

Greetings from Ghana #38
Same Dance, Different Day

Well it has been almost a month since we last looked at what is going on here. I was about to say “here politically” and then thought I would refrain from that because it might misdirect your thoughts. The politics of this country are what has shaped the culture so far though and the political influences are going to determine the society on the horizon.

Ya get used to bureaucrats offering reassurances such as, “We are doing very good. Inflation was at 54% in December of last year and it is only 35% now, so it shows how good we are. It will drop to 18% by the end of the year. This is why you should keep our party in power.” They conveniently avoid mentioning whose policies got the country to a 54% inflation. Their claims are countered by someone mentioning that inflation was at 6% when this government came to power and the following year it was at 17 percent.

The government announced it was going to the Cocoa Board for \$400 million to pay the loan they have with the International Monetary Fund. Three weeks later the Cocoa Board announced it is seeking funding for operations.

A national banking conference just concluded with the caution that if the economy is to grow the the banks must limit the number of unauthorized withdrawals.

The opposition candidate is swearing he will not give permits to mining companies for the national forest areas.

Members of the opposition party are complaining the current government is doing nothing to fight corruption. One part of the budget apparently prohibits importing of certain goods without a specific permit. The New Patriots Party (current government) is saying Ghana has become import dependent and to correct that they are going to stop allowing certain goods to be imported without an exception. The New Democratic Party (minority government) is saying that invites corruption and “fees.”

The current list of prohibited items includes poultry (gov’t signed an agreement to import poultry against industry outcries about three months ago), and used vehicles, including salvage vehicles and vehicles over ten years old. Vehicles represent almost 5% of total imports.

Salvage, by the way, means just that. There are a couple ways to tell if a vehicle was purchased ‘salvage.’ You can research the VIN and find out it was in a flood, or that it sold for a dollar after having been totaled by the insurance company. An easier way is just to look at the economy rental car you just got. Or the vehicle someone is trying to sell for \$3000. Is the airbag for the driver missing? Has the passenger airbag panel been pop riveted in place? Are the sunvisors and/or floor mats glued in place to hide holes in the body? Do the headlights work

like parking lights unless they are set to “bright” and then look dim? Well soon, that discovery joy will no longer happen. And the auto dealers predict it will cause a shortage.

Also on the list are rice, fruit juice, soft drinks, and canned tomatoes.

The wildlife restoration and preservation forces are complaining that when they catch poachers government officials step in and ask the courts to forgive the transgression.

The finance minister showed that last year the government brought in \$143.9 billion. It spent \$176.4 billion, roughly 22% more than what they had. This year they have brought in \$79.1 billion so far and have spent \$104.8 billion to date (roughly 25% over). They are spending far less this year and this, according to the minister, shows financial resolve and economic progress. If the parliament passes the budget he promises that they will not overspend next year.

In the midst of all this is the delightful story of the National Cathedral, a favorite project of the president. There is a great brouhaha with the board of directors, all devout members of the clergy with strong passions.

The current project, like so many others here, has gone way over budget. Construction has stalled. Public debate about the viability of such a project in these times is ongoing. . . for good reason. A 2022 article in Bloomberg News noted that the cathedral's original price tag of \$100 million had quadrupled amid record inflation and the devaluation of cedi in 2022. By 2022, the Ghanaian government had spent over \$58 million on the cathedral, with about half of it going to an internationally renowned architecture firm with offices in Ghana, UK and USA.

There are some on the board of directors who believe that Ghana should pay for the cathedral for all the church has done for the country over the past 70 years and before independence. There are others on the board who say they are uncomfortable with the current level of investment and involvement by the government and want as much separation as possible with church and state and no more should come from the government.

There are some who say that the project can be finished with loans. And some who say they vowed when they entered the ministry that they would never take a loan to do the Lord's work. Some want to do fundraising and others who say that is demeaning for such an opulent structure.

Ready for the fun part? The ones who don't want the government have said they will resign from the board if more government funding is sought. The anti-loan folks have said the same, “Get a loan and we are out of here” but government paying is okay. And then there are those who will quit if made to do fundraising.

So the semi-finished cathedral sits in an election year caught in the midst of a multi-pronged tug of war that is going nowhere. And no one in government wants to offend any of these religious leaders with the ballot boxes in the near future. And with the public sentiment that it should not be funded by the government, it has become a bit of a hot button. So the politicians are not going near the subject and the project, like others, sits.

The government is also building a stadium near the University of Ghana for the Africa Games coming here in summer 2024. The contractor says they are running behind from lack of funding and manpower. As of now, at the rate they are going, the stadium could possibly be ready in late 2024 or maybe spring of 2025, a mere four to six months late. That is unless there are delays or cost overruns.

The powers that be, in an effort to show social responsibility, have a motion to remove any import fees or taxes on the materials for the manufacture of sanitary pads. This should lower the cost of making them and the savings can be passed on so girls do not have to miss classes. The motion will only affect Ghanaian made pads. The Ghanaian companies that make sanitary pads have about four percent of the market. When asked why the motion does not remove the fees from the imported sanitary pads, the finance minister's response was the equivalent of, "Do you know how much money we would lose if we did that!?" So they are "helping" by lowering the price on a line of products most students cannot locate, which – if you do not bother explaining it – sounds benevolent in a press release.

The current government was touting the party working as a unified body for the good of the people during their candidate elections. The vice-president will run for the presidency and all those within the party who supported the other top candidate have now been removed from the party.

At some point the largest voting block of the population (25 - 49 year olds) are going to say, "that is enough." and things will change. You can see the tension growing. You can hear the unrest, much like that of the 60's in America. They are recognizing that the current politicians are in power to benefit themselves and that is not sitting well. The protests are continuing to grow.

They are beginning to face the fact that the difference between humans and animals is that animals do not let the least qualified run the pack.