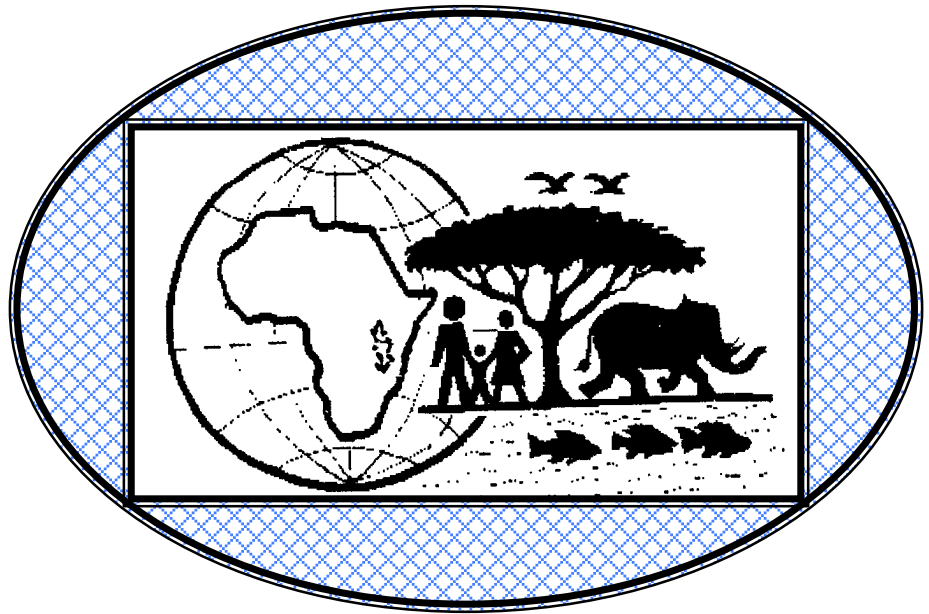


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**SEPTEMBER
2010**

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

Compiled by the
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LIST OF NEWSPAPERS REVIEWED

Daily Times

The Weekend Nation

The Sunday Times

Malawi News

The Guardian

Nation on Sunday

The Nation

PREVIEW

Whatever is happening between the 2 top most citizens of Malawi is sending wrong signals to ordinary Malawians. The month of September witnessed the climax of a good relationship gone bad between the president Bingu wa Mutharika and his vice Mrs Joyce Banda. Mutharika chose Joyce Banda as a running mate and gained a political mileage for appointing a woman.

But what began as a mere complaint by the Veep about not being covered on state radio and television has finally been proved to be true. As vice president of the nation Mrs Joyce Banda should have been given airtime commensurate with her office, on both stations but this is not the case. Whenever her name is being mentioned it is for wrong reasons.

For whatever reason president Bingu wa Mutharika has never taken to task those that are conspicuously seen to be ridiculing his vice. This is what leaves more questions than answers because in normal circumstances, Mutharika should have made it clear that he is not happy about the current state of affairs as regards the position of his second in command. As some observers have noted, by being silent Mutharika is giving room for critics to think he is the one who has problems working with a deputy because even during his first term of office he had issues with the then Vice President Dr Cassim Chilumpha.

It is really meaningless for the state broadcasters to fill the airwaves with programmes that are only aiming at ridiculing Mrs. Banda who in normal circumstances should be respected at all cost. To make matters worse Mrs. Banda has no means of hitting back at her critics. Instead the content of some programmes is all about marketing Professor Peter Mutharika as the next presidential candidate for the ruling Democratic Progressive Party. What a waste of precious airtime when elections only in 2014!

One thing that comes to mind is why the Members of Parliament never look into the issue of controlling the state radio and television so that when any party comes to power there should not be such abuses. For instance parties should not use airwaves for their benefit because they are in power. Fresh in people's minds is the way the ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* abused the airwaves for its campaign. This would only change for the better if and only if there is a law against the abuse of state radio and television by a ruling party.

Malawians surely look forward to clean politics where all aspiring candidates are given an equal opportunity to market themselves on state owned radio and television.

POLITICS

Former president Dr Bakili Muluzi dazzled some people when he announced that he is now willing to bankroll the *United Democratic Front UDF*. In his statement Muluzi also said he was disappointed by what was happening in the party. Reports have shown that there is a taskforce that is aiming at getting rid of the current leadership of the party. The taskforce which is led by Ken Mnsonda has on several occasions undermined the authorities of the party including the incumbent leader Friday Jumbe. Former president Dr Bakili Muluzi who single-handedly appointed Jumbe some months ago announced that he has retired from politics. His latest pronouncements in the press over the problem have left people thinking that he is still into politics.

The recent squabbles in the *UDF* seem to have followed the same pattern as what the MCP experienced some months ago. Now this scenario makes one wonder if at all the opposition parties in Malawi have a chance of maintaining their parties without any wrangles. One would have expected the opposition to rebuild their parties after a poor performance in the 2009 elections. But instead of working on ironing out their differences the opposition are involved in endless wrangles thereby weakening their parties.

The situation is even worse in the ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP*. Some people are at pains to understand why *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* officials are making a mountain from a molehill over President Bingu wa Mutharika's brother Peter's future in politics. It seems to have given a number of people something to talk about. Even the traditional leaders who are expected to be non-partisan have already endorsed Peter Mutharika, who is minister of education, as the ruling *DPP's* presidential candidate in the year 2010.

The state owned radio *Malawi Broadcasting Corporation MBC* came under heavy attacks in October over its current transmission. For some time both *MBC* television and radio have aired programmes that are focusing on selling Peter Mutharika as the next presidential candidate for the ruling *DPP*. This situation has not pleased some human rights organizations who have since condemned the state radio for this. The *Human Rights Consultative Committee HRCC* has condemned *MBC* in strongest terms and advised the state broadcaster to focus on National issues. According to observers there are more important issues that can fill the airwaves of the state radio and that can benefit the whole nation unlike what is being covered now. It should be noted that *MBC* is run on tax payers money.

Any association with the Vice President Right Honourable Joyce Banda seems to be a crime recently especially if you are a member of the *DPP*. Some members of the ruling *DPP* were caught on the wrong side of this "law" when they had dinner with the Veep and were suspended. This came as a shock to every Malawian because it never occurred to anyone that the current problems that the *DPP* leadership is facing would spill to the members. Surprisingly *DPP* gurus are the same that preach about tolerance and reconciliation. One wonders if at all this was not just political rhetoric.

It seems the preparations for the long awaited Local Government Election slated for April next year are now finally under way. The press in September announced that the stringers that are supposed to report about the elections have been trained and some deployed to cover the voter registration exercise. Some writers have already predicted that the turn out of people for

registration is going to be low because many have lost trust in the organization of the local government elections. This is because the Electoral body keeps changing the date of the elections. This is evidenced by the exercise that has been going on. The elections were initially supposed to take place in November this year but were adjourned to April 2011.

Members of Parliament (MPs) in Malawi continue to make headlines in the media with their proposals on their salaries. During the last sitting of parliament the same legislators who are known for their appetite for more money asked for a raise in their fuel allowances. Although their proposal met deaf ears then, the MPs went ahead this time around asking for an increase in their salaries a thing that has startled some observers. When parliament is meeting the Mps get K20,000.00 per day. The same parliamentarians also demand not less than K15, 000.000 just to attend a meeting arranged by other stakeholders like the civil society. Whatever it is that the MPs want they for sure get it. It should be noted that these are the people who are supposed to prioritize the welfare of ordinary people but evidence has shown that the opposite.

ECONOMY

As the close of the tobacco season draws near press reports on the economy have shown that so far the sales have raised K54.9 billion. While some reports have described the 2010 tobacco market season as one of the best, others still think this year's season had a fair share of problems. Strikes by the farmers have been the order of the day as they protested against prices that buyers were offering. On the other hand at times the buyers also complained of the quality of the leaf, which they said was not good at all. All in all more sales of tobacco mean more forex for Malawi and a lot of cash to the farmers. But as *Center For Social Concern (CFSC)* continues to advocate for the tabling and passing of the Labour Tenancy Bill, as a nation we need to consider the people that actually produce Malawi's gold leaf, tenants. Passing the bill would at least take care of the current pathetic living and working condition of tenants.

With news of less demand for tobacco in some parts of the world, *the Tobacco Control Commission TCC* announced Malawi is looking for other markets. There has been an anti smoking campaign in Western European and North American countries and this has affected the demand of tobacco from Malawi. Against this background Malawi is looking elsewhere for more markets. It should be noted that some people advised government to find other means of earning forex other than relying on tobacco because its future looks hazy.

Meanwhile the *Malawi Economic Justice Network MEJN* reacting to the in availability of forex advised the government to look for more forex resources. This advice comes after uninterrupted reports of shortages of forex that have been appearing in the press for a long time. To date Malawi's forex reserves are not that appealing and surely as a nation we need to find more reliable ways of sourcing forex.

Malawi motorists faced yet another fuel shortage in the month of September. As usual government refused to take responsibility of the shortage that affected many businesses and other operations. Some businesses came to a halt because of the shortage of fuel. Long queues could be seen on almost all the gas stations in Lilongwe and other parts of the country. The blame game continued as government through the minister of information pushed the blame to the Mozambican government a thing that the later denied.

To date people are just speculating why there is fuel shortage as others are saying it is because of the shortage of forex in the country and government is failing to pay suppliers. Others have also attributed this to the many foreign travels that the president has under taken in recent times. Many foreign trips mean a lot of allowances to the larger than life entourage that the president travels with. President Mutharika who is also Chairperson of African Union AU has of late traveled extensively and it has so far not been made public whether his allocation on travel as AU chair will see him through his tenure.

FOOD SECURITY

While it is all good news and comments about Malawi's success story on food security, the situation in some households is deplorable. This time of the year there are some areas where there are still shortages of food. It seems hard to believe that the country that has made it big in achieving food security among member states in the SADC region is the same country that has people sleeping on an empty stomach. As it has always been the case these people need food assistance at all costs.

President Bingu wa Mutharika once again continued to speak without fear on his position as regards fertilizer subsidy. Some donor countries have again and again spoken about Malawi finding an exit point on fertilizer subsidy. But the Malawi leader seems to be adamant. Speaking to the BBC in New York Mutharika whose subsidy programme is seen to have worked minced no word in making sure that even without the donors he would continue with subsidy. Mutharika went further to say Africa cannot do without subsidy. It should be noted that his plan on subsidy seems to have worked as of now because with good rains Malawi as a nation at least has produced surplus of maize the local staple food crop.

Although this is his plan it should be borne in mind that some economic and environmental experts support the idea of phasing out fertilizer subsidy programme. On the environmental front specialists feel too much use of fertilizer will erode natural nutrients that are found in soils.

Some more good news came out on Malawi's food security status in the month of September. Press reports have disclosed that Malawi is rated 4th among a number developing country trying to achieve food security. As the world leaders were reviewing the *Millennium Development Goals MDGs* an organization called Action Aid international in its survey rated Malawi 4th among 28 developing countries as it tries to achieve the first *MDGs* which is on eradicating hunger and extreme poverty. The fact that Malawi is on position 4 is good news and very encouraging.

Some observers have noted that the importation of fertilizers meant for subsidy programme has also contributed greatly to the current situation on forex. Analysts have noted that apart from fuel, fertilizer also has contributed to the depletion of forex reserves. As the country is preparing for the next growing season a lot of forex is being used for the purchase of farm inputs in readiness of the next growing season.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The *Media Institute for Southern Africa* Malawi Chapter (MISA Malawi) in September expressed concerns over the current relationship between the state and journalists in Malawi. Of late there have been some instances when president Bingu wa Mutharika has threatened the media fraternity over some stories that appeared in the press recently. MISA is the umbrella body for journalists. Mutharika is on record to have vowed to deal with any media house that reports negatively about his government. One may wonder if at all freedom of expression is being exercised to the fullest in Malawi.

Some observers have noted that there is not much that civil society and human rights organizations have done in the recent attacks on the incumbent vice president right honourable Joyce Banda. Just recently the state run *Malawi Broadcasting Corporation MBC* television paraded some journalists who claimed to have been abused by the Veep. According to the state media they stopped covering Mrs Banda because she verbally abused some of the journalists. But this latest justification on Joyce Banda's 'faint' on MBC's TV and radio is contrary to what Director General of the 2 stations earlier said. Bright Malopa told the Malawi nation that the station only beams what is news to which some people concluded that he meant the Veep does not make news. There is not much that the civil society organizations have done in condemning the state broadcaster for the treatment it is giving Mrs. Banda.

The *Catholic for Commission for Justice and Peace CCJP* did not mince words when it labeled parliament as a rubber stamp. According to a survey conducted by the organization the current parliament lacks real and critical debates on issues that are dealt with in the house. During the last sitting of the National Assembly members of parliament cruised in passing some controversial bills much to the annoyance of the opposition and other sympathizers. With a handful MPs in the opposition the government side, which has the majority, made sure they never wasted any time in passing the budget. Malawians will live to remember the 2010/2011 budget sitting of parliament as one most abused sessions. In the history of Malawi members passed the entire budgets within 2 days. As CCJP has observed the current parliament is failing to assist in making sure that the votes are properly scrutinized. The findings only show that such a government majority in parliament is the last thing that Malawi needs in its young democracy.

Civil society organization in the month under review took donors to task for failing to fulfill their pledges. According to the organizations many countries in the world especially in Africa have not performed well in achieving the 8 *Millennium Development Goals MDGs*. Some of the projects that some civil society planned that would have assisted countries to fulfill their fight to achieve the MDGs, have not been done because developed countries did not carry out their pledges. In other words the eight goal is performing the worst.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIVES

Malawians are still at pains to understand what exactly led to the death of 4 siblings in Ndirande Township in Blantyre city who threw themselves in a fierce fire. Three of the 4 siblings died on the spot the other died later at *Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital QECH*. It is not yet known what exactly drove the family to end their lives in such a way. Meanwhile some observers have noted that while it is true that there is freedom of association and worship in Malawi, people should not abuse such rights.

Witchcraft stories continued to appear in the press in the month of September. In Blantyre a witch doctor dazzled the nation when he detained 9 women for 2 months because he suspected they were practicing witchcraft. The old women who were later released were being held hostage without their consent. This is the first time that press reports have covered such a story. But with the increasing reports on witchcraft this could only be a tip of an iceberg there could be some more old people who are being kept in isolation.

The wrangle between the ministry of labour and the *Malawi Congress of Trade Unions MCTU* over the newly passed Pension and Employment bill still continues. Ever since the bill was passed the media has carried a number of articles most of which are against the newly introduced age that one can access their pension money. *MCTU* among other things noted that although they were part of the process of formulation of the bill, some of their input and ideas on the bill were not considered. Meanwhile the National Assembly has asked people with different views on the bill to put them through to parliament. Perhaps this is the only way the disagreements over the bill can be ironed out.

Police in September expressed concerns over the rate at which sudden deaths are occurring in the country. Press reports have shown that some people resort to committing suicide when they are faced with problems. Even the youths are also among the number of people who are committing suicide.

Some political analysts have strongly raised concerns on the statements that Paramount Chief Lundu said at a chieftain ceremony of Traditional Authority Dzoole recently. Lundu against all odds advised the mammoth crowd that attended the function that all chiefs should obey and support the government of the day. Political analysts feel such sentiments should not be coming from a whole Paramount chief. Evidence has shown that from time immemorial chiefs are expected to be non-partisan so that they lead their subjects without fear or favour. Chiefs in Malawi are now famously known for openly supporting the government of the day. But who can blame the chiefs when government is paying for their salaries and building them houses.

EDUCATION

Months after the ministry of finance allocated the hardship allowances to teachers that are staying the rural areas the issue is still causing a lot of confusions among teacher. In his budget presentation statement, Finance minister Ken Kandodo said there is an allocation of hardship allowances for teachers living in rural areas amounting to K5000.00 every month. Kandodo added on to say that the allowances were expected to motivate the teachers to stay in the rural areas hence improve the quality of education in Malawi.

Surprisingly the issue caused a lot of debates among the teachers some of whom went on to ask government to consider those that are teaching in urban centers. Their reasoning was they also need the hardship allowances because they teach in classes where enrollment is very high and they have to deal with many children more than those in rural areas. Similarly some schools don't have enough classes and the teachers have to withstand the cold harsh weather while teaching under a tree. Just recently the ministry made it known that the hardship allowances will only be given to those that are in the utter most rural areas where there is no electricity and running water and no trading centers.

When government changed the school calendar one of the reason was it wanted to give more time for people to attend traditional practices like initiation ceremonies. This would enable the students to go through initiation as tradition requires and at the same time be able to go to school . Although this is the case, some traditional leaders are finding it hard to convince their subjects to let children go to school. It is reported that one traditional leader had to burn all the initiation houses (*Tsimba*) to make sure that the children go to school.

Reports on education have shown that one way in which institutions can do away with problems of accommodation is by introducing distant learning. It is not a secret that there is shortage of accommodation in almost all the institutions of higher learning. One of the solutions was the introduction of the quota system, which is expected to help equal access to places at all public institutions of higher learning. Similarly government has planned to build 5 more universities to sort out these problems. While the construction of 5 universities is a long-term solution, Mzuzu University has come up with open distant learning , which will help people to access higher education and training.

Some sectors of society have bashed government for changing the school calendar and failing to adhere to it. These sentiments have been uttered after observers had noted that almost a month after the new school year started there are still no form 1 and 3 students in government secondary schools. This is the case because the examinations body MANEB had not yet released *Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations PSLCE* and *Junior Certificate Examinations JCE*. Was this change ill timed?

HEALTH

The squabble between various stakeholders in the health sector and some faith communities in the country continued to make headlines in the press lately. A number of articles have been appearing in the press that have seen some religious groups failing to comply with ministry of health vaccination campaign against Measles. Government had to go a step further to make sure that people access the vaccines by using armed law enforcers.

Press reports have revealed that some faith groups have been denying their people medical treatment and that instead they should just pray to God. These according to reports are some of the problems the ministry of health faced when they were conducting a measles campaign. For this reason government resorted to using armed police to do this job and the results are the 152 children that were vaccinated

Still on the same issue of faith it was reported that a certain boy had his leg amputated after his parents refused to take him to a hospital in Zomba. Sadly this is not the only case where faith clashed with one's health and resulted into deplorable consequences. Just some months ago some members of the Zion Church lost their children to measles. Some people are still at pains to understand why parents put the lives of their children at risk. . President Bingu wa Mutharika also rebuked such practices.

The press also revealed that Lilongwe residents might be experiencing a health risk following the erection of a plant in the city without the knowledge and consent of the city assembly officials. A construction company Mota Engil erected the plant which releases fumes that are posing a danger to people's lives. Among other things inhaling such fumes may cause respiratory problems to some people working around the area. At present reports show that many people have already complained about the illegal plant and the city officials have since asked the construction company to remove it.

Recent reports in the media over the dog bite story that made headlines some months ago has disclosed that the condition of the victim Mr. Cephus Chimdima who was flown to South Africa to get further medical attention is now improving. But the other angle of the events that happened after Chimdima was taken to hospital is still being pursued. Latest information has disclosed that the *Medical Council of Malawi MCM* is now questioning the doctor who tested Chimdima for HIV. The said doctor is reported to have tested Chimdima for HIV without the patient's consent. The *MCM* now says the doctor has a case to answer because he acted contrary to medical ethics. Some observers have applauded *MCM* because any disciplinary action on the doctor in question would serve as a lesson to others in the profession.

ENVIRONMENT

Recent reports that some parts of Mulanje Mountain have been destroyed by fire should act as wake up call to all Malawians. To begin with this is the mountain that attracts a lot of tourists and assists Malawi in earning some forex through such visitors. At the same time Mulanje Mountain is well known for its rare species of trees, which is known as Mulanje Cider. Now reports of fire destroying part of the mountain are a cause for worries among environmentalists. What is more painful is the fact that the fire that did the damage was caused by charcoal makers and mice hunters. This scenario calls for more concerted efforts from all the people around the Malawi's highest mountain so that our Mulanje Mountain is safeguarded.

Environmentalists in September warned that although the country would receive normal rains, some areas should expect floods and dry spells. In general the experts have predicted good rains for the nation but other areas would still have floods. Almost every rainy season there are still some parts that experience dry spells and floods. According to the Meteorological Department areas that are expected to have dry spells should therefore plant their crops early and type that matures early.

Experts on the environment expressed gratitude to a campaign that was aimed at cleaning Mudi River in Blantyre. This exercise targeted this river because it is one of the streams that have greatly suffered from waste dumping and many forms of disposals. This is evident by the visible heaps of waste and plastics that are dumped in the river by factories and other city dwellers. But Mudi River is not the only river that has suffered from waste disposal many rivers in Malawi have also been infested by waste.

Media reports on the environment have revealed that some quarters of the society are not happy with news that there is a possibility that mineral search might happen in Lengwe National Park in Chikhwawa. This follows reports that government has awarded a letter to some company to look for minerals in the park. This has not pleased some environmentalists who have since have raised concerns this development at Lengwe National Park in the district. *Coordination Union for Environment CURE* asked government to step in making sure that any mining activities do not happen at the national park. According to experts any traces of minerals in the national park mean mining activities in the near future and this would interfere with life in the park.

GENDER

Some months to the local government polls, the campaign on more women in decision-making positions continues. *NGO Gender Coordinating Network NGOGCN* who were also behind the 50/50 campaign in the last presidential and parliamentary elections is also geared to help make it happen during the April 2011 local government election. Meanwhile political parties in the country have vowed to give men and women equal chances during primary elections. Observers have however noted that with a vigorous campaign and good resources women can make their dream of occupying more decision-making positions come true

Cases of gender-based violence continue to feature highly in press pages every now and then. Very fresh in people's minds is the gruesome murder of 25-year-old Zimbabwean national Linda Gassa. In what could be described as one of the worst forms of cruelty, Miss Gassa was murdered and buried in a bathroom under a concrete slab allegedly by her lover Misonzi Chanthunya. To date Chanthunya who is the main suspect in the Linda Gassa's murder case is still at large and reports have shown that he has crossed the border.

As if this is not enough another woman in Ntcheu district died after her uncle dipped her face in hot porridge. Press reports have shown that the lady's only sin was to ask the uncle why he had cut a tree. After days of pain and agony the woman passed away and the uncle is in custody answering murder charges. All these acts of barbarism are happening and a number of women are at the receiving end. Evidence has shown that a number of women continue to suffer in the hands of men who they trust so much. It should be noted that Malawi passed the domestic violence bill some years ago.

Recent reports of a father who received a bride price amounting to K7000.00 only for his Standard 5 14 year-old-daughter has raised a hot debate among some gender activists. Media reports have shown that the father did this without the consent of the child. This is not a rare case because quite some more parents and guardians are involved in such malpractices despite the fact that parliament recently passed the Child Care and Protection Bill. Perhaps what Malawi needs is more awareness on the availability of the just passed law so that the rights of children are protected.

An expert on women issues in September strongly noted that men are fundamental in the fight against domestic violence. The expert from the United States of America notes that the war against domestic violence should also include men. A number of cases have shown that men at times perpetuate a number of domestic violence cases. But then the US expert notes that while other men perpetuate violence against women there are still a few good men out there. Against this background the expert calls for the few good men to assist in challenging those who mistreat women.