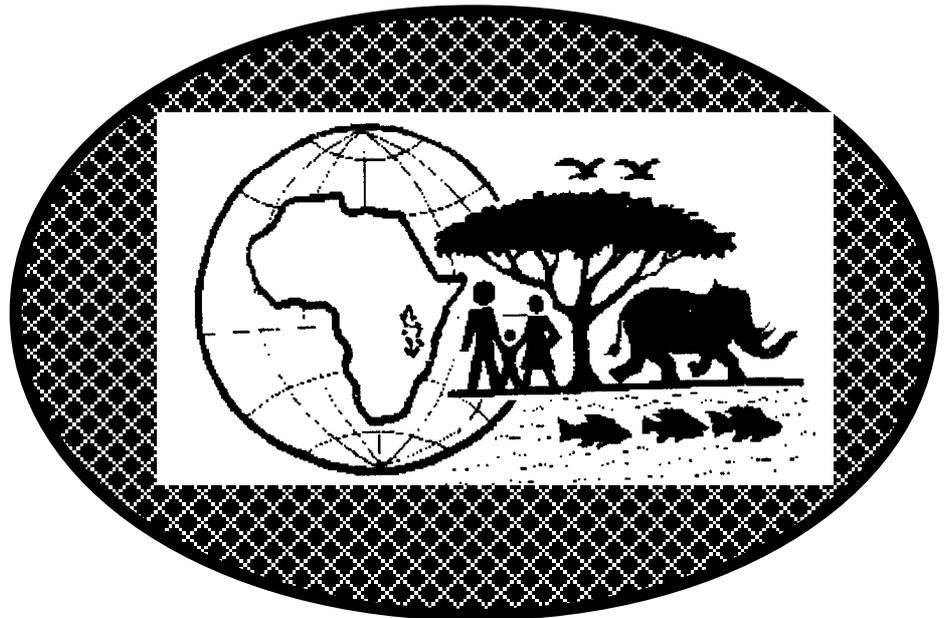


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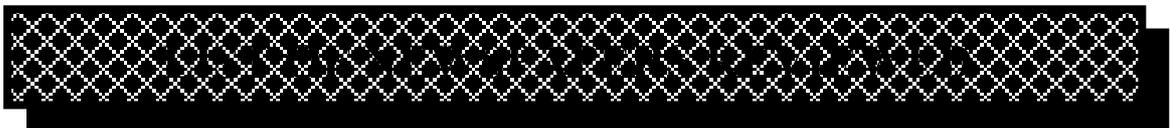
**MARCH
2014**

**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

With just a few days to the election parties launched their campaign with a pledge to have a violence free campaign and without castigating others. Malawians expect to see what the parties have pledged translate into action. The past elections were characterised with incidents of violence here and there and now the electorate do not want a repeat of that.

The tobacco season started on a low note raising fears among farmers that the prices may not improve to meet their expectations. At a time when the cost of farm inputs and labour have gone up, farmers expected to have a good season that would translate into better prices but so far this has not been the case. One can only hope that things will improve as time goes by so that the farmers can be motivated to put more effort in the gold leaf production in the next growing season.

Food security reports show that there are some signs of hunger in some parts of Malawi. This is because these areas did not receive sufficient rainfall. For others it is because the rains were late and therefore people planted their crops later in the season there by exposing their crops to stalk borers and other insects.

In March the Public Affairs Committee organised another all inclusive stakeholders meeting in Blantyre. This time around it was held at Mount Soche Hotel. A number of issues came as the meeting created room for debating and discussion of what has been happening in Malawi in recent times.

Government want to open the *Malawi University of Science and Technology MUST* at long last. But then all is not in place as there is no running water at the college and they will be using boreholes as people are wondering why it has taken so long for government to start using one of the best universities in the land.

The health sector continues to face a lot of challenges due to minimal financial resources. Some public health facilities continue to face a lot of hiccups in their operation because of the unavailability of the required amounts of funds. In the case of Kamuzu Central Hospital it is now problem after problem as the March health reports have disclosed.

POLITICS

Apart from the Cashgate Scandal the ruling *Peoples Party* is once again being haunted by the mysterious sales of the presidential jet. The Joyce Banda administration seems to have made another blunder in as far as the jet sales is concerned. From what is being said in the press it is very clear that something is just not right. Actually one would easily say there is more than what meets the eye at least going by the circumstances surrounding the sales. Various players in the government have spoken about the jet sale and there are different statements coming out. There is some secrecy on this issue which is of national interest and has brought so much interest.

Surprisingly with all the tension that has come about because of both the Cashgate and Jetgate scandal the *People's Party PP* Ken Msonda announced that he is not worried. For starters the fact that the *PP* is the party in government now the scandals should surely be a cause of concern with the scandals that have rocked the party and have dented its image. Some analysts have wondered why Msonda, the ruling *PP's* publicity secretary, is not moved and not ashamed of the scandals that have rocked his party. In normal circumstances party leaders should have tried to do damage control by making sure that even in the middle of image threatening scandal. *Zodiak Broadcasting Station ZBS* held the first ever presidential running mate debate in Lilongwe and Blantyre. The four of the presidential running mates are Richard Msowoya, Sosten Gwengwe, Dr Godfrey Chapola and Saulos Chilima from the *Malawi Congress Party MCP, Peoples Party PP, United Democratic Front UDF and the Democratic Progressive Party DPP* respectively. During the first debate the four panellists battled it out as they answered questions from the audience and listeners in the live debate.

The ruling *People's Party's* running mate Sosten Gwengwe announced he will not be one of the panellists in the second leg of the presidential running mates debate according to the *PP* the organisers were giving unfair advantage to one of the running mates. Just like they earlier announced Gwengwe never showed up at the debate and left the battle to the other three. But while this might have been a collective decision within the party, others still feel Gwengwe should have attended the debate to market his party.

President Joyce Banda's cabinet got an assessment based on their performance. For the first time the majority of the ministers were rated poorly. Less than five ministers got 5 out of 10. This only shows that some of these cabinet ministers have lost touch with reality on what they are expected to do as ministers. So many reports of ministries performing poorly have been in the press ever since president Joyce Banda became president. It is no wonder that the ministers have been rated poorly.

In normal circumstances the ratings, though they are subjective, should give the concerned ministries room to work on the issues pointed out. Being in Malawi press reports have shown that on a number of occasion anything negative that is said against the cabinet for any other people in authority are always swept under the carpet. Ignoring such assessments is a choice that is mostly taken and it seems this time around the same has happened.

In March President Banda startled many Malawians when she failed to directly answer any of the questions that the media had asked, but instead handed over the microphone to some officials and ministers. This however, did not go down well with some experts who felt Banda should have addressed the nation and not her ministers and officials. It goes without saying that as President Banda has the overall responsibility and has the mandate to address the nation and answer any question so that the people's fears and anxieties are put to rest. But

her failure to do so is the least that many people expected and they therefore expect her to do better.

Many observers and political experts have condemned the fracas that happened at Goliati in Thyolo District where a civilian and one police officer were killed. Press reports have shown that violence erupted at Goliati where irate people nearly interrupted the president's meeting. With just some few days to the tripartite elections any form of violence is the last thing that Malawians expect.

Still on the same issue of election the courts cleared the way for *Malawi Congress Party MCP* Spokesperson Dr Jessie Kabwila to contest in parliamentary race on May 20. The electoral body had denied Kabwila a chance to participate in the election on the grounds that she is still in employed by the university of Malawi Chancellor College. On the same note the *Malawi Electoral Commission MEC* made a U-turn on the Wakuda Kamanga who was also been barred from contesting because as a presidential aid he was holding a public office. But after some time allowed him to do so because he had resigned from his post as

ECONOMY

Economically Malawi seems to have gone back to its old self where no donor wanted to support this nation. Nobody could blame the donors because back then it was all of Bingu wa Mutharika's own making when he failed in economic governance issues. The Joyce Banda's administration is also sailing in the same troubled waters just like the former administration did. It is not all rosy on the economic front as low income earners are now feeling the pinch of the mistakes that the present government has made.

It is now very clear that Malawi will keep on struggling economically because of the gross financial management that has been made in the public service. It must be very painful for those that work hard to make sure that they assist Malawi financially and support the country's national budget to see the resources being wasted in this manner. Malawi still needs budgetary support as the poor state is not yet at that level where it can fund its own budget, although at one point president Bingu wa Mutharika tried to have a fully locally funded budget. And indeed if Malawi will not get budgetary support it will mean a lot of tough times ahead especially that this is also an election year.

Economic reports have disclosed that Malawi's tax system remain unjust and is again promoting inequalities among Malawians. This has been an ongoing story as many civil society organisations including the *Malawi Economic Justice Network MEJN* and the *Centre for Social Concern CfSC* have advocated some changes in the tax system that would see the low income earners getting some kind of a relief. It is not a secret that the majority of Malawians find it very hard to cope up with life because of the high cost of living and the tax measure as their salaries are heavily chopped in the name of tax. It is for this reason that the *MEJN* and *CfSC* want some changes that will ease the burden on the low income earners.

It has all been sour on the economic scene with no positive reports coming from this sector. Just minutes after opening the tobacco market in Lilongwe, the prices of the gold leaf have not been that impressive much to the annoyance of the farmers. So far the highest price has been over two US dollars. This is unlike some years when on the first day the prices were much higher than what is the case now. Press reports have disclosed that in Limbe farmers had to force the sales to be suspended because they were not happy with prices.

Some more bad news was on the closure of the Kayerekera Uranium mine. The closure means the loss of jobs for a number of people whose income had changed after getting employment. On the other hand there are cries that the coming of Kayererkerera mine in Karonga raised the standards of the town as evident by the high cost of living. Now that the mine is folding there are fears that the cost of living may never go back to the old level again.

FOOD SECURITY

Calls for a stop to the distribution of food are becoming louder each passing day. It seems a number of observers and activists have been against this tendency and have already spoken out against it. But by the look of things it seems the president is far from stopping now that Malawi is in the campaign period preparing for the 20 May tripartite election. For some time President Joyce Banda has been going around giving people bags of maize and flour. While the gesture of giving is on its own a good one that should be commended, some people still have reservations.

For starters as president of the nation Joyce Banda should not have focused on maize distribution but rather on some pressing issues that need her attention. By being on the road almost every day Banda is missing out on the reality of being in her office as the number one citizen of this country. At least going by what has been happening, the distribution of the maize and other food stuffs the exercise has been highly politicised. Instead of the exercise being for the entire nation it has been attached to the president's party. This is because every time the president travels there are always party zealots following her. It is for this reason that some people feel the president could have done better by improving the way the exercise is being conducted now.

It is now the campaign period when aspiring candidates for the presidents and members of parliament posts get to make their promises to the masses in exchange for a vote. He who has the best plans will surely be able to woo the votes from the electorate. By the look of things the promises that some of the politicians are making have also touched the agricultural sector. For sure one cannot talk about Malawi's agricultural sector and skip the food security component. So far some have pledge to improve irrigation schemes in Malawi and others want a complete overhaul of the fertilizer subsidy programme.

Like any other month, March press reports also tackled the *Fertilizer Input Subsidy Programme FISP*. As long as this programme is around there will always be something to say about it. In the time of president Bingu wa Mutharika experts noted that the purchase of fertilizer and the awarding of the contracts is one of the reasons that the programme was proving to be very costly and therefore difficult to sustain in the long run. Others noted that the *FISP* is also one of the reasons that therefore were forex shortages because the farm input is sourced from outside Malawi. Recent expenditure review has also faulted the *FISP* as one of the areas that is consuming most of the resources in the sector. Perhaps as a nation that is struggling economically this programme need to be looked into critically and see how we can improve as a nation and at the same time remain a self food sufficient nation.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Both Nkhoma and Livingstonia synods of the *Church of Central African Presbyterian CCAP* came up with pastoral letter on the forthcoming elections. Among other things the synods are worried with the secrecy in issues of national concern. The current government has been accused of being very economical with the truth on issues concerning the presidential jet. Various statements coming from the government have made some people question the truth behind the jet sale. In their writing to their faithful the synods have asked their flock to think carefully when choosing a leader in the May 20 tripartite election. They are calling for the flock to vote for a God fearing leader.

Again the Nkhoma Synod of the *CCAP* was in the papers when it condemned the *People's Party* running mate Sosten Gwengwe for dragging the church in his attacks on the *Malawi Congress Party MCP* leader Reverend Dr Lazarus Chakwera. In his political attacks Gwengwe said Chakwera had deserted the *CCAP* Nkhoma Synod Church and would therefore be capable of ditching the Malawi nation if elected leader. These statements did not go down with the leadership of the church and they immediately asked Gwengwe who apologised

After a successful meeting in Blantyre where they came up with resolutions, the *Public Affairs Committee's* wishes to have the National Assembly meet have not been granted. Delegates at the all inclusive meeting agreed that there are so many pressing issues that members of parliament should discuss and therefore before parliament is dissolved it should meet and discuss such issues. But this wish has not been granted as the speaker of national assembly dissolved it. Even with an added voice from other players parliament has been dissolved and Malawians will only wait if the president wishes to call for an emergency meeting.

A number of civil society organisations under the name the *Grand Coalition* in March organised a peaceful demonstration in Blantyre. Although the demonstration started on a low note with just a few people at the begging, eventually more people came and attended the march. The coalition managed to hand over its petition to the chief executive of the city of Blantyre. But as the situation is at present it seems the coalition's wishes have not been fulfilled none of the things that were brought forward has been taken into consideration by the authorities.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

The campaign period brings about its own issues one of which is the strategies that the presidential candidates come up with to woo the voters is by giving handouts. It is always the case in Malawi as aspirants get very desperate to get the much needed votes. It therefore, is not surprising that this is the hand out season. But this culture of handouts seems to be now very rooted among politicians and by the look of things they feel they can always get their way if they give out handouts. As press reports in March have disclosed, some recipients have said they will receive the handouts but since it is a secrete ballot they will vote wisely.

Paramount Chief Kyungu of Karonga is one of the many people that have spoken against handouts. Kyungu has openly banned anyone who comes to the area with handouts. The Paramount Chief joins a group of many other organisations and individuals who have openly spoke against the handouts. For some it is like the political leaders are buying the voters and thus taking away their right to choose. It therefore, is only fair that the voters should be left out to make their own choices instead of corrupting their minds with a few handouts.

Traditional leaders from Thyolo District disowned an apology that apparently was going the rounds saying they are ashamed of the fracas that happened at the presidential meeting at Goliati. This was meant to make people believe that the traditional leaders are very apologetic and they have vehemently disowned the apology. In March two people a civilian and a police officer died in a fracas that happened when President Banda was addressing a meeting.

March press reports on social and cultural life dwelt much on the traditional leaders who spoke on various issues. Being an election season the chiefs also spoke about the use of foul language and castigation. This is because the chiefs would want the campaign period to be issues based. By castigating each other during the campaign period the politicians will not give out to the masses anything but just mere words that will only tarnish the other politicians' name. In an election year this also may cause unrest among other members of the party.

Once again the issue of the marriage was in the press in March. By the look of things this is here to stay and will remain appearing in the press until such a time when it is resolved once and for all. This is one of the issues that various sectors of the society have spoken about with one voice. Every other individual who has spoken about the marriage age issue has proposed that it should be revised upwards. And this has been the case since that time when members of parliament blundered and made the marriage age to be at 16. Until such a time when the proposal to put the marriage age either at 18 or 21 is turned into a policy people will keep on talking and debating about it.

EDUCATION

With very few places in public universities many people have no choice but to find places in private owned institutions. Being a liberalised economy Malawi has seen boom in the private universities in recent times. While it is all very good that Malawi has all these colleges coming in there is great need to find out which ones are accredited by the government. A report in the press in the month under review gave out free advice from the government that students should not enrol in private colleges. The Minister of Education Science and Technology Dr Lucius Kanyumba gave out their advice saying that those who do so do it are their own risk.

The government in March admitted that that there is low quality of education in community day secondary schools. This acceptance coming from the government is a positive sign because it means authorities will ensure that they do the needful to improve on this. Some experts have noted that the government rushed to turn these schools into day secondary schools. There was no proper preparation from the infrastructure that was in these schools that would qualify them into secondary schools. On the same hand the teachers and other staff were not of secondary school level. With these shortfalls there was no way we could have expected the best from such schools. But now that the government has acknowledged that there is a problem somewhere perhaps there may be deliberate policies to improve on things.

Finally government announced it will open the *Malawi University of Science and Technology MUST* in Thyolo. Various sectors of the society have accused the government for doing delaying tactics and not putting too much effort in as far as the opening of *MUST* is concerned. For others they felt the present government was deliberately doing this because the university was built by late president Bingu wa Mutharika. Late last year a number of individuals accused the government of lacking political will to allocate funds to finish off the remaining essential facilities at the college. In March the press disclosed that the university will open but will run on boreholes because there is no running water.

This will be the first time that a private college would run on borehole water let alone a science university. It is not a secret that even the other public universities have always had financial problems, but not that of water. On the other hand by not opening *MUST* it is a missed opportunity for Malawi because such a great structure needs to be put to its use as soon as possible.

The debate that was taking rounds on both the social network and the press in March is that of introduction of teaching in English in Standard One. Government announced pupils in the very first class in primary school would be taught in English. Some people have greatly supported this like *Civil Society Education Coalition CSEC* but others feel this will not solve the problems of poor quality of education in Malawi. This issue has followed the pattern of all the other issues in Malawi and therefore people wait patiently to see how this will turn out to be.

HEALTH

Medical personnel at *Kamuzu Central Hospital KCH* did not take it well when Minister of Health Catherin Gotani Hara pushed the blame of the poor conditions of the mortuary to the authorities' negligence. In response to questions over the poor showing of the hospital, Gotani Hara washed her hands and passed the blame on to the authorities saying they were negligent. This has not pleased the authorities and staff who have questioned the minister's motive for saying this.

It does not rain but pours for *Kamuzu Central Hospital* after getting some bad publicity over the stinking mortuary, problems at the referral hospital are far from over. Barely weeks after bad stench at the morgue had the hospital suffered another setback, this time it was the elevators that had stopped functioning. Press reports have how that the patients had to be carried on the backs of the vendors who had taken advantage of the situation to make a few quick Kwachas. Such bad publicity has been hovering around the central region's main referral hospital for some time now.

Late last year we heard of shortage of equipment and essential drugs to the extent that doctors had to use their resources to save lives. Again some people are reported to have died of treatable diseases. As if this is not enough then came the petition that the medical personnel took to parliament. All these and many more issues have reduced *KCH* just like any other hospitals and not like the main referral hospital that it is supposed to be. Meanwhile there also reports that the hospital has now reduced the use of the operating theatres. All these are pointers to some of the things have really gone wrong and need urgent solutions.

KCH seems not to be the only hospital that is struggling but many other public hospitals as well. The fact that there have been depleting funds in hospitals has affected many hospitals operation. The high cost of living has also affected the hospitals as the same amount of money has to be used to buy and access services whose prices have sky-rocketed. This has a bearing on the operations of the hospitals. If the situation does not change Malawi should brace for tougher times in the health sector.

Although a fair part of the health sector's media reports have been negative, there are still some positive developments. After years of wasting a lot of resources in the fight against cholera Malawi is now winning the battle. The past records have shown that the situation was always hectic because this is when the cases of cholera were on the increase. Now that the cases have increased it is good news not only to the sector but also the entire nation.

ENVIRONMENT

The focus on the environment in March took a different turn as compared to the past months. In recent months there has been too much talk about the environment and trees. It has always been the focus of discussions in various forums where the talk is trees and forests in Malawi and this resulted into massive media coverage of the environment. Another factor is that Malawi is still in a forestry season where citizens are encouraged to plant more trees and therefore the media could not run away from reporting such stories. But as it has been the case in March the media coverage is now more on other issues other than trees. Press coverage has taken different turn by the look of things.

On poaching the Minister of Wildlife and Tourism honourable Moses Kunkuyu spoke of the increasing number of poaching in Malawi and the *SADC* region. It goes without saying that Malawi and other states in the *SADC* region continue to lose some of the animals through poaching. Not so long ago the Malawi police were commended for intercepting loads of ivory from Chinese nationals. It goes without saying that for the loads of ivory found at the airport there are a number of elephants that were killed. Again some people are also just in a habit of killing animals for one reason or the other, these have also been condemned.

The press again reported of the Lake Malawi turtles which are under threat. Press reports have disclosed that it is not only the fish in Lake Malawi that are dwindling in number but also some other creatures. Lake Malawi turtles are in high demand in some countries abroad and this scenario is putting their population in danger. Reports further say the turtles are being butchered and smuggled abroad. The butchering of turtles needs to be looked into with haste to avoid any loss of these creatures.

One other commendable thing that the authorities in Malawi have done is to partner with neighbouring Zambia. At a time when Malawi is receiving too many reports of poaching and smuggling of wild life, partnering with a neighbouring country seems the only sensible thing. This is because it will ensure that there is collaboration on security for the wild life in both Malawi and Zambia. At a time there is a lot of smuggling of wildlife Malawi needs a lot of protection and therefore needs this type of partnership.

GENDER

The gender sector in March received a lot of press coverage compared to the past months. Such focus on publicity of gender issues is not something strange. It is something that was expected because of the May 20 tripartite elections and this directly affects women.

President Joyce Banda Malawi's first female president in March asked women to promote each other. Banda who became president after the sudden death of the Professor Bingu wa Mutharika faced a lot of challenges the time she was vice president of Malawi in the Mutharika era. Therefore, Banda has first hand experience of what it feels like to be pulled down and sidelined by men with the help of fellow women. President Banda told women at the world women's day of prayer in Lilongwe that women in Malawi need to claim their place in decision making positions.

A number of reports have also come out on how various players of the sectors have fared in the fielding female representatives in the May 20 election. According to report the Northern Region has failed terribly in fielding female candidates. As the media have said the Northern Region has failed on 50:50 goal. Fielding female candidates is one step towards women's election into decision making positions. But then if not too many women are fielded it means there is no way they could make it. The revelation that the Northern Region did not field many female candidates as possible raises so many questions as there are fears that this fight may never be won this year.

Meanwhile the story is different in Mangochi where the *Malawi Congress Party* has fielded 50% women candidates in the parliamentary elections. This is a commendable development as it gives hope and chances that at least that the number of women in parliament will improve. On the same note chairperson of the *NGO Gender Coordinating Network GCN* has said this is the year that all players in this game should make sure as many women as possible should make it come 20 May.

The *Peoples Party* is said to have fielded more female candidates than any other party. Coming from a party whose leader is also a woman it is not surprising but at the same time it is something that should be commended. This shows that the party has confidence in women's leadership and this is a plus in the campaign. Although there have been hitches here and there Malawi needs to win this fight now.