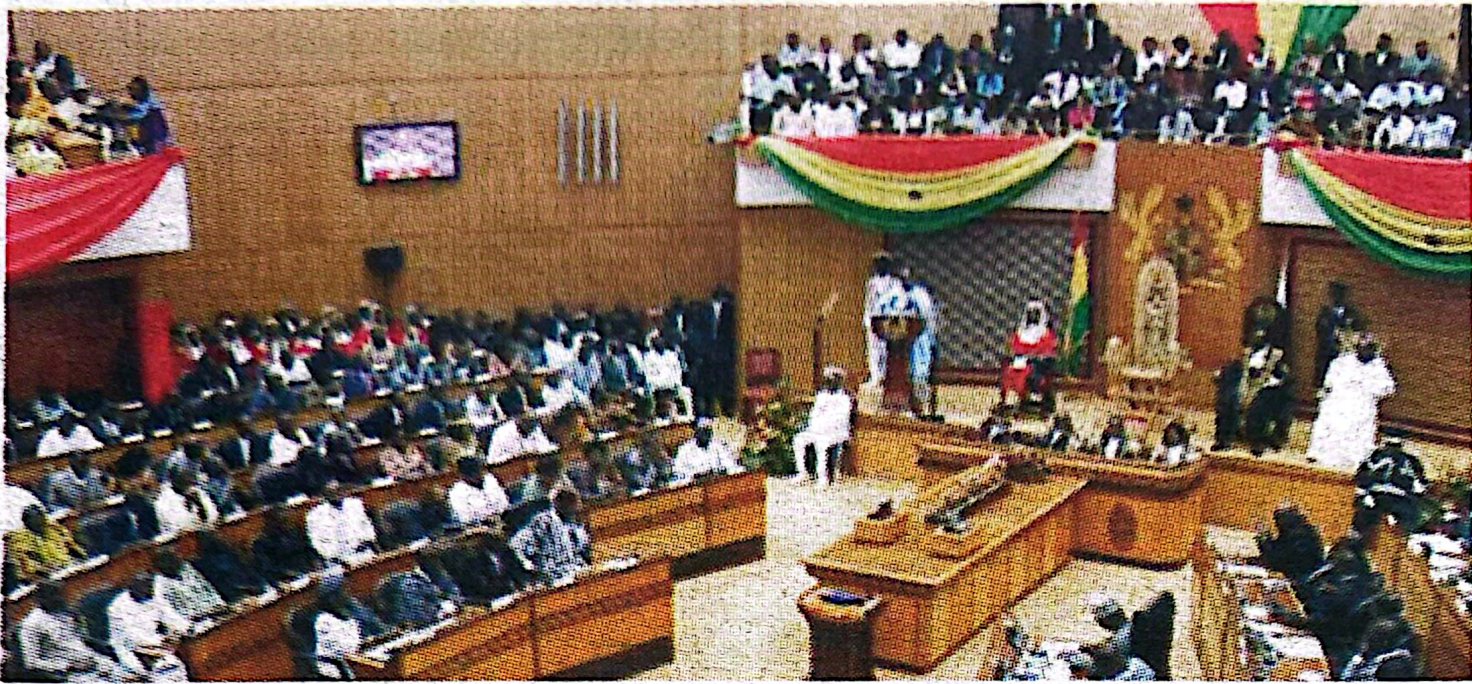


How to insult an African politician



Ghanaian Parliament during the State-of-the-Nation-Address. PHOTO BY AGENCIES

BY AGENCIES

ACCRA. We are not quite sure here in Ghana what to make of the drama that President Jacob Zuma faces when he goes to parliament to deliver his State-of-the-Nation Address.

Our Parliament in Ghana has its share of heckling, rowdiness and walkouts. Our MPs are experts at dishing out insults without being seen to be insulting. Members regularly accuse each other of trying to mislead the chamber and there are regular demands to withdraw some word or sentence regarded as un-parliamentary. But, by and large, the collective ire of our parliamentarians is aroused only when an outsider says something that is deemed to be uncomplimentary about

them.

Recently for example, our honourable members got into an almighty tizz when someone suggested that parliament had displayed “ignorance” in a discussion on Ebola vaccine trials.

Every Ghanaian now knows there is a strong chance of being hauled before the privileges committee of Parliament if you as much as say anything that can be interpreted as “bringing the House into disrepute”.

The descriptions

We listen carefully to the words the MPs use to describe their colleagues in the House.

You are not allowed to call an honourable MP a liar, but everybody knows that when a parliamentarian says a col-

league has been “economical with the truth”, it means the person has told a lie.

There is usually some amount of drama when the president comes into the House to deliver the State of the Nation address or the Minister of Finance delivers the Budget statement.

One year, members of the opposition boycotted the sitting and left the majority to cheer on the president at every pause in the speech.

Another year the president was heckled non-stop but it was quite good natured and not enough to interfere with the delivery of the speech.

On a third occasion, the opposition refused to stand up at the end of the speech for the customary standing ovation after the address.