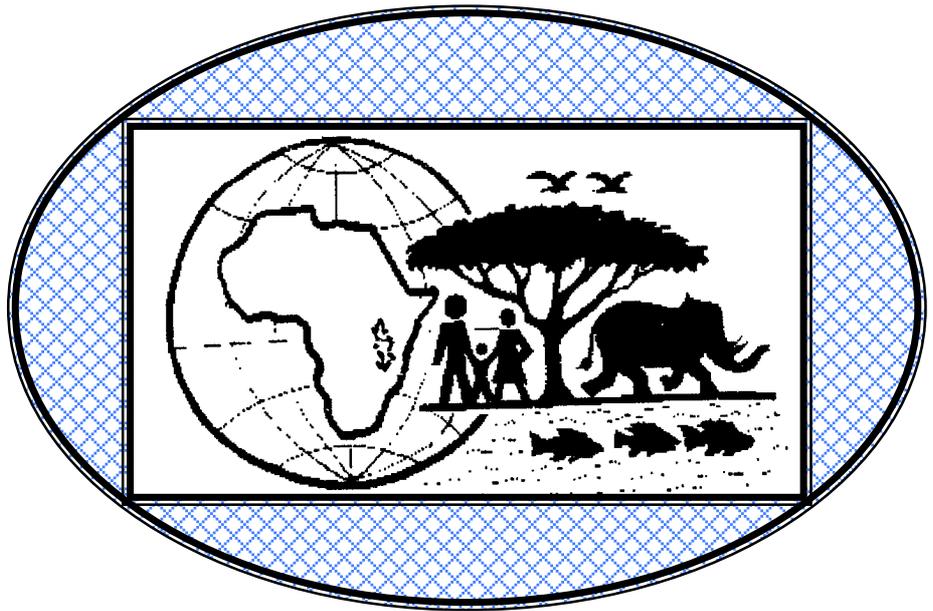


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***APRIL
2011***

**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 all started with reports of the United Kingdom rebuking the Malawi Government for purchasing a presidential jet allegedly using part of the budget funds that the British government gave to the country. For those that know what it means running government in Malawi it was easy to see that all was not well in as far as relations are concerned.

No sooner had people recovered from some nasty decisions that the DPP led government has made, reports came out that government was intending to expel the British High Commissioner to Malawi Mr Fergus Cochren Dyte. The only crime he made was to communicate the truth to his government about what is happening in Malawi.

Here is a man whom the British Government, the former colonizers of a small impoverished nation in Southern Africa with a staggering 13 million people, entrusted with the responsibility of being a High Commissioner and the Malawi government say they have lost confidence in. Sounds strange and funny!

Britain is Malawi's main donor that fact cannot be disputed. Gives the government 40% needed for every fiscal year's national budget. Supports military and medical training, gives medical support, and countless more projects are funded by the British. The list is endless. One cannot even think of getting into bad terms in any way with such a good and old friend!

But what did people get, a confirmation that indeed government has expelled the High Commissioner for saying what many people have observed. After all the pleading from the opposition political parties, faith organizations, individuals and even civil society not to deport Mr Dyte, President Mutharika went ahead and did the opposite of people's wishes.

While it is too early to say what the consequences will be of this emotional decision one thing is clear that the British government is not too happy with this development. Already, they responded by asking the Malawi High Commissioner to United Kingdom, Flossie Gomile Chidyaonga, to leave the soonest and withdrew her invitation to Prince William's wedding to Kate Middleton the same week.

Some observers are still at pains to understand why the incumbent government does not accept any criticism even when it is constructive. For sure one cannot expect appreciation and praises all the time. One should question the people that surround you if they always saying sweet nothings!

Yes, Malawi is a sovereign state but what is sovereignty when poverty levels are high, unemployment rate are skyrocketing, and fuel, forex, water, medical shortages are the order of the day. Not forgetting constant power failures! Malawi surely needs the likes of Britain more than the British does Malawi.

POLITICS

Opposition parties in the month of April showed great concern over the president's conduct in recent months. The *United Democratic Front UDF* has actually warned that president Bingu wa Mutharika is slowly sliding into dictatorship. Who can blame the *UDF* for thinking along these lines when Mutharika is shows some signs of being a dictator? On several occasions Mutharika has shown another side that many people never knew. Some of the decisions and announcements he has made are typical of a dictatorial styles of leadership. Barely two years into his second term Mutharika has completely changed.

There is evidence that the Mutharika style of leadership is now a cause for concern for Malawians and even other people across the globe. Mutharika faced some hostility in the Republic of Botswana. The leader of the opposition political parties refused to attend any activities that Mutharika was involved in during his state visit to the Southern African nation. Among other things civil society and opposition parties were angered with Mutharika's signing some repressive laws and his behaviour shown in recent times which they said matches that of a dictator. As some political analysts have noted the government needs to take such warnings seriously and to check on some of the grey areas.

Over the weeks Malawians have witnessed a sudden change in president Mutharika's tone. He seems to have slowed down. Mutharika went a step further and promised freedom to all Malawians. He said after finally signing the K53 billion Millennium Challenge Cooperation Compact Account with the United States of America officials. It should be noted that the signing of the compact should have been done a long time ago but because of other issues it was delayed. Those that know the president well have always said that he is unpredictable, he could just be saying this and not mean it.

As some observers have advised, Mutharika needs to match his words with actions. By just saying and promising the nation freedom it does not mean that he will give it. While it is true Malawians easily forget as former president Bakili Muluzi used to say, the president should know that the more people are getting annoyed with his carefree attitude, lack of choice of words and human rights abuses, they are bound to react on the ballot paper. This reaction was evident in the last general election when the opposition lost votes because of their conduct in the year 2004 to 2009. History might repeat itself in 2014, but this time in favour of the opposition. It should be noted that a number of organization and observers have spoken of their displeasure over the government abusing its majority in parliament. Therefore anything is possible in 2014.

After months of outbursts from Malawi's first citizen there has been a sudden change of tone in his speeches. One may actually wonder if the toning down is for real. In his recent speeches Mutharika has avoided uttering any carefree statements. He seems to have learnt how to speak in public without ridiculing his opponents and critics. There is indeed a change in Mutharika going by his directives recently. Mutharika ordered the reopening of the *Electoral Commission EC*, suspension of Reverend Levi Nyondo's case, and authorized former president Dr Bakili Muluzi's medical trip to South Africa. But how long will this silence and refraining from intimidation last, one can only wait and see.

Although there have been calls by some stakeholders over the environment where Mutharika conducts some of his press conferences, there has not been any improvements. The Mutharika administration seems to have fallen in love with conducting press conferences in environments that are not media friendly. On a number of occasions Mutharika has conducted press conferences at the airport in the presence of his party supporters. During such press conferences independent journalists feel so insecure to the extent that they fail to ask any question. Who can blame them after one of the scribes was intimidated by the DPP's youth morale and had to be saved and whisked away from the airport by the police. Meanwhile the *Media Institute for Southern Africa* Malawi chapter (*MISA Malawi*) and other stakeholders have condemned the government for such acts that hinders the journalists from doing their work professionally.

Finally in April government expelled British High Commissioner to Malawi Fergus Cochren Dyte. President Mutharika's government seemd to have tampered with Malawi's ever longest friend. After all the pleading government went ahead and deported Dyte. It remains a shock to many Malawians knowing that Malawi depends on donor aid and Britain is one of the main donors of country. This decision will haunt Malawi forever.

ECONOMY

With just some weeks to the budget sitting of the National Assembly the Minister of Finance, Ken Kandodo, conducted pre budget consultations in all the three regions. During these consultations the minister and his team welcomed views and ideas from all sectors and stakeholders that would later be included in the budget. As usual civil society made its contributions and one of its proposals is a raise in the taxfree band. Civil society organizations led by the *Malawi Economic Justice Network MEJN* are asking government to put the tax free band at K20,000.00. In the past the watchdogs asked government to raise the taxfree band to K20,000.00 but have met resistance from authorities. It should be noted that at present it is only K10,000 which is taxfree.

Some economic experts have warned that Malawi should expect tough times in the economic sector because of the continued unavailability of forex. While other analysts have blamed the shortage of forex on the many foreign trips by government officials other experts have put the blame on foreigners who are hoarding it. Whatever the reason the problem of shortage is nothing new in Malawi therefore government should find a lasting solution.

Meanwhile press reports have disclosed that the government has put strict measures in place in some of its operations. There is evidence that officials received a communication to stop purchasing big and expensive cars for official use. Against a background of delays by some donors like Norway, to disperse funds to Malawi, the finance ministry has advised authorities to minimize the buying of such cars in order to make some savings. Perhaps the order has come too late when finances have already been used because it is a well known factor that some government officials have a big appetite for large cars.

The press carried some interesting findings by the auditing firm *Pricewaterhouse Coopers* on the salary scales in Malawi. It has revealed that the gap between Malawian Executives and other workers is too wide compared to other nations in the region. The report further indicates that chief executives receive 106.7 times more than the lowest paid. As if this is not enough the same low paid people are subjected high taxes leaving them with little hope for life. What is more interesting in this report is that even neighboring countries like Zambia try their best to share incomes to both executives and other in a more fair manner than giving a very large to one group of people.

Financial analysts have noted that although Malawi might be making a lot of forex through exports of goods, the reserves cannot improve for the better because of the increased imports. Malawians need a lot of forex to import goods such as cars, medical supplies, raw materials for the manufacturing industry, and other services. Therefore, even when the country is making a lot of forex from its exports of tobacco and other commodities, the forex gained is being used up to pay for imports. This scenario makes it difficult for people to see any tangible results and improvement in as far as forex availability is concerned.

FOOD SECURITY

Government dropped a bomb shell on the Malawi nation in the month under review. The amount of subsidized fertilizer has been reduced from 170,000 to 90,000 tonnes. Going by these figures some farmers that the government targeted in its fertilizer subsidy programme will certainly have to do without the farm inputs, thereby reducing their produce. It is no secret that the bumper yield that Malawi has experienced in the past years can safely be attributed to the availability of cheap fertilizers and good weather. Therefore, the reduction of the number of bags of fertilizers in the coming farming season will surely have implications for people's farms.

It has been said every now and then that Malawi needs to find an exit to fertilizer subsidy but so far there is nothing concrete that has been suggested to replace the use of fertilizer subsidy. A number of organizations have advised farmers to use composite manure and indeed made demonstrations on how farmers can make manure. But it seems too hard to change people's mindset on the use of chemicals in the soils. At the same time environmentalists have also warned about the continual use of chemical fertilizers, as they are harmful to the soil when used in large quantities over a long period of time. Perhaps the reduction in fertilizer subsidy this coming season should act as a wake up call to both farmers and all stakeholders. But what are the implications of overusing fertilizers and then suddenly stopping? This is something that needs to be looked at critically.

Although the estimates that were made some time ago on maize production showed that there is going to be another bumper harvest the situation could change because of the dry spell that some areas experienced. According to *Famine Early Warning System Network FEWSNET* there could be a fall in maize produce this year. In the crucial months of January and February some areas experienced a dry spell. The districts of Mangochi, Neno, Mwanza and others in the Southern Region were affected and therefore the harvest will also be affected in terms of quantity.

President Bingu wa Mutharika in April advised farmers to take advantage of the changed rainfall patterns. Mutharika observed that the rainy season being prolonged could be beneficial to farmers if they plant early maturing crops. The president noted that people can take advantage of the prolonged rainfall for food security in households. Mutharika feels the prolonged rainfalls should be put to good use.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The number of civil society leaders who are being harassed by unknown people seems to be rising at present. It all started with reports of unknown people who broke into the office of Executive Director of *Centre For Human Rights and Rehabilitation CHRR*. To date there have been no arrests made but the number of activist that are being emotionally and psychologically abused by these threats that continue to increase. Just recently unknown people denied Benedicto Kondowe, of the *Civil Society Coalition Basic Quality Education CSCQBE*, his freedom by harassing him with threatening phone messages. Authorities have since promised to look into the issue and arrest those that are responsible for these threats. Dorothy Ngoma of the *Nurses and Midwives Council* and Chancellor College's Jessie Kabwila Kapasula have also been victims of similar threats.

Following a series of events that have made the relationship of government and some organizations and individuals sour, the *Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace CCJP* advised stakeholders to be tolerant. The Mutharika government seems to have made a lot of enemies lately. Mutharika is not in good terms with the clergy, the academic staff at the University of Malawi, civil society organizations and many more. Whatever the problems are, there should be a quick and lasting solution.

The expulsion of British High Commission to Malawi, Fergus Cochren Dyte, in April has sent shock waves among many Malawians. Dyte is reported to have sent communication to the United Kingdom about president Mutharika's conduct. Dyte has made it clear that Mutharika is autocratic and this has compromised his relationship with the media, the clergy, the academia and even the civil society. When the story was first made public people expected Bingu to come to his senses and to reverse the decision only to realize that despite all the advice that came his way Mutharika went ahead with exercising his powers. Now Malawians will pay for his blunders.

Local newspapers have disclosed that there is a lot of international pressure coming to Malawi on human rights and governance issues. The *Democratic Progress Party DPP* led government has made enemies not only on the local scene but also internationally. To imagine that journalists in other countries have added their weight in fighting for freedom of the press when the government of Malawi feels there is nothing wrong with having Section 46 around. The rate at which the Mutharika administration is going on issues of governance and human rights we might as well be living in the one party era.

The saying that a prophet is never honored in his own land was proven right when international organisations praised local NGOs for standing firm and reported Bingu wa Mutharika to the United Nations. Though this is what internationally people feel is worth commending the government has ridiculed the same CSOs at every opportunity. Of late civil society in Malawi has become government's number one enemy following a number of issues that the two do not agree on.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

For a very long time there has been talk about the congestion and poor conditions of Malawi prisons and the problem seems to be far from over. This is the case because crime is also on the increase and new convicts fill the same prisons that are available. Even the female prisoners with babies are also subjected to these harsh conditions in prisons. Although experts have advised that a jail is not a place to raise a child reports have shown that at present there are 11 babies in Malawi's prisons.

With just some days to the opening of the budget session, the NGO Coalition on Children's Rights has noted that there is need for the budget to include issues that directly affect children. For sure the allocation of issues in the national budget should take children's needs on board. Against this background the Coalition want a budget that will meet the needs of children at all levels. It should be noted that the Malawi constitution recognizes anyone below the age of 18 as a child.

The press in April disclosed violations that some women are facing at the hands of medical personnel. In Ntcheu reports have shown that women are being forced to undress for blood tests. Surprisingly the doctors only take the blood samples from a finger and the arm and what raises more questions is the fact that it is only women who are being told to undress. One thing is clear that the medical personnel are harassing women by asking them to undress.

The words "searching for greener pastures" could make others smile but this is not the case with the women in Mzimba district. While it is true that everyone needs to find something better in life in order to live a dignified life, some women in Mzimba are not happy with the current set up. Reports have disclosed that a number of married men trek to South Africa looking for better paying of jobs leaving their spouses in the district. The wives have now come into the open to say that they are not happy with these arrangements because it is partly the reason there is high rates of AIDS transmission because the couples stay apart for a very long period.

Fifteen years after the Labour Tenancy Bill was drafted the bill is still not in parliament. Some bills have received massive support but despite having all the needs that will legalise the tenancy system in Malawi the bill seems to attract less attention from the legislators. A lot of advocacy work has been done and yet the bill is nowhere near parliament corridor. It is for this reason that over 5,000 tenants petitioned the government on the bill Lilongwe recently. If passed the lives of tenants would perhaps change for the better because of the availability of working contracts.

EDUCATION

After proposing that education minister Peter Mutharika should resign for failing to deal with issues that are currently bothering many in the education sector, opposition political parties are now demanding for him to be fired. They are now asking the president to fire the minister mainly on two grounds. For starters the Ministry of Education is entangled in the salary delays of teachers with some not being paid for three months. To date the main reason behind the delays is not known. One other issue is the closing of Chancellor College following a wrangle between University of Malawi Chancellor College lecturers and the Inspector General of Police, Peter Mukhitho. To date the Polytechnic and Chancellor College remain closed because the issue has not been resolved.

It should be noted that Peter Mutharika has never made any statement on the academic wrangle. If he resigns he will be the first Malawian minister to do so after a crisis in his ministry. This silence is what has irked some observers thinking the younger brother of president Mutharika is not concerned with what is happening in his ministry. The president is the only person who can hire and fire a Cabinet Minister.

In recent years Malawi Schools of Education Examination results have not been impressive and this is not a secret. On many occasions the authorities have spoken about the falling pass rate during almost all the national examinations. As some observers have put it this is happening at a time when examinations are leaked and examinations cancelled. Cheating is the order of the day as some students bring materials into examinations despite thorough checking when entering examination halls. These are said to be some of the reasons that education standards are plummeting. No wonder education minister Peter has a reason to worry about the falling rate.

President Bingu wa Mutharika presided over a ground breaking ceremony of the *Malawi University of Science and Technology MUST* at his Ndata farm in Thyolo district. *MUST* is one of the five colleges that president Bingu wa Mutharika promised Malawians in his State of the Nation Address last year. As one way of dealing with shortage of places in institutions of higher learning Mutharika has vowed to build five more universities in Malawi spread in all the three regions. If this materializes, issues of space in colleges would be an issue of the past.

HEALTH

The issues of the Malawian government expelling British High Commissioner Fergus Cochrane Dyte will also affect the health sector. According to press reports some health projects get their funding from the British government. The same government also gives Malawi some budgetary support. Now the fact that the relations seem to have gone from good to bad following the expulsion of Dyte a few days ago, there are fears that any consequences may affect the health sector big time.

Following a series of negative stories that have been appearing in the press in recent months, government has advised doctors to stop talking to the media. There have been a lot of stories on shortage of drugs and the medical stores running on debt. Another negative story that was also in the press was that of the government cutting funds to hospitals, including *Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital QECH*. Reports further indicated that at *QECH*, government had trimmed the monthly allocation by 30% and that some activities have been suspended. Against this background the government has resorted to gagging anyone in the ministry from speaking to the media. Of late doctors at *QECH* contradicted in their statements to the press over the availability of oxygen at the hospital.

Kamuzu Central Hospital KCH has a shortage of mosquito nets. This is the first time that a referral hospital has run out of mosquito nets. It is common knowledge that hospitals should be seen trying their best in preventing their patients and guardians from getting other diseases. To imagine that the only referral hospital in the whole Central Region is does not have mosquito nets for admitted patients sleep under is a deplorable situation that needs urgent intervention.

Malaria continues to be one of the major killers in Malawi and the world over. In Malawi expectant mothers are advised to get Malaria treatment in the first trimester of their pregnancies and get medication against the deadly disease. Children under the age of five has also been a target of mosquitoes that transmit malaria.

On the same noted the press disclosed in April press reports disclosed that projects on the fight against malaria in Chikwawa and Nsanje are bearing fruit. This is a good development that needs to be supported by all stakeholders. For sure some districts can a thing or two from the lower shire to avoid deaths that are caused by Malaria.

ENVIRONMENT

Media in April carried a lot of stories on Karonga disasters. First it was the earthquake that left a number of people homeless last year. This year floods hit some parts of the district washing away crops for some households. Some observers have questioned the calamities that keep occurring in the lakeshore district. As some writers have said there should be something that could be done to avoid losses of property, crops and life in the times of floods. For instance people should be told in strongest terms to avoid living in flood prone areas. Although this sounds a difficult task to persuade people to leave such areas, emphasis should be made in sensitizing people on relocation.

Still on matters concerning Karonga District issues of uranium mining have always raised a lot of debate in the press since the project started. At first some environmentalists and activists had raised questions over the authenticity of the Environmental Impact Assessment which they felt was questionable. For a starter some people were against mining activities in the district fearing the worst could happen to Lake Malawi if something goes wrong at Kayerekera Mines. Now that the activities are in full swing at the mines there were fears that there might be spillage of radioactive materials from Kayerekera following the flooding that happened in recent weeks. But as press reports have disclosed there is no need to panic because nothing of that sort would happen.

The Meteorological Department in Malawi announced in the media that Malawians should expect reduced rainfall in the month under review. The announcement came against a background of unusual heavy rainfall that some areas experienced. Unlike in previous years the trend has been reduced rainfall in the months of March and April. But during this farming season this changed because some areas received lots of rainfall in April. As experts have said April is a transitional month from rainy season to dry.

The cries of residents near Lengwe National Park seems to have hit a blank wall because government is reported to have defied the Wildlife Act which does not allow any mining activities to be done in the area. According to press reports government awarded a South African company a licence to explore coal deposits in the wildlife protected area. For sure after the exploration mining activities will follow leaving the wildlife in the National Park at a disadvantage. As usual the government has defended its decision.

GENDER

The month of April had stories on the Vice President's party *People's Party*. For sometime there has been talk about Joyce Banda's party and who has joined her. Finally some hints were made in April as it was obvious Banda would indeed form and register her own party. Joyce Banda has faced a lot of difficulties to work with the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* for refusing to endorse president Bingu wa Mutharika's brother Peter, as the presidential candidate for the ruling party. Since that Banda fell out of grace and was eventually removed from the party along with Khumbo Kachali. Now that Mrs Banda's political ambitions are obvious this is going to be a test to women in Malawi. Will she get the much needed support in a country where all presidents have been men?

There is strong evidence that over half of Malawi's population is women and one would expect that they would use their numbers to turn down the tables in the political circles. The trend has been that most of the top positions in political parties are shared among men, and women take the lesser demanding ones. Could the coming in of Joyce Banda with a political party be a turn over or the beginning of a new in era in politics in Malawi? On the other hand women are also well known for pulling each other down. Will this trend change now that one of the gender champions in Malawi is planning to run for presidency in 2014?

Although it is not certain when exactly Malawi will have its long awaited Local Government Elections some faith leaders are of the view that Malawians should go for more women candidates. Not only should people go for female candidates in LGE but any other positions and competition. It is a woman who makes and changes a home or village therefore if people entrust female candidates in the LGE they should expect more changes in terms of development. A number of organizations have also promoted the same cause in many of the lections that have happened before.

Civil society and other organizations in Malawi commemorated World Women's Day in April despite the day being on March 8. This date is little known in Malawi because among other reasons it is not well publicized. But during this year's commemoration speakers at the ceremony noted that authorities should empower women and the girl child at all costs. Observers have noted that some of the MDGs goals can be achieved if women and the girl child are empowered.