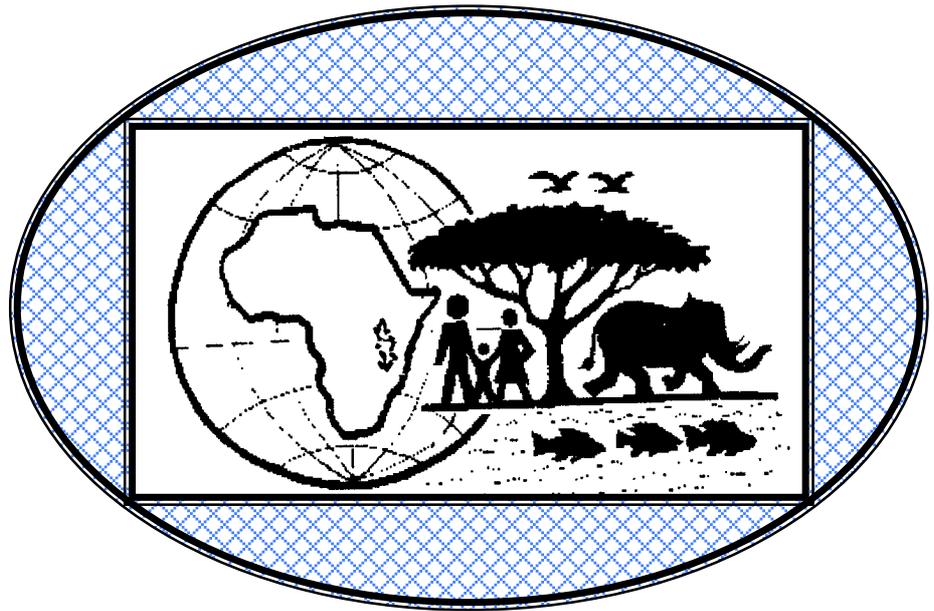


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***FEBRUARY  
2012***

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

Compiled by the  
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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**

Not only are people finally relieved to hear that President Mutharika will not contest in the 2014 general election, but are also happy knowing that at least the president has some respect for the Constitution as it only allows two five year terms. Mutharika is in his second term. If he really wanted the third term he could have used the majority that government has in the National Assembly but he did not.

Food security at national level does not translate to food security in every house hold. Reports of food shortage in some households in Thyolo, Nsanje and other districts surely mean at national level there is plenty of food but not in every household.

Dialogue between civil society leaders and the government seems to be heading towards a deadlock. The two sides have not met for a very long time to map the way forward on the issues that civil society leaders raised in the petition they gave government to look into on 20 July 2011.

It is not a secret that the judicial strike has affected the operations of the courts and again people's rights to justice have been violated. People that were supposed to appear in court at the time of the strike are failing to do so. Government announced that it does not have money to meet the striking junior staff demands meaning the strike might not come to an end any time soon.

More news on climate change should appear in the press because at present there is very little. Journalists are shying away from reporting this topic. Is it because environment is not an interesting topic?

Some female members of parliament have a tendency of following blindly when it comes to the issues of voting against fellow women in the National Assembly. They were very comfortable siding with home affairs minister Aaron Sangala when he had an argument with female MP Anita Thundu. They were at it again voting two female MPs out of continental forums.

POLITICS

Some political leaders in the country have described president Bingu wa Mutharika's State of the Nation address at the opening of the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of Parliament as empty. Mutharika who in his usual style repeated the same things he has said in all the other addresses he has made so far. There was nothing new in the speech. As some observers have noted Mutharika should have offered solutions to some of the issues that Malawians are facing at present. There was no hope in the speech that was made. Despite all these concerns about the president's speech, many MPs still praised Mutharika in their response to the State of the Nation Address.

Ministers scored badly on the cabinet assessment by the Blantyre Newspapers Limited's *Sunday Times*. Almost all the ministers, including president Bingu wa Mutharika and his vice, have scored below five out of ten. As observers have noted that many of ministries still have many challenges and the men and women in charge of such sections should run an extra mile to turn things around. Political commentators have further said that in Western countries the poor scoring could have made some of the minister to resign for failing to perform their duties. But in Malawi one waits to get the chop and it is only the president who has the powers to hire and fire a person from cabinet.

What does this cabinet poor scoring mean to an ordinary Malawian. Does this mean that the ministers' expertise is misplaced or that they are just not good at what they are doing? Perhaps we have the wrong people in the wrong ministries. This is not a surprise because even when President Bingu wa Mutharika appointed the current cabinet many people expressed disappointment over some ministers who were said to have been put at irrelevant ministries. Is it safe to say the people's observations were very right?

Surprises never end in political circles. Gwanda Chakwamba who made a public announcement some years ago that he has quit politics for good announced his comeback. This is the same person who has been in government with the first *Malawi Congress Party MCP* dumped the *MCP* only to form his own party. In his time in the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* government, where he served as Minister of Agriculture, Chakuamba did not waste anytime but to buy himself a very expensive Mercedes Benz. His only reason was that he is very much in love with Mercedes Benz. His announcement has raised some debates among Malawians as people still feel that Chakuamba has nothing new to offer.

Following the offer that president made early this year, the opposition leaders in the month under review asked government if they could meet with the Mutharika. It remains a mystery whether Mutharika will indeed meet the opposition leaders and take their advice. Not so long ago the president has been openly dressing down the opposition at any given chance, now that they are willing to let go of the past and meet with Mutharika, it means there is at least some traces of maturity in the opposition in as far as nation building is concerned. The opposition has extended the olive branch will government take it?

Mutharika blundered again in February when he called Malawians chickens. It is not surprising to hear Mutharika belittle Malawians. He has done it on several times both directly and indirectly. One wonders why a president would call every Malawian a chicken because by doing so he has diminished himself to a leader of birds. Religious and civil society leaders have condemned Mutharika for such a speech.

Finally Mutharika has put the issue of his candidacy to rest when he publicly said he will retire in 2014. There have been rumours that Mutharika would want to extend his tenure when his second term of office expires in 2014. Even some inside information suggested there is a group that was advocating for the come back of the unpopular third term bill. By being silent on the issue people could have thought the rumours were true. But now that Mutharika has spoken about his plans it puts away the fears that people had on the resurfacing of the third term bill. Former President Dr Bakili Muluzi also wanted a third term but it was defeated in the National Assembly. Constitutionally a president is expected to rule for two five year consecutive terms.

## ECONOMY

Analysts have expressed shock at the mid-year budget which they have said offers no tax relief. Despite the many economic problems that Malawi is facing at present, the mid-year budget seems not to have given any solutions at all. It is good to note that some of the veteran politicians, like parliamentarian Joseph Njovuyalema, have offered some help on how Malawi can overcome some of the financial mess the country is in. Similarly Honourable Atupele Muluzi has also offered suggestions and solutions to what he thinks is the problem at present.

One can safely say that Malawians have lived with the fuel shortage problem for three years. In the past month all seemed to have been well because for once people rarely slept on fuel queues. Today the problem has resurfaced as in the Capital City the petrol stations are dry. It is not a secret that when there is no fuel also affects some of economic activities.

There have been contradicting reports about the future of tobacco Malawi's main foreign exchange earner. As some people are saying there are high prospects on tobacco production this year, others are of the view that it could be affected by rains. Again tobacco experts have said the production will be on the low side because farmers were disappointed with last year's prices of tobacco and large volumes of the leaf that was rejected due to poor quality and they have resorted to planting other crops. In the same line poor rainfall will also affect the production of tobacco. With this scenario the future of Malawi's main source of forex looks hazy it will greatly reflect on the economy.

The *Malawi Revenue Authority MRA* came under attack by the opposition members of parliament over reports that the tax body had borrowed K15 billion from banks to paint a rosy picture of the revue collection it made. Speculations are going around that *MRA* exaggerated the figures for its revenue collections in backing up the zero deficit budget. A number of people and observers have been doubted the Zero Deficit Budget which they are saying is not working. In its 2011/2012 budget government introduced some forms of tax in order to collect a lot of revenue for the national Zero Deficit Budget. But as it has been said *MRA* is accused of having bloated the figure for revenue collection and got some loans from other banks a thing the tax body denies.

Malawi's inflation is now in double digits. The writing has been on the wall for some time now but for whatever reason the inflation continued to be in single digit figures even when the pointers were showing to a different story. At that time one would think inflation is politically doctored to suit the wishes of those in power. People have questioned the logic in having single digit inflation when prices of food, one of the major component in coming up with the inflation is skyrocketing. The cost of living continues to go up each passing day raising fears among consumers over how people are going to cope with life if this trend continues.

## FOOD SECURITY

There have been a lot of debates over the recent maize price hikes. *ADMARC* Malawi main grain marketer announced it has raised the prices of maize from K2000 to K3000. The move did not please many as people were against the price adjustment at a time Malawi was boasting to have plenty. It is against this background that members of parliament in their meeting took the minister of agriculture to task over the issue. But, knowing government, the minister justified the increase saying it is normal. At present there are not many *ADMARC* depots that have grain making it difficult for people to find the grain.

With just a few weeks to the harvesting season press reports have shown that the prices of maize have gone down because of the flooding of the grain on the markets. Apart from *ADMARC* there is *Mulli Brothers* who have a lot of maize accessible on the markets. It is reported that the maize prices have gone down by 20 and 30% this is in a way paralysing the sales of maize at *ADMARC* depots. With the current price of maize at *ADMARC* many people resort to buying from *Mulli's* markets. It is only sensible that people buy the grain where it is cheaper so that they save a few Kwacha.

Some international bodies have shown concern over the flooding of some areas in the Lower Shire valley. The districts of Chikwawa and Nsanje are some of the district that are annually hit by floods leaving some households with no food. Every year these areas are faced with floods and food shortages. In some cases crops are washed away leaving people with no crops in the gardens. It is against this background that some organizations are worried over the food situation these areas. But as authorities have said there is plenty of maize the staple food in Malawi.

The cost of food items continued to go up in the month of February. According to the monthly cost of living monitored by the *Centre For Social Concern CFSC* many food items have continued to show an upward trend in terms of prices. In the Capital City the cost of food items is reported to have gone up to K46,789 making it the most expensive city. While Mzuzu is the least expensive city with K40,347 as the cost of food items only. This is the cost of food items only adding up with non food essential costs it means many people are having problems to cope up with life.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

In the month of February we witnessed the arrest of activist and prominent lawyer Ralph Kasambara. It was reported that Kasambara who is one of government's critics was arrested after he roughed up three men who had come to attack the lawyer but the funny thing is the attackers were let free. To everybody's surprise Kasambara was arrested for defending himself. The arrest of Kasambara has darkened Malawi's already bruised image both on the local and international scene. Kasambara spent some days in prison and later was given bail only to be rearrested some hours later. He once served in the Mutharika government as Attorney General.

Civil Society leaders who are in dialogue with government over some issues at last pulled out from the talks in the month of February. After some months of no talks between the two entities the groups were supposed to meet in February, but CSO leaders pulled out of the dialogue talks because there are some 17 petition issues that are still outstanding that have not been dealt with. CSO leaders were asking president Bingu wa Mutharika to look into the issues of concern in the petition they sent.

The verbal wars on civil society by president Bingu wa Mutharika continued in February. Civil society leaders are bitter with president Mutharika who has in recent times resorted to castigate the NGO gurus at every opportunity he gets. Just recently Mutharika publicly accused the CSO leaders of being influenced by some external forces to topple him. For a very long time Mutharika has always said that there are some people who want his seat. If it is not the opposition then it is church leaders or civil society leaders who Mutharika is accusing of running after his seat. President Bingu is in his second term of office but as evidence has shown Mutharika feels there are some people out there who want him gone. But the civil society leaders have denied these allegations.

Meanwhile civil society leaders have asked the international community to remove president Mutharika from international bodies because of his bad governance principles. President Bingu wa Mutharika's sudden change in leadership styles has seen Malawi being rated as a country that is slowly sliding into dictatorship. It is for this reason that some of the CSOs would like Mutharika to get the chop.

*Malawi Electoral Support Network MESN* in February asked authorities to appoint commissioners at the *Electoral Commission*. The contracts of the commissioners that were appointed expired some years ago and there is need for new ones as we approach the next general elections in 2014. According to director of the *MESN*, the electoral body will only perform its duties well if commissioners are appointed way before the election year. *MESN* noticed that Malawi can have a free and fair election if the commissioners start their work now. The commissioners are supposed to be drawn from all the different political parties in the country.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

For sometime it seemed the call for the review of bad laws had been heard. But recent reports show that government is not exactly committed to have bad laws reviewed. It was announced in the month of February that government has no money for such an exercise and the *Malawi Law Commission* should look for funds. This means that on the one hand those in authority want the laws scrapped but on the other they are still clinging to the bad laws. One can only hope that the commission will find funding for the review. There have been calls from various sectors of society, both on the local and international scene, to have bad laws reviewed and scrapped. Some of the bad laws include the Injunctions Bill, and the amendment of Section 46 of the penal code. This empowers an information minister to ban a newspaper.

President Bingu wa Mutharika has been rated as an underperforming president by a Kenyan group. Not so long ago Mutharika was a role model to some African countries. He was a man many people wanted to meet. That trend has changed now. Mutharika is not the same person who was the darling even of the clergy and civil society organizations in Malawi. His leadership style has gone from bad to worse in recent times. With about two years to go before Mutharika finally leaves office he will surely leave a mark in the history of Malawi as someone who messed up things terribly in his second term.

The issue of the right marriage age in Malawi is refusing to die as a number of organizations and individuals keep giving out their views and proposals. In the year 2009 parliament passed a bill that would allow children to marry at the age of 16 and since then a lot of ideas and proposals have come out. Parliament came under fire for passing this bill and to date a number of organizations are still not impressed. Meanwhile the *Malawi Interdenominational Aids Associations MAIAA* has proposed that the right marriage age should be 18 years.

Consequences of the strike by the judicial staff were heavily felt in the month of February. It was reported that there was heavy congestion in many prisons as suspects were being sent to prisons. It is reported that Zomba Maximum Security Prison was heavily congested with the number of people in the prison has gone up by 19%. As some human rights organizations have noted peoples' access to justice has been denied because of the continued strike by the judiciary.

It seems the issue of mob justice has resurfaced in some areas. Press reports have shown that in Bangwe Township in Blantyre, there are new cases of mob justice. People are now taking the law into their hands and are punishing alleged thieves on the spot. It should be noted that in the past the Police has been taking task those that incite mob justice because it is against the law.

## EDUCATION

Reports that trained teachers have not been assigned are something that the Ministry of Education should be worried about and needs an urgent solution. Imagine the time and resources that the government wasted to train the teachers only to leave them to stay idle for eleven months without a posting. Education experts have noted that this is not only a waste but also might demoralize the newly qualified teachers. All in all the teachers are supposed to be deployed immediately after finishing their training while the excitement of becoming a teacher is still there. Now the eleven months that these teachers have been idle have some might have switched off to think of abandoning the profession.

Although the education sector banned the use corporal punishments in schools a recent story has sent shivers among some people. Cases of teachers beating pupils were not strange in the past but now no teacher dares to beat a student. Therefore it was surprising to learn that a head teacher at a primary school in Blantyre beat a standard four pupil because he was late for school. Some parents and guardians have condemned such an act as it creates an environment of fear among some of the students.

Students that learn under trees are feeling the pinch more in the rainy season as every now and the classes are disrupted by rains. As evidence has shown these are not the only problems that students learning under trees meet. At times classes are easily disturbed by anything that happens in the vicinity of the school there by attracting the attention of students away from what the teachers are saying. The Ministry of Education is aware of the hurdles that the schools meet in the rainy season but not much has been done to get rid of the problem once and for all.

There is a lot of evidence that the special needs education sector is one of the issues that the ministry of education needs to look at carefully. Cases of well deserving special needs students who fail to access tertiary education because of lack of materials have been in press for a very long time. Either there are no teaching or learning materials. Calls have been made by organizations that deal with people living with disabilities and advocate for more resources in the special needs education section. For sure Malawi needs to work hard in the special needs section to meet the Education For All goals in the Millennium Development Goals.

## HEALTH

The problem of drug shortage is slowly coming to an end if reports in the health sector are anything to go by. Press reports have shown that although the essential drugs are available at the Central Medical Stores there are still no such drugs in some health centers in the rural areas. This is because roads to some health centers become impassable in the rainy season. This means that when the drugs are available patients cannot access them because they were not delivered due to poor roads. Again scarcity of fuel is also slowing down the delivery of drugs. This means that some patients are suffering in the time of plenty of drugs.

Malawi joined the rest of world in commemorating World Cancer Day. Figures of cancer cases are so alarming in Malawi at present. Sadly in Malawi we do not have as many cancer specialist doctors as in other developed countries and this makes it difficult for people to access treatment. Speaking during the commemoration Minister of Health Dr Jean Kalirani noted that the number of cancer deaths is increasing at an alarming rate because of late diagnosis. While it is good that the minister pointed out this problem, it does not help matters if there is no awareness and civic education for people to go to hospitals in time. Similarly there should also be enough staff with the right expertise on cancer detection at an early stage so that patients are treated and lives are saved.

Parliament in the mid-year budget cut the budget allocation to the health sector by half. The decision by parliament to chop the budget has been condemned by many analysts who feel it is too much and will paralyse some of the work in the sector. Already the health sector is faced with a lot of problems that range from drug, equipment and staff shortages and these need finances. Even with the previous allocation the sector was still struggling to run because the monthly allocations were on the lower side.

Cases of Cholera were recorded in the month under review in flooded areas. Reports of floods in some parts of Nsanje and Chikhwawa meant sanitation problems in areas that were affected because many families that were displaced and were living together. Health personnel announced that there were cases of cholera recorded in the two Lower Shire districts when floods happen. Every rainy season water borne diseases are expected not only in Nsanje and Chikhwawa but also in some other areas. This is the reason why the ministry responsible raises awareness to people on how to prevent cholera.

## ENVIRONMENT

Yes indeed the observation by international called *International Centre for Journalists ICFJ* organization that the media in Malawi do not report much on climate change is true. It takes sometime before both the electronic and print media have reported on the environment let alone climate change. To many media people it is bad news that makes news, and this has to be politics and other topics but not environment. So many news writers are into politics and find environmental stories rather too flat to write about and therefore only write about natural disasters that happen periodically. This could be the reason why many Malawians are not well informed on environment and continue to plunder the only natural resources because they are not told of the long term effects of such actions.

Agricultural experts have disclosed that there is a link between climate deforestation and farming. It is reported that some soils are not giving out the best when it comes to farming because of soil erosion. It all started that with deforestation saw the ground with no cover resulting into soil erosion. The good fertile soils were washed away eroding the natural food nutrients. According to *NASFAM* officials some of the prolonged dry spells have come about because of climate and have resulted into low production of crops.

As the tree planting season continues Malawians from all walks of life are planting trees in large numbers. The corporate world has not been left behind as reports have disclosed some have shown their corporate responsibility by donating tree seedling either to schools and communities. Religious groups have joined in the exercise. The Hindu community has also taken part in the tree planting exercise. The rate at which people are planting trees only shows that many people are willing to assist in one way or the other in conserving the environment and keeping Malawi green.

While the tree planting season is still going on, conservationists are worried about how some forest reserves have been depleted. It is not a secret that the Chikangawa forest has been vandalized left right and centre and the future generation might not enjoy the fruits of the forest if nothing is done to rescue the largest man made forest in Africa. On the same note it has also been noted that the extent at which Malawians and some foreigners are depleting forest reserves we might wake up one day only to realize that we have no trees in these plantations. Against a background of continued deforestation in reserved areas, officials at Dzalanyama are leaving no stone unturned in making sure that the areas is not plundered.

## GENDER

Only Reen Kachere, Minister of Gender, Child and Community Development Welfare, scored six out of ten in a recent cabinet assessment by the Blantyre Newspapers Limited's *Sunday Times* Newspaper. The gender minister is recognized for the way she handled the barbaric stripping of women in the major cities early this year. A number woman who wore trousers and mini skirt were stripped naked in Lilongwe Blantyre and Mzuzu and Kachere worked hand in hand with other gender activists to make sure women are not abused in any way over their choice of dressing. Kachere is the only one who got the highest score beating all the other ministers one can think of.

It was the same old story of women being used to make fellow women suffer in the National Assembly. Men at times are always there for each other trying to cover each other's tracks. A story is told of a cheating man who told his wife he had spent a night at a friend's place. The wife is said to have called three of the man's best friends and they all said he had indeed slept at their place making the woman wonder where exactly the husband had spent the night. In fact one of the friends went on to say that the man was still at his house. This only shows that men try as much as possible to bail each other out and support each other. But the story is no the same for women in the Malawi parliament. Without any consideration members of parliament supported the motion to vote fellow women out of continental forums simply because they had ditched the ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP*. As some people have noted it is shame that men are using the women to oppress fellow women and female *DPP* members of parliament are willingly allowing men to use them to fight each other.

Parliament is expected to set an example to other women but it seems the National Assembly is not the role model that it should have been in as far as women issues are concerned. At present some bills to do with women issues still lie on shelves. We again witnessed female MPs siding with a male counterparts in an argument between a female legislator and a male minister. In fact the same women on the government side were in the forefront asking for the suspension of Anita Kalinde who beat up Home Affairs minister Aaron Sangala for a personal comment he made in the National Assembly. Kalinde got the support of a few women on the opposition side in the National Assembly. Whatever happened to sisterhood love!

Even if Malawians are willing to improve things in the gender sector, the efforts are being threatened by the fact that the country has not yet ratified the *SADC* Gender Protocol 2008. According to gender experts as a ministry they have finalized everything and only wait for government. Meanwhile NGOs that work on gender issues have pleaded with government to add its signature to the Protocol so that it is in full force.