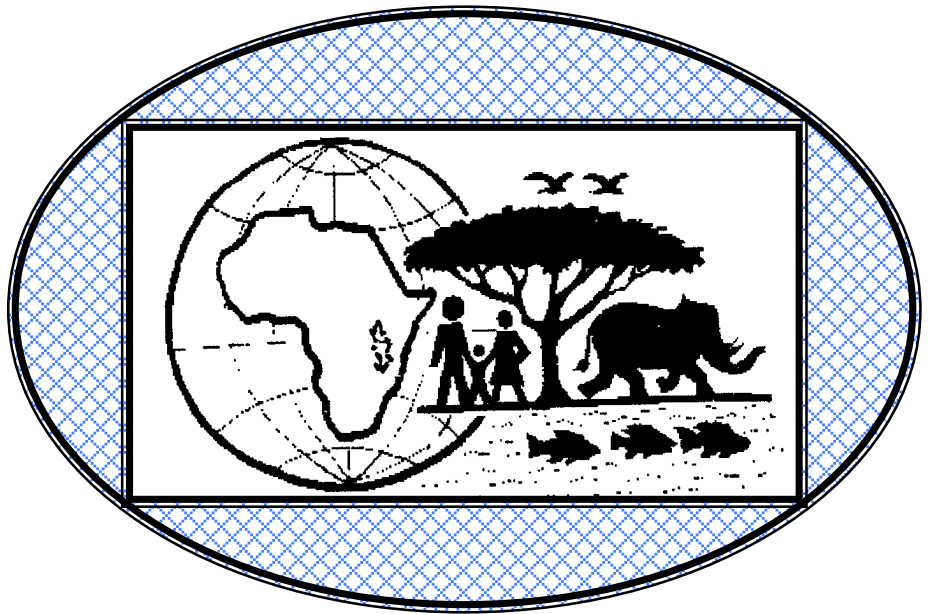


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**NOVEMBER
2010**

**News clippings
with analysis
From the
Major newspapers
in Malawi**

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LIST OF NEWSPAPERS REVIEWED

Daily Times

The Weekend Nation

The Sunday Times

Malawi News

The Guardian

Nation on Sunday

The Nation

PREVIEW

It has been said more than once about the current crop of Members of Parliament. It has only been some months since they met during the budget sitting when they made the same proposals. This time around the legislators want some of the benefits to spill to their spouses.

The lawmakers announced that they would want their salaries to be increased to the extent that they want each one of them to get half of what ministers get per month. Malawi has about 42 ministers and 193 legislators. This should surely give a picture of how much is going to be spent on their salaries only if their proposals are going to be met.

As the MPs are making outrageous demands tenants who are the ones that make the much-needed foreign exchange are living in dire poverty. Surprisingly these are some of the people whose votes assisted these MPs come to power but their daily concerns are not being taken into consideration.

It seems that all the legislators care about is what the nation can do to their pockets and their wealth and not what they can do to serve their constituents better. If they really had the welfare of the people at heart they would not have made such exorbitant and extravagant proposals.

For starters the MPs are asking for an extension of the diplomatic passport to their wives. Above all they also want to fly business class every time they travel. One wonders why the same MPs who are supposed to serve their constituents should have such ambitions.

It has also been noted that some MPs still owe the National Assembly debt on the loans they accumulated in the last parliament. Reports had even shown that they were very cross with Clerk of Parliament Matilda Katopola who had promised to collect the debt from the MPs salaries. No wonder Katopola was not in good books of some MPS who to date still owe government a number of kwacha.

Yet these are the same MPs are asking for the retention of the K6.4 million loans for MPs vehicles. Again they would also want parliament to purchase 4 x4 vehicles for each MP. Are these MPs being realistic? Do they really know they are in these positions to serve the people one wonders

POLITICS

After days without a comment coming from government, president Bingu wa Mutharika answered some of the question in the contents of the Catholic Bishops Pastoral letter. Not even any of the spokespersons for Mutharika was ready to answer the concerns later alone comment on the contents of the pastoral letter. The minister of information asked for more time, the Statehouse press officer had no ready comment and so did the presidential advisor Dr Hetherwick Ntaba. Among other things the Catholics in the letter pointed out the abuse of the office of the vice president Mrs Joyce Banda. Mutharika in his carefree mood told a press briefing that Malawians should not expect his vice to be in front of him.

Mutharika also commented on the proposed candidature of his brother who is also Education Minister Professor Peter Arthur wa Mutharika. For some months there has been a heavy campaign as some media institutions are busy selling Peter Mutharika as the next presidential candidate for the ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP*. A number of traditional leaders and some religious leaders have been paraded on national television declaring their support to Peter wa Mutharika in 2014. Tuning in to *MBC Television* one would think it is campaign time. By endorsing his brother as the next presidential candidate President Mutharika is indirectly quashing dreams of other members of the party who had similar ambitions. One might never know what will happen to the party as time goes by. But experts have warned that this idea of endorsing the younger Mutharika as the next candidate for the *DPP* might spell disaster for the party.

There are still contradicting reports coming from the press on comments made by Professor Peter Mutharika himself as regards his candidature. In one report the younger Mutharika is reported to have said that he is greatly humbled by the pleas by chiefs and other people in Malawi who are asking him take over from his brother. While at a recent rally in Lilongwe Peter Mutharika publicly said being a president is not an easy job and therefore one needs not rush into such an office. Whatever the truth of the matter is the *DPP* should tread carefully to avoid the same things that happened to the once mighty *United Democratic Front UDF*.

Former *UDF*'s Publicist Sam Mpasu's advice to the party could best be described as a stitch in time. In his first interview to the print media after his release from prison, Mpasu gave free advice to the party on its survival in the 2014 general elections. One of the things that Mpasu is not hiding is the fact that there are leadership struggles in the party and this needs to be sorted out the soonest. Similarly the party also was hit hard with its chairman's resignation from active politics. Mpasu did not mince words when he told party members the need to strategize on how they are going to regain the people's trust.

There is a saying that the past will always haunt especially when you did some bad things. This is what is happening to the *UDF*. When the opposition were in majority there are some decisions that the Party made that they are now regretting. On the other hand people can understand the *UDF*' anger and vengeance mood after all they were bitter with the way President Mutharika dumped the party that nominated and tirelessly campaigned for him to become president. Mutharika later formed his own party the *DPP*. The *UDF* became a party in the opposition when in normal circumstances they should have been in government. The party is reported to be regretting having engineered the impeachment bill, which was introduced in parliament by Lucius Banda.

It never rains but it pours in the *Malawi Congress Party MCP*. Barely some weeks after losing a seat in a parliamentary seat Dowa South West the party has lost one of its members in Lilongwe Msozi. MCP has a few members of parliament in the national assembly and to lose a seat and a reigning MP in a space of one month is far too much for a party that is the main opposition in the country. Honourable Godfrey Kamanya defected from the *MCP* months after being in the taskforce for leadership change in the party. As if this is not enough MCP member for Dedza Central Constituency Sosten Gwengwe also quit his position of the party's spokesperson on finances. Gwengwe who is a new comer in parliament has spoken with maturity and intelligence in the national assembly on behalf of the *MCP*. Gwengwe says he has resigned over sour working relationship with the party's leader Honorable John Tembo.

ECONOMY

Press reports on the economy have revealed that Malawi will not be able to achieve its set goals on imports cover. The Reserve Bank of Malawi had projected that by December 2010 the country's foreign reserves would at least be at 3 months. This is the international recommended standard. Finance Minister Ken Kandodo in his 2010/2011 national budget presentation announced that it was Malawi's desire to have the imports cover at 3 months. Kandodo had banked his hopes on the sales of tobacco and donor disbursements. But other reports have noted that Malawi might not be able to achieve this because of late the nation has been hit by forex and fuel shortages among other things.

Malawi's external debt has gone up from K136.8 million to about K126.6 billion. All this accumulation of this large sum of external debt has happened after Malawi's debt was cancelled in the year 2006. 3 years down the line Malawi has accumulated all this external debt, one may be right to ask if at all Malawi will ever be a debt free nation. Some experts have already warned that as a nation Malawi risks going back to the status of being a heavily indebted nation because of the government's large appetite for borrowing. But the Central Bank has assured the nation that Malawi's debt at present is sustainable.

Meanwhile the *Malawi Economic Justice Network MEJN* has noted that government can easily avoid domestic debt. According to *MEJN* it can easily stay away from domestic debt if government received donor pledges for the budget in good time. Evidence has shown that donors delay in giving out their pledges for the budget as result the authorities resort to borrowing. The Organization notes that if Malawi met all the conditions set by donors accordingly there could be no delays in donor disbursements. Just recently finance minister Ken Kandodo was quoted pleading with donors to release funds for the pledges they made for the national budget.

Still on the same issue other observers have noted that domestic debt is only meant for consumption. Therefore domestic debt should be discouraged. But the economic experts have on the other hand favoured external debt because they say it increases and boosts the country's foreign exchange and imports cover. It should be noted that Malawi's domestic debt is estimated to be at about K116 billion.

As parliament is sitting at the National Assembly, it is still not clear whether the much advocated for Labour Tenancy Bill will be tabled during the current sitting of parliament. The task force on the Labour Tenancy Bill got all the promises from the concerned quarters that they would make sure the bill finds its way to parliament but alas this was not to be. The tenants, who are at the helm of tobacco Malawi's main foreign exchange earner, still live in dire poverty. Here is a bill that would have at least uplifted the lives of some Malawians but our MPs would rather ask for their salary and benefits increase. While it is true there are procedures that need to be followed for a bill to find its way to parliament, authorities on their part should also do their homework.

FOOD SECURITY

Fertilizer subsidy distribution is never short of controversies. This year's subsidy programme has also had its fair share of hiccups. Some days ago the press had pictures of people including women with babies spending a night at an ADMARC depot in Balaka as they were waiting for their turn to buy subsidized fertilizer and seeds. As if this is not enough some people are also finding it difficult to access the farm inputs because they are simply not available. All this is happening at a time some places are ready for planting because of the considerable amounts of rainfall that these areas have received. An example is that of Neno where not even a single bag is available and yet people have coupons to buy the farm inputs.

Meanwhile the ministry of agriculture has promised to look into these problems and sort them out. Ever since the programme started, reports on problems are always the same old stories and each time authorities promise to change for the better. Some parliamentarians cry out loud at every sitting over coupon distribution and availability of the farm inputs in their areas. While there is scarcity of the subsidised farm inputs in some areas, other districts like Thyolo, Mzimba and Lilongwe have plenty. Media reports have revealed that Thyolo district is the biggest beneficiary of the subsidy programme because it was allocated with the largest amount of the farm inputs this year.

Some experts have attributed Malawi's high growth rate to the availability of food. In its recent release on human development the *United Nations Development Programme UNDP* disclosed that there has been tremendous economic growth in Malawi. Although there is economic growth it does not translate to people's income. But the same report has noted that the growth has come about because of the availability of food, meaning some people have plenty of food but have no income at their disposal.

Although maize is the main food crop for Malawi, evidence has shown that it is not easy for farmers to benefit from the crop. With bumper harvests in recent years, the prices of maize have been going down making it difficult for commercial traders to realize any tangible profits. Some observers have noted that in Malawi maize is just sold without being processed therefore there is no value added. In this case it has become difficult for traders to maximize their profits from the sales of the staple grain. Evidence has shown that the prices of maize have tremendously gone down. This means that at present it is not practical to venture into maize business. It also shows that government should fix minimum and maximum price of the commodity. Leaving it to market force is not enough

Members of Parliament MPs in the month of November took the ministry of agriculture to task over *ADMARC*. Reports have shown that although *ADMARC* got K1 billion allocation for the 2010/2011 fiscal year, farmers are still failing to sell their produce to the national grain marketer. Evidence has shown that *ADMARC* is only buying 10kgs of the grain from each farmer. The farmers had to wait for months before they started selling their produce.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Reactions from different quarters of the society to the recent pastoral letter by the Catholic bishops continued to dominate press coverage in the month of November. After days of no comments coming from the government over the contents of the letter which is titled *The signs of Times*, a number of people from the government side have made their stand known. It took the government some days with any response, which is very strange especially that Mutharika has a considerable amount of people who speak on his behalf. None of these provided answers when people needed their reaction to the contents of the letter.

Some churches like the Livingstonia Synod of the church of *Central African Presbyterian CCAP* and the Evangelical Lutheran Church and a number of civil society organizations have added their weight to the Catholic Bishops letter. But the Blantyre Synod of the same CCAP church was all comical when it bashed the epistle only to apologies after some days. Reports have shown that the Synod's moderator, Reynolds Mmangisa earlier in the month announced that the Bishops should have found a better way of communicating with President on the contents of the letter other than doing it publicly. Mmangisa went further to say the catholic leadership should have booked an appointment with President Mutharika to discuss the letter. It should be noted that this is a 20th letter that the bishops have written and they have always followed the same format. Mmangisa came under heavy attack and pressure from the nation and even members of the same church and the entire synod apologized barely some days after Mmangisa's pronouncements.

In November Fr Anwell Martin Mtumbuka was concentrated Bishop of the newly created Diocese of Karonga. The colorful function, was presided over by the Pope's Nuncio Nicola Girasoli. The new Bishop was advised to avoid indulging in politics. President Bingu wa Mutharika who has attended concentration ceremonies of some bishops stayed away from the function and no other government representative was present. Mutharika chose to go to Gaborone in Botswana where he opened headquarter offices of SADC. But as other individuals have noted Mutharika should have at least delegated the Botswana trip to one of his numerous ministers or better still assign some one to attend the Karonga function. Many have interpreted this a slap in the face to the church.

The *Institute for Policy Interaction IPI* condemned president Mutharika for the remarks he made when he was addressing the press at the *Kamuzu International Airport* in Lilongwe. Mutharika said the remarks as he was answering questions on concerns raised by the Bishops in the epistle on the mistreatment of the vice president Right Honorable Joyce Banda. Mutharika literally said Banda is a vice and is on the carrier not the saddle and we should not expect her to ring the bell. Executive Director for *IPI* Rafik Hajat has noted that these are demeaning and disrespectful to the Vice President. By saying these words Mutharika has answered the questions that have been lingering in people's minds over his relationship with Mrs Joyce Banda. This is not the first time Mutharika has had problems working with his deputy. During his first term of office the president had also issues with the then Vice president Dr Cassim Chilumpha.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Just when civil society organizations are busy protecting the rights of children some parents are doing the opposite. In the month of November the press covered stories of children who are either tied to trees because they have mental problems or confined in a house for a whole year. These are some forms of abuse that children are facing in the communities. In a recent report a mother is said to have imprisoned her own son in their house for a year because she did not want to take him to a hospital. Such kind of acts and other unreported forms of abuses on children should be discouraged at all times.

The recently released United Nations Human development report has disclosed that Malawians are now healthier, more educated and wealthier. Contrary to what the *United Nations Development Programme UNDP report* on national development has said some critics are of the view that as a nation Malawi we are no where near this and can do much better because it is only a few individuals who have amassed a lot of wealth over the years. As some writers have put it one only needs to go outside the cities and towns to appreciate the levels of poverty among the majority of Malawians. To date some people still sleep with empty stomachs not because there is no food in Malawi but because they cannot afford it. The UNDP resident representative told a meeting repeatedly that the national poverty datum line allows of MK 62 puts many Malawians above the poverty line. Were Malawi to follow the international poverty line of US\$ 1.25, 72% of the population would be under the poverty line! One wonders if this is merely shifting the goals post? As other observers have noted reports of people fighting over goat meat during Eid-Al-Adha celebrations in Mangochi is also evidence that we are still far from being a wealthy nation

The issues of chiefs being the most corrupt and partisan group in Malawi was also in the press in the month under review. While it is understandable that chiefs live and represent the views of the grassroots, evidence has shown that most chiefs could easily be mistaken for politicians. Reports show that they are normally more active in politics than their intended role in society. In some cases the chiefs are imposing their views and political decisions on the grassroots. Against this background the *National Elections Systems Trust NEST* has warned chiefs to be non-partisan. *NEST* officials have noted that the more chiefs are involved in politics the more they threaten the country's democracy.

Just some weeks after police claimed to have accidentally shot a child in Lilongwe, the law enforcers shot another man in Chiradzulu district. The man who was at the time coming from his in law's house met his fate at night as police were patrolling the area. Press reports have shown that the Police thought he was a thief when he was actually not. The same police also shot a man in Nkhotakota during a wrangle among smallholder cane growers.

The Chewa in Malawi mourned the death of Senior Chief Mazengera in the month of November. Mazengera died at *Kamuzu Central Hospital KCH* in Lilongwe after a short illness and is survived by a wife and three children. He was 33 years old.

EDUCATION

Although for some years the education ministry has been trying its level best to develop standards of education by among other things improving infrastructure. In recent times the ministry has conducted a number inspections that have resulted in schools with substandard buildings closed. In November the press also disclosed that some schools in Malawi still do not have good structures. One such school is the Namiwawa Primary School in Blantyre where pupils with disabilities are using a toilet for a classroom. According to media reports the room, which used to be a toilet but now is a resource center still smells and has no proper ventilation. The UNDP told the nation that if Malawi is to meet the MDG on education, it will need to build more than 20,000 classrooms. We have only till 2015!

The *Malawi National Examinations Board MANEB* released the 2010 *Malawi Schools Certificate of Education Examinations MSCE* in November. *MANEB* also indicated that there is an increase in the passing rate, which was at 51.2% in the year 2009, but now it is at 53.35%. There have been a lot of cases of cheating during examinations and leakage of exam papers way before the actual day of the test. The 2010 examinations were also not spared from cheating; there was an increase in the number of cheating cases. Evidence has shown that the number increased from 153 cases last year to 251 cases this year. What does this tell us of the caliber of candidates Malawi has? At the same time it slows down the government's efforts to fight for better standards of education.

Meanwhile reports have shown that prisoners have done exceptionally well in the 2010 MSCE examinations. The results show that some prisons had a 97% pass rate. The good pass rate is encouraging to those that are in prison and have not considered of attend school. It should be noted that prisons in Malawi have been at times described as death traps because of heavy congestion and unhealthy living conditions that prisoners are subjected to. All these scenarios are not conducive to education, but against all odds the prisoners did well in their examinations. Some credit for this should go to some catholic chaplains who have made it their mission to build classrooms in the prison compounds.

Compulsory education still remains a thorny issue for Malawi. Although there have been proposals from different sectors of the society (it was also mentioned by many countries and organizations at the recent Universal Review Process see below) to have a deliberate policy that would make education compulsory, government has opposing views. Evidence has shown that the levels of illiteracy are very high in Malawi. Against this background government came up with adult literacy programmes and other initiatives that would help in reducing the number of people who are illiterate. But at a recent human rights summit (UPR) in Geneva in Switzerland the Malawi government rejected some proposals one of which was the introduction of compulsory education. For now it seems this compulsory education is not in government's plans.

HEALTH

The *Malawi Health Equity Network MEHN* in November expressed concerns over reports that hospitals are sending back elders when giving out drugs. Press reports have shown that some doctors have a habit of telling old patients to leave drugs to young ones. It is a right for every Malawian regardless of their age, gender, tribe or race to access drugs in government hospitals. Now the trends mean the elderly are being discriminated against and organizations like *MEHN* would want an end to this. It should be noted that Malawi has a whole ministry that looks after the elderly therefore denying them drugs is surely an act of inhumanity.

Press reports on health have disclosed that Malawi as a nation is doing badly in terms of health spending. Malawi is falling short of the standards that were set internationally. An agreement made in Abuja Nigeria states that countries should allocate at least 15% of their national annual budgets on health. But evidence has shown that in recent years the allocation has been decreasing from 26% to 12%. Contrary to the Abuja declaration Malawi's spending is lower than the set standard. However in the 2010/2011 budget the allocation is at 15%.

Malawians in November woke up to a screaming headline on Zomba State House being turned into a hospital. While some quarters of the society have welcomed this announcement others still feel government should have done wider consultations before making such a decision. But president Bingu wa Mutharika is already geared to make his dream of turning Zomba State House into a referral hospital a reality. It was publicly reported that architectural experts from the ministry of health headquarters would go to examine the Zomba State House. Further reports on the same referral hospital have shown that the Federal Republic of Germany has already pledged support for this cause. If this materializes this would increase the number of referral hospitals in Malawi.

Although the *Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi ESCOM* changed its slogan from *Power All Day* to *Towards Power All Day*, it seems people are now feeling the pinch even more. A case at hand is that of Queen Elizabeth Central hospital which had to resort to the use of candles because of frequent blackouts. Here is the biggest referral hospital in the southern region where patients are in the dark and guardians are shouldering the expenses on candles. One wonders what would happen to the guardians' resources if the situation continues. Surely *ESCOM* and hospital administration need to do better than this.

ENVIRONMENT

Findings of a research done by an international environmental organization have disclosed that developed countries have not done much in honouring pledges they made towards climate change. At a climate change meeting in Copenhagen Denmark last year developed countries promised to give developing countries funding that would help such nations to cope with climate change. This is a new phenomenon that is affecting many nations and the focus for a number of organization is on climate change issues and even donors are more than willing to fund programmes on this topic. But observers have said developed countries should start fulfilling their promises.

Malawi is one of the nations that are at extreme risk to climate change. According to global rankings among the 16 countries that were listed as being at a greater risk of climate change Malawi is on number 15. Environmentalists have disclosed that because Malawi depends on agriculture for its economy it might suffer some calamities due to climate change. This scenario puts Malawi under threat of being greatly affected by climate change. Evidence has shown that most of the countries that are at an extreme risk to climate change effects have high populations and high levels of poverty.

Press coverage in Malawi is normally full of political and other topics but environmental stories rarely receive coverage. It has been said more than once that the environment is an equally important sector of the society and needs equal press coverage just like the other topics. But there has not been enough improvement as regards reporting on the environment. In the meantime local environmental journalists have expressed concerns over their absence at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Mexico. Therefore Malawi's coverage on the proceedings at the meeting is going to be scanty.

GENDER

Whatever is happening between President Bingu wa Mutharika and his Deputy Mrs Joyce Banda does not reflect well on government's stand on women empowerment. To imagine that the Malawi nation is a signatory to a number of declarations on women development and empowerment the treatment that Veep is suffering in the hands of the Mutharika administration does not reflect well on the nation. To some observers it does not make sense to have a leader who claims to be a champion of women empowerment when his junior who is a woman is being sidelined in all decision making meetings like that of cabinet. Perhaps it is high time we started walking to talk.

All the energy seems to be focused on women's participation in the Local Government Elections next year. The much talked about 50-50 campaign is also in full gear. Although there were some hiccups between the ministry of gender and children's welfare and community development and *Non Governmental Organisations NGOs*, the ministry is leaving no stone unturned in making sure that the number of female councilors is increased. Press reports have shown that the ministry would want to have the number increase from 8.3% to 50% in the 2011 local government election.

Whatever went wrong between NGOs and the ministry of gender on the 50-50 campaign must be sending wrong signals to observers and donors. Here are two separate groups who are supposed to be fighting on the same front but are failing to do so. Recently the *NGO Gender Coordinating Network NGO GCN* announced it had pulled out of the campaign. The Coalition went further to say they were not happy with the way the whole campaign is run. But the donor, the Norwegian government, has asked the two groups to sort out their differences.

Ministry of gender in November launched the 16 Days of Activism with the theme *Prevent Violence Against Women*. During this period the responsible sectors of the society fight for a violent free nation not only to women but children and men as well. During the campaign every Malawian is urged to avoid and stop all forms of human rights abuse against women and children. On several occasions the media has reported of abuses women and children are facing in society. Some gender activists have recommended that Malawi as nation should strive at making the nation a violence free nation the whole year around, not only the 16 days.

Meanwhile some traditional leaders have disclosed that other customs are behind the accelerating number of gender based violence cases in Ntcheu district. In his own words Inkosi Makwangwala of Ntcheu noted that the custom of beer drinking is one of the reasons women are suffering from gender based violence. The Ngonis in Ntcheu are well known for their love for beer and meat. Media reports have shown that a number of men in the area drink excessively and they end up neglecting their families and abuse their wives and children in their drunken state. Observers have noted that a change in one's drinking patterns could also be one way of dealing with the problem.