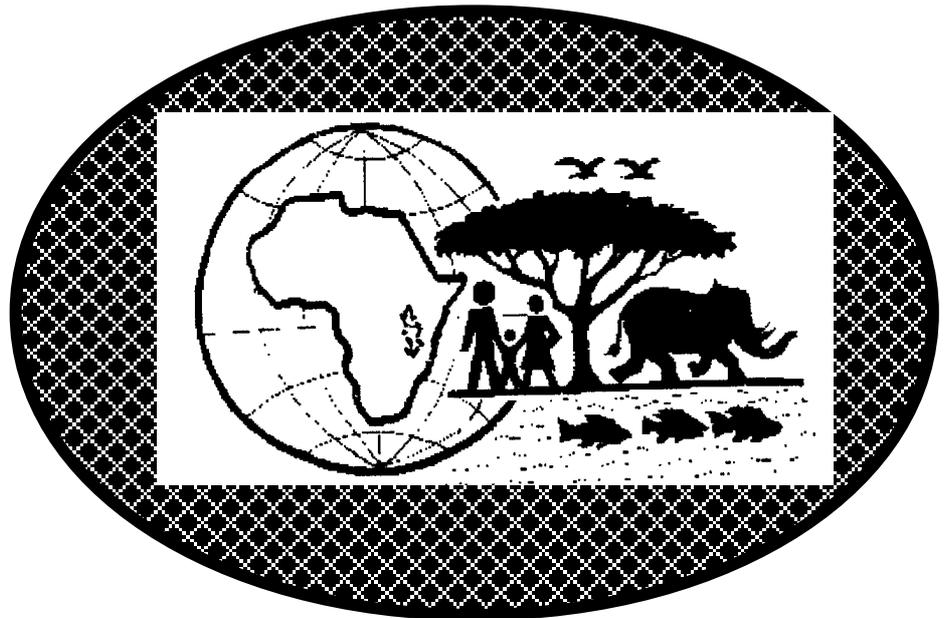


**C
F
S
C

P
R
E
S
S

R
E
V
I
E
W**



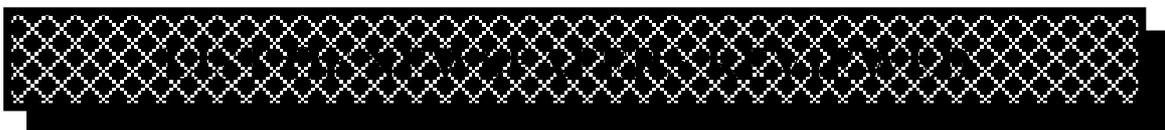
**FEBRUARY
2014**

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

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



www.cfscmalawi.org



Daily Times
Malawi News
The Nation

The Weekend Nation
The Guardian

The Sunday Times
Nation on Sunday

PREVIEW

The presidential nomination papers were delivered to the *Malawi Electoral Commission MEC* in grand style in the City of Blantyre. The exercise set the mood of the elections as presidential candidates drove in the streets of Blantyre some showing off their running mates for the first time. It indeed ended the rumours that had been speculating on who the presidential candidates would pick.

Names of the people involved in the much awaited *Cashgate* forensic audit report were omitted, making it hard for the masses to accept it. Without the names of the culprits and how much they looted Malawians feel they have been cheated and therefore may lose trust in the audit report. The *Cashgate* scandal is very fresh in people's mind and its effects are hitting hard on any ordinary Malawian and it is very normal that they are demanding for the inclusion of names in the audit report.

Government is giving out contradicting statement on the proceeds of the sale of the presidential jet. Again it is also showing us different pictures on the hunger situation in Malawi. While a cabinet committee is indicating that there is plenty of food in Malawi, the president is going around distributing maize an indication that people are in dire need of food.

The *Public Affairs Committee PAC* met the presidential candidates and had serious and important talks with each one of them. The religious body wanted to know the presidential candidates' stand on some of the constitutional issues in the country. What is their position on Section 65 and 64. The past two presidents of the republic of Malawi have not used Section 64 because it was scrapped from the constitution. Now there have been calls to bring it back and *PAC* wanted to get an assurance from the president.

Shocking! This is how one can explain about the situation at the Kamuzu Central Hospital. The cold rooms of the main referral hospital in the central region stopped working and the result was a bad stench coming from the mortuary. It is regrettable that some of the dead bodies decomposed and had to be buried in mass graves.

There are fears that the more the penalty for forest mismanagement remains on lower side, the more people will continue to cut down trees. This is why environmentalists are advocating for better policies and an increase in the penalty that will make people stop malpractice. May forests in Malawi are on the verge of being swept clean by charcoal makers.

POLITICS

After so much speculation and rumours on the political parties' presidential running mates the issue came to rest when parties unveiled their candidates. To some observers it was unexpected that the parties came up with running mates that they have. The ruling party *Peoples Party PP* unveiled Honourable Sosten Gwengwe who was formerly of the *Malawi Congress Party MCP* who later on joined the *PP* and is now minister of Trade and Industry.

The choice of Sosten Gwengwe did not go down without some people questioning why the president settled for a youthful minister and not her Vice President Khumbo Kachali. But President Joyce Banda told the nation that Kachali's contract had expired because she had only asked the Vice President to assist her for two years. Kachali has since vowed to support the *PP* candidate and her running mate.

In the quest to woo the youths for their votes, Professor Peter Mutharika of the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* chose Saulosi Chilima a newcomer in the political circles in Malawi. Chilima is a staunch Catholic and Ngoni by tribe but is not well known in Malawi political circles. Young Atupele Muluzi president of the opposition *United Democratic Front* chose former Tobacco Control Commission boss Dr Godfrey Chapola as his running mate. And the Malawi Congress Party's Lazarus Chakwera settled for Richard Mswoya former cabinet minister in the late Professor Bingu wa Mutharika government.

The City of Blantyre was subjected to a one week of congestion on the road in February when presidential candidates presented their nomination papers to the *Malawi Electoral Commission*. Business came to a standstill as twelve aspiring candidates handed over their nomination papers. Out of the twelve candidates the electoral body has barred Professor Chisi of the *Umodzi Party* to contest during the elections. This means that there will be eleven candidates on the ballot papers. For the first time Malawi will be having all these candidates on the ballot paper.

After all the talk on the eligibility of *Democratic Progressive Party's* president in the presidential election, Professor Peter wa Mutharika denounced his American Green Card, rumours circulated on whether Mutharika would be allowed to compete. Mutharika also resigned from his posts as Member of Parliament. The *Malawi Electoral Commission* also gave a green light for the *DPP* president to contest.

The aftermath of the primary elections was felt in February when high profile members of some parties vowed to go ahead and contest in the election on an independent ticket. Like in the ruling People's party Frank Tumpale Mwenefumbo, Eunice Makangala, Hophmally Makande and others have resorted to stand as independents and have been given the go ahead by the *Malawi Electoral Commission*. But as some party observers have noted this scenario is not healthy as it may cause divisions among the members. At a time when we are just a few days away from the elections divisions are the last thing that parties need. If anything parties should be as coherent as possible to avoid splitting the votes.

Some of the candidates are promising Malawians a lean cabinet. As a small nation that is highly dependent on donor funds, many people are advocating for cuts in many things in the government. For example some still feel Malawi does not need the services of scores of ministers some of whose relevance in Malawi's development is questionable. Reverend Dr Lazarus Chakwera has since promised to have a lean cabinet if he is elected president in the forth coming elections. Chakwera is of the view Malawians do not need a larger than life cabinet that consists of ministers that are not performing.

The *Alliance For Democracy AFORD* is reported to be in a working relationship with the ruling *People's Party PP*. For some reason Enock Chihana president of *Aford* is said to have taken matters in his hand and partnered with the *PP*. It is therefore, against this background that some of the people in the party are not happy with Chihana's decision to sell the party off *Aford*. Even with this decision there are still some issues that are unsolved because while this partnership may mean that Chihana is not competing as a presidential candidate some areas especially in the northern region people have fielded a candidates. People have fielded parliamentary candidates from opposing parties of *People's party* and *afford* in the same constituencies despite their alliance.

ECONOMY

Economic reports in the month under review dwelt much on the forensic audit reports and the *Cashgate* scandal and its effects. It is evident that the investment sector has been hit hard by the aftermath of the *Cashgate* scandal. Business seems to be very slow in the cities. The Small indigenous businesses have been hit hard by the *Cashgate* scandal. Going around in the City of Lilongwe one finds that the building sector has faced little progress because some in the construction industry are not receiving their payments and therefore are failing to do other activities.

After weeks of waiting the *Cashgate* forensic audit report was released to the public. The waiting and speculations were finally put to rest. But just when people as tax payers expected to get all the answers in the report, there was little satisfaction in its contents. There are no names of people involved in the looting of government money. Many are of the view that the audit report should have included the names just like most reports have done in Malawi. One example is that of the inquiry into the death of president Bingu wa Mutharika which has names in it. Leaving out the names has made some people to lose trust in the report.

Meanwhile the *European Union* has said that the *Cashgate* scandal is a chance for Malawi to correct things. The fact that people were able to beat the system and make unscrupulous transactions means that something was wrong with the system. Now this revelation is a blessing because it gives government a chance to put its house in order and correct things by correcting the systems that were beaten clean by the looters.

Even with all the negative reports on the economy that have seen a lot of exposure to gross wastage of government resources the government is saying the economy is on track. To a lay person it is not understandable especially that the majority of people are still in dire poverty. It is a well known fact that many Malawians have problems to make ends meet because of the high cost of living which does not match the income they get. Now this scenario is not in line with the issues of an improving economy.

On the same hand there are other reports that are showing indicators of the local currency appreciating. If indeed the Kwacha is appreciating it could be good news because it means the Kwacha is gaining its buying power. This is at least some good news to Malawians because people will be able to buy more in terms of exported goods.

FOOD SECURITY

The press have carried contradicting reports of the food situation in Malawi from the first citizen and some members of her cabinet. In normal circumstances these people should have been speaking with the same voice, but this is not the case. This scenario makes it difficult for people to choose who to believe. While President Joyce Banda is busy making food distribution to the people who come to her public rallies and enhancing an indication that there is a shortage of food, her cabinet committee says there is plenty of food. The committee's assessment had shown that there was a positive indication on the availability of food. But surprisingly these two offices which are expected to be giving out the same kind of information agree to disagree.

Malawi's staple grain maize is said to be the most expensive in the region. Although there are so many factors that should have made the grain cheaper and easily accessible, evidence shows that maize in Malawi is very expensive. Even with the availability of farm input subsidy programme where the yields have always improved resulting into a good harvest, one would expect the grain to be cheaper in the time of plenty. But alas this is not the case. A number of organisations have once in a while proposed that the price of maize should be regulated but these proposals have not been taken on board. This is why we still have various prices of maize of the same quantity as every trader does with what they please to the grain.

The flaws of the *Fertiliser Subsidy Programme FISP* have been there since the programme started. The calls to have the programme reviewed seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Almost all governments that have been in place have failed to administer the *FISP* to the satisfaction of the people. Often they have failed to meet the demand of the farm inputs and deadlines for delivery. This time around there is more because February Press reports have shown that the government of Malawi is failing to pay K33billion to suppliers. This development only vindicates earlier proposals to have the programme reviewed because only the review will point out to where things are going wrong and possibly come up with a solution. Again the fact that government is failing to pay the debt is a clear indication that the country cannot cope up with the programme and should be finding an alternative.

It is now obvious that the presence of red locusts in some parts of Malawi needs an urgent solution. Already some reports show that the locusts have also been spotted in some parts of Mozambique meaning that instead of getting rid of them, the locusts are multiplying. This has raised fears among farmers who feel this scenario will affect the production of maize. In the end this may have an impact on the harvest and in the end on food security. Meanwhile other efforts are said to be made to get rid of the locusts although other experts have noted that this whole process could have been made easier if there was a chopper.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

In February *Public Affairs Committee PAC* met some of the presidential candidates in a closed meeting to get some answers. PAC gave out a plan and dates when they would meet the presidential candidates from various parties. And indeed the meetings were done but press reports have shown that the results of the meeting are far from what *PAC* expected. Among other things *PAC* wanted the presidential hopefuls to give out their position and promises on their commitment to Section 65 and bringing back Section 64 in the constitution of Malawi.

Civil society spoke at length about the publishing of the *Cashgate* forensic audit report which took longer than people expected. After weeks of waiting and pressing for the release of the audit report on the *Cashgate* scandal, it finally came out. Although many Malawians had been waiting for the audit report with bated breath, its release has not amused a number of observers. There is no mention of anyone who was involved in the malpractice. It does not add up just to have this report in figures of the money that is alleged to have been looted with no names mentioned in the report. Like all reports all the queries and anxieties over what exactly happened will fade away, as Malawians easily forget and mostly fail to demand for what is lawfully their own.

Meanwhile the *Malawi Human Rights Commission* has also set up a parallel probe into the *Cashgate* scandal. This will mean that if there was any political interference from any quarters this *MHRC* report will prove it. This therefore gives hope to Malawians that if there was any interference with the just released report it will be discovered.

Still in a state of shock from the stolen money from the Capital Hill, reports show that the controversial jet that was sold some months ago promises to be another scandal. To date the proceeds from the jet sale are nowhere to be seen. At a time Malawi is still coming to terms with the fact millions of donor money was stolen the disappearance of any money is the last thing that people want to hear. It is however not surprising to hear that civil society organisations are planning to go on a national mass demonstration. One other issue that needs an explanation is the rotten maize that was made available in *ADMARC* depots recently.

The Catholic Church in Malawi in the month under review inaugurated Bishop Joseph Stima and Archbishop Thomas Msusa, for Mangochi Diocese and Blantyre Archdiocese respectively. President Joyce Banda attended both functions. Also present were some of the political party leaders like Atupele Muluzi of the *United Democratic Front UDF*, Peter Mutharika of the *Democratic Progressive Party* and *Malawi Congress Party* vice president and running mate Richard Msowoya. It is not surprising that these political party leaders always want to show up where people are gathering because the elections are just around the corner.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

There was a stunning revelation in the Malawi media in the month under review. February the world over is known as the month of love, but reports that more than 3.1 million children grow in violent homes do not reflect love in the families. These children are victims of a loveless environment where there is a lot of violence and there has a lot of effects on the development of such children. Evidence shows that children growing up in a violent environment are affected emotionally and psychologically. As a nation we can surely minimise cases of violence in the homes so that children grow in an environment where there is peace and love.

Many people doubted the possibility of Malawian youths getting employment abroad through the Ministry of Labour. Each time there was a call for youths to apply for jobs in Kuwait, Dubai and South Korea many people doubted the reality of such chances, especially with the controversy that surrounded the whole labour deal. Some reports came out from one of the countries that the labour office in that nation was not aware of the labour deal with President Joyce Banda. Again the international media reports had disclosed that there were a lot of human rights violations in North Korea.

Therefore, many people were against the programme as they feared for the youth's life and it has brought mixed reactions to learn that 800 youths have acquired jobs through this labour deal. While it is very exciting to have some of the youths go for well paying jobs abroad, the fact that there are some issues to do with human rights violations need serious consideration. To have some youths who have employment is in a way reducing the number of the unemployed in Malawi. But their human rights must not be disregarded.

Cultural experts expressed their fears that Malawi may lose some of its cultural practices due to the fight against HIV and Aids and the fight against child marriages. Due to the latter there are some traditional dances that are performed at night and most of these have been banned in the battle against child marriages. Experience has shown that it is during such night ceremonies when some girls find a chance to sneak with men resulting into early marriages. On the same hand the future of other cultural practices lies in jeopardy because of the same reason.

EDUCATION

There was a lot of news that came regarding the plight of teachers in Malawi. Teaching seems to be the one of the professions that is being treated unfairly when it comes to salaries. As of February some teachers in rural areas had not yet received their salary for the month of January. Press reports show that although there is an increase in the hardship allowances that teachers in the rural areas get, reports show that even this they have not received it. Coming from a background of salary delays this problem needs to solve this problem once and for all.

Not a month passes without the talk on special needs education and the lack of funding with some schools getting less than K30,000.00 per month. With this amount of funds there is very little that can be achieved. It is therefore, pleasing to note that the government has plans to invest in the special needs education. Reports show that government intends to train special needs teachers and improve their welfare. At the same time government will also put in place policies and programmes that will ensure that special needs education is incorporated in this sector and not sidelined in the efforts to improve the standards of education.

Zodiak Broadcasting Station once again awarded the best performing student in the 2013 *Malawi Schools Certificate of Education Examination MSCE*. Just as they have done in the past 6 years girls that scored 6 and 7 points got scholarships to study in China, this time around the same has happened to some of the students. Apart from getting Scholarships to study in China some will study in Russia. The awards encourage the girls to work hard in class especially at secondary schools so that they may qualify for the scholarships.

While all this is taking place some girls are facing harsh conditions in order to make it in secondary schools. Press reports have shown that many girls who are in self boarding schools are at a higher risk of going astray because there is no one to look after themselves. In Chikhwawa and Mzimba press reports show that girls have fallen into the trap of love affairs as they search for materials to help with the chores of their daily live.

HEALTH

The most shocking news of the month happened in February when front pages of the daily newspapers carried stories of dead bodies rotting at *Kamuzu Central Hospital KCH*. It all started with people complaining that there was a stench coming from the morgue and these reports had been going on for some weeks. The top of it all was when the hospital's cold rooms were finally reported to have stopped working resulting to the decomposition of the bodies. The irony of it is that the hospital authorities knew these cold rooms had stopped functioning and were supposed to pay K3 million to the people to start repairing the morgue but did not do so.

At a time when there are so many questions on the billions of Kwacha that were looted at Capital Hill, having a non-functional mortuary that at one of Malawi's biggest public hospitals is the last thing that Malawians want. All this shows gross negligence on the part of the hospital officials. It is a straight forward issue that the mortuary should be made a priority because it is the only public morgue in Lilongwe. It goes without saying that as a major public hospital in the entire Central Region there is greater need for the use of the mortuary and therefore it should have been on the list of priorities. Now the onus is on the government to make things right.

The closure of the mortuary is not the only problem that the *Kamuzu Central Hospital* is facing; the referral hospital is also in dire need of drugs. This problem has been going on for some months now. Late last year the newspapers came out with articles of how medical personnel were at pains to save lives because of shortage of drugs, reports show that some people during that period died of treatable diseases and in some cases doctors had to use their personal means just to make sure the sick were assisted. This month it seems the gods have smiled a little bit at the hospital because the *University of California* project in Malawi *UNC* donated some drugs to *KCH*. *UNC* is said to have lessened the shortage of drugs.

Although the health sector was dented with the *Kamuzu Central Hospital* stinking mortuary, the other part of the month the press gave out some positive news about the sector. It was said Malawi has made great progress in the fight against malaria. In fact it is even better because it says Malawi is leading in the *SADC* region. Malaria is a major killer in the world. In Malawi a number of efforts have been made to prevent children under the age of five from catching the deadly disease. Again there are free treated mosquito nets that are given out to every family. No wonder that the Malawi nation is rated high in the *SADC* region. One hopes the fight against Malaria will not relent.

ENVIRONMENT

Environment reports in February centred on the forests and trees. As we are in the *National Forestry Season* a number of organisations are into the exercise of planting trees. If they are not doing it directly they are offering support with funds for others to do the job. *Blantyre Water Board* has pumped K2.7 million in tree planting exercise. In a country where reckless cutting down of trees is the order of the day replanting more trees is the best that Malawians can do to compensate for the lost forest cover.

Some columnists and observers have commended the *Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi ESCOM* for the improvement in its daily work. It seems the days of daily blackouts are now over at least going by what has been happening in the past three months. Since December many Malawians have not experienced blackouts the way it used to be some time back. Consumers now have 24 hours of power supply a thing that was never the case in the past. The load shedding announcements in the local press are no longer present showing that there is some improvements. It is therefore against this background that some consumers are

Although this is the case other reports show that *ESCOM* is still lagging behind in making new connections. The utility body is being accused of taking too long to connect new applicants. Customers have to wait for more than two years to get connected. The demand for energy is getting bigger each passing day raising fears that if these are not connected soon, chances are they may resort to using other forms of energy. Some of these are the use of firewood and charcoal which is rampantly being used as the only alternative to electricity. President Joyce Banda launched the Kapichira II Hydro Project, which is expected to boost energy power and this has raised many people's expectations are that they would easily be connected.

Environmentalists in February expressed concerns that the penalty that people are given as they destroy forests is on a lower side. With high levels of deforestation, there are calls for a stiffer penalty that would make people think twice before they indulge in the malpractice. At present there culprits are only told to pay K1,000 only and then they are set free. This amount is too little that some people are willing to indulge ion the malpractice because they know they will easily pay the fee once caught. This is being done at the expense of the forest products some of which are very difficult to replace because it takes years to have a full grown tree for example. The call for stiffer penalties and other policies in forest management seem the only solution to the problems.

GENDER

The state visit by Africa's first female president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has encouraged many women in Malawi that women can ably make it to the top. Being the first female African president Sirleaf has inspired many women in Africa and in Malawi and therefore her visit will live in many women's minds for a very long time. It is also a plus to Malawi especially that the nation also has a female president and is in an election year. This means that the campaign for more women in the National assembly and in decision making process has been given a boost.

The month of February also saw Dr Jessie Kabwila receiving a recognition from the United States of America for her courage achievements in Malawi. The awards which are presented annually by the US government are called women Courage. Kabwila's work that show courage date back in the time of late Bingu wa Mutharika when she successfully led the Academic freedom fight at the University of Malawi Chancellor College. She is an activist, a lecturer and now a politician who has done so much to be ignored. Kabwila indeed deserved the ward and recognition as one of the few women in Malawi that can stand tall and fight for the rights of women and other forms of freedom.

As the election day is getting closer there are concerns over party conduct in choosing running mates. None of the 11 presidential candidates has chosen a woman as a running mate expect one female candidate. Even the incumbent president has settled for a man. This is one way tells us that the presidential candidates have no belief in female running mates. It gains tells us that even the political parties have less will power to promote women into the high office on the land. Already gender activists have always left no stone unturned in making sure that more and more women make it in high positions, but the party leaders themselves have done the opposite in the appointment of running.

The work on the Gender 50-50 campaign is facing hitches because of the delay in funding. At a time Malawi is getting closer to election day, female aspiring councillors and members of parliament need a lot of funding to assist in the campaign activities. It is not a secret that many of the female candidates are not financially independent and therefore may benefit from the funding that is received from various donors via the NGO *Gender Coordinating Network*. Therefore any more delays may cause hiccups in the 50-50 campaign and affect the number of women in the elections. In a new democratic Malawi, aspirants need a lot of funds to successfully run a campaign that can yield positive results.