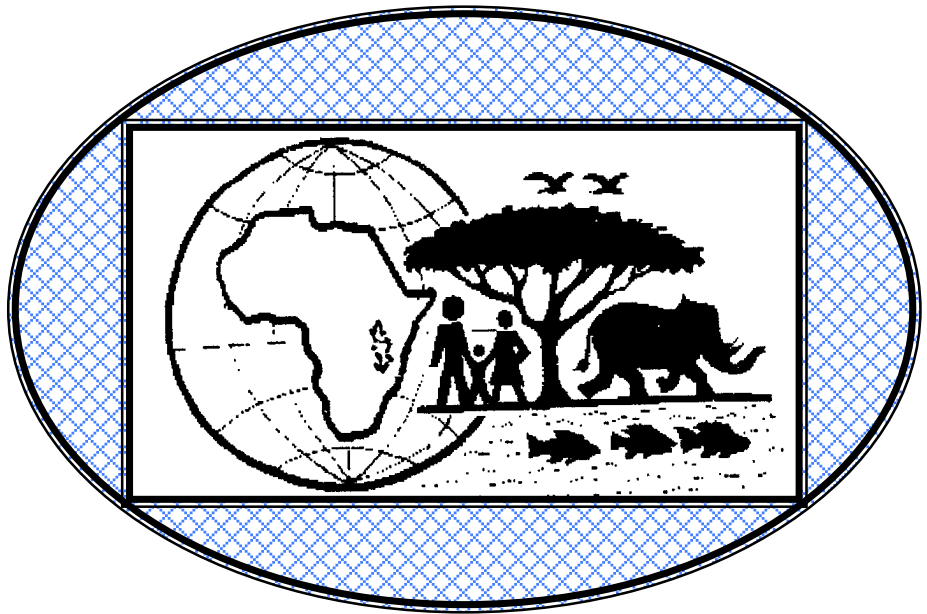


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***FEBRUARY  
2011***

**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**

It is now evident that the incumbent government is having problems in running some of its affairs. One can sense it the moment you open a newspaper. The front page stories tell it all: human rights abuses, economic problems, governance crises and many more.

Looking at the present state of affairs we are prompted to say: Surprisingly in his first term of office president Bingu wa Mutharika managed to deal with all the above problems without many hassles. Many people were impressed as is evidenced by the landslide victory during the 2009 general election. People trusted Mutharika to run the state the next 5 years because of his performance during his first term in office.

At present there is fear among some activists because they have either been intimidated or ridiculed publicly. Fresh in people's minds is the way police foiled what could have been a peaceful demonstration on the fuel shortage; the way the inspector general interfered in academic freedom; the way a simple household survey was interrupted by over anxious police officers.

Those in government offices are very conscious of who pays their salaries and is in charge of their promotions. They have become very cautious and many have joined the praise singers even if it is not called for at all.

Of late the police have seem to have gotten into a habit of denying people from expressing their views in form of demonstration. Not so long ago the same police denied some civil society organization the right to march to parliament on the tabling of the tobacco labour tenancy bill.

Observers are also concerned of the passing and signing of the Media Ban Law. Many have spoken against it not only in Malawi but even outside the country. Although government has defended the passing of Section 46, the media both locally and internationally are still concerned about the future of freedom of the press in Malawi.

With some years to go until the incumbent president finishes his term, the civil society should not tire in making checks and balances. As watchdogs they should caution government where necessary. A democratic nation can only be recognized if the leaders receive criticism positively and this is what the present government lacks.

With the president's call on the DPP party to protect his name and sing his praises, he seems to have put the party above the rule of law and expresses mistrust in the forces of law and order to protect him.

Fear is back big time.

## POLITICS

The leader of the opposition in parliament John Tembo expressed disappointment over government's abuse of its majority in Parliament. Tembo is not the only person who is not happy with government's conduct in the national assembly. A number of people have also shown their dissatisfaction. Tembo expressed these statements after it was noted that government did not observe private members day and instead went ahead with government business on Thursdays. This is not the only time government has abused its numbers in the house because during the last sitting there were also complaints from people about the legislators. Just recently the *Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace CCJP*, in its findings of the survey it conducted noted that the government used its majority in parliament to bulldoze some controversial bills.

Some observers have disclosed that the rate at which the Mutharika led government is going, we might soon find ourselves with no support from our donors. Mutharika has made some questionable decisions that have left some donors with no option but to cut aid. One such decision is the signing of the Media Ban Law. Some donor countries like Germany have given Malawi only half of their promised budgetary support. Despite calls by the United Nations and other stakeholders advising Mutharika not to sign the bill, the president went ahead and signed the bill. Another result is the uncertainty around the Millennium Challenge Cooperation support that the American government was set to sign with Malawi. All this is at a cost of some 50 billion Kwacha or about one fifth of the total annual budget in Malawi. As if Malawi is a rich country! Already cracks are appearing like teachers not receiving their pay, some hospitals without medicine. It will really become obvious when the time comes that parliamentarians won't get their pay. But probably that won't happen.

In as far as governance issues are concerned Malawi seems to be going from bad to worse. In his first term of office President Bingu wa Mutharika seemed to have at least tried his best on governance and keeping the country's economy afloat. But Malawians have witnessed a sudden change of events in his second term of office. Many people have wondered why presidents tend to mess everything up in their last term. One would have expected the incumbent president to learn from his predecessor to avoid making similar mistakes.

A number of external organizations have warned Malawi to improve on governance and human rights issues or risk losing the much needed aid. Surprisingly Mutharika's cabinet ministers have bashed the donors telling them Malawi is a sovereign state and cannot be pushed around by them. But others have observed Malawi still needs donor money and should therefore improve for the better on the donors' concerns.

The problems in the opposition *United Democratic Front UDF* seems to be far from over. It is now evident that there are squabbles in the party. Some weeks ago the press reported of a row between the incumbent leader of the party Friday Jumbe and George Ntafu. It has become clear that there is a leadership crisis in the party in as much as it had to take the former head of state who is also chairperson of the party Dr Bakili Muluzi to intervene. The former leader who resigned from politics some time ago surprised many observers when he tried to mediate in internal power struggles of the *UDF*. Despite Muluzi's intervention there have not been any changes in the state of affairs in the former ruling party.

Some analysts have noted the *UDF* and other opposition political parties should have taken advantage of the situation and the many blunders that the ruling DPP is making to strengthen

their parties. A lot of issues have arisen on both the political and social scene that have made some of the electorate doubt the capacity of the incumbent administration to govern. One can easily point at the way parliament is conducted as the reason some are losing trust in the DPP led government. But instead of capitalizing on these failures fighting goes on within opposition parties making it difficult to strengthen their groupings.

With just two months to the set date for the local government elections, some parliamentarians have taken government to task. Government has not yet made any statements on the position of the local government elections following the closure of the *Electoral Commission EC*. President Bingu wa Mutharika late last year closed the electoral body over allegations of financial mismanagement. Meanwhile calls by civil society and international observers to open the organization seem to be falling on deaf ears. President Bingu wa Mutharika has strongly told the nation that he will not open the commission. Mutharika who spoke at the National anti Corruption Day commemoration in Mzuzu stressed that opening EC when the money issue has not been resolved is one step backwards in fighting graft.

Meanwhile some parliamentarians expressed fears to attend Bingu wa Mutharika's rallies. The speaker of the National Assembly invited the house to welcome Mutharika who was coming from Ethiopia after completing his term of office as the Chairperson of the *African Union AU*. But the MPs turned down the invitation saying the atmosphere is so volatile because of the resurgence of the likes 'young democrats', youth militants that they feel so insecure.

## ECONOMY

Government officials continued to tell different stories on the reasons why we still have shortages of fuel. A lot has been said and just when people thought they had enough of the excuses the president himself also joined the band wagon by coming up with his interpretation for the problem. In his speech at the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* Valentines dinner Mutharika blasted the civil society for blaming government for the fuel shortage. In his own words Mutharika told the nation that the fuel shortage is a result of congestion at Nacala Port. He also has mentioned Indians as culprits. While other players have told Malawi that forex shortage is behind the scarcity of fuel.

Minister of Finance Ken Kandodo Banda announced in the National Assembly that the domestic revenue collection has gone up in the 2010/2011 by 5.5%. This means that many Malawians who receive lower salaries are contributing to this domestic revenue from *Pay As You Earn PAYE* tax. Malawi's revenue mainly comes from tax collection from the citizens. Any increase in the revenue collection is good news to the country. But in a country where the majority of the people are low income earners it means this section is contributing comparatively too much to the revenue collection. In a number of budget consultation meetings the civil society has pressed for an increase in the tax free band. At present only 10 thousand kwacha (50 euro) is tax free.

The Minister of Finance Ken Kandodo in February spoke in one voice with the International Monetary Fund IMF over the price adjustment of fuel. The Petroleum Control Commission PCC in February raised the prices of fuel much to the annoyance of many motorists. Already there is this persistent fuel shortage that Malawian motorists are having to deal with and now the fuel increases seem to have added more fire to the boiling waters. But the minister and IMF still feel the price hike is in order and is what should have happened before. Actually the minister has even added that the hike will not affect any of the targets made (e.g. inflation, cost of living etc.)

As the fuel shortage continued, a number of organizations have noted that there are some jobs that are being affected day in day out. Some activities and industrial production that rely on fuel like work at the Kayerekera mining has been affected by the fuel shortage. Kayerekera is not the only place that has been affected as other operations are not functioning to their full capacities because of the shortage. MHEN mentioned that people have died because there was no fuel for ambulances. Other refer to the problems experienced in getting the subsidized fertilizer to the beneficiaries. Fuel shortages have now become an annual occurrence. A number of businesses have also been affected by the fuel shortage as motorists have to queue for fuel for hours on end thereby delaying business in a number of sectors. For sure this problem needs a lasting solution.

## FOOD SECURITY

The *Centre for Social Concern CFSC* in its monthly findings on the cost of living noted that there has been an increase in the prices of food in all the four major cities. This scenario has highly contributed to the high cost of living in general. While the prices of maize which is the country's staple food are not bad because of the bumper harvests that Malawi has been having for three years in a row, the prices of other foodstuffs went up in the past two months. Prices for food stuffs like fish, usipa and others have gone up thereby contributing to the increase of the whole 'basic needs basket'.

Just to concur with the *CFSC's* Basic Needs Basket findings on the prices of maize, *ADMARC* slashed down the price of the grain. The price was slashed from K60/ kg to K40 making it K2000 per 50kg bag. To consumers this is good news because it means less money to be paid for the purchase of maize. But on the other hand economists have noted that *ADMARC* will be selling the grain at a loss. According to economic experts by reducing the price *ADMARC* will be losing K5 per kg instead of a K15 profit it expected to gain.

The issue of *ADMARC's* performance was again in the press in the month of February. The media disclosed that the farmers are the ones that are feeling the pinch due to the organization's failure to perform. In recent times some farmers have failed to sell their produce to the grain marketers because not all the markets were opened when the harvest was ready. In some cases the *ADMARC* depots did not have enough money to buy all the produce available. This scenario has left many farmers with no option but to sell to unscrupulous traders at prices that are under the production costs.

It seems Malawi will again experience yet another bumper harvest. Good rains and the availability of cheap fertilizers are the reasons Malawi is now a food secure nation. Of course with some people living with no food here and there the general feeling is Malawi graduated from being a begging country to a food exporting nation. At present government has disclosed that the yields this year will surpass last year's. While last year the nation produced 3.5 million metric tones of maize this year we should expect 3.9 metric tones.

It has been reported more than once in the press and so far one would confidently say there is still a lot that needs to be done. In the National Assembly, Members of Parliament both from within the ruling party and the opposition took government to task over the way the fertilizer subsidy programme was run. Some legislators brought in the house unused fertilizer coupons. All this points to one thing that the programme needs to be overhauled because of the problems it faces since inception.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Police in February foiled a peaceful demonstration organized by the civil society groups to express their concerns over persistent shortage of fuel. It is evident that the fuel shortage is affecting many motorists thereby delaying businesses. Just when people expected that this march would give the platform for the civil society to ask government to address the issues at hand, the police took the NGO leaders to task for organizing the march and held them for sometime for questioning. Some observers have questioned the Mutharika government for denying the civil society the right to assemble and demonstrate. The highly publicized demonstration failed and to date the civil society have not organized another one though they promised to do so.

Meanwhile some faith leaders have condemned the government for banning the demonstrations. A similar demonstration that was arranged in Mzuzu City also flopped following the presence of heavy police. Both *Public Affairs Committee PAC* and the *Muslim Association of Malawi MAM* have openly expressed their disappointment over the ban.

The demonstrations in the month of February spilled over to the education sector when lecturers of Chancellor College took to the streets to express their concerns. The lecturers are currently demanding academic freedom and an assurance from the government that arrests of lecturers will no longer happen. To add it all up the lecturers would want an apology from Inspector General Peter Mukhitho for interfering in academic freedom.

President Bingu wa Mutharika invited the civil society leaders to the state house to talk about a variety of issues. Among them was Blessings Chinsinga lecturer of the university of Malawi Chancellor College. Chinsinga was taken to task by the police for mentioning about demonstrations in Egypt in his Political Science class at the college. The civil society groups have of late been attacked left and right and centre for criticizing and condemning the Mutharika administration. The group petitioned Mutharika over governance issues and the persistence of fuel shortage.

From a lay person's view one can easily tell that the Mutharika administration is wading through rough waters. One can actually believe what former president Dr Bakili Muluzi used to say that running government is not a kid's job. The blunders and failures that Mutharika is making in his second term are like a replica of what Muluzi himself did. The shortages of fuel, forex, passing of Section 46 which is aimed at suppressing the media and governance are some of the issues that have dented the Mutharika administration. With some years to the next general elections one can only hope that Mutharika will try his best to make some changes for the better. Mutharika will mostly be judged especially for how he has performed in his second and last term of office because of the overwhelming majority and therefore mandate he was given.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Cases of dog bites have been on the increase lately. The press in recent times has carried articles of people bitten by dogs. Fresh in people's minds is the story of a guard who was mauled by dogs of his white employer. To add salt to the injury the dog owners asked a doctor to have the bitten man tested for HIV/AIDS. This is not an isolated case because another man also was bitten by vicious dogs belonging to his employer. One wonders what exactly happened to man's best friend.

Another issue that has been appearing in the press a lot lately is bizarre cases of women giving birth to strange things like stones. Agnes Misolo from Mulanje who was last year in the press for bearing a stone went through a number of medical tests in Blantyre. It has raised many questions now because some more cases have been reported recently. To date there is no medical explanation that has been given out about what exactly causes pregnant women to bear objects instead of babies.

Parliament passed the Local Courts Bill amid great resistance from the opposition of the house. A number of observers including leader of opposition in the National Assembly JZU Tembo (who was one of the architects and implementers of a similar system under the Banda regime and therefore very knowledgeable about the potential abuses) have spoken against the passing of the bill. Among other things observers feel that government will just use the local courts to deal with political opponents. But those that were for the traditional courts are of the view that the passing of the bill would help ease cases at magistrate courts and would help assist people to access justice easily. The fact that some bills like the Local Courts Bill are being passed amid some reservations from the minority opposition speaks volumes of the type of parliamentarians we have on the government side.

The *Malawi Congress of Trade Unions MCTU* in February expressed gratitude over some changes made on the Pension Bill. The bill has caused a lot of debates and controversies. The bill sought to push the retirement age to 60. This would have meant that people would only access their pension money after reaching 60 years. But the recent announcement in the National Assembly has revealed that the age has now been reduced to 50 years. Like the Pension Bill there are still some issues that the unions want to be included in the bill before its tabling and passing. But as reports from the National Assembly have disclosed the bill has now been passed.

## EDUCATION

Demonstrations spilled to the education sector in the month of February. It was supposed to be a month of love and peace but the opposite is what has happened in some of the University of Malawi colleges. Lecturers at the Chancellor College in February protested over the questioning of political science lecturer Blessings Chinsinga. As if this is not enough students at the same college took to the streets and damaged property in Zomba, the reason being the authorities' delay in disbursements of book allowances to the students. The same also happened at their sister college Polytechnic in Blantyre where 13 students were arrested for being involved in the fracas. Discipline in colleges has been a problem for many years as students resort to the use of violence instead of negotiations.

Ministry of education woes on teachers hardship allowances have been reported in the press for a long time now. By now one would have expected the issue to be resolved once and for all but the opposite is true. It is now close to one year since the minister of finance announced an introduction of the hardship allowance to teachers in the rural areas. The fact that parliament passed the 2010/2011 budget means that hardship allowance is binding and teachers in the rural areas were supposed to be smiling all the way to the bank to get their extra K5000s. But alas this is not the case for some teachers in the Mpapa Education Zone in Blantyre. To date some teachers in the rural areas in Mpapa Zone have not been receiving these allowances. This revelation needs to be looked into and be dealt with for the benefit of not only the teachers but also the students.

One month after students at Blantyre Girls Primary School fainted at the premises there is still no explanation as to why this kind of thing happened. A number of students fainted at the school campus raising suspicions that there are evil forces at the school. Meanwhile the Minister of Education Professor Peter Mutharika has asked that the girls who fainted be diagnosed. There was commotion at the school as parents were failing to understand what was really going on. Press reports have added on to say that the incident happened again making it two appearances in one month. However some renowned psychologists have explained that it is quite common that young people are under some peer pressure and do the same as their friends; if faints for a medical reason, some other may do the same without any medical or other 'mystical' reason.

People in Salima district seem to hold what the former United Nations General Secretary Kofi Annan said "*If you teach a girl you have taught a nation*". Indeed in Salima there are a number of initiatives that the people are doing in making sure that there are fewer cases of girls dropping out of school. Among other things in Salima people want to have high literacy levels among women and have since resorted to addressing the causes of girls' absenteeism and drop outs in the district.

## HEALTH

Health reports in the month of February took some time to examine the availability of *ARVs* in some parts of the country. Reports have shown that some people in Blantyre are failing to access the drug that prolongs the life of an HIV infected person. According to the reports this situation is making it difficult for the country. The *Malawi Health Equity Network* MEHN has noted that some AIDS patients have to travel long distances to get *ARVs* and some give up. The situation is the same in some parts of Machinga district. This scenario is putting people's lives at risk because failing to access the medication is dangerous for those who are already on the treatment.

Still on the same issue of ARVs, there have been complaints from people that are taking the drugs it has some serious side effects. Some people have visible swollen glands and lose a lot of weight when they are taking the drug. Some people have been deformed. Again some people have complained that some of the side effects have made their lives difficult because even if they don't disclose their status, people know. This scenario could easily be attributed to the increase in cases of discrimination in some communities.

In other HIV/AIDS related stories although it has been more than two decades ever since the first case, some people are still failing to come to terms with the fact that being HIV positive is not the end of the world. Can we really blame it on counseling and awareness? Could it be people's mindset on the disease? Some people have ended up committing suicide after losing hope the moment they are told they are HIV positive! A recent report in the press disclosed that a man in Nkhata Bay district committed suicide after he tested positive to HIV. While this could be the lone story in the daily newspapers, there could be more stories of this nature that go unreported.

The beginning of the rainy season is mainly associated with water borne diseases like Cholera. When the rains started this wet season people and health personnel expected to register Cholera cases but to everyone's delight, this has not been the case. This is great news because it has lessened the stress on health personnel who previously had to take extra work load to look after cholera victims.

Although government is trying all avenues to minimize deaths of pregnant mothers by providing them with all the necessities in hospitals expectant mothers in Chitipa have a sad story to tell. They sleep on the floor. This is a deplorable situation especially at a time Malawi is trying to meet MDGs on reduction of maternal deaths. One would have expected the emphasis in the health sector to also go to the care of expectant mothers as well. The fight for reduction of maternal deaths will be a commendable achievement but is far from over if our expectant mothers have to sleep on the floor.

## ENVIRONMENT

The church in the month of February joined the environmentalists in asking Malawians to conserve natural resources. On many occasions one would expect the church to focus on preaching the word of God only. This tendency is now changing because the church is also involved in many issues like the environment. For sure issues of conserving the environment cannot be achieved if the church is sidelined. The church also needs to include natural resources and the environment in its programmes.

Every rainy season stories of floods are reported in the press. It is nothing strange to hear of floods, crops washed away, property damaged and people displaced in the Lower Shire districts of Nsanje and Chikhwawa. It is against this background that some organisations are finding ways dealing with the problem in Nsanje. The press reported that with funding from the Irish Aid and the *United Nations Development Fund (UNDP)* the Department of Disaster Management Affairs is engaging the people in the areas that are prone to floods in trying to avoid natural disasters from happening every year. According to reports the people along Thangadzi river in Nsanje are making some parts of the river stronger by removing silt and building flood defences.

Reports on the environment have in the past revealed that there are a number of cases of human-animal conflicts happening in some parts of Malawi. In Mangochi elephants have on several occasions trampled crops and damaging people's properties. In Rumphi district those that are living near the Vwaza Game Reserve are also in a similar situation. The Ministry of Tourism has since disclosed that government is currently erecting a fence around the game reserve to avoid any further conflicts. It should be noted that there has been a growing population of elephants in recent times.

After giving warning to Malawians to expect heavy storms called Bingiza the Meteorological Services Department later announced that the country would not experience such rains. According to experts Malawi is now not under any threat because the storm has weakened and it has drifted to Madagascar. Malawi will no longer have any impact from the storm.

Caring for the environment is everybody's business and Malawians should not wait for organizations and churches to show them how to do it. Most mountains and hills in Malawi are bare after owners of the land cut the trees for firewood and for building houses and charcoal.

## GENDER

Although the focus on gender based violence is on women and children, there is evidence that some men are also victims. In recent months the press has reported on a large number of cases of men abusing women and children only. The picture that one can have is that men are abusers. But underneath those loving smiles of some women there is a hidden clock. Just recently the press disclosed that a woman poured hot beer on her husband scalding him in the process. While this seems to be a rare occurrence because it is a lone case that appeared in the press, there could be more of this happening going unreported. In a Malawian setting it is unheard of for a man to be beaten or abused by a woman. A man is expected to be protective, powerful, decision maker. This is what hinders men from reporting any abuses for fear of being laughed at. For sure men should be told in strongest terms that all abuses should be reported.

While it is difficult for Malawians to get impressed by the number of female representatives in the National Assembly, some people from elsewhere have a different view. Visitors to the August house in the month of February said they were impressed by Malawi's achievements on the 50-50 campaign. This only shows that there are still some countries that are even further from achieving the 50% of female representation in decision making position. But then such positive comments should not make all stakeholders relax but should give Malawians more zeal to achieve these goals. Press reports have shown that 27% of MPs in Malawi's parliament are female and only 15% in Zambia's.

Some women are becoming more innovative especially at this time of economic hardships and few jobs. With the growing numbers of unemployment and job losses a number of women have ventured into businesses. Reports on successful women in February featured a woman called Lonely Mhango who is holding her head up high after losing her job. According to the report Mhango's business has problems just like any other. But all in all the business is putting bread and butter on her table and paying her bills.

Talk of innovation: an old woman in Mzimba is reported to have re-designed a clay pot. The old lady has added a tap to the clay pot. A number of people use these clay pots called *Mtsuko* to keep drinking water cold. It is a known factor that clay pots do not have taps but this old woman has told Malawians that anything is possible. Reports have disclosed further that she has orders from a nearby school and she sells the clay pots at K400 each. This old lady is an inspiration to other women with various skills that there is sweet after some sweat.