially and fairly.

While we expose and fight corruption we also tighten systems to ensure that existing loopholes are sealed to avoid a recurrence. One major way to achieve this is with the use of information technology. There has been strong resistance in many instances in our roll out of technology in MDAs because many prefer the laxness of the manual system. We will invest and speed up technology uptake in all facets of national life.

Mr. Speaker,

Last year I authorized the BNI to conduct investigations into allegations of fraud in the National Service Schemes pay roll. The investigations revealed an organized system of misappropriating government funds through the insertion of ghost service personnel. Investigators have so far retrieved over GH¢20 million.

In addition some officials of the service are currently before court.

The NSS following the pay-roll scandal also put in a new electronic pay roll for all national service personnel enabling their payments to be loaded on their E-Zwich cards. This will help to eliminate ghosts in the NSS pay roll. Government has through this already saved an estimated GH¢26.5 million.

Prosecution of public officials involved in the Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Authority (GYEEDA) is ongoing and monies are being retrieved from the service providers. A new YEA to replace GYEEDA has just been approved by Parliament.

All the checks and controls for proper accountability would be used to ensure that the youth of Ghana benefit fully from this all-important project. Major steps have also been taken to bring SADA back on course. A new Board was reconstituted and an acting CEO appointed. Significant progress is being made in terms of reforms in many areas of SADA's operations in line with its core mandate.

Mr. Speaker,

Government will continue to strengthen the integration of the Ghana Integrated and Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS) with the Human Resource and Management Information System (HRMIS) to eliminate institutional weaknesses, which allow criminal elements to perpetrate pay roll fraud. The Judgment Debt Commission and the Brazil 2014 Commission of Inquiry have concluded their work and the reports are due soon. Upon receipt of the reports Government will study them and take the necessary and appropriate actions.

Mr. Speaker

A number of Bills laid before this House in 2014, i.e. the Conduct of Public Officers' Bill; the Whistle Blowers (Amendment) Bill and the Right to Information Bill, when enacted into law, will significantly deal with the identified gaps and I look forward to these Bills being passed into law by this house as soon as possible.

The Minister for Justice and Attorney General would also ensure that the Witness Protection Bill and a Criminal Offences (Amendment) Bill are laid before the House. These bills, I believe, will adequately deal with illicit enrichment and trading in influence that were also identified as lacking in our criminal legislation.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. Speaker,

As Chair of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, I have worked to give meaning to the implementation of our foreign policy of seeking to create a more integrated West Africa Sub-Region where our economic development is enhanced by promoting our economic integration.

During the last year, we finalized the Common External Tariff for the ECOWAS region, an important step in the establishment of a Customs Union, which will be implemented in our member states in the course of this year.

We stood in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia and provided the coordination Centre for the United Nations Mission on Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER).

We continue to provide peacekeeping support and are working with ECOWAS to consolidate peace and democracy in Mali. We have also sent a battalion of officers to South Sudan to help return Africa's youngest nation to peace and allow for the re-establishment of an effective Government.

Ghana will also continue to work within the multilateral international arena to join other nations of the world in fashioning out the successor to the millennium development goals. We will also work with ECOWAS and our neighbor Burkina Faso to facilitate a peaceful transition to culminate in free and fair election later this year.

We shall work together with our partners in the region to ensure safety and security. In doing so we acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that our neighbours- Togo, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Cote D'Ivoire and Guinea- are preparing for crucial elections.

I urge the Governments and People of these countries to take all the necessary measures to reach understanding between all the political interest groups on important issues relating to the preparation, organization and conduct of the elections.

Ghana also stands in solidarity with Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin Countries in their fight against the Boko Haram terrorist group.

Mr. Speaker,

The initial delays in the response to the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in West Africa exposed some deep-seated weaknesses in International Crisis Management. There were needless mortalities and morbidities.

Accordingly, I have accepted and joined German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg to propose to the United Nations the setting up of a high-level panel of renowned personalities and the commissioning of a report on how to strengthen the International Crisis Management system, particularly in health.

We have based our proposal on the lessons we are learning from the Ebola epidemic, and believe that the UN Secretary General's Panel may also consider mechanisms for information sharing at the outset of any national crisis so that there is the opportunity for a faster and more coordinated response.

SECURITY AGENCIES

Mr. Speaker,

Over the last few years, Government has intensified efforts at positioning the country's security agencies to adequately respond to the contemporary security challenges. Government has done this through the biggest retooling of the agencies in recent Ghanaian history.

Mr. Speaker, currently the numerical strength of the Police Service has moved from twenty-three thousand, two hundred and four (23,204) in 2012 to thirty thousand, six hundred and thirty-five (30,635) in 2014. This has resulted in a current Police-Population ratio of 1:784 as against 1:1,100 in 2010. This has brought us closer to the United Nations' benchmark of 1:500. It has also led to an increase in police visibility and accessibility, which are key prerequisites in crime prevention, detection and control.

Consequently our crime statistics dropped by over five thousand (5,000) cases between 2010 and 2014. This downward trend is expected to continue in this year and beyond. The Police needs our support and collaboration in making our cities, villages, and places of work safer and more peaceful.

Mr. Speaker,

For the first time in Ghana's history a Marine Police Unit has been established and equipped with modern speedboats to police the country's territorial waters. In addition, a number of critical logistics such as bulletproof vests and riot control gear have been procured for the Police Service.

The Ghana National Fire Service received 85 more fire tenders in 2014. The operations of the Border Patrol Unit (BPU) of Ghana Immigration Service have been enhanced through the installation of border Surveillance Systems (CCTV and WIFI Systems) at 15 out of 17 strategically selected Border Control Points throughout the country.

Safety and security are key planks in my Agenda for Transformation and will continue to receive my utmost attention

Mr. Speaker,

As Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, I wish to use this occasion to commend the Service Commanders, Officers and Men of the Armed Forces for their valour and dedication to duty in the defence of the territorial integrity of our dear country.

I also commend them for their humanitarian service through Peacekeeping missions and specifically the unique role they played together with other security agencies to facilitate the establishment of the United Nations Mission on the Ebola Emergency Response.

We will continue the programme of retooling and reequipping the armed forces with the appropriate instruments and platforms to enable them carry out their constitutional mandate. In this regard, vehicles, helicopters, aircrafts, armoured personnel carriers, and other ordinance are being procured to enhance the capacity of the forces both internally and externally.

Mr. Speaker,

In fulfillment of the NDC's 2012 manifesto promise to strengthen the fight against narcotics, I have assigned a seasoned investigator and principled intelligence chief, William K. Aboah,

the task of restructuring the Narcotics Control Board into a Commission. He will also assume the Chairmanship of the Commission when the Board is constituted.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

Mr. Speaker,

Ghana has enjoyed a long history of religious tolerance. From the period of the Trans-Saharan trade, the 2 major world religions and African traditional religion have coexisted peacefully in this land.

Our constitution in Article 21, Clause 1, guarantees the freedom of religion and the freedom to express one's religious beliefs. That is why recent complaints about religious discrimination coming from Muslim Groups in the Western Region and the Christian Council of Ghana are worrying.

It is wrong under our constitution for Muslim students to be compelled to attend church services or for Christian students to be compelled to attend Muslim congregational prayers. It is also wrong to prevent Muslim women from wearing the 'hijab' or Nuns from wearing their habits to work or to school. Heads of institution must note this for strict compliance. Appropriate sanctions would be taken against any head of institution who act contrary to the constitutional provisions.

POLITICAL RELATIONS

Mr. Speaker,

To enhance rapprochement and political harmony, I will continue to dialogue and build bridges with the leadership and membership of other political parties.

I have received a petition from the Council of Elders of the CPP asking for a return of properties seized from the party after the 1966 coup. I have referred the petition to the AG for consideration and advice.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker,

Eight days from now, we will be marking our 58th anniversary as a free and independent country. Even as we celebrate this occasion and reflect on the struggles waged by our illustrious forbears to wean us off colonial domination and subjugation, there is now more than ever before, the need for an honest assessment of our own contributions towards the sustenance and development of our dear nation- Ghana.

Mr. Speaker,

Recently we have been offered a stern test of our resolve and commitment to the course of our nation. Our response to this test is mirrored by the story of our aptly named national football team, the Black Stars, in the last year.

The Black Stars of Ghana after several failed attempts at qualifying for the World Cup, finally managed to do so in 2006 and put up a creditable performance to the admiration of the world. This brought immeasurable joy to an adoring nation. Four years later at the same tournament in South Africa, the Black Stars turned on the style and only missed out on a historic semi-final berth through the cruelest of circumstances.

This performance cemented our place as one of the most potent forces not only in African football but also on the world stage. It instilled in us a deep sense of National pride and we doted on the team.

Mr. Speaker,

Based on this impressive record, expectations were high that a third straight appearance at the World Cup in Brazil will bring even greater laurels to the nation especially at a time when our team had some of the most established players in the game.

Through a chain of events with which we are all very familiar, the Black Stars crushed out of that tournament in the most unexpected manner. The deep hurt and disappointment that greeted their unceremonious exit from the competition was to usher in a most regrettable phase in the relationship between the team and its once adoring fan, the Ghanaian.

Suddenly the high spirits that greeted every appearance of the Black Stars in a match was replaced with extreme skepticism and doubt. Hope turned into despair and vociferous support was supplanted by open hostility. The Black Stars therefore cut the image of forlorn orphans, abandoned by all and left to their fate.

For the first time in many years their participation in an international competition like the just ended African Cup of Nations was met with disinterest and a near total absence of support. There were widespread predictions of an early exit for the team from the tournament on account of the very tough opponents that they had been grouped with. The loss of their first match further strengthened this notion among large sections of our people.

Mr. Speaker,

The Black Stars in their next match were however to demonstrate in dramatic fashion, the fabled resilience of the Ghanaian. With virtually the last kick of the game, our national team, led by Captain Asamoah Gyan, snatched survival in the tournament from the jaws of elimination.

They were then to move on and play some breath-taking football to beat all their next three opponents to qualify for the final of a tournament in which their own compatriots had written them off. Of course they lost to a formidable Ivorian side in the final but only the most eternal pessimist will doubt the quality of the performance they put up in that game before missing out on the trophy through the lottery of penalty kicks.

Perhaps the Ghana Football Association (GFA) has not adopted the full prescriptions of His Excellency Professor John Evans Atta Mills of blessed memory when he used an occasion of the State of the Nation address to speak to the issue of penalty taking in football.

Mr. Speaker,

I have recounted the story of the Black Stars because it provides a vivid illustration yet of our story as a people. We have won laurels before and we can win more. We have a buoyant, smart and energetic youth.

We were birthed as a nation after centuries of spirited struggle by past generations. They handed down to this present generation a nation with enormous potential, which had come to represent the beacon of hope for many nations who were held down by the yoke of colonial domination.

Like every great nation we have been through rough patches in our history. We have been through periods of political and serious economic instability. We have made mistakes and some wrong choices in the management of our affairs over the years.

Mr. Speaker,

We have at many points in our history emerged stronger from adversity. We are now an established and respected democracy after coming from prolonged periods of experimentation. This is what I mean when I say we have victory in our DNA. Our quest to build a prosperous, inclusive, free and just society is very much on course in spite of the temporary setbacks of erratic electricity supply and slippages on the macro-economic front.

Even as these challenges are tackled head on, there is compelling evidence of unquestionable progress made in almost all aspects of our national life. Today there are more of our children enrolled in school than ever before as a direct result of unprecedented opportunities made available to them. More girls are being kept in the classrooms. More women are holding responsible and sensitive positions in our country.

Today Ghanaians are more likely to receive better healthcare services than ever before because of significant investment and work done in the sector.

Today we have succeeded in moving more of our citizens out of poverty and reduced hunger and malnutrition.

Today we have increased life expectancy over the 58 years of our nation's life from 45 years to 63 years.

Today millions of our compatriots who had to endure shortages of potable water have access to the vital commodity leading to the eradication of the Guinea worm disease in Ghana.

Today we have adopted more than ever, the use of ICT and Telecommunication as a driver and a catalyst in our daily activities.

Our roads continue to be improved. Some of the remotest parts of our country have been given access to electricity making the rate of access to electricity one of the highest on the continent. Many other human development indicators are showing significant improvements in the lives of our people.

What is required to sustain this momentum and to propel us to greater heights is a renewed commitment to the progress and wellbeing of our nation. Nation building is a long and arduous task, which can only be undertaken through collective effort.

This effort must be anchored in unconditional love for our country, hard work- I repeat hard work and an immutable sense of patriotism. This is the path treaded by those who before us, through sheer valor and sacrifice, sweat and blood, toiled to secure our nation 58 years ago.

With patriotic zeal and a burning desire to ensure the progress and prosperity of our country there will be no obstacle too lofty to surmount. No nation has attained greatness without these values.

The greatest impediments in the way of patriotism and collective nation building however are unbridled cynicism and excessive partisanship- two creeping phenomena, which we must guard against and expunge from our psyche.

A cynical approach often leads to a craving for every national endeavour to end in failure in order to justify a deeply flawed perspective on national affairs. It latches onto temporary problems to paint a picture of abject hopelessness. A partisan approach places premium on political calculation and gain above what should be the national interest.

On the airwaves, on a daily basis, we hear polarized views on critical national issues from people from all walks of life including those who should be sharing academic and professional perspectives with the general public. Unprintable expressions are sometimes allowed without caution or censorship, misuse of the Internet inclusive. A conscious effort is thus made to either exaggerate or distort the true picture that should emerge of our nation.

We must not allow ourselves to be sucked into the vortex of cynicism and extreme partisanship. Like the Black Stars, let us fashion out of the jagged rocks of fleeting setbacks, smooth stepping-stones to greater laurels.

Mr. Speaker,

I will add, that in our case, let us score our goals to secure victory. Our history is replete with glorious tales of remarkable victories and successes. These must spur us on to achieve even far more than we can imagine.

So on this auspicious occasion as I end my third state of the nation address and as we commence festivities to mark our independence, I invite everyone, boy or girl, man or woman, rich or poor, religious believer or non-believer to shed off what divides us, concentrate on the many issues that unite us as a nation and let's work together to accelerate the progress made so far as we work to transform Ghana.

We owe it to our forebears whose toil and sacrifice led to the victory over those who sought to oppress us and keep us from realizing our destiny as a great nation and laid down the building blocks for the progress we have made so far.

We owe it to our forebears, once again, to keep the unity and cohesion of our country. Together we will build a strong and prosperous Ghana. I urge families and educational

institutions to continue to inculcate a sense of unity, patriotism and nationalism in our people. Destiny brought us together as one nation. Our ethnic and cultural diversity is a source of strength not a weakness. We must reject any attempt to sow any strife and discord among us.

We owe it to ourselves as heirs of a generation that did this for us and perhaps even more importantly we owe it to our children and our children's children who deserve to live in a fully developed, prosperous, free and just society.

I thank you Mr. Speaker.

God bless our homeland Ghana.