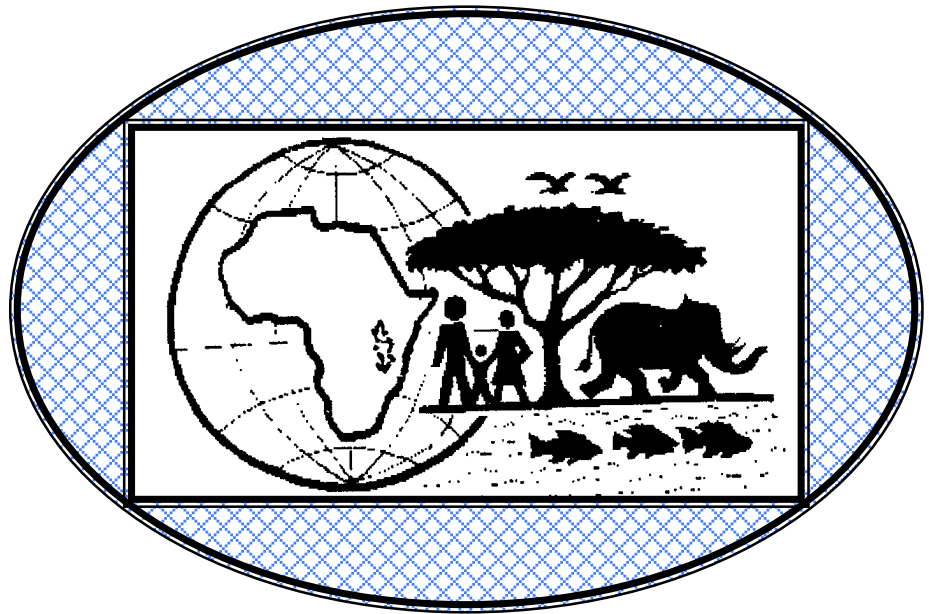


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**NOVEMBER  
2011**

**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**

Journalists in Malawi will live to remember the psychological, emotional and verbal abuse they suffered at the hands of some overzealous Democratic Progressive party youth cadets at the Kamuzu International Airport in November.

Overzealous were the youth cadets that they openly booed journalists in the presence of president Bingu wa Mutharika. At one moment Mutharika had to ask the DPP youth cadet members to give a chance to the scribes to ask questions on issues of national importance.

President Bingu wa Mutharika had gone to Hong Kong on holiday immediately after attending a *Common Wealth Heads of Government CHOGM* meeting in Perth, Australia. To the surprise of many Malawians who were not told where their leader had gone leading to speculations that Mutharika was very sick and in a hospital.

Upon arriving Mutharika decided to address the media in the presence of a multitude of party zealots who had already been angered by the many questions that the journalists had been asking in Mutharika's absence.

Insults were hurled at the journalists for merely trying to get information from the Malawi leader. It took police officers' intervention to help the journalists reach their newsrooms in one piece.

On several occasions the journalists body *National Media Institute For Southern Africa NAMISA Malawi* Chapter has asked the *DPP* to consider using other secure venues for such media conferences but the party seems not to be in a hurry to do so. The security of journalists is at stake in such an intimidating atmosphere as they might fail to ask pertinent questions. For sure the *DPP* officials can do better than allow the president to host the press in such venues.

## POLITICS

As is always the case opposition members of parliament promised to put government to task over the mysterious death of student Robert Chasowa during the November sitting. It has also been announced that government has bought what has been dubbed as a spy machine and the opposition would like an explanation. Just like any Malawian, members of parliament for the opposition want to know exactly why government purchased a spy machine at a time Malawi is in financial problems. Rumours have been circulating that the machine is going to be used for listening to the conversations of some phone users and that their target is mainly political opponents of the government. Authorities have denied such stories.

Just when people expected members of parliament to repel some archaic laws in the November sitting of parliament, the legislators had something else in mind, their salaries. Just a day into the sitting, both the opposition and government unanimously agreed to raise their monthly salaries to K1 million each. If there is anything that the MPs agree on it is the increment of their salaries. These are the same MPs who have been pressing for an increment in the fuel allocation. Their large appetite for hefty salaries never ceases to amaze many people.

When it is time to debate on issues that will benefit every Malawian the MPs are very reluctant to do so. But in unison they didn't waste any time to increase their own salaries. This only shows the type of leaders Malawians chose in 2009. Although they ask for so much money some never visit their constituencies. It is a pity that the MPs are demand salary increments when the country is not doing so well economically. As some political observers have noted this is not the time for MPs to be asking for salary increases.

President Bingu wa Mutharika came back from his holiday amid continued shortages of fuel, forex and soft drinks. It has not been easy for those that are close to the president in the last weeks because of the demands of the people who wanted to know where Mutharika had gone to were just too much. As some political experts observed Mutharika should not have gone to Hong Kong instead he should have stayed right here in Malawi. The fact that those that are close to him were keeping a tight lid on Mutharika's whereabouts also added anxiety to the people. Their efforts to make Malawians believe Bingu wa Mutharika was safe and sound only made it worse as people speculated that he was very sick and in hospital.

Mutharika again dazzled many people when he said he would have to check his files when a question was put to him about the new proposed salary for MPs. Strange because Mutharika's spokesperson had been saying that even when he was not in the country Mutharika was still in charge. One wonders what exactly this means when the same person who we were told was in control failed to answer questions on what has been happening in his absence. One can never be sure with the likes of Hetherwick Ntaba who are always defending Mutharika even when it is not necessary.

Unpredictable this is what Mutharika told the nation some time back. True to his word Mutharika amazed many people when he held a press rally where he referred back the questions to the journalists present at the airport, upon being asked what his government would do to ease the fuel shortage situation.

Similarly other observers have questioned the logic behind the construction of a K43 million swimming pool at the Reserve Bank governor's house when Malawi at present is not doing so

well in the economy sector. It is the same Central Bank that is aware of the shortage of forex in Malawi and yet it is going ahead with such luxuries. At a time when Malawi is on the brink of losing some of its donors' one would expect some seriousness in managing the scare resources. Is a swimming really that important? These are some of the questions that people have asked.

The recent fracas in the *United Democratic Front UDF* over use of offices by two factions only shows that the party is far from being united. The papers for the past weeks have reported the alleged misuse of party money by the former chairman Dr Bakili Muluzi and some leaders want the money back and have taken the issue to court. At the same time the party is not happy with Atupele Muluzi's wishes to stand in the next general election because he is young and is the son of the former president of Malawi and chairman of the UDF. All the squabbles only show that they still have long way to go in trying to mend the party that was once a force to reckon with.

## ECONOMY

Things are now obviously falling down, from a vibrant economy to a dwindling state of affairs. This is what Malawi has become. The country used to be a success story, one that some could learn from but now it is sour. Where did it all go wrong? Many questions have been asked. Malawi was just gaining donor confidence and making new friends all over the world and all this seems to have changed. To date Malawi seems not to be in good books with some of the donors. Malawians are now at the receiving end of the collapsing economy.

From a layperson's point of view the buying power of the Kwacha is slowly going from bad to worse. The recent price hike of fuel has resulted in many shops also increasing the prices of their goods. As the *Centre For Social Concern CFSC* in its monthly cost of living survey, the *Basic Needs Basket BNB*, found out there has been a sharp increase in the cost of many goods and services. Transport fares in many parts of the country have gone up, passengers now have to pay through the nose when traveling. The same applies to motorists who are now digging deeper in their pockets to buy the scarce fuel for their vehicles. This is what the situation is like in Malawi and it seems consumers should brace themselves for tougher times ahead.

Press reports have shown that the Malawi government has been angered with the European Union's new funding policy. In November the European Union announced it was going to channel all its fund through civil society organizations only, until the government improves on the human rights and democratic governance. This scenario has annoyed government especially at this time when it desperately needs any form of funding. Malawi's democratic record has been dented following by the many bad laws that government has passed using its majority in parliament and many more attacks on religious leaders, journalists and some activists.

Opposition Members of Parliament in November advised government to abandon the zero deficit budget. Ever since the budget was tabled many people have been very skeptical and doubted whether government was going to make it with its much touted about zero deficit budget. For the opposition *Malawi Congress Party Malawi MCP* the country is currently facing all these economic problems because of the current budget. The *MCP* would want government to abandon it but government is of the contrary view.

Revenue from the tobacco industry is expected to plummet further, this is the announcement that has been made by the *Tobacco Control Commission TCC* in the month under review. With tobacco being Malawi's major forex earner such kind of revelation is a shocker especially to those that are employed in the industry. From tenants to farm owners and those in the mainstream tobacco processing companies, all this will affect their lives in one way or the other.

<b>FOOD SECURITY</b>
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Donors came in at the right time just when farmers were getting desperate over the availability of fertilizer in the selling depots. Press reports have disclosed that a group of donors have given money to fund the fertilizer subsidy. It has been reported that the shortage of fuel has also affected the delivery of fertilizer to some areas. Government introduced the subsidy programme where the targeted are given coupons for fertilizer and seeds. Perhaps the donor money will ease the problem at present as there is also a forex shortage that has made it difficult to purchase the farm inputs.

In Chiradzulu reports show that irate farmers went to the District Commissioners office where they wanted to give back the subsidized fertilizer coupons because they could not use them due to the unavailability of the farm inputs. The farmers feel it is better to give back the coupons than keep them when they know the farm inputs are not available. If reports are anything to go by there are other areas without the farm inputs. Perhaps with the arrival of donor funding these problems will soon be over.

Although there are reports of looming hunger among some Malawians, press reports have shown that the country sold maize and donated some to Southern Sudan. About 300 metric tones was sold to Southern Sudan after it was reported that there is a food crisis there. Surprisingly there are also similar reports in Malawi. One can only pray that this will not be a repeat of 2002 scenario, where government sold maize to Kenya while others in Malawi suffered due to the shortage of food. It has been disclosed that 200,000 people in Malawi need food aid. Meanwhile the government of Malawi has promised to quickly look into the issue of Malawians who need food aid.

Some organizations have asked farmers to consider growing more food crops now that there has been a sharp increase in food prices. According to agricultural authorities in Blantyre even globally reports show that prices of food are rising and it is difficult for some to buy it in the markets. The authorities also advised farmers to grow crops that can easily adapt the effects of climate change.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

A number of organizations have asked government to repeal all archaic laws. It has been a lesson to many Malawians who have now realized that they goofed in trusting the government with such a majority in the National Assembly. The many archaic laws have been hurriedly passed in parliament even without too much resistance from other players outside parliament. The abuse of the majority in parliament has been greatly felt this time around because of some of the laws passed recently. It is against this background the *Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace CCJP* is also asking MPs to look into some of the bad laws and repeal them.

The same *CCJP* also asked parliament to improve their performance or adjourn. *CCJP* came up with this warning after the organization noted that there was not much that the members were discussing that would benefit Malawi. The organization said that by not tackling real issues the November sitting would only be a waste of tax payer's money. For instance there are some bills that have not been to parliament but are very important and should have been tabled in the house.

The month of November saw MPs raising their monthly salaries to K1 million, a thing that did not please many. Press reports have shown that civil servants are very bitter with the proposed new salaries for the legislators when all civil servants got was a miserable 7% salary increase. With the daily increasing cost of goods and services, the civil servants have threatened to go on a national wide strike. Leaders of the *Civil Servants Trade Union CSTU* reported in the press that they plan to go on strike due to the escalating cost of living which cannot be matched with the civil servants' income.

Some civil society organizations have raised concerns over government's tendency to appoint a commission of inquiries. In recent months we have witnessed a number commission of inquiries being appointed to look into some of the sticky issues that are still raising a lot of questions among Malawians. Surprisingly many members of this commission of inquiries do not come out in the public with a report to answer all the questions that people have. Against this background some *NGO* leaders feel commission of inquiries should not be encouraged because they only waste money. These are people who get allowances to their job but end up with no report and conclusions. Press reports have disclosed that government uses commission of inquiries just to avoid issues. Just recently president Bingu wa Mutharika appointed a commission of inquiry to look into the death of Robert Chasowa, an engineering student at the Polytechnic.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIVES

It has been announced that the world's population has reached 7 billion. Malawi also joined the rest of the world in commemorating this day with several activities held in Mangochi and led by the *United Nations Population Fund UNFPA* and the government. Many of the speeches made emphasized taking advantage of the high population to contribute to the development of the country.

As if the fuel and forex shortage are not enough people are now queuing just to buy soft drinks. Gone are the days when one could just go in a shop to get a mere soft drink. According to reports there is no choice of drinks. Observers have said the manufacturers only produce one brand and for a week that is what people will find in the shops. The list of scarce commodities goes on. Nobody knows what else people will be queuing for in the near future.

A case of the ugly face of prison conditions was reported in the press in the month under review. A boy claimed he was paralysed and is wheelchair bound because of medication he got in prison. Despite being asthmatic the boy was given drugs that he is not familiar with and ended up being numb in the legs after the dosage. Malawi's conditions in prison are reported to be one of the worst because of congestion and lack of medical access for prisoners. There have also been complaints over food which most prisoners claim is only taken once a day.

Although there are reports that government has made progress in reducing child labour other reports show the contrary. There are still high incidents of child labour in some farms across Malawi. In tobacco farming districts reports show that there are many children working in estates. Way back government quashed a report by *Plan International* which revealed that there is child labour in tobacco farms, and that many children are exposed to deadly chemicals in the estates because they do not wear protective gear.

People living with disabilities got an assurance from government that although there is no full ministry for the disabled, their issues will be dealt with in the gender ministry. Despite this assurance the disabled still want to have a separate ministry with a person living with a disability leading it. But government has assured people living with disabilities that their issues will be dealt with in the same ministry.

## EDUCATION

Years after a tree fell on a school block in Area 49, Lilongwe, killing some of the pupils instantly another accident happened in Karonga. Pupils at St Joseph Secondary School in Karonga were injured after a school block collapsed on them. These were students who were studying for end of year examinations and ended up in hospital with broken limbs. In the past the ministry of education used to inspect schools to see if the blocks are in good condition. Perhaps this exercise should be revived so that we save students from such accidents.

Finally Chancellor College students are now in class after a long battle on academic freedom. It took almost nine months for the college to get back on track after cries for academic freedom bore no fruits. At present classes are in progress with assurance from the government that there will no longer be spies in lecture halls. Press reports have shown that the delays in opening the college after the running battles with government has seen two groups of students who are supposed to start first year at the college. It is against this background that the college has resorted to have a double stream. This is a new development in the *University of Malawi*.

Observers on education took advantage of the sitting of parliament in November to air their concerns over the delay in tabling and passing the *Education Draft Bill*. According to *Civil Society Coalition for Basic Education CSCQBE* some less important bills have been easily tabled and passed with haste in the National Assembly despite the fact that education standards are declining in Malawi. It is not a secret that education standards have plummeted in recent years and *CSCQBE* feels things would change for the better in the education sector if the bill is tabled and passed into law.

Government in November announced that there is progress at the construction of the *University of Science and Technology* in Thyolo District. Parliament authorized the construction of the college in a previous sitting. This is one of the six universities that president Bingu wa Mutharika's government promised they would build as one way of dealing with the shortage of space and to give great access to university students. Evidence has shown that a large number of students want to access university education in public universities but there is not enough space. Government came up with the quota system of selecting student in colleges to partly solve the problem.

## HEALTH

Government in November announced it would ensure that there are plenty of drugs in hospitals. There has been a lot of pressure from the opposition parties in the National Assembly over the availability of drugs. For a very long time there have been reports of drug shortage even in some referral hospitals and it has raised a lot of concerns by many people. Reports have shown that some patients were being sent away from public hospitals because there were no drugs.

Authorities in the government denied reports that expectant mothers were being asked to pay money for buying fuel to run generators when there is a blackout at the Ethel Mutharika Maternity wing, Kamuzu Central Hospital. Blackouts are the order of the day but this does not warrant for expectant mothers being forced to buy fuel for the hospital generators just in case there is a blackout at the time they are in labour. No matter how bad things are expectant mothers should not be expected to pay for such services which are the responsibility of the hospital.

The onset of the rainy season comes with waterborne diseases like cholera. In the past many district health personnel have fought day and night to make sure that there are no cases of cholera. Awareness messages on how people can prevent the disease have been sent out in various media outlets but still more cases are always reported. One thing is for sure it is possible to have no cases of cholera if all preventative measures are taken seriously.

Media reports in November have disclosed that Malawi needs 120 new doctors trained every year. It should be noted that a number medical doctors trained in the past have either left the government hospitals and joined the private sector or trekked to the West where the grass is said to be more greener than in Malawi. This has affected the ratio of doctor and patients in Malawi at present. Reports show that College of Medicine plans to train more doctors so that they reach this figure.

Tuberculosis continues to be one of the most deadly diseases in Malawi, but of late there has been an improvement in its treatment. In the past people would be on treatment for a very long time and occupied hospital beds for months thereby using a lot of government resources. Now the song is different, as experts have announced that TB patients will no longer need to be in hospital. The experts say this will help in making savings for the hospitals

## ENVIRONMENT

The change in rainfall patterns is now being greatly felt in Malawi. By November end some areas had not yet received enough rain. Even some farmers were still not too sure whether to plant their crops with the little amount of rain that they received. This is contrary to what the situation has been in past years. By October in the past farmers would have planted their crops. But as usual government is optimistic that Malawi will receive normal rains. Farmers and many Malawians wait with hope that the rains will be normal just like the meteorological department have predicted.

The *African Caravan* passed through Malawi on its way to Durban South Africa where various activities speeches, prayers and demonstrations on climate change were to be held. Several religious leaders, environmental activist and some Malawians joined the caravan. It is believed that this is supposed to hammer the point home on how to manage and adapt climate change effects. As the caravan passed through ten countries across Africa it also gained signatures of people so that they add a voice in asking negotiators on climate change and other environmental challenges.

Mulanje Cedar is a rare specie of trees and is well protected by many. But as some environmental reports have noted some political leaders are interfering in the safeguarding of the cedar. Reports have shown that a top politician ordered for the release of a truck that was confiscated for illegal cutting of the trees. Instead of minding his own business the politician is contributing to the cutting down of these beautiful trees. One wonders if it is indeed normal for a leader to be in such an incident instead of being at the forefront in replenishing Mulanje mountain and making sure that the cedar is protected.

It was all joy in November when the world's population reached 7 billion. But some experts are of the view that as population is growing poor and developing countries will feel the pinch of climate change more. Environmental experts have noted that with a large population people are more likely to cut more trees thereby making the ground bare. Soil cover is also going to be affected because people will be building more houses even in riverbeds. Therefore developing countries should expect more problems with the increasing world population.

## GENDER

It was again 16 days of gender activism and as usual Malawi joined other countries in observing the days. As some people have noted it is all very nice and flowery to have days where activists advocate for a violence free atmosphere for women and children but what happens when the days are over? It would have been better if after 16 days the world continued to be a better place that is free from any forms of violence against children and women.

All focus has been on the sitting of parliament where a female Member of Parliament is reported to have physically assaulted the Minister of Internal Security and Home Affairs, Aaron Sangala. People have judged both members who were involved in the fracas and some have concluded that the female MP was in the wrong to manhandle the minister. It has been proved beyond reasonable doubt that some women would never support a fellow woman on anything. Anita Kalinde was tormented and had fingers pointed at her by fellow female MPs and only very few offered their support. This only shows even at institutions like the parliament women do not support each other.

The bare breasted girls that danced at the traditional ceremony of *Mulhakho wa Alhomwe* in Mulanje are still causing a lot of debate among Malawians. More than twenty little girls, mainly from the villages coming from an initiation ceremony, were paraded and danced bare breasted to the multitude that were gathered at Chonde the headquarters of the *Mulhakho wa Alhomwe* in Mulanje. To date some people are at pains to understand why they had to be half naked. Others have wondered if the elite families also had their children parade for anyone who cared to see. It should be noted that the function was also beamed on national television.

The umbrella body for gender organizations *Non Governmental Organization Gender Coordination Network NGOGCN* in November pointed an accusing finger at traditional leaders for gender gaps. Evidence has shown that chiefs are very influential in society and as a result whatever they say is taken seriously. The organization noted that many traditional leaders continue to be silent on gender issues. Many issues on women and girls are left unaddressed and this affects their access to essential things like education. As the gender organization has noted chiefs should speak a lot on the need to educate girls, on making women decision makers in some of the activities in the villages. This is the only way these gender gap can be dealt with.