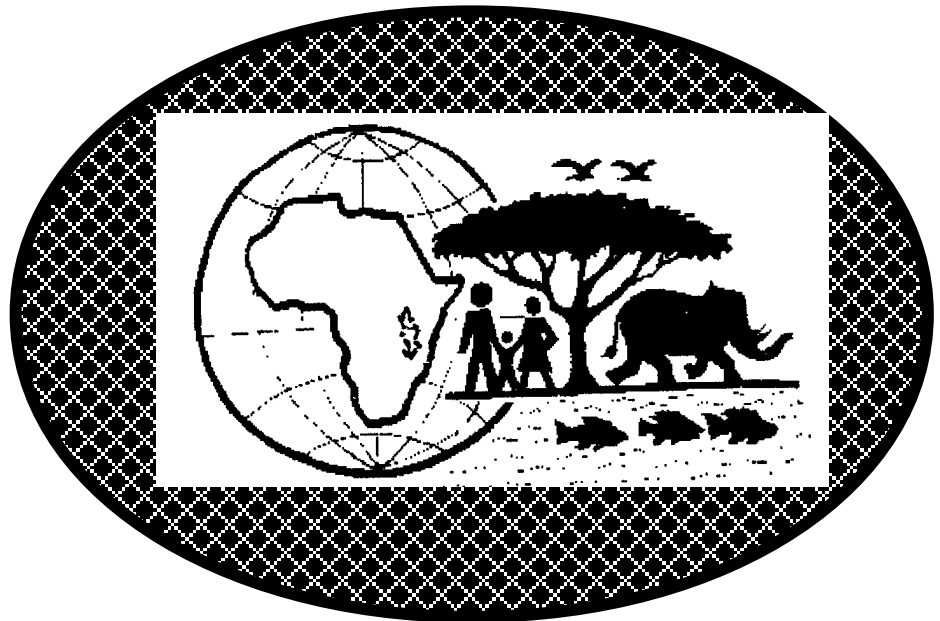


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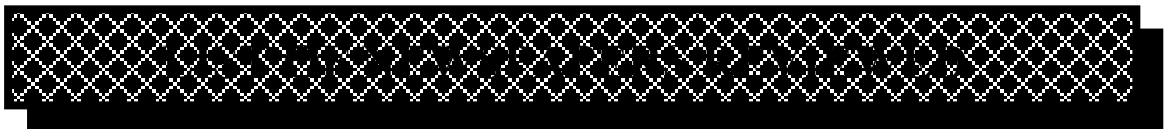
**JANUARY
2014**

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

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Daily Times
Malawi News
The Nation

The Weekend Nation
The Guardian

The Sunday Times
Nation on Sunday

PREVIEW

One thing is very clear the tripartite elections fever is definitely gripping all political parties in Malawi. This is evidenced by the coverage that the parties have enjoyed in readiness for the elections. It seems everything else has been over shadowed by politics. While all this is happening one thing is for sure Malawians need more than just mere politics and therefore our leaders need to take note of this.

The *International Monetary Fund IMF* gave the Joyce Banda administration something to smile about in the month of January. It was a good news year's gift to the government when the *IMF* released funds to Malawi after months of wondering about what this institution would decide on Malawi. Such a decision by the *IMF* proved they had confidence in Malawi despite all the scandals that had dented Malawi's image on economic governance.

A question among civil society organisations is where is the ruling party getting all the money its president Dr Joyce Banda splashes around across the country. At a time when the government is cutting funding for some of the activities, one wonders what is the source of the money the number one citizen gives and keeps donating to people in Malawi. Just like the former president late Bingu wa Mutharika, Joyce Banda has vowed to continue doing the charity works although some people are against it.

There is still no report from the University of Malawi on the cause of the withdrawal of students from both the *Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources Luanar* and *Chancellor College*. To date the *University of Malawi* office has not issued a report at a time many people are interested to have it.

Malawians have taken the issue of reforestation a step further by planting fruit trees. At a time when many people are struggling to make ends meet, it is very sensible that they are conserving the environment by planting more trees. In a way they will benefit in terms of nutrition by eating the fruits and financially from the sales.

A number of female aspirants did not make it during primary elections. This has raised fears concerning the 50-50 campaign as it means not too many women will contest in the parliamentary race and therefore, have no chance of going into the National Assembly. This will only happen if those that have failed in primaries and are willing to stand as independents are still in the race. But then this does not guarantee their automatic entry into parliament.

POLITICS

The year 2014 is finally here! The year that will see Malawians go for the first time into tripartite elections where people will choose a president, a member of parliament for their area, and a ward councillor. And so in readiness for the elections a lot of exercises have taken place in various parties. One such exercise is the primary elections where party members are expected to choose a torch bearer for their area in the 2014. The press in the month under review have covered some of the primary elections that have seen party heavy weights failing to make it.

The fact that some party heavy weights have gone down during primary election should give all political parties food for thought. This is a clear indication that as a member of parliament one needs to work extra hard for the expectations of the constituents. Being a heavy weight at party level does not necessarily mean you will have an easy go in the primary elections let alone in the actual election. We are coming from a background where people are slowly moving away from voting along party lines. People are more and more aware of what the works of the aspirant and the party they are representing. It is therefore, not surprising that even with good positions in the party it does not guarantee an automatic win in the parliamentary elections.

While it is commendable for parties to conduct primary elections, the way they are conducted is also important for the good of the party. Reports in the press in January disclosed that the way the primaries were conducted in some areas leaves a lot to be desired. There are complaints among party members to the extent that some people have resorted to stand as independents. Meanwhile the *People's Party* is reported to be overwhelmed with complaints on the same issue and this is not good for the image of the party, because it means something somewhere is wrong.

Election time in Malawi comes with its own issues, one of which is defections. It therefore is not something strange to have people defecting from one party to the other months before elections. But Sidik Mia's sudden announcement that he has resigned from the ruling *People's Party*, where he was vice president for the south and his post as minister of transport, came as a shock and a surprise to many even some people within the party. Mia has served in all three governments as a minister and is a well know politician both in his area and in Malawi as a whole. Ever since he made that announcement Mia has not declared his next political move. Many speculated that he was going to join the MCP but they has not been any confirmation on his part.

Professor Mutharika was also heavily covered in the January press over his possession of an American Green Card and his absence from the country in early January. Mutharika found himself in the media frequently over the fact that he has a Green Card. The masses took him to task and others actually wanted to know his eligibility in the 20 May tripartite elections. Mutharika, a lawyer himself, said it was not such a big issue that he had an American Green Card as this would not hinder him from running the race in the elections. Meanwhile other observers wanted to know from what the electoral commission would say on the eligibility of Mutharika.

Almost each and every presidential candidate has had enough time to look for a running mate. There has been speculation of various names linked to some candidates for a time now. The truth is that the presidential candidates normally want to unveil their running mates at the very last moment. This has always been the case as presidential candidates want to unveil their

running mates on the day they are presenting their nomination papers. Running mates eventually become the Vice president in the event that the presidential candidate wins the election.

For the first time since multiparty democracy fifteen candidates have shown interest to compete for the hottest seat in the land. All the fifteen people want to be Malawi's president. This is not surprising especially in a country where there are fifty registered political parties. Surprisingly in many countries where there is democracy rarely do people find fifty parties. As people have noted some of the political parties have no impact at all on Malawians, if anything they are just briefcase parties. But being in Malawi where there is freedom of association anybody is free to start a party or join one and hence the many parties that we have.

ECONOMY

It was a bad start to the year for the economic sector because of the cuts in the funding for most of government activities. This scenario has been attributed to the delay in most civil servants receiving their salaries. Other activities as well have been affected and this has made it difficult to run things smoothly. The prisons across the nation have not been funded since December last year and this has made it difficult for authorities to provide food and other services for the inmates. Already there is a shortage of food and medical supplies in the prisons because of the in availability of funds. There are again many more other activities that have been affected and need urgent attention.

At least there was some good news on the economy scene in January. Coming from a background of a messy economy where some donor countries had frozen aid, the news that the *International Monetary Fund IMF* has approved funds amounting to K8.3 billion came just at the right time. This is a boost to the economy at a time when Malawi's image is in tatters in as far as economic governance is concerned. With the cash gate scandal still fresh in people's minds, many lay people are not too sure how government will recover the lost glory with the donors let alone the citizen's trust. Now with this development there is at least a sigh of relief and hope.

On the same note the *IMF's* vote of confidence on Malawi is great news as it may also open the doors of some donors who had suspended aid to Malawi. They suspended aid after they learnt of the misuse of funds in the government. Now with the *IMF* releasing funds it could also make some donors to do the same. The *IMF* has since expressed hope that the other doors may also do the same.

Such a big chunk of funds coming into Malawi from the *IMF* mean a lot of things. One is the availability of forex in circulation as this will assist in improving the imports cover. In fact press reports have disclosed that the imports cover has gone up to 2.3 months. An improvement on the imports cover is a good development in the country as it means the country will be able to import goods and raw materials for the development.

A number of economic observers wanted the presidential aspirants to tell the nation what they would do to make Malawi economically independent. On several occasions some of the aspirants have said that they intend to make Malawi economically independent, but the experts want to know how these politicians will do this. It is the tendency of many politicians to make statements on the podium without having a clear plan on how they will achieve it. It is therefore against this background that the economists are demanding the answers.

FOOD SECURITY

Many areas in Malawi the rains were late and therefore it affected the time of planting maize. There has always been a problem when farmers planted their crops and the rain is late as it is likely that the fields will be infected by army worms. So it was not a surprise when experts announced there was an outbreak of army worms in Machinga, Phalombe and Zomba districts. This, according to food security experts, is not a dangerous development though in a way it affects the production of maize. Could perhaps this be the reason the government is upbeat on 2013/2014 bumper maize yield?

It could possibly be this and many other reasons. Already there are worries that some areas have not received enough rain. In the same vein there has also been many farmers who rely on fertilizer for their crops and they seem not to have received it in good time for its application. Press reports have shown that there are some farmers who still have coupons and are waiting for their turn to buy fertilizer but it is not available. This may result in low yields. It is therefore very difficult to know if Malawi will have a high yield and this could be the reason authorities are not openly announcing this.

At a time many people are reported to have no food in some areas, experts have revealed that Malawi will experience longer lean periods. This is not good news because it means longer periods of food shortage. Again there is already a shortage of the staple grain which has resulted into high prices of maize. This will also give a burden to low income earners for a while as it is during lean periods that the prices of maize are very high. Only those with a good income will find it easy to have food.

The Basic Needs Basket findings of the *Centre for Social Concern CfSC* on the cost of living show that there is high cost of living in the cities and some towns. They show that in 2013 there was a jump of 40% in the cost of living. This revelation shows that people need to have more in their pockets to make ends meet. Therefore, with reports of the shortage of food it means the cost of living will go up even more. There has always been an upward trend in the cost of living now with the shortage of food we should expect the same pattern because food is one of the major components in the Basic Needs Basket and therefore any changes in the cost of food has an impact in entire basket.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Some quarters of society are not too happy with the way the government has handled the whole cash gate issue. A lot of money went down the drain when a few individuals looted millions of Kwachas meant for all Malawians. Many people expected government to act with haste and have the culprits arrested, go through trial, and for those proved guilty to be convicted. Since the cash gate scandal came into the public domain there has not been much progress in the case. So far no one has been convicted of any crime.

On the same note civil society organisations have asked the government to come out with the entire preliminary forensic audit report that was sent to the *International Monetary Fund*. The Malawi civil society organisations feel that all Malawians are concerned with the issue and should have access to the report. In the time when every other Malawian wants to know the truth of the matter the best would have been to give out the entire report the way it was handed out to the *IMF*. The ball is now in the government's court that is if they are keen on mending public trust that has been dented by the cash gate scandal.

Some civil society organisations question the source of money that President Joyce Banda continues to splash around in recent weeks. The President has been giving out money and other things to people wherever she goes. Much as people want a kind president dishing out money at a time government is failing to fulfil some of its obligations because of lack of funds is something beyond peoples' understanding. At the same time some people have expressed concerns over this tendency because it instils laziness in people. This was the case in the time of former president Dr Bakili Muluzi who was always dishing out handouts to people and hence people had a dependency syndrome and stopped working hard.

As the tripartite elections get closer *Public Affairs Committee PAC* announced it has scheduled to meet all presidential candidates. *PAC* wants the presidential candidates to give the religious body their commitment on Sections 64 and 65 of the Malawi Constitution. Section 64 will give the voters the powers to call back any member of parliament who is not performing on his/her duties to the expectation of the constituents. Again *PAC* wants an assurance from the presidential hopefuls on Section 65. This Section gives powers to the Speaker to declare vacant the seat of any member of parliament who has crossed the floor to another party other than the party that brought them to parliament.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Malawians woke up to the shock of a front page picture showing abuses on Malawians by foreigners. *The Daily Times'* front page picture of a young man who was being chased by a Chinese man at the stadium construction site in Area 49 Lilongwe caused a lot of anger among Malawians some of whom wanted the Chinese man to be deported instantly. The young man was alleged to have stolen a cable at the site and therefore the Chinese man carrying a cane in hand was trying to catch him. This photo opened a can of worms as it acted as a reminder to many people of the problems they face when they are working for a foreign organisation with foreigners.

There has been a general complaint from many people who work with the Chinese of the many abuses they inflict on them. The picture acted as an eye opener to those that may have doubted that there are indeed some foreigners who abuse Malawians in the workplace. It was against this background that the *Malawi Congress of Trade Unions MCTU* has condemned such acts in the strongest terms.

The issue of unemployment among the youth continues to haunt many Malawians as there seems to be no improvement fifty years after gaining independence. Even those that are well trained for specialised jobs, find it hard to get work thereby increasing the number of youth unemployment. It is therefore only proper the government that will be ushered into power in May 2014 should come up with solutions to minimising the high rates of unemployment. Already Malawi at some point experienced a rise in crime and theft and some attributed this to the high levels of unemployment. Perhaps with good policies on youth development all these issues will be dealt with accordingly.

The Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security Honourable Uladi Mussa made a stunning revelation that prisons in Malawi have run out of medical supplies. In his report Mussa went on to say that the problems are indeed in all the 31 facilities across the nation. Other observers have however noted that the revelation that there are no drugs make the situation much worse in the lives of prisoners because already there is a food shortage in all the prisons. This scenario makes it worse for those that are sick because they have no medication and at the same time have to go without food. Again chances are very high that some diseases that could have been avoided will easily be spread to other prisoners.

EDUCATION

Some experts have condemned government for failing to recruit new teachers at a time when Malawi needs more of them in both primary and secondary schools. The media disclosed that there are a number of trained teachers who are lying idle waiting for government to recruit them and give them posts but the government is failing to do so because of lack of funding. These teachers may easily be tempted to look for other jobs and therefore it will mean a loss to the profession. Government should act with haste on this issue to avoid losing out on these teachers.

Although there has been some kind of a blame game between *MANEB* and police over the 2013 *Malawi Schools certificate of Education Examination MSCE* the later has been given the responsibility of doing the same job this year. The Malawi police will again offer security during *MANEB*'s examinations. The examination last year was heavily criticised for the leakage of the examination papers way before the actual date of the exams. *MANEB* just like is always the case did not want to take the blame and instead pushed the blame on the Police. On their part the police also refused to be responsible for the leakage. To date it is not known what exactly went wrong and who caused the leakage despite conducting an investigation.

Months after it was announced that the University of Malawi Chancellor College and Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources had withdrawn 116 and 132 students respectively, there is still no report that on the out come. People are very interested to know what caused the withdrawal of students from the colleges. The colleges have only said the students were expelled on grounds of poor academic performance. Among other things there are many questions that have come out on what is the actual cause of the poor performance among college students.

There were again concerns that the *University Entrance Examinations UEE* is one of the reasons for the poor performance among students. The University of Malawi has since quashed these assertions and has backed the *UEE* saying they cannot be the reason why there was this massive withdrawal of students. On the other hand some observers feel the students themselves are the ones to blame, because after getting into college they relax and waste so much time with demonstrations and this affects their studies

HEALTH

The month of January started with nurses demanding to be upgraded to registered nurses. The press has revealed that the nurses who are Nurse Midwife Technicians gave a petition to the government saying they want their concerns to be met. The issue went out of hand for some time and caused concern among the people. Some even wondered why this issue reached this extent when these issues and concerns of the nurses could have been handled internally. The president had to intervene and meet some of the concerns which included firing of the chairperson of the Nurse and Midwives Council Dr Grace Chiudzu. For now everything seems to be in order but reports have not come out yet on whether the nurses have been promoted or not.

Although there were these issues that dented the image of the ministry of health, there was something positive that was in the press concerning the sector. Spokesperson of the ministry Henry Chimbali announced there was no recorded case of Cholera last year. This is a relief to the health practitioners because it may mean the same can also be the case this year. Memories are fresh in many people's minds of how medical personnel spent a lot of efforts and resources to save people with cholera in the past especially in the rainy season. Now that there seems to be this improvement some of the resources that were used for this will now be put to good use elsewhere.

The press also disclosed some developments about male circumcision. Malawi just like some countries in the region is advocating for voluntary male circumcision as one way of minimising the chances of the spread of HIV/Aids. Although the issue has been received with mixed feelings there seems to be progress in some of the districts in Malawi. Press reports in January disclosed that in Thyolo District the number of men going for voluntary circumcision is on the increase with the youth being in majority. But the same reports also indicate that elderly men are shunning the exercise because they feel ashamed to be among the youths going for this exercise. Despite this setback the exercise is attracting more and more males and many more are expected.

The woes of Nsanje District Hospital continued to appear in the press as is evidenced by the recent reports in the month under review. Patients are now being forced to share a bed with some sleeping on the floor. This is not surprising especially when people remember that the papers also revealed that there are too many Mozambicans receiving treatment from the same hospital. The people in the area have to share the facilities and anything else at the hospital with the Mozambicans and now this has led to the shortage of beds. Meanwhile the fact that the patients are sharing the beds means there is a great risk of spreading other infections.

ENVIRONMENT

Although the rains were late in some parts of Malawi, that is not something that people should get worried about. This is because the government has assured people that the country will receive normal rainfall. This is good news not only for the government and environmentalists, but also the majority farmers who rely on rain fed agriculture because it gives hope to even the nation on good food prospects.

Environmentalists in January applauded government for the seizure of ivory at Kamuzu International Airport. At a time when environmentalists are trying their level best to protect elephants the arrests of the Chinese nationals who were trying to illegally smuggle ivory is applaudable. The trade in ivory is illegal the world over and countries try their best to guard against any potential harm to elephants. It therefore was a relief to the environmentalists when a report came out in the press that authorities had seized ivory as this will scare off some who are intending to do the same trade.

The press in January disclosed that there residents that are living closer to industrial areas are at a risk because they are exposed to industrial fumes. Stories are said of how people suffer from various ailments all because they breathe hazardous fumes from the industrial areas. Similarly other crops and vegetation in industrial areas also have tough time to do well because of the same bad environment because of the fumes. This is the case in Chungalume Zomba where dust from quarry where cement is made affects the vegetation.

As the rainy season continues Malawians take advantage of the situation to plant as many trees as possible. This is the reason a number of Malawians are planting more trees during this season. To add more value to the exercise press reports have disclosed that in some areas people are planting fruit trees. This is a clever way of making the country green but at the same time the fruit trees will provide food for the people and it will also be a source of income from the sales of the fruits. This is an improvement at its best as not only are the people dealing away with deforestation but they are also in a way empowering themselves economically.

GENDER

It was the same old story of failure to make a break through in the primary elections. Female aspirants are reported to have fared badly during the party primary elections of most political parties. This means that those that have not made it in the primary election have no chance to carry the party's flag during the election and therefore may only compete as an independent if they still want to be in the race. This again is a sign that there is still a tough job ahead of Malawians in promoting women's participation in the 2014 tripartite elections. Much as Malawi desperately needs as many women as possible in the National Assembly, the results of the primary elections give no hope at all.

For this reason the *NGO Gender Coordinating Network* expressed shock over this poor showing of women in the primaries. Press reports show that the *NGO GCN* noted that 90% of the winners in the primaries in all parties are men. This at the same time will not make matters easier for the women aspirants. The network feels that political parties are not supporting the aspirants enough. It again is a recipe for disaster because this means not too many women will not make it to the National Assembly.

The last elections saw a small increase in the number of women in Parliament and this year people expected the number to increase even more. But looking at the trends of the primaries one can easily say it is not going to be an easy task. Therefore, if things do not go well for the female independent aspirants, it may mean a draw back from the 50-50 campaign. But still on the same issue of elections and female aspirants the United Nations advised women to have confidence in themselves to succeed in the elections.

However, there was some good news from to with women in the press as government continues to show its commitment to the economic empowerment of women. It was reported that the government will embark on a project that will create jobs for women. Such initiatives will surely empower women economically and therefore make them independent.