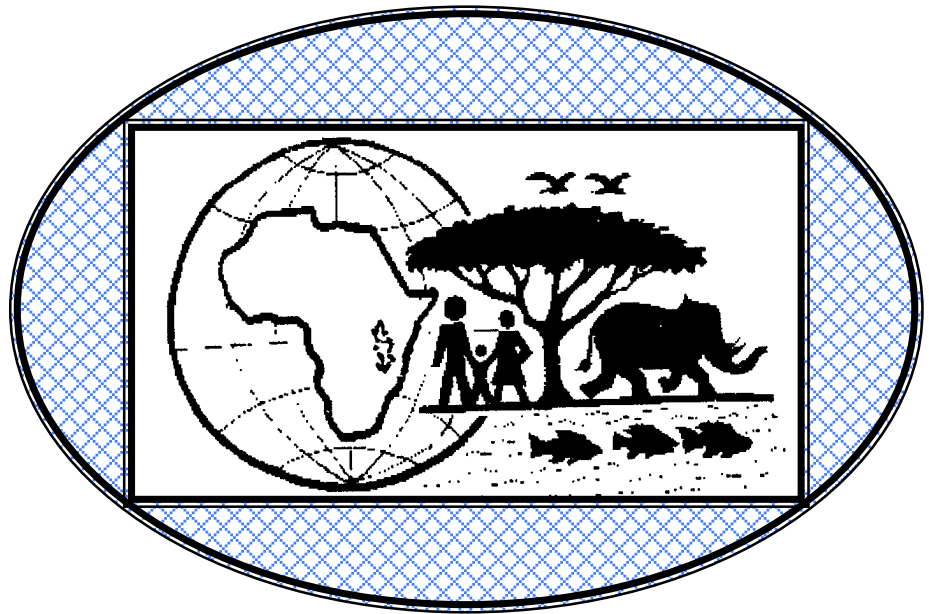


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***JULY
2010***

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

Compiled by the
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(CFSC)***
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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

The National Flag Bill was passed in hasty manner in Parliament with the government who are in majority overwhelmingly voting for the change amid a lot of criticism and rejection from the opposition, the clergy, some civil society organisations and the public in general. Not so long ago government announced the proposed change on the flag, which had black, green and red stripes and a rising sun.

Government cited the rising sun as a sign of a newborn nation, which was just developing. According to government spokesperson Leckford Thotho Mwanza, the rising sun meant Malawi was coming from the darkness therefore the flag depicted a rising sun.

Thotho who says he has conducted consultations throughout Malawi cited food security, the booming economy, and infrastructure as some of the developments that beg for a change of the flag. The consultations raise a lot of suspicions because in many cases the information minister consulted chiefs. These are a group of people who are paid by government and it is more likely that they would never bite the hand that feeds them. They would never have said that the flag should not be changed even if they felt that way.

Despite the strong opposition of clergy, civil society and the masses government went ahead to table the bill in the National Assembly and president Bingu wa Mutharika has assented to it. Now we are expected to change every flag in Malawi and in all diplomatic offices across the globe. Thotho has already defended the cost issue saying the money that is used to replace worn out flags will be used for the new modified flag.

To some people it does not make sense to modify the flag basing on developments that have taken place because the reality is a good number of Malawians are still illiterate, thousands are unemployed and live in dire poverty. As if this is not enough in towns and cities the majority of the people have no running water and electricity. To such people development would have meant easy access of all the above. Sunrise and kwacha are often experienced as signs of hope like it says in the Holy Bible: God's love is as certain as the dawn.

Another argument seldom mentioned is that the flag is closely associated with both the name for the currency, called kwacha, which means 'it is dawn' and the name of the country, Malawi, which was named after the "flames" (reflections) on the water at the time of sunrise. The whole of our reputedly very capable DPP members of parliament allegedly did not know enough history to mount a real debate on the issue. Colleagues from countries, which were sometimes cited as examples in the debate have warned that another government might reverse the change in flag. Like in Congo, which became Zaire and is now the Democratic republic of Congo. The whole flag saga almost forces one to believe that parliament is just rubberstamping. Too bad for democracy!

POLITICS

Malawi celebrated 46 years of independence in July. 46 years after attaining sovereignty the country has made some strides in many sectors of the society but still more there are areas that experts feel need more attention. While it might be true that Malawi has made tremendous improvement in the education, the economy and infrastructure sectors the reality on the ground is not in line with what is on paper. Surely after years of independence we should have been able to change some of the lack of access to basic needs and therefore rights for the better.

Just like last year president Bingu wa Mutharika awarded some deserving citizens of Malawi during the Independence anniversary celebrations. This time around political commentators feel the recipients of the awards were not politically chosen. Some have actually commended Mutharika for the selection of the recipients of these awards, which were given out to different people for their outstanding contribution to the nation. Among them is former president Dr Baklili Muluzi, Late Dr Aleke Banda, Late Ethel Mutharika, Coach of the Malawi national football team Kinnah Phiri and seasoned singer late Everson Matafale.

President Bingu wa Mutharika once again repeated comments about his retirement. While it is a known factor that after two 5 year terms a president should bid the State House goodbye, Mutharika reminded Malawians that he was not going stand or ask for a third term. According to political analysts the recent remarks should not be taken seriously because that is what they all say but in actual sense the ambitions are there. At the same time revelations would also mean that those that had earlier on thought of asking Mutharika to prolong his tenure should shelve their thoughts and dreams on this issue.

The controversial flag bill was passed in the budget sitting of parliament amid mixed feelings over the issue. The Government side of the house overwhelmingly passed the bill despite all the queries from religious leaders, the civil society and other players in the society. Among other things the opponents of the flag change sighted the many problems that Malawians are facing. But government through its spokesperson Leckford Thotho Mwale has backed the changes saying as a nation Malawi has gone through tremendous changes and developments and as such the flag should not have a depiction of dawn but of midday with a full sun at the centre of the flag. Though the bill has been passed some organizations fought against the changes and asked president Bingu wa Mutharika not to assent the bill. But much to people's surprise Mutharika, dismissing all those opposed as just being difficult, went ahead to assent to the bill.

Although the electoral commission disclosed that it would hold local poll on November 23, a recent revelation by the press has left people wondering if at all the elections will take place. It has been announced that there are no funds for the local government elections. To add salt to the injury at present there is no calendar. For a long time the civil society and other stakeholders have been looking forwarding to the day the country will go to polls to choose councilors. With a few months remaining before the polls, by now the electoral calendar should have been released so that various players conduct their duties in preparation of the elections. The 2010/2011 national budget allocated K2 billion for the polls and expected K1 billion from Malawi's partners and donors. These announcements seem to prove the critics right when they said the nation is not yet ready to conduct the elections. Meanwhile the Electoral Commission insists that all is set for the November elections.

Debate is still ongoing on the proposal to have a fixed term of office for Members of Parliament. While some people are of the view that a fixed term of office is what the MPs need others have opposing views. The proposal is to have a limit for the legislators just like we have for the president. The constitution of Malawi allows a president to only rule the nation for 2 five-year terms. Some observers feel the same should apply to MPs who have an open term. So far some constituents have welcomed the proposal while others have contrary views excusing themselves by saying in a democracy one can disagree. While this is so, bringing arguments for each side and having a mature debate is needed. The excuse of disagreeing being democratic seems at times rather childish.

Political analysts have learnt with great shock the carefree attitude that Mutharika seems to be showing to the nation recently through his utterances. President Mutharika who is also the African Union Chairperson made it clear that he will go ahead assenting the flag change bill whether anyone likes it or not. The civil society organizations have been asking Mutharika not to assent the bill. His recent remarks only show that any further plans by the civil society on the flag have been jeopardized. These utterances are coming barely some weeks after Mutharika had spoken of a united Malawi as we are building one nation. Now the carefree speeches sound dictatorial and do not reflect well on a person who is preaching peace and working together for development.

Tread carefully that is what the ruling *Democratic Progress Party DPP* has been told. It is now obvious that what started like a rumour can now be safely be said to be a fact. Peter Mutharika president Bingu wa Mutharika's younger brother is the eligible candidate for the party in 2014. Although there is no convention that endorsed the young Mutharika he is already getting a lot of airtime on both state run television and radio. Political experts have warned the party from making the same mistakes the *United Democratic Front UDF* made. It is not a secret that the UDF lost popularity for failing to do things properly on leadership handover.

ECONOMY

Malawi's imports cover continues to go up in the year 2010. The situation seems to have improved from shortages of forex early on this year, which resulted in the imports cover going down. Seasonally because of the tobacco sales and other developments the availability of forex in the country has increased. If the forecasts by the *Economist Intelligence Unit EIU* in London are anything to go by then Malawian importers have all the reason to smile because it means they can securely import raw materials.

Economic experts have wondered why the cost of living and the inflation rate seem to be telling different stories. In normal circumstances, when inflation is going down the cost of living should also be going down. But strangely the monthly cost of living is showing that the cost of living is going up. According to *Centre for Social Concern's CFSC* monthly basic needs basket the cost of living has gone up mainly because of the rise in food cost. On the other hand the government announced that the inflation is going down. According to experts this is not supposed to be the case. The fact that the cost of living and the inflation are telling us different things raises a lot of questions because economic experts have disclosed that the 2 are supposed to point in the same direction.

Analysts in July praised Bingu wa Mutharika for trying his level best in making sure that the economy is right on track after years of mismanagement. With 46 years of independence they have noted that Malawi has made improvements in the economic sector. Among other things there is good infrastructure development and food security that Malawi can proudly show. Malawi has won donor confidence for the past 6 years courtesy of the Mutharika administration. While this is the case Billy Mayaya of Civic and Political Space Platform noted that the current government has failed Malawians on civil and political rights.

A high level meeting on Malawi's position on *Economic Partnership Agreement EPAs* has continued to say Malawi is not ready to sign the agreement. On this issue it seems the civil society, government and president Bingu wa Mutharika are speaking the same language. Various civil society organizations have organised different campaigns on the same issue but now that even Mutharika seems not to be in favour of the agreement, it means Malawi will not sign the *EPAs*. It should be noted there are some countries in Africa that have already signed the interim agreement. Meanwhile negotiations have been taking place because countries do not want to sign the agreement in its current form.

FOOD SECURITY

There is a lot of evidence that points to food wastage during storage time. Some agricultural experts have noted that there is always a problem among farmers who have a lot of harvest but end up having too little space to store their produce. Experts would want households to have enough food throughout the year with as little wastage as possible during storage. In this regard authorities are sensitizing the farmers to use metal silos in storing their maize in Mchinji. President Mutharika also launched the same type of silos in Luchenza in Thyolo district in July.

As a food secure nation Malawi has various food crops as well. Although this is the case press reports have disclosed that on average most Malawians eat the same type of food year in year out. This scenario puts some homes in an awkward position because once their usual meal is not available the households go hungry even when there are different types of food. In many homes people feel the only food they can eat is Nsima, which is made from maize flour. If maize as a crop fails, families feel there is no food in the household. This tendency has caused some families to suffer when there is plenty of food and other options that could have been used to supplement one's diet. For this reason the Story Workshop launched a food diversification project in selected areas in Chiradzulu. One surely should not sleep on an empty stomach when there are different types of foods available.

Every month contradicting reports emerge in the press over the hunger situation in Malawi. Just recently the media announced findings of the *Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committe MVAC* and figures. The report by *MVAC* only mentioned 78,000 people who would be affected by hunger in the Southern Region. But this is contrary to the *Famine Early Warning Systems Network FEWSNET* who says the figure is now at 1.1 million. This is only in the Southern Region. Although at national level reports show the situation is not bad the fact still remains that in the Southern Region some people are starving. Evidence has shown that the situation is better for the Central and Northern region. These 1.1 million people or more surely need attention so that international reports on food security should indeed reflect what is on the ground.

The fact that there are some districts in the Southern Region that are affected with food shortage every year calls for a permanent solution. It is not something strange to hear of reports of food shortages in the Southern Region. However authorities have not succeeded yet to do away with the food shortage in the region for good. It does not make sense to have the same districts suffering from starvation every month when Malawi is being praised as a role model to other nations on food security.

A monthly survey on the cost of living has gone up because of the rising prices of food. The cost of food is also a major component of the Basic Needs Basket that the CFSC compile. It should be noted that once the cost of some food items has gone up, the whole Basic Needs Baskets changes. But then although the cost of living is going up the incomes of a number of people still remain on a lower side. One wonders how some families manage to go through the month.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The *Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation CHRR* in July asked the government to at least honour Sauka composer of the national anthem. The three-stanza national anthem is the work of one man whose creativity cannot just be pushed aside. CHRR noted with great concern that Sauka's name was not among the people that were honoured on Anniversary celebrations. Sauka equally deserves to be honoured for the contribution he made to Malawi. To date it is Sauka's composition that Malawi uses as national anthem so it is high time that as a nation we recognize Sauka's work. Perhaps Sauka will be considered during the next round of awards because composing a national anthem is not a simple task that should just go unnoticed.

Different organizations have shown contradicting views over the change of the national flag while some religious groups like the Livingstonia Synod of the CCAP joined the civil society in condemning government for the change; others are commending government for the change. Reverend Malani Ntonga who is former presidential advisor on religious affairs is for the change. Ntonga is backing government for the changes, which he said, are timely because we are no longer at dawn as a nation. While this is the case some civil society and the masses still feel the bill was rushed because it is not true that government made thorough consultations as it claims.

After a successful completion of the Interfaith Project in Mangochi district the *Centre for Social Concern CFSC* launched a similar project in Machinga district. Among other things the project seeks to have peaceful co-existence among people of different religions. It should be noted that in the past there have been cases of intolerance among people of different faiths in some parts of Malawi. Previously the projects also operated in Karonga, Nkhotakota and Likuni in Lilongwe. It is expected to help people of different religions in Machinga to work together in development projects in the district and conduct all activities peacefully, including elections.

Civil society organizations have criticised the acts of a white couple who asked for medical personnel to conduct an HIV test on a man who was bitten by dogs. The man who was severely bitten by dogs has been the center of attention after the owners of the dog asked doctors to perform the tests fearing that their pets might have contracted the virus from the bites. This has irked human rights organizations who have since asked for the deportation of the white couple. In the same line *Human Rights Consultative Committee HRCC* held a peaceful demonstration and have given a petition to the home affairs minister to deal with the issue.

On a sad note the Lilongwe Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church mourned the sudden death of the youthful auxiliary bishop Stanislaus Tobias Magombo. He was ordained bishop on 11th July 2009 at Maula Cathedral in Lilongwe. The late bishop hailed from at Helani Village in Traditional Authority Kachindamoto's areas in Dedza district. He was 43.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

With the first world cup hosted on African soil over, there have been fears of some new xenophobia attacks in South Africa. This is not going to be a new occurrence because in 2008 a number of foreigners lost their lives and properties at the hands of some South Africans. To date some South Africans still feel the migrants are taking their jobs and other resources. Malawians were not spared from such attacks. Now that the world cup is over the countrymen have threatened to restart the attacks. One might never know whether it is safe for those living in South Africa a country that successfully hosted the world cup.

There is a hot debate going on since the passing of the Pension Amendment Bill in the National Assembly. A number of workers have blamed government for failing to do its homework properly on the issue. This argument has come in because of the revelation that people will only get their pension money after reaching 55 years of age. This clause in the just passed law has left people with more questions than answers. On the same issue the amendment bill has also left out workers whose income is K10,000 a month and below. *Malawi Congress of Trade Unions MCTU* has since said that government did not consider the proposals the organization made regarding the amendment of the bill.

Malawi celebrated World Population Day in July just like the rest of the world. With Malawi's population shooting up at an alarming rate, here have been calls for families to consider having only 4 children. A recent research indicated that on average families have 6 children. The same research went further to say that Malawian women have a high fertility rate. With Malawi's population soaring around 14 million, some experts have suggested that as a nation we should have a policy that should see only 4 children per couple. Perhaps this is one of the many ways that could help in controlling population growth though this is debatable

As part of the Anniversary celebrations President professor Bingu wa Mutharika pardoned over 200 prisoners. The pardoning of prisoners, which is nothing new, comes at a time there are reports of congestions in Malawi prisons. Some international organizations have in the past cautioned Malawi on conditions in the prisons. Reports on prisons show that a number of inmates are at a risk of contracting airborne diseases because of the congestion. Surely authorities still have their work cut out for them making sure that congestion and other problems are solved for good.

EDUCATION

Controversy still surrounds the recent announcement by government on the hardship allowances for teachers in the rural areas. In the 2010/ 2011 national budget government has put aside some money for these teachers. They will be receiving hardship allowances as one way of motivating them to teach and remain in such areas. Teachers living in the rural areas welcomed this news but it did not go down well with their counterparts in the cities. Just recently it was disclosed that some teachers who are in rural areas but are at trading centres where there is running water and electricity would not benefit from the allowances. According to newspaper reports over 4600 teachers who are at Trading Centres will not benefit from the allowance.

Just some weeks after students of Mzuzu University went on rampage over shortage of printers and photocopiers, their woes are not yet over. It seems the college is always in problems leaving students with tough learning conditions at the college. Being a new college, which has been in operational for less than 10 years, students have not enough learning space. Reports have revealed that students learn while standing up at the school. One would not be wrong to ask if at all the government will be able to build the promised 5 colleges when it is failing to manage 1 of its already existing college Mzuni.

The *Malawi National Examinations Board MANEB* in July administered Standard 8 *Primary School and Leaving Certificate PSLCE* and *Junior Certificate Examination JCE*. Perhaps these could be said to be one of the successful examinations because there were not many reports of cheating or any other problems. In the past examinations have been marred by leakages and cheating leaving MANEB with no choice but to either disqualify students or cancel the whole exam. Could this mean that the situation is changing for the better?

In July government made it known that it would deal with any school owners who have substandard buildings. This is one of the many ways that authorities are trying to improve standards of education. Just recently government went around and closed some of the schools that did not meet its standards. Although some quarters were not amused with the exercise at least it gave school owners some kind of push to make sure they put their house in order. Sanitation in schools has always been a problem. Evidence has shown that a number of girls absent themselves from school because of shortages of toilets in their premises.

Universities are never short of controversies. This is evident by the many issues that come from the *University of Malawi UNIMA* offices. Press reports recently disclosed that top officials at *UNIMA* have been giving each other exorbitant allowances when they go on leave. It should be noted that these are the same colleges that have to cope with numerous problems. The fact that top staffs are abusing their powers by misusing funds at the colleges is a deplorable situation that needs to be taken care of once and for all.

HEALTH

Professor Bingu wa Mutharika in July also added his voice in condemning some religious leaders who deny their faithful from going to hospitals or receive vaccination. It is not a secret that Malawi is a God fearing nation and that there is freedom of worship, but recent deaths of children suffering from measles has sparked a debate among Malawians. Since it was announced that there is an outbreak of Measles government has done vaccination campaigns. To the surprise of many some denominations refused to have their children vaccinated resulting in deaths. Against this background Mutharika cautioned such people who are putting the lives of their young ones in danger.

The campaign against malaria one of the major killer diseases continued in the month under review. This time around it has been dubbed Malungo Zii campaign and it has spread into the districts after officially being launched in Lilongwe. Press reports have disclosed that in Nkhata Bay there is some resistance among couples to sleep under a mosquito net. According to reports people think sleeping under a mosquito net reduces one's fertility rate. Experts who have since managed to change the people's perception have denied these allegations.

Still on Malaria, the saying old habits die hard proves to be true for some people in Nkhata Bay. Although the use of Fansidar SP has been discouraged among Malaria patients, others are still using the drug, which has been proved to be resistant to the disease. This is because others think the recommended prescription has too many drugs that one has to take. The scenario has resulted in some people dying from the disease in the district. There is need for more sensitization and awareness on the effectiveness of the drug and the importance of completing the dosage, if people are to be healed once they have malaria.

First Lady Callista Mutharika launched a Safe Motherhood organization in July barely some days after being appointed AU ambassador on such issues. Mutharika replaced vice president Joyce Banda who was relieved of her duties under very controversial circumstances. Callista Mutharika's organization will among other things assist in making sure the campaign to reduce child and maternal mortality rates to spread far and wide.

ENVIRONMENT

The environment and natural resources continue to get low press coverage in Malawi. For whatever reason newspapers in Malawi are dominated by political squabbles as result issues on the environment are overshadowed by such occurrences. Rarely do we find a story on climate change being on front page. But then although the media in Malawi shun environmental issues in their daily work it should be noted that this sector is equally important and needs as much attention as politics and others. In one week one would be assured of reading about politics, the economy, sports and entertainment almost every day of the week but the environment is never given such coverage.

Similarly issues of climate change are also not being covered in the press. At a climate change meeting authorities asked journalists to give the environment some attention in coverage. This confirms the observers who noted that climate change issues are not reported in the press. With the government's plea readers perhaps be informed more on the topic.

Press reports have revealed that finally government has come to the rescue of Chikangawa forest. The forest, which is Africa's biggest man-made forest, which stretches from Mzimba district to Mzuzu City, adds beauty and has been a source of timber to the nation and other neighbouring countries. But of late bush fires and unauthorized cutting of trees has left the plantation bare in some patches. At the same time some harvested areas need to be replanted and government intends to give out funds for the replanting of the trees.

Some environmentalists in the month of July noted that there is not much that has been done in the national budget that goes towards the environment. According to the experts as a nation Malawi should also put the environment as one of its priority areas. The environment is also one of the *Millennium Development Goals MDGs* and such needs our attention. It should be noted that all the other goals like on water, sanitation and food security go hand in hand with the environment.

The media has disclosed that climate change is hitting hard on farmers who are feeling the effects more than others. The changes in rainfall patterns have made the farmers also realize that they need to be more innovative, if they are to cope. For instance some farmers in Karonga are making manure that would keep water in the soil once the rains fail they should not be worried about the harvest.

GENDER

During the 46th anniversary independence celebrations President Bingu wa Mutharika once again renewed his vows on women empowerment in Malawi. The incumbent president has won the hearts of many gender activists as someone who has the welfare of women at heart. In his speech Mutharika promised to make plans that once implemented will ensure that at least 90 women go to the National Assembly. This will in a way assist in achieving the SADC goals of having 50% of female representation in decision-making positions. It should be noted that some African nations have a policy that allows for the reservation of some seats for women. In these countries they have managed to achieve the 50-50 goals.

Gender Minister Patricia Kaliati did not mince words when she blasted women who bail out their husbands once they are put in police custody for gender based violence offences. Observers have noted with great concern that there are a lot of victims of gender-based violence who bail out the same husbands that abuse them. This tendency seems to be slowing down the fight against gender based violence in Malawi. Parliament passed the domestic violence bill into law some years ago. But then the fight against gender based violence cannot bear fruits if the women who are in most cases victims bail out the men who should be punished once they have been proved to be guilty as charged. It surely needs more awareness so that the offenders are punished accordingly.

Press reports in month under review have exposed more problems that women continue to face in the society. Evidence has shown that most women are abused on land issues. This is the case because in some cultures in Malawi women do not own land. In this regard even the proceeds that come out after they have contributed fairly to farming do not belong to the women. Much as they do spend their strengths on the land they do not make decisions on the proceeds that come out after farming. Some women in Machinga have asked for ownership of land. Land ownership is the only way the women think they will be at liberty to do as they please.

Gender reports have revealed that a number of women have fallen in the human trafficking trap. Some organizations are currently raising awareness on human trafficking. On the other hand others are taking advantage of high unemployment rates in Malawi to trap women and girls into their plans. But the most shocking thing is the fact that more and more girls and women end up being in sex trade instead of the promised jobs. Contrary to what trafficked people are promised, traffickers still abuse the victims. Recent reports show that some individuals have taken advantage of Malawi and are using it as a transit country. There is need to tighten the screws in the fight against human trafficking which has been dubbed modern day slavery. Currently there is no law against human trafficking in Malawi.