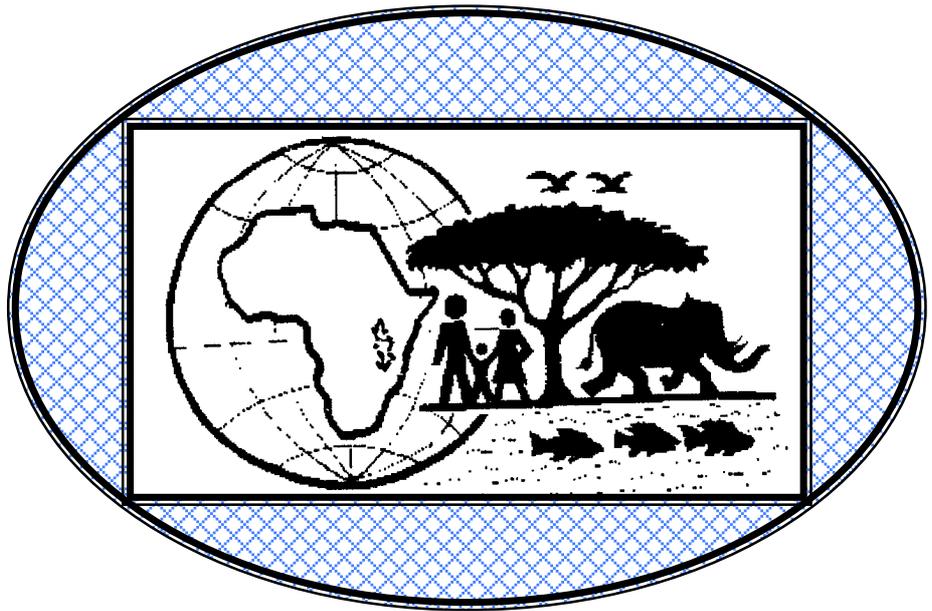


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**OCTOBER  
2010**

**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 is now becoming an annual occurrence to have fuel shortages in the cities. Late last year motorists had to spend hours just to buy petrol and diesel. It was estimated that people lost a lot of businesses because of the shortage.

This time around the situation is the same but as usual government is not giving out any convincing answers. The government's spokesperson has at different times pushed the blame to others saying fuel tankers are stuck at Zambezi Bridge much to the annoyance of Mozambican authorities.

The fact that government authorities are not coming up with a good explanation on the fuel shortage situation has left room for people to speculate. While some are saying the shortage is as a result of forex shortage because government cannot pay suppliers, others are saying it is government's problem for failing to plan on the availability of fuel.

No one can be blamed for having an opinion because in a democratic Malawi there are rights for all to express himself or herself. Now having to face the same problem every year-end will cause frustrations among Malawians.

The moment fuel is scarce in Malawi production goes down even for white-collar jobs. Even managers have to spend hours on queue the moment they have knowledge of the availability of fuel at any petrol station. People fail to fully concentrate on their jobs if they know they have no fuel in their cars to take them home after work.

For transporters it is even worse because the days they spend without fuel means no business. The situation is even worse especially in this time of the subsidized farm input program. Therefore the shortage needs a quick intervention.

## POLITICS

The ruling Democratic Progressive Party DPP in October got all the seats during the bye elections that were conducted in Mangochi-Malombe and Dowa-South East constituencies. Surprisingly these areas are the ones that were formerly well known for being strongholds of the United Democratic Front UDF and Malawi Congress Party MCP respectively. At one point the UDF used to call Mangochi district its bedroom where no other party would find a seat. And the Central region is well known for being the heartland of MCP. But the bye-election results have shown that things have changed.

Some political analysts have noted that the opposition party needs to do a lot of soul searching to find out why they did not get what should have been an automatic seat. The result could mean that people have lost trust in their parties. With some years to the general elections, parties should treat these results as a wake up call, if they are to make it in the 2014 general elections. People's memories are still fresh of how the MCP chased 2 of its high profile members instead of welcoming them back in the party. One of the victims Chris Daza was chased for aspiring to become president of the MCP. It should be noted that while some people feel time is up for John Tembo, others think no one should oppose the big guy. To them whoever opposes the MCP leader is a traitor and has no room in the party.

**Latest information from the MCP taskforce has shown that the party is asking comedian artists Michael Usi to be the party's running mate in the 2014 general election as vice president. Usi has never been known to be a politician, but the comedian has said he is happy with what he is doing at ADRA Malawi. Some people are wondering why the party is going for candidates outside the party when it has other young people of great potential within the party.**

All seems not be well in the UDF camp. The sudden announcement by the Atupele Muluzi, son to former president of Malawi who was also chairman and sole financier of the UDF that he would like to lead the party has opened a wrangle among the members. Secretary General Kennedy Makwangwala has made it clear that he is not happy with the former chairman pushing his son to lead the UDF. Makwangwala thinks Muluzi is the one who is behind Atupele's sudden interest in leading the party. Before he publicly announced his retirement from the UDF, Muluzi single-handedly appointed Friday Jumbe as the party's leader. According to experts whatever is happening in the UDF will not build the party but will instead ruin what the members have tried to build up. The leaders need to take a lot care.

President Bingu wa Mutharika in October extended an olive branch to the leaders of the Livingstonia synod who have not been on good terms with the Malawi leader. On several occasions the religious leaders from the synod have openly criticized the president and his government. One of the things is the way government reintroduced the equitable access (or quota) system of selecting students into public institutions of higher learning. The Synod strongly felt the system was targeting the northern region a thing the government denied. As if this is not enough the synod feels Mutharika who got massive support from the region has not done much to develop the region.

Government has always criticized the synod for not following proper channels in their attempt

to address the issues. Mutharika and the synod have not yet met to iron out their differences but observers have commended the president for his efforts. Meanwhile the synod has written the president to ask for what will be on the agenda of the proposed meeting and the venue.

After dropping them from the cabinet President Bingu wa Mutharika removed Goodall Gondwe and Khumbo Kachali from their leadership positions in the National assembly. Mutharika has since appointed Dr. George Chabonda as the leader of the House and Dr Ken Lipenga as his deputy. The new Chief Whip is Vuwa Kaunda and Anna Kachikho still remains his deputy.

## ECONOMY

People living in the cities continued to experience fuel shortages in the month of October. This is still raising a lot of questions among Malawians especially business people who rely on forex to import raw material. Surprisingly this is the tobacco season and again the sales of Uranium should have meant more forex in circulation. Even the opposition parties have asked government and its leadership to explain the shortage. But in his defence newly appointed presidential spokesperson Dr Hetherwick Ntaba replied by saying government does not make forex. But some people who are not economists have attributed the shortage of forex to the numerous foreign trips of the president.

Reacting to the issues of forex shortage president Bingu wa Mutharika assigned his newly appointed members of the national advisory council whose chairperson is the president's brother Peter Mutharika on a strategic planning exercise to solve the issue. So far there has not been any good explanation that Mutharika has given on the shortage of forex. Some time ago he just accused some foreigners of siphoning forex.

Meanwhile some observers have noted that the current fuel shortage could also cause price hikes for some goods and services. Economists Association of Malawi, ECAMA has noted that if this trend continues there are likely going to be increases in prices of commodities. For instance the fuel shortage will pose a great threat to transporters who import raw materials as a result there is going to be less production resulting in low supply. Therefore traders will be left with no option but to increase the prices of their goods.

Finally after so much talk and publicity government launched the Nsanje World Inland Port. Although there were some doubting Thomases the project has shaped up and the first phase is now over. In October the port was launched in the presence of Zambian and Zimbabwean leaders Dr Rupiah Banda and Dr Robert Mugabe. It is still not clear as to why Mozambique stayed away from the launch, which even the African Union Commissioner Jean Ping attended. Prices of some goods like fertilizers are going to be cheaper if the port becomes fully functional. Other reports have shown that there has been an on going blame game between Mozambique and Malawi officials. On their part Mozambique says they were not invited to the function but Malawi insists they did. It is not known who is telling the truth.

The decision by the World Health Organization WHO to ban production of burley tobacco is a shock to many. Tobacco is called Malawi's green gold because more than 60 percent of Malawi's foreign exchange comes from tobacco. The tobacco industry also helps the nation in employing a lot of people. Now the revelation that burley tobacco will be banned puts Malawi at a disadvantage. To date there is no other crop that is seen to be a replacement of the gold leaf. At present there is less demand for tobacco in the world as a number of countries are engaged successfully in the anti smoking campaign.

## FOOD SECURITY

Distribution of the national farm input program started in the month of October. The exercise, which started about five years ago, has been facing a lot of criticism from both the opposition parties and independent observers. Experience has shown that the distribution of fertilizer subsidy is never short of controversy. The Ministry of Agriculture has on several occasions been accused of not running the programme properly. There have been reports of theft and late delivery of fertilizer. Some reports have indicated that the whole exercise is politicized because those that are seen to be in the opposition parties have problems to get a coupon. As the distribution started in October people can only hope that the ministry responsible has already taken care of the problems and that this year's programme will meet people's expectations.

Some observers have noted that there is need to give subsidized fertilizer to other nutritious crops. At present the target is maize, which is the staple food of Malawi. The Irish government, which is one of the financiers of the subsidy programme, has noted that other nutritious food crops need to be on the subsidy programme.

While some donors are of the view that more crops should be added on the subsidy programme, others would like the Malawi Government to find ways of stopping the programme. The United Kingdom's *Department of International Development DFID* has advised the Malawi nation to think of ways of putting the subsidy programme to an end. Although *DFID* is not spelling it out as to when Malawi should stop the subsidies, the writing is on the wall that they are not in favour of the subsidy to be continued without end. President Bingu wa Mutharika at a United Nations summit on the review of the *Millennium Development Goals MDGs* told the meeting recently that even with or without donors he will continue with the subsidies.

Evidence has shown that the subsidy programme gets a big chunk of the agricultural national budget. The price of subsidised fertilizer is still at K500/ 50 kilogram bag. It should be noted that some civil society groups proposed that the price of the 50mkg bag should be raised to K1000.000.

Meanwhile some farmers have pleaded with government that the subsidy programme should be there for ever. The farmers feel because of the success story on food security, they should not stop the subsidy programme. But experts have always warned that the extended use of fertilizers is not good for the soil because it erodes the soil off its natural nutrients.

As the world was reviewing the *MDGs*, Malawi seems to have done well in achieving the goal on food security. To this extent president Bingu wa Mutharika shared with the world his vision of making Africa its food basket. Mutharika further noted that this can only be achieved with subsidies and a lot of machines and equipment for irrigation.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Transparency International an organisation that monitors governance and the way countries are fairing in handling corruption in October announced that Malawi is improving. Recent findings by the international organisation have disclosed that Malawi has performed better this year. But some observers have said the recent release does not reflect what is really on the ground. Corruption cases are the order of the day for some Malawians who are reported to have gained a lot of wealth through such malpractices. Others have actually questioned and wondered if at all Malawi is cleaner this year in terms of corruption.

Just recently the *Anti-Corruption Bureau ACB* announced that so many chiefs are involved in corrupt practices. The other group is that of police officers. The traditional leaders use their powers in their daily work of their own advantage.

The Non Governmental Organisation Coalition for Children's Rights in October condemned the shooting of a 16-year-old boy in Lilongwe. Press reports have disclosed that Police shot the boy with two bullets for suspecting that he had stolen K20,000.00 from a minibus driver. Memories are still fresh of how police have fired bullets that have ended up killing innocent children. People will live to remember how a trigger happy policeman shot young Epithania Bonjesi who sat on the veranda of her house in Chilobwe in Blantyre several years ago.

Press reports in the month under review have disclosed that Malawi needs to do a lot in reporting on human rights. The African Commission on People and Human Rights has disclosed that Malawi has not been submitting its reports on human rights making it difficult for the commission to assess the country. Reports have shown that rights of prisoners are being violated because of the abuses that happen to the prisoners including severe congestion. The commission has since asked Malawi to do better by replacing Zomba Maximum Prison.

The *Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace CCJP* in October launched its findings in the way the National Assembly conducted business since 2009. In a survey it conducted, the commission notes that MPs are failing in their duties as overseers. Some legislators have faulted the composition of the house at present where the majority is on the government side. This scenario has made it difficult for the opposition to effectively debate on any issues while the ruling party just agrees to all government proposals.

The Catholic Church on the very last day of the month of October read a pastoral letter in all its churches throughout the country. The letter which is entitled 'Reading the signs of times' touches on the successes of the present developments, abuse of the vice president and the attacks on the media. This is the 20th pastoral letter that the Catholic Bishops have written since the 1992 Living in Faith which led to the downfall of Late Dr Hastings Banda.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIVES

The gods have smiled on Agness Misolo a woman from Mulanje who made headlines last year for giving birth to a stone baby. This time around Misolo is a proud mother of a baby boy. Misolo became an overnight celebrity after it was reported that she had given birth to a 'stone baby'. She was all over the newspapers and television and people called her the stone baby mother.

October is the month of some cultural festivals in Malawi. It all started with the Ngonis from Mzimba who celebrated Umtheto at Hora Mountain in Mzimba. Ngonis from all walks of life were at Hora where they joined Inkosi ya Makosi M'belwa IV. President Bingu wa Mutharika was also in attendance.

Later in the month the Lhomwes also commemorated three years of Mulhako wa Alhomwe at their headquarters at Chonde in Mulanje. President Bingu wa Mutharika, a Lhomwe himself, but also the patron of the cultural event attended the celebrations. Mutharika once again called upon people from different cultural backgrounds to live together in harmony. He also encouraged people to come up with associations aimed at preserving different cultures that exist in the country.

Some Chewa chiefs in October fell out of grace with the Chewa chief Kalonga Gawa Undi over their involvement in partisan politics. Paramount Chief Lundu in his outbursts said he does not recognize the Zambian based Gawa Undi because Malawi is not a kingdom. Even Traditional Authority Kaomba of Kasungu also shared the same sentiments. But it is good to note that Gawa Undi who recently attended the Mulhakho wa Alhomwe celebrations and Paramount Lundu have mended their relationship.

The military in Malawi is well known for discipline and good behaviour. But the news that three soldiers sold their uniform and badges to an ordinary person is deplorable. One would have expected the soldiers to shun from such kind of trade but the reports show that the people who bought the uniforms were using them in roadblocks. Unfortunately the buyers were caught with an illegal drug ( Marijuana). Perhaps the arrest of the three soldiers would serve as a lesson to some who might want to ply the same trade.

The society woke up to some strange news of two couples in Zomba. The two men are reported to have swapped wives and are all living happily with their new spouses. This is the first time that the media has reported such a story. In Malawian culture such occurrences are better kept a secret, but the men defied all odds by making it known that they have done this much to the displeasure of the traditional leaders in the area. It is not known whether this is the only case in Malawi because in many circumstances these issues are not reported in the press.

## EDUCATION

The dust is refusing to settle around the issues of teachers' hardship allowances. Ever since the issue of hardship allowances came up it has created a lot of controversy between the teachers and the ministry. Since finance minister Ken Kandodo announced in the national assembly that teachers living in the rural areas would be getting K5000.00 hardship allowances a lot has been said and debated on. The first to complain were teachers in the urban areas who felt they equally deserve the hardship allowances. As if this were not enough the ministry came up with another way of dealing with the allowances and disclosed that teachers living in the rural areas but at trading centers would not be getting the allowances.

Just recently the ministry again told the teachers that even in the very same rural areas some schools have good structures and as such would not qualify for the hardship allowances. This latest announcement has not pleased leaders of the Teachers Union of Malawi who have said the new system of choosing who should benefit from the hardship allowances is discriminatory. One can only hope that all the grievances will be looked into and dealt with once and for all.

Teachers the world over commemorated the World Teachers Day in October. As Malawi was celebrating this day a number of issues came up one of which is the shortage of teachers in Malawi. Figures have shown that in the rural areas the situation is worse because there are a few teachers and enrollment of pupils is very high. Meanwhile reports have shown that government is trying its best to deal away with the shortage of teachers.

In what can be best described as a comedy, the university council of Malawi raised the fees of University of Malawi students only to have their decision reversed some days later. It cannot be easily said in normal words what exactly happened for the council to come up with the fees hikes because President Bingu wa Mutharika who is the chancellor of UNIMA stopped the council from effecting the changes despite the fact that they had already communicated to the nation. It is not known whether the council consulted with the chancellor before making the announcement.

The ministry of education in October continued with its inspection of schools where it ended up closing 30 private schools. The exercise, which has been going on for some time, is aimed at improving the standards of education. Some schools with substandard infrastructure have been closed during the exercise. Another issue that the ministry looks at is the availability of teachers and laboratories. Perhaps this exercise will indeed go a long way to improve the ever-plummeting standards of education.

## HEALTH

Press reports on health carried the same old story of drug theft at the *Central Medical Stores CMS*. Not only are theft reports embarrassing but they also dent the image of the people who are responsible for the drugs some of which are very expensive. It was reported in October that the problem at the *CMS* is not only theft of drugs but also shortages and lack of accountability. To add salt to the injury, the group of donors that assist Malawi in the health sector, which includes funding for the purchase of the drugs, are aware of the situation at *CMS*. Against this background the Health donor group have since asked authorities to turn the *CMS* into a public trust.

The news about *Traditional Birth Attendants TBAs* received massive media coverage in the month under review. After banning them for some time President Bingu wa Murtharika announced that the *TBAs* should still be used in the country. This development has pleased some members of the medical profession who have backed the president's decision. At the same time other experts are not for the resurrection of the *TBAs*. Mutharika announced that *TBAs* should not only be allowed to operate but also be supported. In some areas, which are very far from any health clinics, people prefer to visit the *TBAs* for deliveries. But statistics show that a number of women die due to complications and the *TBAs* are some times not hygienic leaving the mother and newly born babies more vulnerable to any diseases.

Still on the same topic some experts are of the view that the *TBAs* should not be brought back into the system at all costs. On the local scene the Association of Obstetrician and Gynecologists are of the view that having the *TBAs* back will only slow down the progress on reduction of maternal deaths. A regional body on health called East Central and southern Africa Health Community share the same view with the local organization.

The media in October disclosed that there is not much that has been done in the proposed HIV/AIDS bill. At present government is reported to have delayed the bill to give room for more consultations. Reports have indicated that the bill has sections that will make room for compulsory HIV testing for people who wear uniforms like the Police and the Army. At the same time commercial sex workers would also be going through mandatory HIV/AIDS testing. It should be noted that some months ago sex workers took a petition to the minister of gender over the HIV/AIDS bill, which they said was targeting them. HIV/AIDS still remains a thorny issue for many Malawians because Aids issues for many is still better kept secret.

As the world was reviewing progress on the *Millennium Development Goals MDGs*, it is good to know that Malawi and other countries have made strides in achieving goals number four and five. Goal number four is on the reduction of child mortality rate. Reports have shown that while Malawi is trying all it can to achieve this goal by 2015 the country needs to do a lot more to realise these goals. But all is not lost because there is hope that the goals will be achieved.

## ENVIRONMENT

The resolution by the *SADC* region to ban and close all markets for illegal environmental products is a welcome development. There is going to be tough and thorough checking in all the borders in the whole *SADC* region. This is good news because it will minimize imports on any products that cause damage to the environment. In Malawi imports on second hand fridges and air conditioners that have ozone-depleting substances were banned some years ago. But evidence has shown that some business people find their way through the porous borders. But there is now hope that this will be dealt with once and for all because of this agreement by all *SADC* countries.

Press reports on the environment have shown that women are also feeling the pinch because of deforestation. It is reported that in some areas women have to travel long distances to look for firewood. In Malawi women are mainly responsible for looking after the home and when there is no water and food they feel the pinch more than men because they have to face the children and explain why the situation is like that. Some women in Mlonyeni's area in Mchinji cook once a day because of shortage of firewood. This is the case because people were involved in wanton cutting down of trees.

Some experts on the environment have noted that Africans should stop getting worried about the annual floods. The experts feel it is now time for Africa to stop having worries over flooding waters but instead they should use them to their benefit. The floods could help countries achieve food security if rice is planted in flooded waters. A number of areas in Africa experience floods every year because of environmental degradation that has taken place in recent years. It is not only in Malawi where deforestation has contributed to silting in rivers and flooding but in other African countries as well. In this regard a Malawian Bioscientist wants the flooded waters to be put to good use.

Memories are still fresh of how some environmental civil society organizations volunteered to do a clean up exercise in the Mudi River in the city of Blantyre. It is not a strange thing to see a lot of waste in rivers in Malawi. Even industries dump their waste in rivers. Perhaps it is now time we took care of our rivers because if we all relax we shall end up having no clean water in the rivers.

## GENDER

The NGO Gender Coordinating Network NGO GCN in October dumped the much touted 50-50 campaign after successfully engineering it in the last general elections. The NGOs successfully did it during the 2009 general elections and now government is at the helm of the campaign. The ministry of gender and children and community development has since asked the NGOs who are interested in the campaign to apply for the funding. This scenario has not gone down well with some organizations that were involved in the campaign last year because they feel the government has stolen their ideas. At the same time they think the gender ministry is doing this deliberately to award the work to NGOs that sympathise with the ruling party.

President Mutharika launched the African women decade in Nairobi Kenya recently. The years 2010-2020 have been declared African Women Decade and the theme is grassroots approach to gender equality and women's empowerment. At the launch Mutharika who is chairperson of the African Union reminded African nations to start implementing the declarations they have been signing all these years.

Some civil society organizations are leaving no stone unturned in readiness of the April 2011 local government elections. The Centre For Human Rights and Rehabilitation CHRR in October urged chiefs to support female candidates. Although many people in the society have different views about nominating women as councilors CHRR is of the view that women can effectively work as men in developmental assignments. Therefore CHRR is encouraging chiefs to give their support to women in the forth-coming elections.

Observers on the developments that have been made so far on women empowerment have noted that there is still more that can be done. The country's leadership has made some strides in empowering women but there is still room for improving. While one might appreciate the fact that there is a female vice president in the country, the fact that Mrs Joyce Banda is not being accorded the treatment she deserves.

The issue of women dancing for male politicians was also in the press in the month under review. Dancing in Malawi is one way of celebrating but some gender activists still would want women to do more than entertain men at political rallies. As women who make big numbers in the parties are dancing the men are busy in leadership positions. This is evident by the structures of parties where only a few women are given big positions. Even in parliament chairmanship of almost all the committees is male dominated. As Malawi celebrated mothers' day women need to be considered when giving out leadership positions.