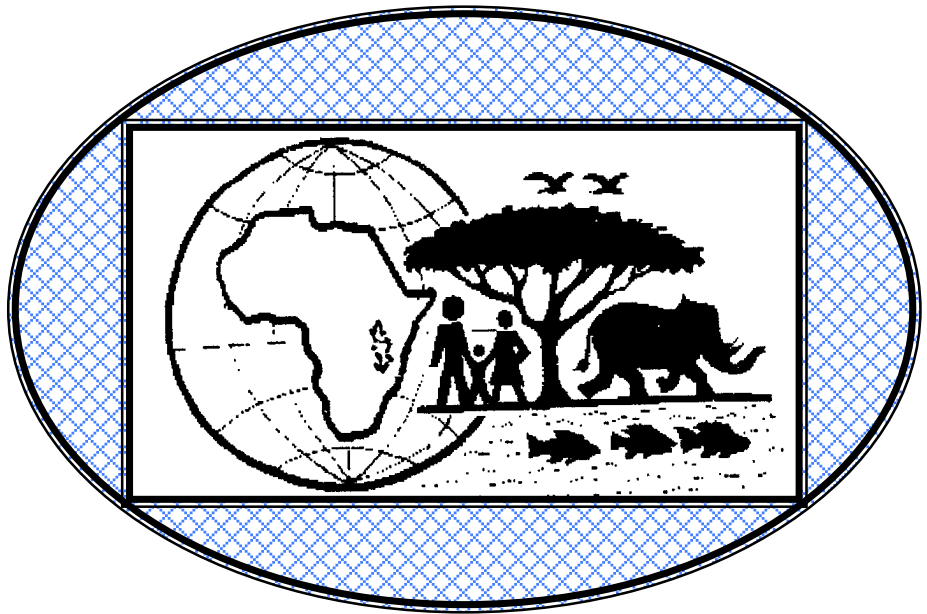


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**MAY  
2011**

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

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**LIST OF NEWSPAPERS REVIEWED**

*Daily Times*

*The Weekend Nation*

*The Sunday Times*

*Malawi News*

*The Guardian*

*Nation on Sunday*

*The Nation*

**PREVIEW**

Government's announcement that it has shifted the much awaited local government elections to the year 2014 has raised a lot of questions among various people. A number of individuals and organizations have raised concerns over the postponement of the elections

Of much interest is why the Democratic progressive party led government is dodging the local government elections ever since it came to power. The incumbent administration had made one excuse after the other to make sure that the LGE are not conducted. Despite a lot of assurances from the authorities, government dropped the bombshell in the month under review that no LGE for now but in 2014.

This means that for now all those that were nursing ambitions of serving people as councilors have to wait a few more years. Some must have been dreaming of developing their wards and later on become Members of Parliament or even ministers, but this for now is shelved.

The civil society and other stakeholders did their part to ask government to show commitment over the issue, but as it was to be authorities never made any concrete announcements.

After being given a second mandate to rule Malawians in 2009, President Bingu wa Mutharika promised that he would make sure that Local Government Elections are conducted in 2010, but this was never to be. Then government also mentioned and set the date 20<sup>th</sup> April but this did not happen.

With this changing of tune every now and then, one wonders if at all Malawians will have councilors any time soon. That aside some observers have noted that it is going to be very difficult to convince people that the LGE will indeed happen in 2014. Already all the preparatory work has been halted in some of the opposition parties.

These postponements raise a serious doubt about the integrity of government. Is telling untruths, lies a new way of governing. But besides this one can: Is there another strategy at work here? The attention given to chiefs, their elevations, remunerations etc. their open support for Peter Mutharika and now even their call for a third term for the incumbent make one wonder: no councilors, but chiefs? Not democracy, but tradition? Since chiefs are said to have great influence on their subjects, is the ultimate purpose not to gear up for a state presidency like a chieftaincy: not by election but by inheritance?

The first local government elections were announced as bringing democracy home. This seems not to be for some years to come. Are we headed for an inheritable state presidency with a rubber stamping parliament? Something that should get supporters of democracy really worried.

## POLITICS

As some observers had earlier predicted the British have started biting Malawi very hard. It has been reported that the British government has suspended Mutharika and his entire cabinet from being a VVIP. This means that president Bingu wa Mutharika wishing to travel to the United Kingdom will be just like any ordinary citizen in the world. It has also been revealed that it is not going to be easy for authorities to get the UK VISA. There will now be no exemption for the processing of visas. All this is coming after the government of Malawi expelled and deported British High Commissioner to Malawi Fergus Cochrane Dyet.

The composition of the Vice President Joyce Banda's party *People's Party PP* has left many people wondering if at all there is room for new blood in Malawi politics. From the look of things the same old faces in political circles are also appearing in the PP. As some observers have noted this is not healthy for a new party. The same old politicians who have migrated from the already existing parties are holding positions in the PP. One wonders what kind of advice and ideas these recycled politicians will give that would strengthen the party. Joyce Banda was expelled from the ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* for allegedly forming parallel structures.

Still on the same issue of the *People's Party PP* the Registrar of Parties denied the Vice President's party registration. There were complaints from Uladi Mussa's *Maravi People's Party MPP* that there is no way the Vice President's PP can go ahead with this name. According to Mussa if the PP carries on with registration of their party there will be confusion with his *MPP*. This is not a strange occurrence because most of the parties follow the same patterns where they end up registering after going to the courts.

Malawians have witnessed some verbal exchanges between the DPP and Vice President Joyce Banda in recent weeks. After reports that president Bingu wa Mutharika is thinking of coming up with a third term bid, the DPP has hit back by saying Banda is fabricating the issue. Banda's pronouncements come after reports allegedly were showing that Peter Mutharika might not stand for the DPP in 2014. Press reports have it that Peter Mutharika has not openly confirmed that he would stand and all campaigning for Peter on state radio and TV has been halted.

President Bingu wa Mutharika continued with his carefree attitude when addressing his audiences. In Mzuzu in the month of May Mutharika went a step further to castigate donors at a public rally. Mutharika who has of late come under heavy attack for making some emotional decisions went a step further to call his critics and Europeans stupid. Just when some people expected Mutharika to handle his opponents and donors with respect Mutharika blasted some unnamed civil society organizations leaders calling them all stupid. So far some citizens have answered back asking Bingu to check his tongue and have refused to be called stupid.

Observers and some political analysts have expressed disappointment over president Bingu wa Mutharika's contents of the State of the nation address recently. Mutharika spoke for close to two hours when he was opening the 2011/2012 budget sitting of parliament. But commentators have noted that Mutharika in his speech failed to mention the important issues at hand. For instance the daily problems that Malawians are facing are fuel and forex shortage. At present there is also the issue of souring relationships with some of the country's donors. The president did not say what his plans are in trying to improve governance issues. Analysts have been left with more questions than answers on the contents of the speech that

failed to touch on what are the real issues. Some opposition leaders have labeled the speech as empty.

Malawians should not expect to have councilors any time soon at least going by what government announced in May. After calls by various stakeholders for Malawi to hold the Local Government Elections, government finally made it known that the elections will be held in 2014. This development has left many people wondering why government has made this decision after pledging to hold the LGE this year. Initially the LGE were slated for April 20 this year but it was never to be because by then Mutharika had just reopened the Electoral Commission EC. To those that had interest in the elections they are left with no option but to wait this long. So much for government's integrity. Even if the president gives his word it cannot be counted on.

Although President Mutharika had made it clear that he is in a dialogue with the United Kingdom the latter has denied these reports. The statements from Mutharika come after a number of stakeholders had faulted the Mutharika administration for pushing Malawi's relationship further down by firing UK's High Commissioner to Malawi.

'Not again!' This is what some people have commented on recent reports that some chiefs would want the incumbent president to stand for a third term when his second term expires. The third term is what parliament said no to in the time of former president Dr Bakili Muluzi. The fact that the chiefs are openly asking Mutharika to stand again and the president is not publicly bashing these remarks could mean he is interested. It should be noted that this is how it started in the Muluzi era when traditional leaders started making similar pronouncements.

## ECONOMY

There is still a lot of doubt in the tobacco industry this season because of the pricing of the crop. To date there has not been any pleasant news coming from the sales of tobacco. Reports have shown that since the markets were opened the prices of the gold leaf have not improved for the better much to the annoyance of the farmers. The fact that the prices are low also puts the tenants at a greater risk of being exploited with no financial benefits from the landlords. Experience has shown that when the sales are not good estate owners vent their frustrations on the tenants. In the same line some small and medium enterprises have also suffered in their businesses because of the current prices of tobacco.

On issues related with tobacco, minister of finance Ken Kandodo also noted that the drop in the earnings from tobacco due to low prices will affect the economy. The fact is that tobacco is not fetching the much needed forex at the markets at present. On the other hand other exports are also not doing well thereby generating less forex according to the finance minister. The scenario has also affected the imports cover. Forex has not been readily available in the country for a long time.

President Bingu wa Mutharika has just told the nation that Malawians should expect a zero deficit budget. But reactions from various quarters of the society have shown that Malawi has not yet reached a point where it can finance its entire budget. Unlike some well developed countries Malawians are already squeezed therefore still need donors. In the same speech Mutharika said though with a zero deficit budget, Malawi still needs donors. Reacting to these statements analysts have noted that it is contradictory. Some observers have proposed that president Bingu wa Mutharika needs to mend his relations with the donors because Malawi still needs them and the sooner the better.

After reports of a zero deficit budget came out rumours have been circulating that to make this work government would be asking for tax on almost everything. One of the things that was mentioned was the money that people collect on weddings locally known as *Perekani Perekani*. But finance minister Ken Kandodo has denied such reports in strongest terms saying these are mere rumours and that government has no intention of doing this.

An announcement by the World Bank that it has withheld funds for Malawi is one of the bad news that seem to be in line with what other donors are doing more often these days. It all started with the German government cutting their funds to Malawi by half. Then other donor countries followed suit. Now the World Bank has announced that it is waiting for International Monetary Fund IMF review. According to financial reports the World Bank has withheld K6 billion budgetary support to Malawi for the 2010/2011 fiscal year. The government has defended its zero deficit budget because of these actions by donors. It does not seem to be willing to change and listen to the donors demands.

## FOOD SECURITY

Many farmers are harvesting in their gardens now that the crops are ready. But as press reports have indicated some farmers will have poor harvest because of late farm input subsidy delivery. The issue of late delivery of farm input subsidy has been blamed for poor harvest in some areas. Reports have shown that in some cases the farmers had the coupons in good time but the actual farm inputs came in when the crops had passed the stage when fertilizers were supposed to be applied. This is the reason why some farmers have not realized maximum harvest from their gardens.

On a number of occasions there have been calls from various stakeholders for government to improve on the subsidy programme. Reports of coupon shortage and late delivery have been in the press since the programme started. When government introduced the farm input subsidy programme the reason was to achieve food security at both national and household level, but at present it seems only part of this plan has worked. It is reported that at national level Malawi has made it. A couple of years ago, the country has been producing bumper yields to the extent that there is surplus maize year in year out. But at household level some do not have enough while others have nothing at all due to a variety of reasons.

Media reports have indicated some households have had poor harvests due to natural calamities like floods and dry spells. Nobody has control over natural disasters. But issues of delays in delivery of subsidized fertilizers can surely be controlled. When a problem keeps reappearing every season it means there is something seriously wrong somewhere. The calls for Members of Parliament on issues to do with the programme should be dealt accordingly.

President Bingu wa Mutharika recently told the nation that Malawi will have a surplus of 1.2 million tonnes of maize. According to Mutharika despite some areas facing dry spells in the farming season the country will still have a bumper harvest. The president estimated that Malawi will harvest 3.8 million tonnes of maize this year. This year's harvest will beat last year's which was at 3.5 million tones.

*Centre For Social Concern CFSC* in the month under review advised government to look into finding other means of coming to terms with some economic problems that Malawi might face in the near future. Project officer for the Basic Needs Basket BNB, Fydess Mkomba has noted that for sure Malawians should expect tough times ahead in terms of the economy and therefore government should look beyond food security

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

President Bingu wa Mutharika in his state of the nation address mentioned that his government is trying its best in maintaining good governance. Mutharika went on to say that in Malawi there are no political prisoners and despite the provocations from civil society and other stakeholders the government has never prosecuted anyone on these grounds. But as some observers have noted Malawi is trailing back into dictatorial status because of some of the decisions and actions that Malawians have witnessed lately. On several occasions Mutharika has made questionable decisions and announcements that have left opponents question his motives.

Issues on homosexuality seem to have received a lot of coverage in the month of May. The *Church of Central African Presbyterian CCAP* Synod of Blantyre in the month under review asked the church to accommodate gays. In his own words Reverend Felix Chingota noted that the church should not discriminate and judge gays; instead they should accommodate them. According to Chingota the church must accept the fact that among them there are people who are simply gay. This goes contrary to government which has reduced the various issues to one: the gay issue. And under the pretext of wanting to follow Malawian culture, no more attention is given to the many other governance issues.

The press in the month of May reported that some international organizations have asked government to bring to book the people that are threatening some civil society leaders. This plea comes about after some weeks have gone by without any reports indicating that those suspected to have threatened CSO gurus have been arrested. It was reported that a certain group of people has been harassing the NGO leaders. To date no arrests have been made despite several calls by observers to have the suspects in the cooler. Press reports have shown that the law enforcers are working on the issues. But how long this will take nobody knows.

An international organization in the United States of America has rated Malawi's democracy as fragile. According to its latest findings the Freedom House, a human rights monitoring body, has put Malawi in a group that has countries that have made progress on governance but still remain fragile. Just like any other findings that are negative to them government has quashed the results saying they are not giving a true picture of Malawi's situation. Among other things Malawi's Solicitor General Anthony Kamanga, defended the country saying it has an independent judiciary that sometimes makes judgments against government and that the working relationship with civil society is very good.

Media reports in the month of May disclosed that police in Karonga had confiscated cloth belonging to *Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation CHRR*. Police are reported to have confiscated the cloth with gay rights messages on them in Karonga district. But the courts have declared that materials should be handed over to the owners and that the cloth can be distributed to people.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

There have been contradicting views on homosexuality in the press in recent weeks. While president Bingu wa Mutharika publicly said gays are worse than dogs, a view he shares with Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, former president of Botswana Festus Mogae has contrary views. Mogae is reported to have said that it is better to avoid criminalization of homosexuals in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The Botswana former president came alongside Kenneth Kaunda, former Zambian president.

The month of May witnessed the collapse of a famous eating place called Kips in Blantyre where some people died and others were injured. A lot of articles have appeared in the press over the tragedy. One of the questions that has been raised is the safety of the buildings in Malawi. Some professionals in the construction industry have advised that there should be policies that would ensure that buildings are built with good materials. Evidence has shown that there was an initiative in the past to demolish all old buildings in the cities. While some business owners responded, to date some of buildings marked for demolition still stand in both Blantyre and Limbe. The Kips accident should be a wake up call for all Malawians.

Malawi joined the world over in commemorating Labour Day on 1<sup>st</sup> May. At the celebrations that were held in Blantyre a number of people spoke on the need to have safety at work. Speaking at the function a female tenant from Kasungu spoke of all the evils that women are facing on tobacco estates. Eletina Mwale said that women are made to work long hours and yet they are not on a pay roll. The female tenant confirmed the fears that some people have always had on the harsh living and working conditions on tobacco estates. But all this could be history if the National Assembly passes the Labour Tenancy Bill!

Some reports in the media in the month under review over what a village headman did stunned a number of readers. It was reported that the chief ordered people not to attend to the funeral of a child whose parents refused to take her to a hospital when she got sick. People in the village deserted the funeral ceremony and went on to do their business following the orders. A number of reports have appeared in the daily papers about parents who fail to give medical access to their children opting for prayers instead. In another instance government had to come in to force parents to take their children for vaccination when there was a measles outbreak.

President Bingu wa Mutharika elevated some traditional leaders in the month of May. The recent elevation of chief Kalonga to Traditional Authority, met some resistance from some quarters in the Ngonde tribe. Paramount chief Kyungu, the top most chief of the Ngonde absented himself from the function which some Paramount chiefs across the nation attended. The reason is they believe Mutharika blundered in elevating Chief Kalonga. Such accusations coming from the leaders of the Ngonde raise only one question if at all government consulted before the decision was made.

## EDUCATION

Following the saying that it is never too late for one to get educated, a 51 year-old man has defied all odds to become one of the first people to learn in a normal primary school. In the past we might have heard of a married woman with children going to attend primary school and being selected to go to a secondary school. But this time around it is a man. Culturally most men would rather be illiterate than mix with women who generally attend adult literacy classes. The news of the Chiradzulu man who is now at primary school in standard 5 is an inspiration to other men who have different views towards school at an advanced age. Still on the same issue another man, a village headman in Salima is a Junior Certificate candidate.

A clergy man preaching at a graduation ceremony at Mzuzu university stole the show when he asked God to give wisdom to our leaders so that they in return can end the financial problems at the college. In his prayer the Man of God asked for the Creator's intervention in the Polytechnic Chancellor College closure. It has been over three months now since the two colleges were closed following a stalemate between Chancellor College lecturers and the Inspector General of Police Peter Mukhitho. The college lecturers are demanding academic freedom after police summoned one of the lecturers for questioning. To date the colleges still remain closed.

It is now getting obvious that the cry for academic freedom for lecturers at the University of Malawi has gained a lot of support even from abroad. The month of May saw some more support on academic freedom from lecturers of various universities across the globe. The media has reported that the foreign lecturers have petitioned President Bingu wa Mutharika demanding academic freedom. It is obvious that the issue of academic freedom is of much concern for many even those living outside Malawi.

The Chancellor of the University of Malawi, Bingu wa Mutharika in his state of the nation address earlier in the month mentioned that his government has plans to build more universities for Malawians. Mutharika said this is the only way issues of space in public universities can be taken care of. But some critics have bashed this statement as mere promises that can never be fulfilled because already government is failing to run the already existing colleges and what more with extra colleges.

Despite promises from the minister of education Peter Mutharika that teachers in government schools would get their salaries and hardship allowances in good time the opposite has happened. The salary delay problem seems to be haunting the education sector more now than it did some years ago. Issues of salary delays have affected the education ministry for so long, and now needs to be dealt with once and for all. Peter Mutharika has watched the scenario since it started and has said nothing to correct the situation.

## HEALTH

Problems at Kamuzu Central Hospital seem to be far from over. It all started with reports on shortage of mosquito nets for patients at the hospital, but now the problems have spilled to the availability of drips. The media has disclosed that there is shortage of drips and paracetamol at the referral hospital and that doctors are now giving quinine injections. Surprisingly this is the only government referral hospital in the entire central region and therefore is expected to have all the required equipment and medicines. The current situation at KCH needs to be dealt with with utmost speed.

Reports of death of an expectant woman referred to Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital QECH in the month under review have caused some worries. The woman is reported to have died at the hospital when she was supposed to go for an operation. The news has not only disturbed the family of the deceased but also raises questions on the fight against maternal deaths. At present one of the focus areas for the health sector is to minimize the death of expectant women and reports of women dying right at the hospital raise questions if the battle will be won at all.

Health reports in the month of May have disclosed that Malawi has very few ophthalmologists (eye specialists). It is reported that one ophthalmologist looks after four million people a situation that has resulted in blindness in many people that could have been prevented. In normal circumstances one eye specialist is supposed to look after 500,000 people only. But the Malawi scenario is way too much because the country has only four qualified ophthalmologists. Malawi's population is at 13 million.

Media reports have noted that women in rural areas have difficulties in accessing family planning methods from health facilities. The result has been unplanned pregnancies among women in the rural areas. Against this background Malawi Sciences for Health and other organizations have taken family planning services to the remote areas. MSH and other *Non Governmental Organizations NGOs* have taken family planning to where the people are in their homes. This is a good development that needs to be supported by all stakeholders.

Still on the same issue media reports have disclosed that many women still do not have a chance to make decisions in the home because of cultural practices. An example is given out of men who pay a hefty bride price who end up demanding many children from the wife to match the amount they paid for dowry. Reports have shown that such women's health is put at risk because they are forced to have many children and they have no say.

## ENVIRONMENT

Stories about elephants terrorizing people in a number of areas have been appearing in the press for some time now. A recent case is that of Salima district where elephants are reported to be threatening people's lives. The Salima case is one of the numerous reports on animal-man conflict. In Mangochi district, Liwonde and other areas elephants have caused havoc in many different ways. In some areas people were injured and property was damaged. The Salima scenario is different from other areas because the animals are not in a protected fence. It is against this background that traditional leaders in this area are asking for government's intervention

On the same note Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and Mining disclosed that government has relocated 600 animals to Majete Game Reserve from various places. Press reports on the environment have disclosed that the relocation exercise has been going on for years after parliament had allocated some funds for the exercise. Press reports have disclosed that about 25 people were killed by the animals in four years by elephants in Mangochi. In that district the elephants have been killing people and damaging crops and property at an unprecedented rate and government's relocation programme should be enforced.

Media reports have disclosed that although a lot has been said in the press about climate change, many people still do not have an idea of what it really is. This among other things is because of high illiteracy and poverty levels in Malawi. Since climate change is a new phenomenon there is need for more sensitization at all levels. Perhaps the approach on awareness on should also target the illiterate in the remotest areas since these are also equally affected by the climate change.

Observers have noted that at present the waters in the lakes and rivers of Malawi are failing to provide the required amount of fish. This has resulted in many people not accessing nutrients found in fish. Despite having fresh waters in Lake Malawi the country is failing to meet fish demands. As some experts have noted this could be because of environmental and climate changes that have affected the natural resources like lakes and rivers. At the same time there has been such a tremendous growth in the population that the amount of fish is not enough to sustain every soul in Malawi. These and many other reasons like over fishing have contributed to the depletion of fish resulting in failure to meet the demand.

## GENDER

A debate about grave digging came out in the press in the month of May. It has always been a man's job that is what most people say about grave digging. During funerals the women are expected to only bring food to the grave nothing more. But as some observers have noted women can also dig the grave if they are given a chance. According to gender activist Seodi White, if women decide to start digging graves they would get the support from the society at the same time it would be a great step towards gender equality.

There is no gender talk without mentioning the use of language when addressing people's titles. Those that are into gender equality issues make it a point that whenever they are writing or addressing people they use gender sensitive words. For a long time in Malawi many positions in the society have always been masculine in nature. For example the use of the word Chairman. Even when the chairperson is a woman people still address her as a chairman. But some gender activists have advised that these words should be used carefully.

As the world was commemorating World Labour Day in the month under review the issues of women in the labour force were tackled in the press. Press reports have shown that women's contributions in the industry is rarely appreciated because people still have the mentality that it is only men that are making it happen in industry. According to the press this is not only the case in Malawi but in other African nations as well. In the business industry a number of women have difficulties to improve because of poor access to big capital compared to their male counterparts. For this reason a deliberate policy that would ensure that women have equal access as men to resources and finances in terms of loans should be put in place

As if reacting to the fact that there are concerns of economic empowerment some church organizations have embarked on a project that will empower women economically in some parts of Malawi. It was reported that Dan Church Aid is supporting government and Livingstonia Synod in promoting rural women. This is a good step towards the empowerment of women and falls in line with government's policies of empowering women in Malawi.