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**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

Members of Parliament in Malawi are never short of controversies. It all started with their proposal to have their allocation of fuel revised upwards. The Legislators would want to have 500 litres of fuel per month for each one of them. There are 193 members of the National Assembly. Their wish is somehow strange. According to some writers who made calculations 500 litres of fuel is just too much for the legislators.

Some observers have noted that the fuel allocation increase will be like another salary raise for the MPs because they get money equivalent to the litres of fuel. If government approves their proposal it means each of the MPs will be going home with the cash and not the actual fuel. Only God knows if all this money is going to be used for its intended purpose.

Already there have been reports of some legislators who desert their constituencies after winning their parliamentary seat. These members are seen in cities and have no time to visit the people who put them into power. One wonders why such MPs are making demands for more fuel allocations when they do not make trips to their constituencies. Of what use is the extra fuel they are demanding?

The same MPs have also had their sitting allowance raised from K15,000 to K20,000. MPs have at times used their positions to have their allowances and other benefits increased, when they are failing to discuss other more important issues that would benefit many poor Malawians. It is like they first of all care about their own welfare and care less about the voters. Not so long ago some MPs failed to make it back to parliament because of this same care free attitude.

We also agree with political analyst Dr Augustin Magolowondo who noted that 193 constituencies are just too many and therefore too much for a country like Malawi. Still being a poor small country with very minimal resources the number of constituencies is too much. Just like they (MPs) wanted to trim the number of councilors it would not be of any harm if the number of legislators was also chopped.

POLITICS

The National Assembly's three weeks meeting ended in the month of February. Among other things the sitting passed a K11.5 billion extra budget and other rather controversial bills. With the ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* over two thirds majority in parliament it did not take a lot of time for the house to pass the controversial local government Bill much to the annoyance of some opposition members who are an insignificant minority in the House. Among other things the MPs have given too many powers to the minister of local Government to even hire and fire the District Commissioners *DCs*. Meanwhile the *Civil Servants Trade Union CSTU* has raised fears over this amendment. Among other reasons *CSTU* says the ruling on *DCs* might leave room for abuse of power during elections because the same *DCs* are used as returning officers during general elections.

Still on the same local government ministry, minister Goodall Gondwe announced in the National Assembly that Malawi is going to have tripartite elections in the year 2014. This will include the local government elections and the usual presidential and parliamentary elections. Government has in the past been under attack from NGOs and other political analysts over its unwillingness to conduct local government elections. Malawians are yet to see if these elections are really going to happen because this is not the first time government has promised the nation that it will conduct local government elections and never fulfilled its promise.

Members of Parliament shocked the nation when they proposed a hike in their fuel allowances. The legislators who are 193 in number want to get 500 liters of fuel every month. Not only has this angered some political observers but some constituents as well. Some civil society commentators feel 500 litres of fuel to each legislator is excessive. According to reports the MPs are only being selfish because they do not receive the actual fuel but a cash equivalent to the liters of fuel. Evidence has shown that some MPs rarely visit their constituencies and therefore do not need lots of fuel.

Some political observers have questioned the announcement by parliament that Members of Parliament will be getting K20,000.00 sitting allowances per day. The announcement came at a time when people are still bitter with legislators for asking for more allocation of fuel for their cars. It is tantamount to a joke to think that these are the same people who claim to be the servants of the people who voted them in power.

After months of waiting the ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* appointed Bintony Kumtsaira as the Secretary General of the party replacing honourable Chimunthu Banda. The later resigned from his position after he was chosen to be Speaker of the National Assembly. Chimunthu Banda replaced Mrs Joyce Banda who was secretary general when she was elected vice president of the Malawi nation in the May 2009 General Elections. The civil society and other political observers commended the *DPP* for filling the vacant positions in its executive committee.

The *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* in the month of February suspended 3 Members of Parliament all from the northern region for questioning government about the equal access to university education (also named the quota system of selecting university students). Typical of political parties in Malawi, the *DPP* has backed its decision that it is for the good of the party. But some observers have noted that the move is undemocratic because the three suspended parliamentarians were expressing the views of their constituents, thus doing the work for which they are elected and are entitled to their opinion. Others have noted that it is

high time parties became tolerant to people who have views different from the party's stand in any issues. The question is even more serious now. Because how can alternative ideas be brought to the policy debate if no one is allowed to engage in debate.

Some Rastas in February touched a raw nerve when they proposed to Parliament to bring back an open term debate in the August House. The bill was defeated when it was brought to parliament to give room to former president Dr Bakili Muluzi for another term of office when his two constitutional terms were about to expire some years ago. Now the Rastas want it back for president Mutharika. The proposal has angered many people who feel the issue of open term is dead and buried and should not find its way back to parliament. Surprisingly some of the sections of the Rastas have distanced themselves from the proposals.

President Bingu wa Mutharika startled the nation when he openly announced that priority is going to be given to only DPP youths in disbursing funds from the *National Youth Enterprise Development Fund NYEDF*. Mutharika who as president (father of all Malawians is expected to treat every one equally) announced that first choice is going to *DDP* youth because of their undying support to the party. The opposition on the other hand and some observers have since condemned Mutharika's utterance. According to the *Malawi Congress Party MCP*, Mutharika's plans to do with the *NYEDF* do not befit a chairperson of the African Union, a continental body. Others have complained about the lack of transparency in the way about a third of the funds already have been spent.

Politicians are a bunch of funny people who say one thing today and do the opposite a day later. Uladi Mussa president of the *Maravi Progressive Party MPP* is one of them. He made a shocking announcement that he intends to rejoin the *DPP* the party he dumped 2 years ago. Mussa who is one of the founders of the *DPP* could safely be described as a good public speaker who at his peak was very close to *DPP* president Dr Bingu wa Mutharika. His recent announcement to dissolve his party to rejoin the *DPP* has left people with more questions than answers. Whether the *DPP* welcomes Mussa or not the *MPP* followers are the ones that will feel the pinch because it might not be true that their president consulted them.

ECONOMY

President Bingu wa Mutharika's appointment as the Chairperson of the African Union in the month of February should have been good news to many Malawians but all of a sudden people's view have changed. To a layperson Mutharika's chairmanship meant a lot of economic gains but to the disappointment of many, the president made it very clear that financial gains were very minimal if at all any. People's hopes were further dealt a blow when Finance Minister Ken Kandodo announced a K950 million budget for Mutharika's engagements during his tenure of office at AU. With his new portfolio Mutharika will be required to make a lot of foreign trips therefore needs all this money and Malawians have to fund it.

Some economic experts have noted that the situation on the ground is still not that good on the economic front despite reports of improvement in the country. According to press reports Malawi's inflation rate continues the downward trend and this should have been reflected in ordinary people's lives. But the economic growth in Malawi cannot be seen in many homes because more and more people are struggling to make ends meet. There are still a lot of people below the poverty line. And moving above this poverty line does not mean being rich!

After months of being stable against the United States dollar the value of the Malawi kwacha finally slipped. This coincided with the price increase of the fuel. The Malawi Energy Regulatory body increased the prices of fuel after some months of no adjustments. Previously government reduced the price of fuel after the reduction of the commodity was announced globally. It took Malawi some time to reduce the price of fuel although some neighboring countries had already done so. Because of this increase the consumers gain has been short lived.

While the citizenry's participation in public policy formulation is regarded as one of the great virtues of democracy, in Malawi up to this time the populace has been very passive on issues of good governance and accountability. For instance, an issue like that of the national budget, the public has long regarded it as an occupation of the government. But this time around, the *Malawi Economic Justice Network MEJN* has decided to turn the tables upside down. *MEJN* has been conducting an exercise, at district level, that gave members of the general public, civil society leaders as well as assembly officials a chance to discuss their district budget with the view of providing input into the national budget, the latter being the overall desired outcome so to say. The exercise is, among other things, meant to sensitize rural communities on the importance of the government budget, as well as on how they can ensure that some of their needs find their way into the annual financial plan for the country.

FOOD SECURITY

Press reports have shown that there are still some problems that are refusing to die during the farm input subsidy program, which has been around for some years but year in year out there are reports of some shortcomings that surround the distribution of coupons. If it is not theft of coupons then it is either shortage of the coupons and late delivery of the farm inputs. This season some people have already complained about the closure of coupon distribution, which they say has closed early. Recent reports have shown that some people who had coupons failed to access subsidized fertilizers. After years of administering the coupon system one should have expected some improvement. Those that are involved in the programme should find a lasting solution so that there is no room for the same old stories during the exercise.

As some areas are expected to reap bumper harvests others will have to replant their crops because of the dry spell that affected their area. According to the agricultural experts the farmers in Mwanza will have to replant because the dry spell affected the crop in the district badly. It was reported in the press that the crops especially maize wilted so much that some people resorted to burning the crops in the garden. Government has since promised to give out subsidized farm inputs to the people that will replant their crops. But one wonders whether the rain season will last long enough to see the crops mature.

Although some people are still in doubt over the food situation after this farming season president Bingu wa Mutharika has other ideas. After inspecting some gardens in the month of February, Mutharika has assured the nation that Malawi will still have plenty of maize, which is the staple food for Malawi. Mutharika is reported to have flown over some maize fields in the country and was impressed and convinced that the maize situation in the country is good.

Contrary to what some people think about the food situation in Malawi, agricultural divisions in the country have revealed that we should expect a reduction in the maize production this year. For two consecutive years, Malawi has been having bumper harvest with a lot of surplus maize. In some districts people will go hungry because reports on food security have indicated that there is going to be a 30% reduction in the maize production this year. Experts have noted that this is going to be the case because of the change in rain patterns that have ended up affecting production in some areas.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Finally the dust is settled down. After months of tension and verbal wars over a border dispute between Nkhoma Synod and Livingstonia Synod of the *Church of Central African Presbyterian CCAP*, the former declared the fight is over. Nkhoma Synod in a pastoral letter to its faithful said it no longer recognizes any borders. In this regard Livingstonia Synod is free to build churches in the Central and Nkhoma Synod can do the same in the northern region. The wrangle over borders reached its climax when Livingstonia Synod penetrated Lilongwe to build churches.

The Muslim community in the month of February celebrated the birth of Prophet Muhammad (*Peace Be Upon Him*). The celebration called *Eid Ul Nabhi* is celebrated every year across the world. President Bingu wa Mutharika and his fiancée Madame Callista Chapola, joined the Muslims in Blantyre during their parade marking the celebration.

Some civil society organizations have expressed concerns over the way parliament conducted business in the last sitting of parliament in the month of February. Members of Parliament missed an opportunity to discuss some of the pressing issues at hand. For instance some of the issues that have welfare of women at heart were not tackled. Instead the members passed a K950 million budget that would ease the food situation in Malawi and an authorization for the use of money for Mutharika's activities now that he is the Chairperson of the African Union. In short it did not meet people's expectations.

The controversy surrounding the change of the Malawi flag continued in the month of February with people giving out their views. Government's proposal to change the national flag has left some people with more questions than answers. In the first place some quarters feel government has already made a decision to change the flag and is only asking people to make contributions on their view just to buy time. To some sections of the society there are debates whether the Malawians will benefit from the change of the flag and whether the move will unite or divide Malawians. Changing the flag as proposed would also call for the change of the monetary unit from Kwacha (it is dawn) to Masana, it is midday) as one observer noted. No one in ongoing debate has mentioned that the name Malawi is closely associated with the dawn over the lake when the **rising** sun produces as it were little flames of fire all over the water. The proposed change to 'midday sun' seems to have so few reasons in favour except to point to the few developments Malawi has made that the rising sun for most is till a symbol of hope, of the country in continuous process of development, the country's name, the process of development. One commentator even thought the proposed change looks more like a moon than the midday sun. it looks as if the consultation was only make belief because new flags have been ordered and a bill to legalise the change was drafted!

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Press reports in the month of February have disclosed that the number of youths who are committing crimes in Malawi is on the increase. Most of the cases reported in the press indicate that the crimes are committed by youths. It is not clear whether there is any hope for these youths who are always appearing on the wrong side of the law. An example is that of Jack Bandawe famously known as *Nachipanti* and a recent case of young man who was caught with private parts in a plastic bag in Chikhwawa district. This scenario has left people wondering what exactly will become of these youths who are expected to lead the country in future.

Some people in this time and era still believe that there are those who can bind rains. This is evidenced by reports that some people in Chiradzulu district are selling rains. It is because of the persisting dry spell in some districts that inhabitants have resorted to buying rains from 'rainmakers' who claim to have powers of making it rain. Bizarre as it sounds but those desperate for rains in the district are buying it from an old man and indeed their wish is fulfilled.

On the same issue of rains some people in Balaka district have taken a different approach in their search. People have revived the old tradition of asking their ancestors. They perform rituals and ask them for things they wish for, in this case the rains. Surprisingly while some areas are receiving abundant rainfall to the extent that some goods and property have been damaged, others remain dry.

As the *Centre For Social Concern CFSC* and other organizations are advocating for the passing of the Labour Tenancy Bill, tenants who are at the helm of the production of the gold leaf are still living in extreme poverty. The latest information has disclosed that tobacco tenants continue to live in poor conditions and are facing a lot of exploitation in the estates. But these are the people who are at the helm of Malawi's main foreign exchange earner. Evidence has shown that after all the deductions tenants receive K14,000.00 per year. This amount is too small considering the huge sums of money that farmers realize at the end of a season. According to *CFSC's* findings of a survey of living and working conditions in tobacco estates revealed that they are very bad and there is a lot of exploitation on the farms.

EDUCATION

Just when people thought that the issue of the equitable access to education or quota system had been put to rest, education minister George Chaponda told the nation recently that the University Council put the system in place, a thing he had earlier on denied. Chaponda added that it was temporary. This latest announcement has left people wondering if at all the minister is being sincere with what he is saying on the issue. Earlier on government had announced that the quota system of selecting students into public universities was here to stay. Now whatever made the minister change his tune, Malawians have the hope that it is for the good of the people.

In a bid to shake up things in the education ministry, authorities in the month of February banned part time teaching. Evidence has shown that most teachers from public schools have extra classes after their normal classes. According to reports the teachers are doing this to supplement their meager salaries. The decision to ban the part time classes has not been accepted by the teachers themselves who feel the ministry has no justification for its stand. While some parents and students feel the government has made a good decision because the teachers will only concentrate on their jobs others feel the ban will kill the spirit of hard work among learners.

Old habits die-hard! This is what the wise say. Many years ago before Malawi became a democratic country, students and teachers were forced to attend presidential functions at the expense of learning in their classes. All this became a story of the past after the one party dictatorship rule came to an end. But the same old practice is back. Press reports in the month of February have disclosed that teachers and students are being forced to line up for president Bingu wa Mutharika. Education organizations have condemned this practice.

The introduction of free primary education in Malawi has been indicated as one of the reasons why there is congestion in schools. To date there are still some schools where the infrastructure is not enough to keep all the students. An example is that of Mwanza district where it is reported that there is a shortage of classrooms. The situation is worse now that we are in the rainy season. It is reported that due to the shortage of classes some pupils in primary schools in Mwanza have classes under trees. When the rains start it is very difficult to continue their lessons. The problem is not only in Mwanza but the problem is countrywide. The shortage of classrooms should be looked into so that the education standards are improved.

HEALTH

Government in the month of February announced it was going to probe reports that some people are using Antiretroviral drugs to brew beer. The revelation also indicated that some farmers are using the same drugs in chicken feed. The story from Thyolo district shocked many people because one would never have dreamt of such waste. The drug, which helps in prolonging the life of HIV/AIDS patients seems to be abused in this manner. It is a good thing that government has promised to look into the issue. Perhaps with government's intervention and good civic education we shall see some improvement.

The future of young Malawians aspiring to become medical personnel in the country is still in limbo following government's announcement that students will still pay K300,000 per annum. Evidence has shown that a number of guardians and parents expressed concerns over the fees, which are far too high. There have been calls from parents, guardians and the prospective students for government to consider the plight of the people that cannot afford the fees, but to date nothing concrete has come out. The fact that not too many people will be able to pay the fees poses a danger to the health sector because there is already a shortage of personnel in the health sector. It should be noted that the hiked fees have not only affected students in Christian health schools but also in the government owned College of Health Sciences.

Press reports on health disclosed some strange demands from HIV AIDS donors. Circumcision, this is what they would want to use to fight the pandemic. There have been mixed reactions ever since the issue of circumcision was raised as one way of preventing the spread of HIV. The funny thing is that those who assist with funds for HIV and AIDS are insisting that the fight can only be meaningful if they include circumcision. But the players in the HIV/AIDS field have noted that though this might be working in other countries, in Malawi it is not having any impact because the districts that practice circumcision are the same ones having higher incidence of deadly disease. AIDS which has no known cure, has for over two decades given researchers and scientists a tough time to come up with a solution to the problem.

Although they are responsible for the welfare of other people, nurses in Malawi are still living on an insufficient salary. The work that nurses in Malawi do cannot match the take home pay they receive at the end of the day. Evidence has shown that only two midwives at a referral hospital attend to 48 sick women in a day. This is so much work so that it needs a good remuneration at the end of it all. Although some Malawians cannot appreciate the work the nurses, do their counterparts in Norway think the opposite. The nurses from Norway feel Malawian nurses and midwives deserve better salaries.

ENVIRONMENT

After an earthquake happened in Karonga district, some international organisation has warned of many more calamities that could also happen in the same district. According to the organisation based in South Africa, the mining of Uranium in the district would expose Karonga to many more calamities. Among other things the organisation notes that if an earthquake shakes Kayelekera where Paladin is mining of Uranium a lot of toxic waste will flow into Lake Malawi. Although the foreign-based organisation warns that there is a danger that another calamity will happen in Karonga again, government has quashed the report by the organisation. To date some people are still struggling to rebuild their homes following an earthquake that happened in the district late last year.

As the national forestry season continues a number of organizations and individuals have participated in some kind of exercise relating to reforestation. Pupils in some schools in the city of Lilongwe are also engaged in a reforestation campaign along riverbanks. In recent times some rivers have changed course mainly because of the cutting down of trees in the riverbanks. This exercise will indeed help in one way to regulate the flow of rivers in the cities.

Recent media coverage carried some stories of residents complaining about the bad smells that come from uncollected waste and sewer pipes and tanks that burst in some areas. All the blame has been pointed to city assembly officials because they do not come to collect bins in time. Evidence has shown that a number of people resorted to disposing waste in rivers and streams in their location. Dumping of things in rivers is happening everyday. But some people in the areas along Nankhaka River in Lilongwe City have decided to change this.

Press reports have disclosed that communities have launched an anti-dumping campaign along Nankhaka River. This is a good example of managing to conserve the environment. Communities are said to help remove all waste in the river. At the same time pupils in schools around the area are also planting trees. The Nankhaka initiative is a one of a kind project that other areas should emulate, if Malawi is to keep its rivers clean.

GENDER

Media reports on gender have shown that the private sector has not done much in putting women in decision-making positions. Evidence indicates that it is very rare in the private sector to find women in top positions. Even when the women have all the required qualifications and expertise they are still being left out. The situation should change for the better now that Malawi signed the gender and development protocol. But there is a lot more that needs to be done in making sure that the requirements of the SADC region are met in up lifting women.

Years after the Domestic Violence Bill was passed into a law in the National Assembly it is sad to note that some people especially women are still not aware of the legislation. The bill, which was tabled in parliament in the year 2006 received massive coverage from both print and electronic media. To have some people who are not aware of its existence should give all stakeholders and gender activists more home work to sensitize the people. Press reports have disclosed that some women in Thyolo are not aware of the existence of the bill. Perhaps Thyolo is not the only district where many have no idea about the bill.

In the month of February the Ministry of Gender and Child Welfare came up with a programme that would assist child headed families. There are many homes that are headed by children and most of them are female. With the help of *UNICEF* the ministry started assisting these child headed families with tool kits and some money. Malawi has a lot of children who became orphans and are now left to make ends meet on their own.

Gender experts in February asked organizations and all stakeholders to formulate policies that respect gender. This plea comes at a time when some companies and organizations are in the process of coming up with workplace policies. Against this background the *NGO Gender Coordinating Network* noted with great concern that women are only used to help men to reach where they are but are not recognized. The gender organization wants stakeholders to do a lot more on their commitments to gender. There is a tendency of making good promises on gender equality but in the end the people fail to follow up on these.