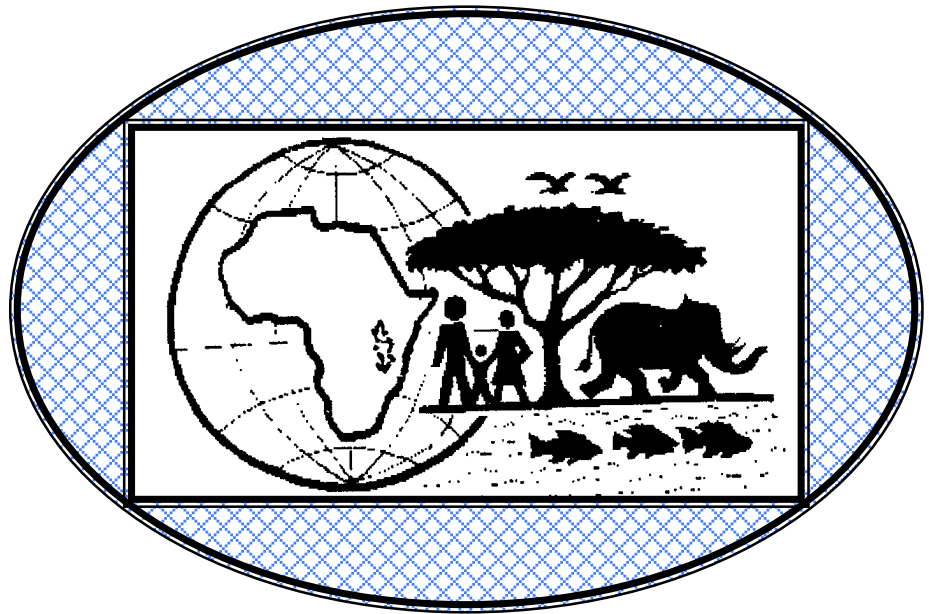


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***JUNE
2011***

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

Compiled by the
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LIST OF NEWSPAPERS REVIEWED

Daily Times

The Guardian

Malawi News

The Nation

The Sunday Times

The Weekend Nation

Nation on Sunday

PREVIEW

There will always be some few brave men in any situation. This has been seen in a recent turn of events in the National Assembly. The ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* might have thought that everything was going to be an easy ride in parliament because of the majority the party has. This was not to be and it might not be for along time if the recent events are anything to go by.

Former Minister of Justice, Henry Phoya, stunned fellow MPs on the government side when he said that government's Injunctions Bill was a bad law. Phoya, who is also a chairperson of the *Legal Affairs Committee* in the National Assembly, openly tried to enlighten fellow MPs why the bill should not be passed in the house. But his efforts did not bear the desired fruits because *DPP* legislators carried the day and the bill was passed.

Phoya did not think of his position in the National Assembly, all he thought of was what is right for the people. For a start Phoya is a learned lawyer and when he said the *Injunctions Bill* is a bad law, a number of people believed him and some in the *DPP* knew what he was saying was the truth. But for fear of their jobs they voted yes to this Bill.

Bearing this in mind experts have warned the ruling *DPP* to tread carefully in as far as unpopular bills are concerned. The fact that some *DPP* MPs abstained from voting and others voted no to the bill shows that trouble is brewing somewhere and the party. This could also mean some people blindly follow what other MPs are doing in the ruling *DPP*.

Of late the *DPP* led government has managed to bulldoze through some bills that have not been popular with people in. Fresh in their minds is the way government rushed to table and pass the Flag change bill and the Local government bill and the infamous *Section 46* amendment to the constitution, thereby infringing the freedom of the media. At the same time some equally important bills have not found their way into parliament.

If what Phoya displayed in parliament continues it could spell doom for the ruling *DPP* which people trusted with the numbers in national assembly. By passing unpopular bills in the House, *DPP* MPs are openly betraying the trust that voters gave them by voting the MPs into parliament.

POLITICS

Reports of victimization of the Vice President, the Right Honourable Joyce Banda, continued in the month under review. Just when people expected the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* led government to make peace with the Vice President, the press has shown us the opposite. It seems there are no efforts on the government side to accommodate Joyce Banda in their day-to-day life. Just recently Malawians woke up to a screaming headline that government has seized two cars from the vice president's security. Despite getting court orders that the security vehicles should be given back to the Vice President, to date the government has not done this. By openly defying court orders to have the cars returned to the Veep's office, government is not being exemplary.

As if this is not enough government again trimmed the Veep's office budget from K425 million in the 2010/2011 national budget to K258 million in the 2011/2012. There were still complaints from some quarters that the allocation was too little for an entire office of the second citizen of Malawi in the 2010/2011 fiscal year. Now to have the money trimmed further to K258 is a reflection that the incumbent government is trying all it can to frustrate the office of the Vice President. It is evident that the working relationship between President Bingu wa Mutharika and his vice is beyond redemption following the expulsion of Joyce Banda from the ruling *DPP*.

More disturbing news appeared in the press over a meeting between President Bingu wa Mutharika and the *Malawi Human Rights Commission MHRC* members had. If the reports are anything to go by the president fears for his position. Press reports have disclosed that John Kapito, chairperson of *MHRC*, is said to have told Mutharika that he only tells him the truth. Kapito on several occasions had rebuked some of Mutharika's decisions but this seems to have annoyed the Malawi leader. Of late Malawi has witnessed some negativity by the president towards anyone who opposes him or rebukes the first citizen's decision. *MHRC's* Kapito is one of the people that have criticized some of Malawi's leader's decision.

The resurfacing of the words *Third Term* has sent shivers among some people in various sectors of the society. As some analysts have mentioned Malawians should not easily forget that this motion was already defeated in the National Assembly and its resurrection would also mean an embarrassment to those advocating for this cause. It should be noted that it is the same traditional leaders who in some cases, without consultation, stand on a podium asking the incumbent president to consider extending his stay in office for another term. Some people have raised concerns over this development which may lead into dictatorship.

Just as is always the case the *DPP* officials have denied palm oiling the chiefs to make these third term proposals. According to the *DPP* officials president Bingu wa Mutharika has no plans to contest for a third term. It could be the wishes of some overzealous members of the party who think changing a president means job losses on their part. They are doing this for their selfish motives in this case to safeguard their interests while at the same time they are trying to rape the Malawi Constitution and, therefore, to safeguard their position they would rather test the waters to see what people think on a third term for Bingu.

Former Vice President Cassim Chilumpha has added his voice on how some people have described the ruling *DPP* as the worst. This fact cannot be disputed because of some strange bills that government has bulldozed through Parliament. Malawians witnessed the passing of Local Poll Bill, the flag change and just recently the infamous Injunctions Bill. Despite all

the efforts by observers and other players for the Bill to be defeated, *DPP* MPs, who are in majority, went ahead and passed the Injunctions Bill. Not only has the *UDF* noted that the Mutharika era is the worst but also some religious leaders and individuals have said the same.

In the month of June some analysts advised president Bingu wa Mutharika to consider trimming the Cabinet. At present there are forty-two cabinet members and deputy ministers. As others have noted the cabinet is too much for a country like Malawi that relies on donor funding, a bloated cabinet is the last thing that this Southern African nation needs. Among other suggestion, some people want all the deputy ministers positions scrapped. Although there has not been much response from the government side, the suggestion should be given thought with a sober mind. It should be noted that cabinet ministers are some of the top most paid people in Malawi and the heavily taxed Malawians are the ones paying the ministers' salaries. Therefore any cut in the size of cabinet would be a relief to many.

ECONOMY

Comments continued to pour in the press over the now term of the moment *Zero Deficit Budget ZDB*. After tabling the first ever *ZDB* in the National Assembly, the 2011/2012 was open for scrutiny and as usual a number of sectors have made their comments known in the press. The opposition members of parliament while some commending government for being ambitious, have warned that Malawi is not yet at the stage where it can fund its national budget with funds sourced locally.

According to the *Malawi Congress Party MCP*, government is running business in a trial and error manner and that it did not thoroughly consult on the *ZDB* and how it is going to work and how it will affect people. Similarly the business community has argued that the introduction of some taxes in the budget show that government is so desperate to prove that it can run without external assistance, but at the same time it will slowly kill some businesses. Joyce Banda, who fell out of government's favour, has openly said the budget only shows that government does not have money although government officials have denied this.

More reactions on the *Zero Deficit Budget* continued till the end of the month under review. Business people are still at pains to understand why the proposed budget did not give any solution to Forex shortage. This shortage of Forex has been in the press for some years now. The more the years go by the more the problem of Forex shortage appears in the press. It seems those in authority are failing to find a lasting solution to this issue. Of late there have been accusations poured at the business Asian community that they are hoarding Forex.

On one hand the future seems to be a bit gloomy for the tobacco this year but on the other hand there are some positive reports. Reports show that the revenue that comes from tobacco has gone drastically down. This has affected many people including those in the tobacco industry. The effect of the low current tobacco revenue has seen some tobacco companies cutting some of their expenditures on travel and other things. As experts have warned it is high time Malawi thought of sources of income that would be regarded as another Forex earner. Despite this some players breathed a sigh of relief following reports that a United Kingdom based tobacco buying company is coming to Malawi. The arrival of a new tobacco buyer would mean improved prices of the gold leaf.

FOOD SECURITY

Following the fall out of Malawi's relationship with one of its major donors Britain, a lot has been speculated. Among other issues some rumour circulated that the future of the subsidy programme is in hanging because of a sour relationship between Malawi and Britain. But finance minister Ken Kandodo has assured Malawians that this programme will continue. It should be noted that Malawi has been having bumper harvest for the past 6 years due to the availability of cheap fertilizers and good rains. The fact that finance minister mentioned about subsidy programme continuation is a relief to some farmers who solely rely on the cheap fertilizers.

On the same note the Principal Secretary in the *Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security*, Erika Maganga, announced that beneficiaries of the farm input programme will be chosen in public. In the past there have been queries on how beneficiaries are determined, as some of the recipients do not deserve cheap farm inputs are reported to have benefited from the programme. For starters the programme is called target input subsidy programme and is meant for the targeted poor. But as reports in the press in the past have shown that the distribution of coupons has always been coupled with some questionable recipients. As the opposition political parties have always said at times the subsidy programme has been politicized. Now the PSs announcement will perhaps ease some of these problems it really benefits the targeted in this case the poor.

Still on the same issue of fertilizer subsidy, members of the opposition political parties in the National Assembly asked government to improve on subsidy delivery to farmers. A number of incidents have been reported in the press ever since the programme started that have shown problems on delivery. Sometimes it is either the fertilizer is delivered late for farmers to apply to their crop or the wrong type of fertilizer is delivered.

Media reports in the month of June have disclosed that Kenya would like to buy maize from Malawi. It has been reported that there is a shortage of the grain the east African country and they would like to purchase from Malawi following reports of bumper harvest and surplus. At present the agriculture ministry has denied such reports. Not so long ago during the former president Dr Bakili Muluzi's era, Malawi also sold some maize to Kenya when some Malawians were starving due to a food crisis that hit the country then.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The news that the Local Government Elections have been postponed to the year 2014 has attracted a lot of reactions from various quarters of the society. In parliament the Minister of Local Government made it known that Malawi will hold a tripartite election come 2014. Stories on the tripartite elections were also said some years ago but nothing materialized. One wonders if at all this will indeed happen come 2014. As other observers have said the government might be promising the elections in 2014 just to allay people's fears over the future of councilors in Malawi now.

History repeated itself in the month under review when traditional leaders, made their promises to supporting the unconstitutional third term bid. Although some traditional leaders came under fire for openly supporting former president Dr Bakili Muluzi's failed third term bid, it seems the others have not learnt a lesson from this. Press reports have shown that some traditional leaders are very deep into politics making their subjects wonder their impartiality in their daily work.

Meanwhile the *Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace CCJP* has advised politicians to stop using chiefs to fulfill ambitions. In many situations chiefs have been paraded on either state television or political rallies praising government and at times advocating for some unconstitutional issues. Against this background the commission is asking politicians to at least leave the chiefs alone so that they can do their duties with no fear or favour.

Some civil society organizations have expressed shock over President Bingu wa Mutharika's latest address to the nation. Out of the blue Mutharika announced he was going to address the Malawi nation. In his speech the president asked Malawians to trust him as leader of the nation. Mutharika must have seen the writing on the wall over people's faith in his leadership styles in recent times. The president has made a lot of questionable decisions, directives and utterances that have left some people with doubts. Among other things Mutharika is being accused of not giving hope to Malawians in his speech.

Malawian Parliamentarians were at it again when they asked government to raise their salaries to K1 million per month. This is not the first time that the legislators have asked for a raise in their monthly earnings. For some time they have been crying for an increase in either their fuel or sitting allowances. MPs are employed by the poor Malawians who are heavily taxed to pay for the legislator's salaries. But the sad thing is that some of the heavily taxed Malawians' annual salaries do not reach the K1 m that the MPs are asking to get per month. It should be noted that there are 193 MPs in Malawi and raising their salaries to K1 million per MP every month would be a gross abuse of resources. At present the constituency representatives get close to K350,000 a month with other which includes other allowances.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Government in the month under review announced the closure of street children's care centres. The news came as shock to many child rights defenders who felt having the care centers was a good initiative by the government. In many news reports it has been said that government was planning to remove all street children off the streets. Now one wonders what will happen with the care centres closed. Children loitering in the streets day and night are at a greater risk of being abused. Evidence has shown that many children have been sexually abused, robbed of their belongings, and used in some nasty operations because they have no shelter. For sure the closure of the street children care centres will be heavily felt among some Malawians.

Some civil society groups have condemned the continued threats on the family members of John Kapito, one of the commissioners at *Malawi Human rights Commission MHRC*. It all started with Kapito himself being accused of wanting president Bingu wa Mutharika's position. All these accusation were leveled against Kapito because of his stance on human rights. Kapito is reported to have told the president on some of the things that the human rights defender felt Mutharika was blundering. As is always the case Mutharika did not take the advice well and has accused Kapito of wanting the president's position. Other reports have indicated that even the family of Kapito is receiving threats.

Press reports in the month of June startled readers when a family in Bangwe in Blantyre buried an empty coffin in the graveyard leaving the dead body in the house. Due to what members of the bereaved family called miscommunication between the religious leaders and the relations of the departed, the dead body was left in the bedroom as people proceeded with the service at both the house and graveyard. The gathering ended up burying the empty coffin and only realised when they found the dead body in one of the rooms at the house upon their arrival from the graveyard. This is the first time in many years that such an incident has happened.

Despite the efforts by some organizations to have the Tenancy Labour Bill tabled and passed in the National Assembly, to date there is nothing that has been done so far. Media reports in the past have shown that a number of tenants are living and working in poor conditions in estates. In recent times there have been reports of tenants taking their landlords to task over the issue of payment of dues. A case at hand is that of tenants in Lilongwe who detained their landlord over payments. This might not be the only case of abuses that tenants are faced with in tobacco.

EDUCATION

Candidates sitting for the *Malawi Schools of Certificate Education Examinations MSCE* started their examinations in the month under review. This time around there has not been any reports of examinations being leaked. The body that administers the examinations in the country the *Malawi National Examinations Board MANEB* has been in the press for the wrong reasons in the past. If it was not cheating among candidates during examinations, then it was leaking of an exam or it was poor results. So far there has not been any case of either cheating or any leakage in the 2011 *MSCE*.

Some people have doubted the announcement by President Bingu wa Mutharika that the University of Malawi Chancellor Colleges and Polytechnic should open. The two colleges were closed about four months ago after a wrangle erupted between the college lecturers and government over an assurance of academic freedom. It all started when Inspector General of Police, Peter Mukhitho, summoned one of the lecturers, Professor Blessings Chinsinga, for merely doing his job. Professor Chinsinga is reported to have given an example during his lecture on political science. Ever since there has been one meeting after the other trying to resolve the issue as lecturers are asking for academic freedom. As some experts have noted the future of the colleges opening looks gloomy.

As it has been reported in the press, the *University of Mzuzu Mzuni* is in deep financial problems. Those that know the college well, the problems are not only financial but also shortage of classrooms. Some observers have noted the college introduced a lot of courses and this has resulted in less space for the students. Financial problems at *Mzuni* were even aired to the Chancellor of the College, President Bingu wa Mutharika, when he presided over a graduation ceremony at the college.

Still on the same issue of *Mzuzu University Press* reports have disclosed further that the college opened this semester with only first years. According to reports this is the case because of the same financial problems. As some people have noted almost all the colleges are facing financial problems. For this reason some people have doubted whether government will be able to run the promised six new universities.

It has been said many times before that access to education for people living with disabilities should be included in all plans if we are to achieve our goals of education for all. Evidence has shown that people living with disabilities have problems in attending school. Even the infrastructure in some schools is not disability friendly. In some instances those that need special assistance when learning are at times left with teachers who have no such skills. Press reports in the past have also revealed that for the blind there is always a shortage of brail materials. As some experts have noted there is need to include people living with disabilities in education plans so that they have easy access to education.

HEALTH

Some press reports in the month of June centered on issues of abortion. Although abortion is illegal in Malawi there is plenty of evidence that it is being practiced among Malawians. It was disclosed in June revealed four women die everyday from abortions. This translates to 1,460 women every year. The situation is also contributing heavily to the number of maternal deaths accounting for the deaths of seventeen women every single day. These figures are so alarming considering the fact that Malawi has made many efforts to reduce maternal deaths. Against this background some people are asking authorities to consider legalizing abortions.

Still on the same issue it has been reported that treating of complications that result from abortions cost Malawi close to K65 million every year. This amount is far too much and could be put to good use especially at this time when the health sector is sailing through rough waters in as far as donor aid is concerned.

Reports on health took a totally different turn when media gurus advised journalists in the country to prioritise, maternal issues over politics. It is a fact that the media in Malawi spends much of its time reporting politics. Not a single day passes without stories on politics in the media. Even front pages tell it all. Politics is what is eating much of media people's reporting sections. This is perhaps a strategy to have more sales because politics at times is more entertaining than other topics. But a recent training conducted by an international media body *Panos* has advised scribes to report on health issues regularly.

The month of June also saw stories on *Kamuzu Central Hospital KCH*. It was reported that there is a shortage of nurses in the pediatric ward mainly because there is congestion in the ward. Nurses assigned to the ward are faced with too much work because the ward is always full due to under-5 illnesses. As a result the four nurses on duty in the pediatric ward at *KCH* are expected to attend to more than 350 children per shift. Reports have indicated that this situation is forcing some nurses to refuse when they are assigned to the pediatric ward.

Shortage of drugs a problem that hospitals are perpetually facing continued in the month under review. It has been reported that two of Malawi's major referral hospitals *KCH* in Lilongwe and *Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital QECHs* and other government hospitals are at present being faced with drug shortage. Malaria patients had to do away with other drugs instead of the recommended *LA*. As some experts have noted the problem could even be worse in clinics in the remote areas. Press reports went a step further to tell us that patients had to be sent away due to the shortage.

ENVIRONMENT

Problems of water shortage continued to be felt in some parts of Malawi. In the Southern region life has not been easy for the consumers as water problems have been going on for some time now. Evidence has shown that water disruptions in the City of Blantyre and other districts in the Southern Region have experienced water shortage even during the rainy season when water is supposed to be available in huge amounts. Water is a natural resource that is a necessity to any household, and any disruption of water supply has some bad effects on people's lives.

It is a fact that Mulanje Cedar is rare specie of tree and deserves to be protected. According to reports the cedar is so unique that it is only found in Mulanje Mountain in this part of Africa. With such a type of tree, one would have expected more care to safeguard the Cedar from extinction but reports are showing the opposite. At the same time reports show that the tree can be used for so many things therefore can produce a lot of income through sales, but this is not the case because only a few people are enriching themselves with the cedar. It is against this background that the *Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust MMCT* is asking government for stricter law for the cedar.

Some civil society organizations have asked government to consider allocating more funds to combat climate change. In a contribution to findings on a report, observers noted that although there are good amounts of funds given out to the key ministries, this has not translated to climate change. Of late Malawi and other countries have experienced some environmental challenges resulting from climate change. Therefore much more resources should be given to climate change.

As parliament was meeting in June some MPs attributed problems that climate change programmes are facing to the Cabinet reshuffles. Uladi Mussa, who is an opposition party Member of Parliament, made it known that sometimes people have good plans laid, but fail to fulfill them because of movements in the ministries. Just when one is about to hatch a good plan in as far as climate change is concerned they are moved to another ministry or department all together. Mussa went on to say that this scenario has affected continuity of some projects on climate change.

GENDER

The month of June saw Malawians celebrating Father's Day with different activities and messages in various newspapers. Though celebrating Father's Day is a new thing for Malawians the idea is slowly being embraced by many. In the past there has only been Mother's Day and even a day was set aside to commemorate mothers. A good look at the calendar the first Monday of October is Mother's Day, a public holiday. This scenario has created a lot of debates among people who felt fathers deserve equally the same treatment as mothers do. Some have asked the same to happen to Father's Day so that it is marked on the calendar.

Some artists in June showcased a play on gender and sexual rights abuses. *Theatre for Change* staged the drama for student teachers at Blantyre Teachers Training College to sensitize them on gender abuses. It is common knowledge that a number of women are not aware of their rights. This situation has been one of the reasons there are so many cases of women who are being abused. For this reason the *Theatre for Change* staged the play so that the student teachers could be accommodated. Perhaps with newly trained teachers who are aware of gender abuses, the knowledge could easily be share to pupils in schools.

Just like in the environmental reports, media coverage on gender also took some time to mention issues of water. Much as water problems affect every person in a home, press reports on gender have indicated that it is more of a woman's problem. It is women who have to make sure that there is plenty of water for all the chores in the house. Even when the source of water is very far from the home a woman just has to make sure it is available for use in the whole family. A mother takes care of the home and every home needs water therefore any shortage of this natural shortage is a hassle for the home. Therefore it is only fair that water be readily found for home use.

On the same note media reports have revealed that climate change is a gender issue. According to reports, there are so many examples of what climate change has done that has directly affected women's daily routine. A case is shown in the press of how some women go to far away places to search for firewood which is the main source of fuel in many Malawian homes. Not so long ago it was easier find firewood because forests were near by with plenty of wood. Similarly flooding rivers have swept away part of the trees and shrubs that were used for firewood.