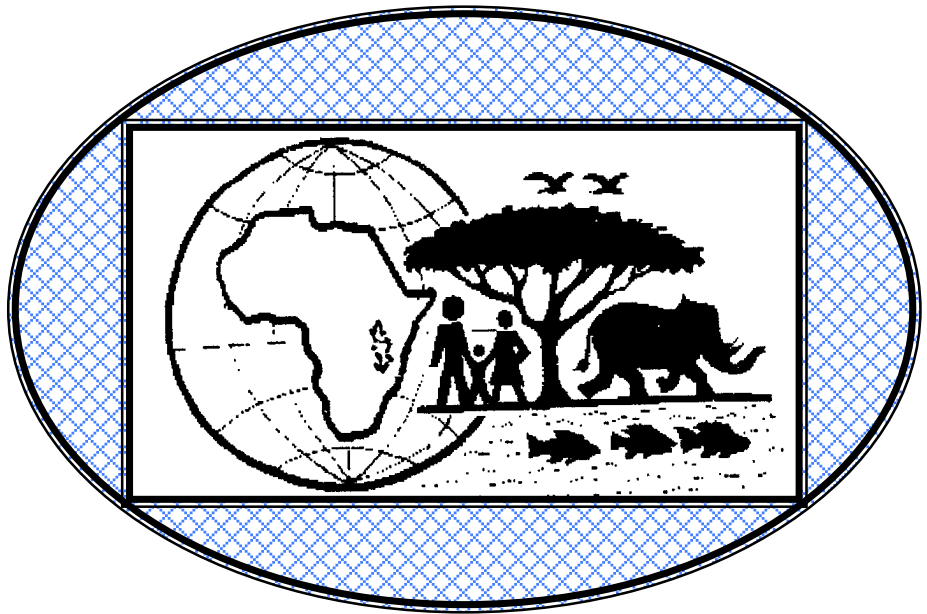


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**OCTOBER
2011**

**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

Malawi's newly appointed foreign affairs minister Professor Peter Mutharika has a lot of work to do in cleaning Malawi's bruised image on the international scene. Though it might sound simple but the going is getting tough for Peter Mutharika because so far not so much progress has been made.

When people pleaded with government to avoid causing unnecessary enmities with neighbours and other countries, authorities threw caution in the wind and expelled the British High Commissioner Cochran Dyte earlier this year. Britain did the same and sent our own Flossie Gomile Chidyaonga back home. This is the decision that is giving the Foreign Minister headaches today.

Now minister Mutharika had to go to the United Kingdom to try and mend the tattered relationship but according to reports it seems he was not very successful. To date the British government has not sent a new High Commissioner to Malawi.

To rub salt in the wounds president Bingu wa Mutharika in an interview on the *British Broadcasting Corporation BBC* said that he is not going to apologies to Britain.

Closer to home Malawi is also not in the good books with newly elected president of Zambia, Michael Sata. Some time back when Sata was an opposition leader in Zambia he visited Malawi was arrested and deported. To date Sata is still bitter with the treatment he received from Malawi. Everything he said about Malawi immediately after being sworn in as Zambia's president proves he still has issues with Malawi.

Evidence of Sata's stand on Malawi is his absence at the COMESA meeting that Malawi hosted in October. President Sata made it clear that he would not attend the meeting because he felt he would be deported again. It is not only Sata who did not attend the important meeting but other neighbouring presidents were also not present they only sent representatives.

It is now Peter Mutharika's job to make sure that Malawi's international relations are in good form. Mutharika has to do a lot to clean up Malawi's image. He will only be judged if he manages to get Malawi back into the good books of all those that seem to have been wronged by Malawi.

POLITICS

Malawi seems to be making a lot more enemies of late. Zambian president Michael Sata is the latest on the list. After falling out of grace with our friends in Britain, the government is now having sleepless nights on how it is going to mend its bruised friendship with neighbouring Zambia. In 2007 the Malawi government deported Sata who came to Malawi to visit former president Dr Bakili Muluzi. Michael Sata who was then in the opposition is now very bitter with Malawi this is evidenced by the fact that he delegated his deputy to attend the important *COMESA* meeting hosted by Malawi. Another slap in the face was when Sata invited Joyce Banda, Malawi's Vice President, and former president Dr Bakili Muluzi to that country's Independence celebration in October. He did not invite President Bingu wa Mutharika! Meanwhile the Malawi government has lifted Sata's deportation order. For sure Malawi needs to make peace with all its self-made enemies.

Malawi found herself in a very awkward position in October when the *International Criminal Court ICC* asked the government to arrest Sudan's president Omar Al Balshir. Malawi hosted Balshir when he attended the *COMESA* meeting recently. Al Balshir is wanted by the *ICC* for crimes against humanity in Sudan. Thousand upon thousands of people have died in Sudan and the *ICC* wants Al Balshir for questioning. It is against this background that the *ICC* asked Malawi to arrest the Sudan president and Malawi did not comply with this order.

There have been a lot of decisions, meetings and announcements made since Atupele Muluzi announced his intention to contest for the post of president in the *United Democratic Front UDF*. While it is true that every Malawian is at liberty to have ambitions of becoming the country's president, the *UDF* leadership is of the contrary views. They feel Muluzi should not go anywhere near the party's presidency because he is a young and immature politically. At the same time the *UDF* gurus, some of whom have the same ambitions, feel the young Muluzi is being forced by his father former Malawi president Dr Bakili Muluzi. Meanwhile the *UDF* has suspended Atupele Muluzi from the party. But Muluzi is contesting his suspension in court and funny enough he has the backing of some of the people that suspended him from the party.

In a related development some experts have welcomed Atupele Muluzi's position on the party's presidency. After trying aged presidents in the past it is time to try new blood that is younger. Perhaps giving the youths a chance to run the country would change things for the better. The tendency in Malawi politics is that it is the same old recycled politicians that hold positions thereby minimizing chances of the youths. The fact that Muluzi, who is only 33, has shown interest in running for presidency in the 2011 general elections could be a turning point in Malawi politics. One Professor Mathews Chikaonda once said Malawi's political software is outdated. Meaning there is need for new blood.

President Bingu wa Mutharika seems to be taking plans to get rid of his deputy Mrs. Joyce Banda too far. As if leaving her out of the Cabinet was not enough Mutharika would again want to strip Mrs. Banda of the position as Vice President of Malawi through the courts. Mutharika has gone to the courts to finally have Mrs. Banda removed as Veep. The two leaders have had a sour relationship since they won the 2009 general elections together. The Mutharika administration has tried several ways to frustrate Mrs. Banda like trimming her security personnel and an annual budget allocation for her office. By going to the courts Mutharika is trying to find the last resort to deal with the Veep for good. This shows how desperate president Mutharika is to do away with Mrs. Banda. It should be noted that it is

Mutharika who appointed Mrs. Joyce Banda to be his running mate in the 2009 general elections. Mutharika fired Joyce Banda from the *DPP* for allegedly forming parallel structures.

A prophet is never honored in their country this saying was proved right in Malawi recently. An international magazine called *Forbes Africa* has rated Vice President Joyce Banda as the third strongest woman in Africa. Although some organizations recognize Joyce Banda for her work and role she plays in the Malawi nation on the home front she has endured a lot of humiliation and insults from some politicians. The only crime she committed was to question some of president Bingu wa Mutharika's decisions.

ECONOMY

Despite the pressure that government is getting from international financial institutions to devalue the local currency further, authorities have indicated that they are not in a hurry to do so. According to newly appointed Minister of Finance Dr Ken Lipenga the debates on the issues at present are welcomed because in the end some of the views and opinions will be taken on board. Government devalued the Malawi Kwacha by 10% a thing that has not pleased the internal monetary organizations who feel the Kwacha should have been devalued further.

Malawi hosted the *Common Market for East and Southern Africa Comesa* meeting in Lilongwe in October. The function which saw Malawi attaining the chairmanship was held at the New State House. While observers have labeled the meeting as a success some analysts have noted that there was just too much money used to host such a big meeting. At the same time business benefited from such an event. President Bingu wa Mutharika attained the rotational chairmanship from Swaziland's King Mswati III.

Government in October released K500 million for fuel. The release of these funds comes after many people have been subjected to pressures at gas stations. Businesses have been affected by the shortage that has been going on for some time now. People in offices are used to spend some time on a long queue. Deserted filling stations are a daily sight in Malawi at present. The fuel shortage problem is taking too long to be dealt with as evidence shows that the problem has been there for some months now. Now the release of the K500 million will perhaps ease things.

The monthly survey by the *Centre For Social Concern CFSC* has disclosed that there has been a sharp increase in the cost of living in the four major cities, but Lilongwe city leads the four. Basic commodities that are fairly high in some cities are tagged as very high prices in the capital. In Lilongwe an average family of six people has to part with K57,656 compared to Blantyre where only K54,394 is the cost of living in the same period.

As this years tobacco market season continues authorities have disclosed that this sector needs a complete overhaul. With the change in demand for burley tobacco internationally, authorities feel Malawi should also put in place strategies that will see farmers engage in flue cured tobacco farming. *Tobacco Control Commission TCC* has since announced that it intends to control the volumes of the gold leaf in Malawi. Dr Bruce Munthali *TCC's Chief Executive Officer CEO* said Malawi needs to be adopting global changes. Internationally more and more countries are saying no to tobacco and a lot of people are into flue-cured tobacco. Tobacco is Malawi's main Forex earner and at present reports show that there has not been much earning from the gold leaf.

FOOD SECURITY

With the fertilizer subsidy programme launched there have been calls for concerted efforts in making sure that the exercise is a success. Over the years the exercise has been a success but with some flaws here and there. Meanwhile reports have disclosed that the number of beneficiaries of the subsidy programme has been reduced by 200,000. The subsidy programme is meant to cater for the less privileged farmers and they buy fertilizer at K500 per 50kg bag.

Still on the same issue of fertilizer problems there are pictures of farmers spending nights at *ADMARC* depots in search for farm inputs in the October press. With the planting season getting closer more and more farmers are looking forward to buying subsidized fertilizer and seeds. But as evidence has shown people are spending nights at *ADMARC* depots looking for farm inputs. There is evidence that some areas in Thyolo District have no farm inputs.

Farmers were also warned in October about fake fertilizer that is on the market. Some crooked traders are selling fertilizer that is combined with stones to unsuspecting farmers in some parts of the country. Authorities have advised Malawians to buy the farm input at only recognized selling points and depots. Laboratory tests conducted on these fake products have confirmed that there are some insoluble materials added so farmers better watch out.

Talk about food security is incomplete if the fertilizer subsidy programme is not mentioned. But as reports have shown only 25% of the subsidy fertilizer has been delivered. It is reported that only 52,000 metric tones of the 140,000 that was expected to be in the programme this year has been delivered. The reason is there is not enough Forex. As authorities have disclosed there is no guarantee that the remaining fertilizer will be delivered in good time for the farmers.

Although some reports have shown that there is plenty of maize in Malawi and the prices are a bit lower this year, the situation in some parts is different. The shortage of fuel in Malawi has affected the prices of maize in other areas. It has not been easy for transporters in recent months because of the shortage of fuel supply. Now because transporters are paying more to get fuel, they are increasing the price of the staple grain. According to reports the trend has made it difficult for some families to purchase maize.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Journalists in the month of October continued to receive threatening messages from unknown sources. Following an in-depth investigative story on the events that are alleged to have led to the death of student activist Robert Chasowa that was published in one of the weekend papers the writer is now receiving death threats on his cell phone. The reporter is not the only one who is suffering emotional and psychological torture through death threat messages. Capital Radio's Brian Banda and another Radio Maria reporter have also been the latest victims of these messages. Meanwhile observers have lamented that the continued threats on journalists would have a serious impact on how they will conduct their job. If not checked it could suppress freedom of expression.

The *National Media institute for Southern Africa NAMISA* chairperson in October told an international meeting that Malawi is slowly becoming a police state. In his report Anthony Kasundu told delegates at the meeting that there is a lot of fear among people more especially journalists at present in Malawi. Over 20 journalists were arrested and assaulted during the July 20 demonstrations. In one of his speeches president Bingu wa Mutharika reminded people of how his government has never killed or prosecuted any activists and journalists. What is happening now is contrary to people's expectation and Mutharika's promises.

Various individuals have shown mixed reactions on the commission of inquiry that has been put in place to look into the deaths of 20 people who were killed during the 20 July demonstrations. President Bingu wa Mutharika, who had earlier on blamed the deaths of the 20 on the organizers of the demonstrations against government, has since instituted a commission of inquiry to look into the issue. But some activists have warned that this could be a white elephant just like others before. There are never any results and findings of the many inquiries that government has come up with. Also in October another group was commissioned to look into the death of Robert Chasowa.

The British government in October repeated its stance on aid to poor African nations that do not respect human rights. It was announced that Britain would not give aid to anti gay nations. Malawi is one the countries where homosexuality is not allowed. In the past Malawi received aid from Britain and has benefited a lot from that country. A gay couple that publicly got engaged were arrested and imprisoned for 14 years and the issue still remains a controversy in Malawi. Meanwhile some activists in the United Kingdom have asked the British government not to peg aid on homosexuality issues.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

The tragic death of student activist Robert Chasowa has raised a lot of questions and fears among some youths in the country. Chasowa a fourth year engineering student at the Polytechnic was found dead at the college premises in September. The late Chasowa is believed to have been very critical to the government and the events after his death still remain mysterious. There have been various reports to the events that led to the sudden end to the life of a young Malawian with a promising future in engineering. What is very surprising is the fact that police told the nation that Chasowa had committed suicide. The law enforcers went further to attribute the cause of death to pathologist Dr Charles Dzumalala who denied releasing any report at that time. Eventually Dzumalala announced that Chasowa was murdered to the surprise of many.

Just recently newspapers disclosed that some weeks before his death Chasowa had shown some activists a hit list which he claimed had names of the people government was planning to kill. Among the people on the hit list were Honourable Henry Phoya, activists Robert Mkwezalamba, Rafik Hajat, Harry Mkandawire and academic freedom fighter Jessie Kapasula Kabwila. Wherever Late Chasowa got the list is not known but one thing is for sure there could be more than what meets the eye.

Humanist George Thindwa's preaching that there is no witchcraft has met a lot of resistance from some members of society. Thindwa who has in the past courted controversy over his stance that there is no God has been telling the nation that witchcraft does not exist. To this extent the man is advocating for a release of some witchcraft suspects who were convicted of the same. The humanist at one time challenged those that think they are good at witchcraft to try and bewitch him. At present some people in Chitipa have asked Thindwa to visit the district and feel the existence of witchcraft. Bizarre as it may sound Thindwa is prepared to prove to Malawi that witchcraft does not exist.

Government in October announced that it was planning to introduce paternity leave in the labour laws. According to reports the paternity leave will give a chance to men to bond with their babies and at the same time assist in taking care of the newly born in the families. In Malawi most workingwomen are entitled to a three-month maternity leave. Malawian men do not go on paternity leave except for a few employers that allow their male employees to do so. It is not yet known when exactly the laws will be put in place.

Telephone users have expressed concerns over reports that government through the *Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority MACRA* will be monitoring emails, text messages and conversations using the machine it has bought. The news has already sent shivers among some people who feel their rights to privacy are going to be violated. Although MACRA has explained that the machine is not meant for spying, evidence from the suppliers indicate can indeed spy on people.

EDUCATION

Eight months after the closure of Chancellor College over academic freedom wrangle, the chancellor of the University of Malawi, president Bingu wa Mutharika, reinstated four fired lecturers. The four who have been on the forefront in the fight for academic freedom, were told to go back to work with immediate effect. Government also assured the lecturers that there are no longer going to be any spies in lecture rooms and has promised academic freedom. On the other hand some reports show that the lecturers were not officially informed and there are still some issues that need to be discussed.

The University of Malawi Chancellor had a rude awakening at a graduation ceremony in the month under review. President Bingu wa Mutharika who has in the past made a name for carelessly choosing words for his speeches stumbled on raw nerves when he addressed the graduates and was booed. As some observers have noted president Mutharika is slowly losing it. Instead of dealing with the issues at hand Mutharika chose to personalize the academic freedom. College lecturers have been asking the Inspector General of Police Peter Mukhitho to apologies to the lecturers.

Still on *UNIMA* stories there was an announcement in the press in the month under review that it would introduce a quota system of selecting female and male students into institutions of higher learning. According to reports *UNIMA* intends to have 50% male students and 50% female students in public universities. This development has been applauded by some experts who feel this is the only way there can be equitable access to education for both sexes.

The *Malawi National Examinations Board* released the 2011 *Malawi Schools Certificate of Education Examinations MSCE* in October. It is commendable to note that the results improved by 1.5%. Though the pass rate for the 2011 *MSCE* results is not that impressive officials still feel this is one of the best results. There were negligible reports of cheating and leakages and hence the results might as well reflect the situation on the ground in as far as education is concerned in Malawi.

Although there are some hassles in the education sector, experts are of the view that Malawi is going to achieve the Education Goal in the Millennium Development Goals. According to media reports Malawi experts are optimistic that Malawi will achieve the goal on education, which states that members of the United Nations should achieve universal access to primary education by 2015. There are still a lot of challenges and negative indicators that could hinder Malawi from achieving the goals. But as experts are putting it, even with these challenges Malawi will still meet education goals come 2014.

HEALTH

Press reports in the month under review have disclosed that the *Malawi Blood Transfusion Services MBTS* has problems to reach the number of donors required. Coverage on health shows that the few individuals who donate blood are not regular donors. *MBTS* says it requires regular blood donors who would be visiting the centers twice a year. In the past *MBTS* has been looking for blood donors after reports had shown that there was no sufficient blood in the banks in some referral hospitals.

Deputy Minister of health Ralph Jooma in October made it known that Thyolo Hospital is being strained by the influx of Mozambicans. According to previous health reports Mwanza Hospital also has the same problem. Locals are sharing the facilities and medication in these public hospitals with foreigners. It is reported that over 20,000 Mozambicans were admitted at Thyolo hospital just last year. It is still not known how many will have been admitted at the hospital by the end of 2011. With all the pressure that the hospital is facing it is good to note that it is doing its best in reducing maternal deaths.

Thyolo Hospital got shot in the arm in the October. Press reports have shown that women who celebrated Mothers Day early in the month under review donated some money to the District Hospital. After a Mother Day Fun Run that the Nations Publications Limited organized, the money realized was given to Thyolo Hospital and Thekerani Health Centre in the remote area of the district. The Fun Run project gave out hospital equipment worth K8.5 million.

Health experts in the month of October advised women to avoid from using injections for contraceptives. It is common among women of childbearing age to use contraceptives and one method is the injections. But according to a report released by health experts, use of injection should be discouraged. The study has cautioned against the use of injections because it also makes people more vulnerable to HIV. The University of Washington in the United States of America in its survey has revealed that women who have been on an injectable contraception are at a higher risk of contracting HIV than those that have not been on this type of contraception.

Patients in government hospitals continued to face drug shortages in October. But all could be well because of the announcement that a group of donors that help Malawi with health funding have released funds. Although some of the donors have withheld the funding because Malawi did not meet some of the conditions, there is at least some hope that the drug shortage problem will ease. The donors that did not disperse their funding allocation include Norway and Germany.

ENVIRONMENT

After many years areas of Malawi experienced some drizzle in the first part of October. In some areas temperatures dropped and people had to put on warm clothes because of the cold harsh weather earlier in the month under review. But later in the month things changed because the temperatures rose to some unbearable levels. But there were no sign of rains in many parts of Malawi. It is indeed a change in the pattern, because never in people's imagination did they expect to have cold weather in October because this month since time in memorial is the month of heat and more heat and rains but this year's October has shown Malawians a different pattern.

But the Meteorological Department announced that there is no need for people to panic because Malawi is going to experience normal rains this year. Experts have revealed that many parts of the country will receive normal to above normal rains. This is good news to the agriculture sector because Malawi depends on rain fed agriculture. Good rains mean a good farming season for Malawian farmers and with timely farm inputs Malawians might as well start putting their houses in order in readiness of another year of plenty.

Some environmental experts have noted that the increasing hours of blackouts of late have increased the usage of charcoal and firewood in many homes. In Malawi there is no other known source of energy apart from electricity, firewood and charcoal. Some people use solar energy but not too many people at present. Now as experts have warned continued blackouts are increasing the demand for more charcoal. This has resulted in a number of trees being cut to accommodate the high demand for charcoal. Meanwhile charcoal sellers are reported to have increased prices because of the high demand. This is happening at a time one can visibly see that the ground is becoming bare as most hills and mountains have no trees because of high levels of deforestation. Charcoal burning contributes greatly to deforestation to Malawi

Press reports on the environment have revealed that the sole electricity generating company *Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi ESCOM*, would be distributing energy saving bulbs. This news could not have come at a right time because the persistent electricity blackouts are now becoming a nuisance. At least something to smile about coming from *ESCOM* at a time we are experience power failures every now and then. With the energy saver bulbs less energy is going to used and at the same time people will save money because they are for free. But, as observers have noted, it is not well explained what criteria *ESCOM* will follow when giving out the bulbs and for how long they will be doing the exercise.

GENDER

Even with the Domestic Violence Law around some men are still battering their wives. A recent report that a man hacked his ex-wife because she refused to come back to him has sent shivers among some women. The Malawi parliament some years ago passed the domestic violence bill after much evidence had shown that mainly women and children are facing emotional, physical, financial and verbal abuse in many homes. In some families women and children are not even aware that they are being abused because of lack of awareness and knowledge about these issues. A woman in Lilongwe now lies in a lot of pain because of a former husband who had no respect for the ex-wife's wishes.

The month of October is when women celebrate Mothers Day. Malawi celebrates the role women have played in the society. Both in the rural and urban areas women have continued to play this special role of moulding the nation. And indeed there are some people who are who they are today because of their mothers. With all the attributes mothers are blessed and one can safely say women have a very important role in building a nation.

As the world is in a breast Cancer awareness month gender writers announced that the problem is not only affecting women but men as well. In South Africa there is evidence that 1% of the men in that country are diagnosed with breast cancer. This means that breast cancer is not only a disease for women but also men. At the same time campaigns for this deadly disease should also include men.

The education sector in October advised authorities to try and eliminate gender inequalities in schools. Evidence shows that there are only a few female teachers especially in rural areas. Not many female teachers are willing to teach in the rural areas because of marriages. This is also contributing to shortages in the teaching industry and therefore creating gaps in the pupil teacher ratio. Against this background some stakeholders are advocating for more investment in girls' education.

Some organizations have disclosed that there is need for more women forum groups in order to help in the reduction of violence against women. *Action Aid* announced that cases of gender violence can only be reduced if women forums are active in various communities. According to *Action Aid* women forums need to grow and turn into organizations so that they can reach out to many after building the forums capacity.