

**C
F
S
C

P
R
E
S
S

R
E
V
I
E
W**



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

Compiled by the
*Center for Social Concern
(CFSC)*
Box 40049 Lilongwe 4
Area 25
Next to St. Francis Parish
Tel: 01 715 632

www.cfscmalawi.org



LIST OF NEWSPAPERS REVIEWED

Daily Times

The Weekend Nation

The Sunday Times

Malawi News

The Guardian

Nation on Sunday

The Nation

PREVIEW

Little known Ephraim Abel Kayembe trounced John Tembo Malawi Congress Party leader as they were fighting for the position of Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly. Kayembe who is a new comer in political circles scooped 118 votes while veteran politician John Tembo only got 8 votes. Surprisingly the government side of the House also participated in the voting process.

Instead of enjoying the fruits of the tobacco season, this year the situation is not the same. There is a shortage of forex. In past years the end of the tobacco season meant plenty of forex and a lot of cash in circulation. It is not the case this year because Malawi rocked with forex, fuel, water and soft drinks shortages. These problems need an urgent solution because already people are feeling the pinch.

On food security Parliament passed the Greenbelt Bill that authorizes government to get a loan to finance the project. With the Greenbelt Malawi is expected to become a food sufficient nation.

Civil society showed their disappointment in parliament's conduct in November. Parliament passed the Poll bill giving the sitting president powers to decide when local government elections should take place. This has not pleased the watchdogs who have since asked President Bingu wa Mutharika not to assent the bill.

Malawi is reported to be doing well in the fight against corruption. Although international organization sees it in this manner some local observers feel there is a lot that needs to be done.

In the education sector there seems to be another problem that has come about because of the ministry's schools inspection exercise. Hundreds of students now have nowhere to go because their schools were closed.

It seems the Ministry of Education now has another battle to fight. People are now using ARVs for distilling Kachasu. Perhaps a lot of awareness needs to be done.

POLITICS

The world seems to be crumbling for John Tembo, leader of the once mighty *Malawi Congress Party MCP*. Tembo who has been Leader of the Opposition in the last two parliaments lost his seat to 36 year old Ephraim Abele Kayembe of Dowa West. Kayembe who was in the taskforce that fought against John Tembo's leadership styles won with 118 votes against Tembo's 8 votes. Although a number of people have expressed gratitude over Kayembe's new role, some feel government should not have been part of the voting process. Kayembe has since asked all members of the *MCP* to work together with him. The *MCP* has since suspended Abele Kayembe from the party together with other members of the taskforce that was fighting Tembo.

Political observers in the month under review have noted that the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* is abusing its strength in the August House. Political observers have condemned the manner in which the Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly was dealt with things. The whole house participated in the voting process when in actual sense the government side should have left the opposition to choose their own leader. In the same line the commentators have also advised the *DPP* not to bulldoze issues in the August House to avoid eroding the whole essence of democracy.

Members of the opposition in the National Assembly did not waste much time when parliament met in November. The opposition MPs asked government to explain why the country is facing forex shortage to the extent that some imports have been put on hold. At the same time the opposition wanted to know why government bought an expensive presidential jet without parliament's approval when the country is facing shortages of forex. Furthermore the opposition questioned the unavailability of fuel. Reports have shown that government borrowed money to cater for the shortage of fuel in Malawi.

Government in the month of November arrested former *DPP* regional governor for the north Harry Mkandawire on allegations that he was trying to incite violence. Mkandawire who found himself in the wrong for condemning some of the decision President Bingu wa Mutharika has made including the reintroduction of the quota system. Mkandawire publicly accused Mutharika of favouring people from the Southern Region especially the Lhomwe belt. In a letter that he wrote to Mutharika and that was printed in the press Mkandawire accused the president of not listening to advice from others. Mkandawire has since been released on bail.

Observers and other political parties in the country have warned that the proposal to change the Constitution on local government elections is not good for Malawi's democracy. Government in the month under review announced it intends to present a bill in parliament that will amend the Constitution to give powers to the president to determine a date for local government elections. This development has not pleased some opposition leaders and civil society organizations that feel the change is not necessary because it will give the sitting president too much power. On the other hand some observers have noted that if the issue goes to the national assembly government will for sure manage to have the bill passed looking at their numbers.

Meanwhile there have been fears among some individuals who feel parliament should not amend the Constitution anyhow. These sentiments have come after press reports had shown that some ruling *DPP* members wanted to amend the Constitution to allow the president and

members of parliament extend their terms to 7 years from 5. Knowing their numbers in the August House a *DPP* MP proposed this and he got a no from President Bingu wa Mutharika. Dr Mutharika has always maintained that he will retire when the time is ripe in 2014 and therefore does not support the idea of extending the current constitutional 5 year terms.

Finally after calls from various observers the Speaker of the National Assembly Henry Chimunthu Banda resigned from his post of Secretary General of the ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP*. There have been calls from different sections of the society for the Speaker to leave his party post. As Speaker of the national Assembly Banda is supposed to conduct his business without favoritism therefore maintaining his position in the *DPP* could compromise some of his judgments. Honourable Banda however is still a member of the *DPP* but will not be attending party caucuses.

ECONOMY

Life is becoming very difficult for motorists in Malawi because of the fuel shortage that has hit the country. For the first time in many years business people have to live with the fact that filling stations are dry almost every day. It looks like the Zimbabwe scenario where fuel is a scarce commodity, is slowly creeping into Malawi. Although people expected government to come up with a convincing answer on the fuel crisis nothing has been said so far. Government recently announced that the shortage is a result of congestion at Nacala port in Mozambique. But officials at Nacala told the local press that it was Malawi that had failed to pay the suppliers. Reports have shown that business have been affected by the shortage of diesel and have lost many millions of Kwacha.

Most Malawians are still at pains to understand why there is shortage of forex in the country when we are only some weeks from the tobacco season. The tobacco season is always boosts Malawi's forex circulation because the crop is the main forex earner. In this regard many would expect less problems of foreign currency to come to an end because of the money that came in from the sales of the crop. Usually this is the time when there is a lot of money in circulation even traders make a lot of sales. The situation is getting worse by the day because other reports have disclosed that a number of foreign suppliers have closed their accounts with Malawi because of the shortage.

As one way of fighting the problem of forex shortage president Mutharika advised people in the civil service and other government offices to minimize external travel. Evidence has shown that a lot of forex is used on these international travels in terms of air tickets accommodation and a number of allowances. Mutharika himself canceled his trip to Trinidad and Tobago where he was supposed to attend a Commonwealth meeting. Principal Secretary in the Foreign Affairs Ministry Anthony Livuza represented Mutharika at the meeting. Some observers have noted that these control measures have come when things have already gone sour. They should have started all these controlling measures sometime ago.

Some economic experts have shown worries over the state of affairs in as far as Malawi's economy is concerned. Contrary to the situation on the ground, foreign organizations have noted that Malawi is the second fastest growing economy in Africa. Malawi for the international organization is a star performer in running its economy. Some observers have noted that to a lay person it does not make sense to have all the awards and good attributes on the economy when Malawi is now accumulating a lot of debt both locally and international. To add to it all Malawians are now experiencing food shortages when the country has been receiving awards for attaining food security. Besides the forex shortages there is also shortage of water, electricity supply and soft drinks.

FOOD SECURITY

As President Bingu wa Mutharika continues to receive a lot of awards for attaining food security for the nation, the situation in some areas does not reflect what the international organization are made to believe. With a lot of silverware in a cupboard meaning all should be well, some people are sleeping on an empty stomach. Reports have shown that in Zomba some people have no food. The situation is the same in some areas that have not been reported. This should give authorities a chance to come up with strategies that would see people are not starved when it is alleged there is plenty of food.

Meanwhile other reports show that there is also hunger in the districts of Nsanje, Chikwawa and Balaka. It should be noted that almost every year people in Chikwawa and Nsanje face food shortages because floods that happen annually. This scenario means authorities should work at assisting the people that are starving in the three districts. The situation could also be the same in other districts that have not been mentioned.

With some hassles the coupon distribution is still going on. It has been a trend that during coupon distribution, there are a number of hitches that spoil what is supposed to be a good initiative. The press featured a number of articles showing incidents of theft of fertilizer coupons. A couple not so long ago was arrested for stealing subsidised fertilizer. The couple is not the only culprits because just recently a driver was arrested for stealing fertilizer.

This year's fertilizer delivery has been with more problems than previous ones. Unlike the other years, this year the authorities have to deal with the fact that there is shortage of forex, a shortage of fuel, and other problems that seem to be slowing down the delivery of the farm input. Among other things reports show that some pirates had hijacked a ship on Indian Ocean. This also delayed the coming of other ships on the ocean.

Parliament during its sitting in the month of November passed the Green Belt Bill. Unlike some bills that take a long time to be debated on both sides of the National Assembly were for the Greenbelt. Among other things the Greenbelt will help Malawi to be a food secure nation for life if properly managed. Against this background the MPs passed the bill that will see government borrowing money from the International Development Association to fund the project.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Although recent press reports have shown evidence that homosexuality exists in Malawi, some quarters of the society are still not ready to welcome gays. But even though there are these reports civil society and faith leaders have completely shunned gays on HIV/AIDS strategy. Dr Mary Shaba Principal Secretary responsible for Nutrition and HIV/AIDS, also noted that the fight against HIV/AIDS will not be completed if the country ignores the fact that there are gays in Malawi.

Some civil society organizations have noted that President Mutharika is failing to stick to what he promised the nation. On several times Mutharika said that he would respect the rule of law. Contrary to his words Mutharika on many occasions commented on issues that are still in courts a sign that he does not respect the judiciary. As an important arm of the government, the judiciary expects people to respect issues that are in court. This month the Malawi Law Society expressed concern over Mutharika's outbursts.

Civil society in November joined journalists in advocating for the passing of the Access to Information Bill. According to reports there are misconceptions over the bill as some people feel it will only benefit journalists. The truth of the matter is that even the public will greatly benefit if they are aware of what the bill is all about. The media together with the civil society also need this bill to be passed. Evidence has shown that civil society and the academia have problems to access information from public officers. All concerned parties await the passing of the bill so that Malawians can enjoy a free flow of information.

The watchdogs have noted with dismay government's proposal to have a bill on polls tabled in the National Assembly. Press reports have disclosed that government wants a bill that will give the president powers to choose when he wants local government elections to be held. Civil society has condemned government's plans because doing so will give the sitting president too much power. Some observers say that there are worries that presidents in Malawi already have too much power and therefore should not be given some additional powers. It should be noted that there are currently no councilors in Malawi.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

In November Yunus Mussa, the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, issued warnings to different government institutions. The Minister warned the Department of Immigration to avoid giving out work permits to people who harass Malawians. Mussa was not short of words when he warned some Indians who ill-treat Malawian workers. Incidents have been reported in the press of some people working for Indians facing different forms of abuse, including insults, which is against any work ethics.

Press reports have also disclosed that some officials are giving out land to non-Malawians in low-density areas. It is reported that in the Capital City Lilongwe, Nigerians and Asians are being allocated land in Areas 47, 6 and 12. This is happening when some Malawians are having problems to access land. Some civil society organizations have also added weight in expressing concerns over these developments.

Contrary to what some people would have expected, Malawi's corruption levels went down according to the *Transparency International TI*. The international organization *TI* observed that the Malawi nation is going towards being one of the least corrupt countries in the world. The Malawi nation is now at position 89 out of 180 countries in the world, up from 115 last year. The *Anti Corruption Bureau ACB* and the Justice Minister have welcomed the *TI's* findings. On the other hand some opposition parties feel there is still a lot that government should do in the fight against corruption because on the ground there is a lot of corrupt practices.

Although different surveys have disclosed that a lot of children are being trafficked within Malawi currently there is still no law against these human rights abuses. Evidence has shown that children who are very young are taken away from their homes to other districts where they are made to work and sometimes they are not paid. It is also reported that these young children are not allowed to attend school and most of the times face all kinds of abuse. This situation puts the girl child at risk as some farm owners abuse them sexually. Against this background some civil society organization that deal with children's rights have asked government to enact a bill on human trafficking.

The debate on the death penalty is still going on. So far a number of groups are speaking against the death penalty. Previous discussions on the issue disclosed that some sectors of the society want the death penalty to be scrapped from the constitution because there are fears that in the future another president might decide to use it. Meanwhile other observers have different views and they want the death penalty to remain. In various meetings that were reviewing the Constitution it was shown that some still want the death penalty. To date an agreement has not been reached on the issue.

EDUCATION

The *Malawi National Examinations Board MANEB* in the month of November assured the nation that the change in the school calendar will not delay the release of examinations. MANEB announced that the *Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations PSLCE* and *Junior Certificate Examinations JCE I* will be released in December. Government announced the change in the school calendar so that it does not interfere with some cultural practices. The announcement that the two examinations will be released in December is good news because it will give time for the students to continue their studies in forms 3 and 1 in good time. Candidates who sat for the two examinations wait patiently for the result as promised by the examination body *MANEB*.

The Ministry of Education in November inspected some of the private secondary schools in the country. Among other things government officials were looking at the qualification of teachers, boarding facilities teaching materials and the structure. At the end of the exercise the ministry has certified some secondary schools that met all the requirements and some have been closed. Over 150 private secondary schools have been closed and the figure is expected to go up. Some observers have noted that the inspection exercise will only disturb many students who will not find an alternative to the secondary schools that have been closed.

Still on the same note the ministry again announced that it would also do the same inspection exercise in private colleges and public schools. The ministry warned that it will close all government institutions that do not pass their recommendations. Among other things the exercise is to help in improving the standards of education.

For the first time in Malawi's education system the issue of school fees in private institutions raised some debate within the society. In recent years the only discussion that the press covered was about school fees in the University of Malawi. Recent reports have disclosed that government intends to intervene on the school fees private learning institutions. Government plans to regulate school fees in private institution because evidence has shown that some schools overcharge students. This is evident by the exorbitant fees that some schools charge. According to the ministry of education students from poor families fail to access secondary education because of high school fees. But private school owners have challenged government on its intentions.

The University of Malawi in November refuted a claim by President Bingu wa Mutharika that examinations in the colleges leak out to students. The lectures reacted to Mutharika's public outbursts that lectures at Chancellor College give exams to students who come from the Northern Region. Mutharika said this when he was trying to justify the reasons why he strongly wants to implement the quota system of selection of students to public institution of higher learning. The system has now been christened with the new name of *Equitable Access to Education*.

HEALTH

Malawians woke up to some sad and disturbing revelation in the month of November. Reports disclosed that some people in Thyolo District are using ARVs the drug that prolongs lives of HIV/AIDS patients to distill *Kachasu*, the local moonshine. This news has left some quarters of society wondering why people would want to trade their lives for *Kachasu*. According to the people that are using *ARVs* in their *Kachasu*, it is cheaper to use the drugs than use sugar, while people need to cough some money to buy sugar all they have to do is go to the hospital to get ARVs for free. However this development has angered a number of people because they feel it is not logical to risk one's life by misusing the drugs. On a similar note the Principle Secretary for Nutrition and HIV/AIDS Dr Mary Shaba disclosed that some people are also using the same drugs as feed for their animals. Reports have shown that the farmers are using *ARVs* in feeding their pigs and chickens.

Press reports in the month under review have disclosed that hospitals in some parts of Malawi are congested with foreigners. This development according to reports is giving hospital staff too much work. Already there is shortage of staff in almost all government hospitals and the congested wards mean a lot of work for the understaffed hospitals. This congestion also means plenty of drugs that are administered to the patients considering the large numbers that need the drugs. Reports have shown that in Chitipa, Zambians and Tanzanians are using government hospitals. As a result some stakeholders have expressed concern over this development because they feel Malawi's bonafide citizens will not be able to access the drugs because they have been given to foreigners.

Eye experts in the month under review have predicted that in the next 25 years blindness will increase if measures to curb the disease are not taken. According to experts Malawi, being a developing country, many citizens lack Vitamin A in their diets and this leads to blindness. Among other things the experts have warned about are that the shortage of medical advice and lack of awareness will also be a contributing factor to the increase in blindness in Malawi in the next 25 years. This warning perhaps will assist all stakeholders to look into the issue and deal with it to avoid the increase of blindness.

Although a survey on HIV/AIDS in other countries has concluded that circumcision reduces the spread of the disease health officials in Malawi have not yet made a decision on the issue. A number of conferences have been conducted on the same issue, but the Government of Malawi has not yet taken a stand on the issue. Meanwhile the *Malawi College of Medicine* is carrying out research to determine whether it is true that circumcision reduces the spread of HIV/AIDS. Evidence in Malawi has shown that circumcision is a common practice in the Southern Region but in some areas where there is high circumcision the HIV/AIDS prevalence is also high.

ENVIRONMENT

Weather experts in November assured the nation that Malawi will still get enough rains this year despite the presence of *elnino* winds. There have been concerns from people over the delay in first rains in some areas raising fears that there might not be any good rains this year. The Meteorological Department officials have assured Malawians that despite the presence of *elnino* winds Malawi will still get sufficient rain. Most Malawian farmers rely rain as a source of water for their crops with only a few having irrigation. The delay in the rains would mean problems for the farmers.

The fact that the population in the cities is growing at a fast rate means the needs of the dwellers are also increasing. The trends at the moment have seen a lot of charcoal being burnt, thereby escalating deforestation and increasing air pollution. This is the case because of the carbon monoxide that comes from the burning of charcoal. Many people in the cities use charcoal as a source of energy because it is cheaper than electricity. Even those that have electricity still use charcoal because at present electricity is not reliable. Cases of power failures are the order of the day nowadays.

Still about issues in the city, the Lilongwe City Assembly is reported to have paid K2 million in a fine because for pollution. Press reports have disclosed that the assembly had to pay all this money because of a sewer it failed to manage in Area 36. The sewer then broke up polluting a larger part of the area. This is a situation that provoked the department of environmental affairs and it made the Assembly pay the fine. Against this background the Assembly would ensure that company premises are also being taken care of and avoid pollution at all times. However the City Assembly wants to have stiffer bye-laws for polluters, who at present pay K2,000 only which is on a low side.

The Press in these times of climate change is leaving no stone unturned on the issue. Every now and then the press carries a lot more stories on the climate change. But the *United Nation Development Programme UNDP* has expressed concern over the country's meteorological department's capacity on these issues. Climate change being a new phenomenon the *UNDP* is worried that *MET* might have problems in dealing with these issues. This is because at present the equipment that the weather experts are using is very old.

GENDER

Malawi joined the rest of the world in commemorating 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence. President Bingu wa Mutharika who has been promoting women empowerment asked government to help the nation in this cause. Mutharika who recently signed the gender and development protocol assured the nation that his government would make sure that women are protected against gender-based violence. Mutharika has since warned that he wants to see the perpetrators stiffer penalties..

Some observers have noted that the 16 Days of Activism are not enough. It is like waiting for sixteen days in a whole year to raise awareness to people on the need to have a violent free nation. It is against this background that observers feel, as a nation Malawians should refrain from abusing each other. Similarly couples should learn to stop abusing each other.

Malawi is still being praised from different corners of the world for its efforts to empower women. Although it took Malawi some years to sign the Gender and Development Protocol it is worth noting that the development has not only pleased Malawians but some international experts as well. An expert on policy matters in SADC in November applauded Malawi for signing the protocol. According to experts this means that Malawi is committed to empower women following what heads in region have signed. Reports have disclosed that out of the 15 countries in the SADC region only 3 have not signed the Gender and Development Protocol.

Years after SADC member states agreed to meet a target that would see 30% of female representation in decision-making positions, only five countries have fulfilled this target. Malawi is one of the countries that have failed to reach the agreed percentage. During the last general election Malawi did not reach the SADC target once again, having failed to do so in the 2004 general elections. This means that Malawi and the other countries that are still behind the 30% target have a lot of work to do if they are to achieve the goals. Media reports have shown that Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Namibia and Mauritius are the countries that met the 30% target. It should be noted that the target is now at 50%.