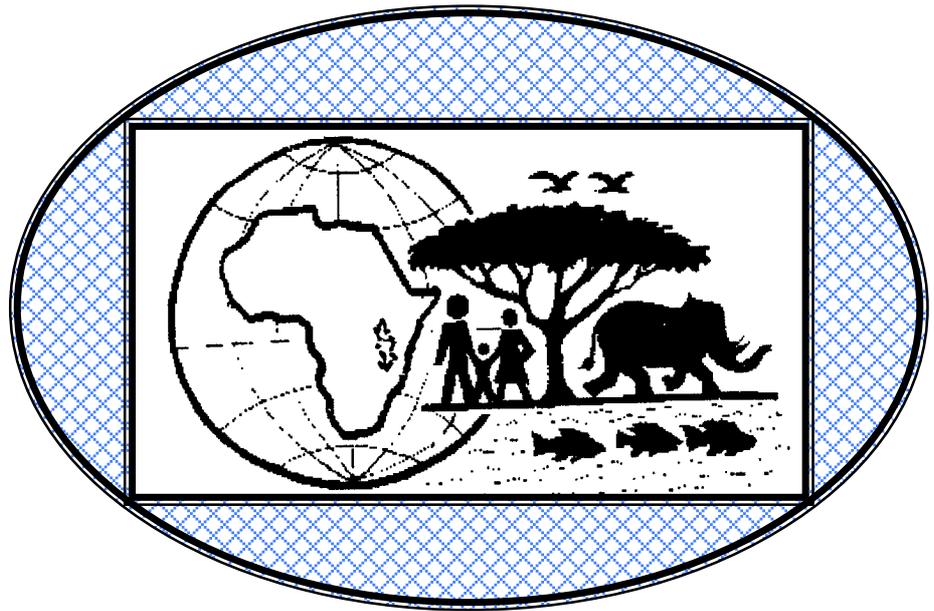


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**AUGUST
2010**

**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

President Bingu wa Mutharika made some statements that should not just go unnoticed. For starters Mutharika is in his second term of office after amassing a more than 63% of the national vote. The electorate even gave him the majority of the 193 members of parliament in the national assembly.

This is where the voters seem to have gotten a raw deal. Because with the majority in parliament Mutharika's DPP is doing things as they please. With the majority in the August House has already passed some controversial bills like the Police Bill, Poll Bill and the Flag bill.

Mutharika seems to be showing his carefree attitude more in his second term because he has the MPs in the National Assembly. Memories are still fresh when he struggled to have the budget passed and how he pleaded with the civil society, traditional leaders and clergy when the opposition was in majority and he only had a handful *MPs* to support him.

His verbal attacks on some Malawians have left some people with more questions than answers. Bingu is reported to have told the Malawi Law Society, a professional body of legal practitioners that they should go back to school and added that little knowledge is dangerous. This is an affront to their professionalism, but also shows their independence. If the Malawi leader thinks they have no knowledge then as a nation we have a lot of homework.

As if this is not enough he has also threatened to shut down all media houses that publish any negative stories on his government. Perhaps Mutharika needs to be reminded that the moment we embraced the dawn of democracy we also parted ways with oppression of the media. Freedom of expression is what we embraced.

Other observers have questioned Mutharika's public attacks on some donors. Even if he has issues with them there is a more civilized way in which a president should talk to the donors. Malawi still needs the donors and washing donor's dirty linen in public is un called for. Such statements make us wonder what type of people are surrounding Mutharika.

POLITICS

As usual politics made a lot of press coverage in the month of August. It is not surprising to see the amount of articles on politics in the media because a lot has happened lately. Just when people thought all that was there to listen to and read about was the young man Jumani Johansson who is claiming to be late Kamuzu Banda's son, the ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* came up with more and more news.

While experts are still in a dilemma to understand what exactly is going on in the ruling *DPP*, the party continues to make many announcements that are seen to be undemocratic and at times even contradictory. One such conflicting announcement is on the candidature of president Bingu wa Mutharika's brother Peter Arthur Mutharika. Although we still have close to four years to the next general election, the vibe is very hot in the *DPP*. It is evident that some members of party have endorsed Peter as the next presidential candidate, without even going for a convention. They surely use all the means at their disposal to push Peter forward, much to the annoyance of those who can only afford to watch the Malawi Broadcasting Television. Strangely enough the vice president of Malawi Right Honourable Joyce Banda is being sidelined at the expense of a mere cabinet minister (Peter Mutharika).

One of either the government's spokesperson honorable Vuwa Kaunda or Dr Hetherwick Ntaba *DPP* publicist is not being truthful in what they are telling the nation. On one hand Vuwa told the nation that *DPP*'s candidate for 2014 is Professor Peter Mutharika on the other Ntaba says the party has not chosen a candidate. Who is telling the truth? *DPP* as ruling party is the government. For sure Kaunda cannot just tell the nation about Peter's candidature without consulting his bosses. Perhaps the two should have shared notes before they went public to avoid the embarrassment they caused

Surprisingly Peter Mutharika himself has openly said that he was not consulted on this issue. Although this may be the case the ground is already being prepared for president Mutharika's brother Peter to take over from Bingu. Eight ministers in the cabinet have publicly supported the younger Mutharika's candidature. But political experts and analysts have warned the *DPP* not to repeat the same blunders the *United Democratic Front UDF* made. Former president Dr Bakili Muluzi defied recommendations from his advisors to pick up a presidential candidate from within his party, preferring Bingu wa Mutharika an outsider who was later to persecute him. It is the same old story of undemocratic and one-man decisions that in the end ruin and breaks parties. Analysts have warned that there might be defections in the party if this trend continues. One wonders why some politicians refuse to keep the promises they made when they took office. Peter Mutharika has since announced that he in the mean time is not interested in contesting as a presidential candidate for the *DPP*, but also added that people in a democracy are free to speak their mind.

President Bingu wa Mutharika in August changed his cabinet in what can be termed as a major reshuffle the first since the general elections in May 2009. Among the casualties of his recent cabinet reshuffle are Goodall Gondwe, outspoken gender minister Patricia Kaliati, Khumbo Kachali, Kingsley Namakhwa, and Professor Moses Chirambo. Others have wondered if at all Mutharika hires and fires his cabinet on merit because the people that were fired were seen to be excellent performers in their job. Just like in all the appointments Mutharika surprised the nation by including the fist lady in the list of cabinet. He has

defended his decision by saying Callista is not in cabinet and that her position is higher than that of ministers.

President Bingu wa Mutharika continued to ridicule Malawians in his speeches. It makes one wonder if at all he was indeed serious when he spoke about building one nation. Evidence is given in his recent answers to some questions that people posed to him. On one occasion Mutharika said that little knowledge is dangerous meaning those that were questioning his appointing of the first lady along side cabinet had no knowledge. Commentators have come out deploring some of Mutharika's statements as not befitting a head of state. Perhaps the people around Mutharika who are given a task of advising the head of state should do so with sincerity. As if this is not enough Mutharika blasted the media and donors at a public meeting in Blantyre later in August.

Just when the nation was about to forget the beatings by *United Democratic Front UDF* young democrats in the *UDF* era, we were rather surprised to see a similar occurrence resurface recently at Chileka Airport. *DPP* female Member of Parliament Anita Kalinde who went to welcome President Bingu wa Mutharika from his recent trip to Namibia had the shock of her life when some misguided *DPP* youths beat her up for apparently supporting Joyce Banda's camp. To date no one has been arrested for the beating. Kalinde also used to be the chairperson of women caucus of the national Assembly but was stripped off her position under abnormal circumstances. One wonders why to date there are no arrests made following the beatings.

ECONOMY

The Reserve Bank of Malawi in August announced a bank rate cut from 15% to 13%. This development has pleased many sectors of society ranging from smallholder farmers, traders to the private sector. This is the 3rd time the Central Bank has revised the bank rate downward in a space of 3 years. Previously it was at 20% and was reduced to 17.5% and went further down to 15% and just recently *RBM* slashed it further to 13%. Meanwhile the *International Monetary Fund IMF* has applauded *RBM* for the reduction in the bank rate, which they say, will preserve the economy's stability.

Just when people expected the nation to have a lot of forex in circulation, press reports have proved them wrong. It has always been a trend that during the tobacco-selling season there is a lot of forex in circulation. But this time around the situation is different. Reports show that there are still some shortages in Malawi. This is evidenced by the fact that there are many imported cars that are seen in the cities meaning a lot of forex goes out on imports. Similarly former president Bakili Muluzi is reported to be stuck in South Africa because of the same problem of forex shortage.

The problem of forex shortage is not new because it keeps occurring every now and then. For sure economic experts should come up with some modalities that would help Malawi to part ways with the problem for good. Some people lose out on business and contracts when it is not available. This situation needs an urgent solution.

Contrary to some reports that have shown shortages of forex, Malawi's imports cover is said to have stabilized. For the past 4 months the imports cover for the nation has hovered around 2.89 months, which is in a way some improvement. Earlier this year in the months of January and February amid fuel forex shortages the country's imports cover was around 1.8 and 1.9 months respectively. The recent improvement is good news as at 2.89 months we are moving in the right direction. Experts have noted that the tobacco and uranium exports have mainly contributed to the stability of the imports cover in the past 4 months.

While it is true that president Mutharika would want to turn Malawi into a producing and exporting country, experts have noted that as a nation we need to add value to our products. This would in turn help Malawi to realize maximum profits. This is evidenced by reports that Malawi loses over \$18 billion for exporting the gold leaf in its raw form. But those that are at the end of the value chain seem to be all smiles at the expense of the producers. It is therefore only fair if the tobacco industry came up with ways of adding value to crop so that the money that is lost for adding value should be earned.

FOOD SECURITY

Media reports locally backed by the *Southern African Development Community's SADC* findings on the food situation in recent months show that over 1 million Malawians have not enough food. This announcement did not please authorities especially president Bingu wa Mutharika who has openly said he is annoyed with the reports. This is the tendency of the Malawi leader because all he wants is good news when it comes to food security. But the fact is good news is not always news. Former president Bakili Muluzi also had a score to settle with journalists who dared to report about food shortage during his tenure. This time around Mutharika has even gone a step further threatening to shut down all newspapers and media houses that say anything negative about his government. It raises a lot of questions as to why Malawi leaders seem to be lied to when it comes shortage of food. Since 2001-2002 reports on availability of food have produced alarmingly different outcomes. It begs the question if even reports on food security are politicized?

Observers have noted that it is a tendency by authorities to run away from the truth even if it is evident that there is a food shortage. Yes indeed there may be a maize surplus, but still some people do not have food and need urgent help. It does not make sense to coat the nation with good and nice reports on food security when the truth of the matter is some citizens of the nation are starving amid reports of plenty.

As the nation is striving to make food shortage a story of the past, agricultural experts have warned farmers to make use of the reduced prices of fertilizers. Farmers are now paying less for fertilizers and saving some money for other farm inputs and needs. With this scenario the *Farmers Union of Malawi FUM* has asked farmers to make use of the fact that fertilizer prices are on a lower side by increasing production. For sure with the money that has been saved one can easily increase production. This will result in high yields and contribute to the food security of the nation.

The announcement by the Reserve Bank of Malawi on the bank interest rate cut has left many farmers with high expectations. A number of farmers rely on the same commercial banks for loans in order to run their farms. Now any good news coming from the central bank on bank interest rate cut is equally sweet music to most farmers. As producers the smallholder farmers would want to get the best results possible from their produce once it goes on the market and adding value to their products.

Evidence has shown that a number of farmers are now becoming very innovative, as they want to maximize all profits coming from their produce. Bearing this in mind they obtain loans from the banks to buy machines that would add value to their products. One example is that of tomato growers who might decide to get loans to buy machines that would help in making paste. Therefore any cut in the bank rate would see the producers getting a lot of returns after servicing their debts.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The arrest of Reverend Levi Nyondo General Secretary for Livingstonia Synod of the *Church of Central African Presbyterian CCAP* has sparked a new row between government and the clergy. Ever since the multiparty democracy came into place in Malawi the clergy have played a major role in cautioning government on some of the issues of national importance. A recent remark by Rev Nyondo at Late Professor Moses Chirambo funeral gained him some days in the cooler. He was later released on bail. A number of churches and some civil society organizations have since condemned the arrest. One such civil society organization is the *Centre For Human Rights and Rehabilitation CHRR* who have said the arrest was undemocratic.

Meanwhile *Malawi Human Rights Commission MHRC*, has since questioned the use of sedition in many cases in the country. Of late a number of people have been arrested for uttering seditious statements. Reverend Nyondo is one of the people who have been taken to task for allegedly uttering seditious statements. According to *MHRC* there should be a line between seditious speeches and freedom of expression. One can easily be mistaken to have made a seditious statement when in actual sense one was exercising their freedom of expression.

Public Affairs Committee in the month of August noted that at present Malawi is lacking a strong voice to caution government every now and then. Daily statements that are made and other actions by people in authority have been left without comment even though some seem to be dictatorial. At present one would say the civil society, also known as watchdogs are now sleeping dogs because they are not cautioning government on very obvious issues. The civil society should surely resume their role of being checks and balances to government. The Baptist convention in Malawi has also added its comments but seems to be the only other religious body to do so.

The Malawi Law Society in August commented on what some quarters are saying about the old flag. Newly appointed information minister Vuwa Kaunda warned people against the use of the old flag. In his statements barely some days after being appointed minister of information Kaunda told the nation that anybody using the old flag would be arrested for causing breach of peace. Contrary to Kaunda's sentiments, President of the *Malawi Law Society MLS* John Gift Mwakhwawa assured the nation that there is no crime in using the old flag as an ordinary citizen of this nation. This revelation at least gives some people a sigh of relief as others have clothes on which the old flag appears.

Some church organizations are still at pains to understand why some people in the ruling DPP are using the state media to attack the incumbent Vice President Right Honourable Joyce Banda. A grouping of leaders from different religions recently condemned government and have since asked president Bingu wa Mutharika to act on the treatment that some of his government officials including those in cabinet are given the Veep.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Human Rights Consultative Committee HRCC in August touched some raw nerves when it proposed that each family should have two children. This has been a controversial issue since it was published in the press some months ago. At first it was said a family should have only four children. With this figure some people were still not happy. And now the number has gone down to two children per couple. Much as some people are supporting this proposal others are totally against it. The proposal is now being put on the table after a survey by the National Statistical Office NSO had shown that Malawi's population is growing at a fast rate. Against this background some observers feel having 2 children in family can control the population rate.

Conditions in Malawi's prisons continue to get worse everyday.. Press reports have disclosed that this is the case because of the congestion in the prisons. The rising crime rate has contributed to the increasing number of prisoners. Evidence has shown that although some prisons in the districts of Mzimba, Rumphu, Chikwawa and others, there is no overcrowding, in Blantyre and Lilongwe the situation is worse. For instance the number of prisoners at Maula Prison in Lilongwe is at 2,217 and yet the prison's capacity is 800. Similarly Chichiri Prison holds 1,790 inmates against a capacity of 800. Perhaps Malawi needs more prisons or to fight crime so that people don't end up behind the bars.

The issue of the new flag seems to have rested after it was officially launched by president of the republic Bingu wa Mutharika. However some days after the flag was officially launched some government departments were still using the old flag. It was somehow embarrassing to note that the entire Ministry of Information and Civic Education failed to use the new flag at a press briefing in Lilongwe. It should be noted that government flew the new flag barely two days after Mutharika consented the flag bill that parliament passed in the last sitting. May be those who claim that the flags were already ordered before any "consultation" was done, are right?

Issues of witchcraft continue to receive a lot of debate among Malawians. It is common to read stories of witchcraft in the daily papers. There have been talks of criminalizing witchcraft because at present it is not in the Malawi constitution. Almost all the cases of witchcraft in the court see the accused being thrown in jail. But although this is the case it has been proven too difficult for medical personnel to determine whether a sickness or death is caused by witchcraft or not. Since witchcraft is difficult to prove, it should be made a crime when accusations of witchcraft are levied? It also seems that many of the accused are elderly people who agree to accusations because they fear for their life.

Some lawyers in the country cautioned government to tread carefully when dealing with sedition. The lawyers feel sedition laws should be scrapped. This is because some quarters of the society can use the law to punish their opponents. At the same time there is freedom of speech in Malawi and having the sedition laws seems to be contradictory. Anyway sedition laws are a leftover of colonial times. Isn't it time to call the past the past!

EDUCATION

An organization that fights for quality education in August noted that Malawi might not be able to meet some of its goals in this sector. One such goal is the Education for All EFA that is supposed to be met by 2015. Countries like Malawi are striving to meet this goal. Currently there are so many programmes that government has put aside that are expected to help realise this goal. But *Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education CSQBE* has noted that this might not happen for Malawi. One reason being that currently there is no policy on compulsory education.

Press reports on education have shown that to date some teachers who upgraded their professional qualification are still getting the same old salaries. This development is sad because with better professional qualification one would expect their salaries to change for the better. Surely there is something that the authorities at the ministry of education can do in making sure that the highly qualified receive that which befits their newly acquired qualification. Getting proper reward for their efforts will also motivate them to use their new knowledge for the betterment of their pupils.

Form four students across the nation sat for the *Malawi Schools Certificate of Education MSCE* examination. In the past *MSCE* examinations have been haunted by leaks and cheating but this was not the case this year. Previously examinations have been called off after almost all the examinations papers were leaked way before the exam date. In these scenarios the *Malawi National Examinations Board MANEB* have had to cancel the whole examination. However the 2010 *MSCE* examination seems to have gone well with no controversies at all. This was also the case with *Junior Certificate Examinations JCE* and *Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations PSLCE*. Cheating and examination leakages erode the prestige that goes with certificates that students receive after writing such examinations. Therefore this should be avoided at all costs and *MANEB* authorities should be congratulated for a job well done.

Private primary schools in the month of August asked government to consider giving out free textbooks to such schools. Evidence has shown that much as the government concentrates on its schools, private schools also require the same textbooks, which are usually expensive. Private schools are also assisting government in its plans to eradicate illiteracy in Malawi and they have a point when they ask government for free textbooks. The Private schools hope that their plea will be favorably considered.

HEALTH

Health reports in August continued to show drug shortages in government hospitals. It has always been the case with some government hospitals that when patients visit to get treatment some drugs are not available. This is however not the case with private hospitals and open markets where drugs are always plenty. For this reason the newly appointed minister of health Mr. David Mphande asked authorities at the medical stores to check all the loopholes that are causing the shortage of drugs.

It should be noted that a couple of years ago some people were arrested for being found in possession of truck loads of government drugs. The arrests only meant that there are more people that have illegal access to government drugs. Perhaps if the authorities at the ministry take heed of honourable Mphande's advice issues of drug theft would be an issue of the past.

Press reports on health have disclosed that as the fight against the spreading of HIV/AIDS continues some people have revealed that there are other issues that are fueling the disease in Malawi. Justin Malewezi, former vice president of Malawi has noted that abusive men are also contributing to the spread of AIDS. In many Malawian families men use their masculinity to abuse women. This is evident by the throngs of girlfriends some men have despite having a lawfully wedded wife. It could be said that this is one of the reasons there is an increase in the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Government in August took a step further to arrest some leaders of the Zion Church who were denying their faithful from vaccinating their young ones against measles. After pleading with the church's senior members to freely allow their children to receive the measles jabs the followers of Zion did not comply with this announcement by government hence the arrests. Earlier reports had shown that a number of children succumbed to measles after their parents failed to take their young ones to hospitals to get medical attention. Since January the disease is reported to have killed 195 people. This is serious business and the government out to remain firm in its resolve.

Some health officials early in August disclosed that many poor women and children are at a greater risk of developing lung cancer. The report by International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung diseases indicate that most poor women use firewood and inhale a lot of soot in the cooking process. This causes problems in respiratory systems of people who use firewood and charcoal as a source of energy. It further says the poor women and children are likely to be infected by tuberculosis and lung cancer.

ENVIRONMENT

One of the *Millennium Development Goals MDGs* is on the environment. Malawi as nation has made some strides in taking care of the environment. Among other things selling of charcoal and firewood is not allowed. But while this may be so the burning of charcoal, which is a main source of fuel for majority of the households in Malawi, continues to grow at a fast rate. Even though forestry officials try as much as possible to discourage people from charcoal manufacturing the traders still do it because they are assured of a ready market. Although government embarked on rural electrification the exercise has not yet reached most areas. To date even in towns and cities some homes mainly rely on charcoal and firewood for cooking.

Press reports on the same charcoal issue have questioned who benefits from the charcoal that forestry officials confiscate from traders. Reports have shown that at Zalewa roadblock authorities seize bags of charcoal only to sell to travelers a few yards from the checkpoint. One wonders with such set up if officials can combat charcoals selling. It still does not make sense if the charcoal that is confiscated is sold later to consumers.

Not so long ago the press showed us what is happening at a dumping site in Lilongwe. Newspapers disclosed that the some residents in the capital city were selling foodstuffs from the dumping site. Again some of the dumped foods are expired and we might never know what implications this might cause on one's health. At the same time the dumping has polluted the air because of the bad smells that comes from the site. As if this is not enough dogs get some of the dumped goods and drag it towards people's residences. Almost everyday there are people who rely on dumping sites for their daily food and survival.

Meanwhile Minister of Natural Resources, Energy and Environmental spoke on the same dumping site in Lilongwe. In normal circumstances a dumping site is expected to be located very far away form people's homes and from any stream. But to the minister's dismay the capital city's dumping site is close to a stream and close to dwelling houses. Among other things the site is not fenced and its makes it easier for children to have access to the disposed goods. Is it too late for the site to be moved to some place where it will not put people at a risk.

GENDER

Not so long ago people were clapping hands and praising the Mutharika government for its efforts in empowering women. The praises came from different directions globally. Mutharika even won an award for recognizing women in Malawi. To those that have a passion for women empowerment it felt good to be a Malawian because Mutharika was showing the world that it is possible to work and develop a poor nation like Malawi while working hand in hand with a female vice president. Mutharika even went a step further to sign the SADC gender and development protocol and indicated that he is committed to achieve full women participation in any decision-making positions.

But recent attacks on his running mate Vice President Joyce Banda have left people wondering if at all he is committed to women empowerment. Mutharika has on several occasions appointed women in decision-making positions like in cabinet, principle secretaries, clerk of parliament and Attorney general just to mention a few. But although this is the case the recent attacks on his vice by some people around the president have left some activists wondering why Mutharika who made us believe he would work with a female deputy is silent on recent developments. Some observers have noted that while silence is golden in this case by being silent Mutharika is clearly telling the nation that he is fine with all the insults directed at his deputy.

Meanwhile some individuals and organizations have vowed to support the Vice president once she declares her interest to run for the presidential race in 2014. Joyce Banda made headlines for being the first female vice president of Malawi after Mutharika personally nominated her to be his running mate in the 2004 general elections. But Mrs. Banda has not made her stand clear on whether she will stand or not.

Gender activists in August noted that women still need to improve negotiation skills. It is not a secret that some employers trust their male employees better than female ones despite the fact that some women are better at their jobs than men. In this set even with better qualifications the female employees are at a risk of not receiving benefits like use of an office car and other profits. This is when negotiating skills become handy. With the fight for gender equality being one of the agendas of Malawi as a nation the women on their part should surely borrow a leaf from their male counterparts who have better negotiation skills.