

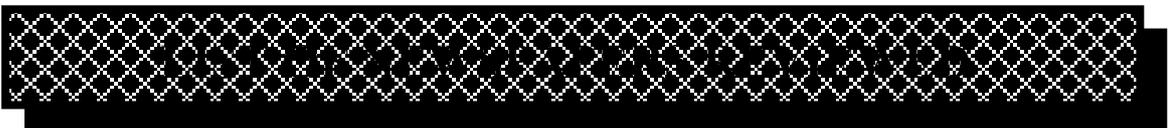
**May
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**News clippings
with analysis
From the
Major newspapers
in Malawi**

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Daily Times
Malawi News
The Nation

The Weekend Nation
The Guardian

The Sunday Times
Nation on Sunday

PREVIEW

Although the Presidential, parliamentary, and local government elections are way behind us, they leave a certain mark in every Malawian's mind. These are the elections that took days before the winner was announced. They are dubbed as the most chaotic elections ever coupled with a lot of complaints in Malawi history of elections.

And so the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* under Professor Peter Mutharika and his running mate Saulos Chilima is back in government. The government slipped out of their fingers when the party's and Malawi leader Professor Bingu wa Mutharika died suddenly leaving the unpopular Vice President Joyce Banda to take the reign. Now that the *DPP* is back in power people have high expectations and look forward to what the other Mutharika has to offer.

The economic sector suffered some losses due to the election stand-off. With the uncertainty on how long the Electoral Commission was going to take to release the presidential results much of businesses came to a standstill. Many businesses entities failed to operate to the fullest for fear of unknown post-election violence which may have led to damages.

Trade unions in Malawi are still bitter with the fact that presidential candidates chose to go and attend prayers organised by the Electoral Commission instead of joining the labour day celebrations. It is at such celebrations that workers express their grievance to the party leaders and politicians who in the end can influence formulation of policies.

In the middle of the elections stand-off the *Malawi National Examinations Board MANEB* managed to successfully administer the *Primary School Leaving Certificate PSLCE*. For the first time in many years the examinations went on smoothly with no reports of leakage. Could this be the start of good things at the once dented *MANEB*? That is the question.

It is a pity that the results of the parliamentary elections did not go the way many gender activists expected. With so much effort that was put in the campaign to have more than half of the seats in the National Assembly occupied by women, the result must be shocking to many. There are now only 30 female parliamentarians out of the 193 seats.

POLITICS

It was the first time that Malawi held a tripartite elections and so the fact that there were some kind of chaos can easily be waved away. It took three days to have some people cast their vote, still more anyone who wanted to do so was given a chance. Being the first time that Malawi was doing this, Malawians had nowhere to gain experience from and therefore any issues that came out were easily set aside. This is perhaps why local and international observers rated the election as free and fair contradicting with what the then president Joyce Banda had said.

Finally after days of waiting in suspense High Court Judge Kenyatta Nyirenda announced Professor Peter Mutharika as the winner of the 20 May presidential election. Mutharika beat the other eleven contestants in what has been deemed as the most chaotic elections ever. There were so many complaints over rigging with some pointing at the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP*. The victory of Mutharika vindicates Afrobarometer, an international research institution, which had predicted the *DPP* leader would emerge winner. And also prophet Liabunya who had said the *DPP* would come back to power. It should be noted that a number of research organisations had their own surveys which predicted other leaders. A number of the same with prophets alleged they had revelations showing who would win.

And so Malawians voted out the incumbent Dr Joyce Banda and she was number three out of the twelve. As if this is not enough most of her cabinet ministers failed to retain their seats in the National Assembly. One wonders how the ruling party could have flopped so badly in an election barely two years of being in power. The party had all the machinery and resources to win the elections but the electorate showed their power through the ballot box and booted the *PP* out of power.

From cabinet ministers to party officials they all failed to retain their seats in the National Assembly. This scenario tells Malawians that getting a parliamentary seat is not automatic simply because one is a cabinet minister or a ruling party official. This is free advice to all that have ambitions to get into parliament: the voters are not easily swayed by one's party's affiliation, but rather by someone who is very ready and committed to serve the people.

Although there were twelve parties that contested the elections at the end of the day it was clear that the competition was among the four major parties namely the *United Democratic Front UDF*, *People's Party PP*, *Malawi Congress Party MCP* and the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP*. The so called small parties were at times getting no vote at all in some instances. This may mean these parties are not known across the nation and therefore the officials need to make sure they do a lot of promotion for their parties. The results of the parliamentary elections confirm that indeed leaders of these small parties are not known even in their areas, as some even failed to get a seat in their constituencies.

A number of lessons can be drawn from the results of the parliamentary race. It shows that independent members of parliament outnumber the political parties MPs. It raises questions as to why there are so many independents in this parliament than those belonging to political

parties. As some observers have noted this could mean that the electorate are now losing trust in the political parties. For some time there have been reports of worries of democracy within the parties during primaries. Evidence has shown that some of the independents resorted to face the elections single-handedly without any party after they had been frustrated with the way the primaries were conducted. This scenario should give all political parties in Malawi homework.

Khumba Kachali has been said to be one of the politicians who is always on the move. After being left out as the running mate for Dr Joyce Banda in the 20 May tripartite elections, Kachali seemingly very disgruntled resorted to doing things his own way. Even during his early days of campaign Kachali would ask people to vote for him as parliamentarian, but vote for a president of their choice. Instead of campaigning for the *PP* leader Kachali was doing the opposite. Eventually the vice president publicly endorsed Professor Peter wa Mutharika. It is at this point that many have branded Kachali as a politician always on the move. He has been in the *UDF*, *DPP*, *PP* and went back to the *DPP*. A mover indeed!

And on a sad note former cabinet minister in the *People's Party* government Godfrey Kamanya shot himself at his ministerial home in Area 12 in Lilongwe. Kamanya, who had also lost his parliamentary seat, was a young man who started his political career at the *Malawi Congress Party* and eventually joined the *PP* under Joyce Banda. It is not known why he shot himself but it was reported that he had left a suicide note.

ECONOMY

Any election comes with its own issues and expectations. It therefore was not surprising as many tobacco farmers were reported to have held on to their leaf before the elections hoping to sell it after the voting exercise. Since the tobacco selling season started the prices have not been promising as on several occasions the sales had been postponed because of disagreements on prices. By holding the crop the farmers are hoping that any changes in the government may bring in hope for them.

Business experts have lamented on the political election impasse that lasted close to two weeks saying it has affected the sector. With uncertainty of when exactly the presidential results would be out, a number of businesses halted their operations. This meant the loss of profits and earnings. In the heat of the election tussles there was a scare that people may start looting and indulge in other activities that would threaten the businesses. It is for this reason that some people were worried with the delays in announcing the results. Again some business decisions were also on hold at this time.

According to economic experts the coming in of the new government at a time when a number of donors have left Malawi, gives the new leaders a chance to clean up the mess that the other government has caused. In the second year of the Dr Joyce Banda administration Malawians witnessed the reporting of the worst plunder of government resources that resulted in a number of donors losing confidence in Malawi. As of January this year one thing was clear that Malawi had messed up on economic governance and needed to do a lot of soul searching in order to get back in the good books with the rest of the world and even the entire nation. But now that the party that messed up thing is out, there are many things that a number of people are hoping for, including better economic policies that will change the country's economy for the better.

Reactions about the closure of the Kayerekera Mines in Karonga were also covered in the economic pages of the two daily local newspapers. The coming in of the mine raised hopes for some Malawians that they would be employed and obviously benefit through foreign exchange earned from the sales of Uranium. Again it was a prestigious on its own to have an international company that was in the mining sector. It is therefore a pity that the Kayerekera Mine is closed for good without prospects of opening soon.

FOOD SECURITY

The Ministry of Agriculture gave hope to many Malawians when it announced that it foresees increased crop production this year. With such a forecast it means Malawi will have a lot of food and this will make the country food sufficient. According to the ministry this has been the case because of the availability of fertilizer via the *Fertilizer Input Subsidy Programme FISP and the Farm Input Loan Programme FILP*. It has been like this for some years now though traces of food shortages have always been reported every now and then.

This is contrary to the *Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee MVAC's* assessment which said that there will still be hunger in areas that performed poorly. At the same time the strategic grain reserves are empty. The silos need to be restocked because part of the grain was used to supply *ADMARC* depots through out Malawi. Although the *National Food Reserve Agency NFRA* did not comment on this issue one thing is for sure there is need to replenish the silos. With some areas likely to face hunger restocking the silos should be done with haste.

One cannot agree more with the observations made at the 49th *African Development Bank* Annual Meetings in Kigali over low agricultural productivity in this part of Africa. In a Malawi set up it is true the road network is poor and that at times farm inputs fail to reach some areas in good time. This for sure disturbs agriculture production as inputs such as fertilizer may reach certain farmers long after they should have applied. The same is the case with seeds. Because of poor roads delivery of subsidised seeds is compromised and farmers fail to plant on time.

Storage facilities are again a problem in Malawi because it is at this time that a lot of food is lost. All that people seem to care about is to look after the crops in the garden and harvest them. After harvest there is very little that people do in order to make sure that they minimise post harvest losses. Therefore it is a section that should be looked into so the little that has been harvested should be preserved to avoid losses.

Sidik Mia former minister of Transport tipped people in Malawi to intensify on irrigation. Mia who is a well known business man owns cattle ranches in the Lower Shire district of Chikwawa and Nsanje, urged farmers to use irrigation at all costs and to maximise production. Malawi is blessed with a lot of running water that should be used to produce crops. Advice coming from such a successful farmer should be taken seriously!

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The Media in Malawi joined the rest of the world in commemorating the World Press Freedom Day in the month under review. The climax of the Malawi celebrations this year was a dinner in the capital city where a number of foreign dignitaries spoke highly of the conduct of the media in Malawi. It goes without saying, being an election month, the media were recommended for a job well doing the electoral process.

It again goes without saying that the media in Malawi are free to report on anything that happens. Malawi is surely a nation where there is not much pressure on the media from those in authority. It therefore, was not surprising to hear Norway hailing Malawi for a free press and speech. Many Malawians are witnesses of the fact that there is a free press in Malawi and this is evidenced by the many media houses we have in the country.

All workers in Malawi celebrated Labour Day under the theme: protect the worker in the workplace. Labour Day which fall on 1st may is a public holiday and the *Malawi Congress of Trade Unions MCTU* organised a function but the president then was not present. The *Malawi Electoral Commission* had organised prayers for the elections and President Joyce Banda and some presidential aspirants attended the prayers. This did not please the *MCTU* who at some point threatened to report the matter to the *International Labour Organisation ILO* saying the 1st May should be left for Labour issues only.

Some observers also noted that it was not logical to have two very important functions that needed high level attendance on the same day. Labour Day celebrations would have made a difference if the party leaders were present. It was a missed opportunity for the political leaders who would have heard the workers grievances and possibly get a few votes.

In May the *Malawi Human Rights Commission MHRC* cautioned the then President Joyce Banda over her continued distribution of maize to people during and before the campaign. Banda had come under heavy attacks for politicising the issue of hunger by trying to buy votes using hand outs in form of food. But Joyce Banda went ahead with the distribution until the very last day of campaign. Actually the *MHRC* went a step further by asking Joyce Banda to pay for the maize she has distributed.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Newspapers in May disclosed that president Joyce Banda had promoted 40,000 chiefs in just two years. Now thinking of the financial implications that goes with the promotion of chiefs 40,000 promotions is way too much. We are living in a time when traditional leaders also get a little something at the end of the month. Having too many promotions means digging deeper into the coffers to have these chiefs paid. While it could be a good political strategy for the ruling party to get all the support from the chiefs it does not reflect well on the type of leadership that we have. It raises so many questions if a leader starts promoting chiefs simply because he/she want to get a political mileage and not on merit.

The press also revealed that there are still human trafficking practices going on in Malawi because of lack laws prohibiting human trafficking in the land. Although a number of organisations have raised awareness, especially in the boarder and lakeshore districts, reports show that acts of human trafficking are still rampant in some parts of Malawi. As the media have rightly put it because of their being no anti-trafficking law there are so many cases of this kind. It is against this background that a number of people would want the anti-trafficking law be finalised, tabled and passed in the National Assembly.

Fresh in people's minds is the story of a man who was found with a number of children in Mchinji. He was trying to take the children to Zambia where he should sell them. But because of no anti-trafficking law, the man just got away with small fine. It is such cases and many more that have not been reported that have prompted the stakeholder to look into this issue demand for the tabling and passing of the law.

Before the elections prisoners at Maula threatened that they would not vote saying nothing changes for them. The prisoners said they would be wasting time to vote because their wishes would not be met. Earlier in the year they had asked for an audience with presidential aspirants and this was not granted. Prisons in Malawi remain heavily congested punctuated with scarcity of funding to run the institution. A number of prisons run on minimal resources which results into shortages of food. Not so long ago well wishers from the opposition *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* were stopped for donating food and drugs to the Maula Prison.

EDUCATION

The story of self boarding debate continued to receive massive media coverage in the month of May. It all started with a few reports from Mzimba and Chikwawa that revealed a number of flaws and disadvantages of the set up. Some individuals and organisation have spoken about self boarding. For one reason or another there is not enough space in some schools for the young girls who still have to get an education. Going by what some observers have said about such schools, others have proposed that the self boarding schools should be banned.

This stand has not gone down well with the Kalondolondo programme which is against the ban of such schools. In the event that there are not enough structures to house the girls, some of whom live very far away from their schools, self boarding becomes handy. It is not a secret that many schools do not have enough facilities to operate a boarding schools for girls. Therefore, if there is a chance that they can stay in a self boarding school, the better.

The *Malawi National Examinations Board MANEB* went ahead and successfully administered the *Primary School Certificate of Examination PSLCE* in May despite the stalemate in the 20 May tripartite elections. Even though there were fears of the usual lack of security and leakage of examinations in Malawi, this year's *UPSCALE* was quiet different, there were no reports of leakage prior to the examinations a thing that many observers have commended. At the same time if there were not any cases of cheating reported during the examinations, then they must have been minimal. Against this background stakeholders have commend *MANEB* for a job well done.

As form two and form four students wait for their examinations there is hope that the same should be the trend. Examinations in Malawi have always been punctuated with a lot of issues. If the recent development is maintained it could be one of best steps towards the improvement of education standards in Malawi. For some years final examinations have perpetually leaked raising fears that the trend may also be the same this year. *MANEB* has always been surrounded by bad publicity ranging from lack of security during examinations leakages and cheating.

HEALTH

Some medications may require patients to take them with food. Even medical personnel make sure they stress this point to the sick when they are prescribing medication. But recent reports show that in *Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital QECH* patients do not have guardians were surviving on cabbage. Now for a large referral hospital such a diet means there is a big problem with the resources at the facility because according to nutrition experts cabbage on its own is less nutritious. With minimal resources it has proved to be very difficult to manage hospitals in Malawi as the shortage of drugs medical supplies and food is evidence to this.

As if the food shortage is not enough at the *QECH*, reports further revealed that the only referral hospital in the entire Southern Region is running without a CD 4 count machine. This shows just how the public health system is struggling. Officials at the hospital revealed the machine had gone for repairs. The absence of the machine which is necessary in HIV/AIDS management poses a threat to this work at the hospital.

Minister of Health Catherine Gotani Hara in May took a swipe at ministry of health officials for ignoring personnel in the rural areas. Gotani noted that although there are some qualified medical personnel who are working in the remote areas, officials at the headquarters tend to shun those in rural health centres. There is an outcry that those in the rural health centres are left out when promoting others. The minister felt those in the rural areas equally deserve the promotion and should rightly be rewarded just like those in towns and cities.

The press carried reports of congestion in public hospitals with foreigners accessing part of the drugs in these hospitals. A case was reported in the press of how Nsanje District Hospital is being congested by foreigners who occupy almost half of the beds at the facility. As if this is not enough press reports further indicated that this is not only happening in Nsanje, but also some other boarder districts. There are fears that if this scenario continues the facility will always have shortages of drugs and many essential equipment.

It is against this background that activists are advocating for the use of identification in hospitals. Without identification in the form of national registration cards, the way they do it in other countries, there are fears that the situation may never improve. Evidence has shown that 40% of the drugs are used by foreigners who take advantage of the situation to access services freely. Perhaps with proper identification the 40% that is being wasted on foreigners would reach out to the rightful citizens of Malawi.

ENVIRONMENT

Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi ESCOM came under heavy attacks in recent months over the continued rising tariffs. So much has been said about the improvement of energy in Malawi after experiencing heavy blackouts in the past. For two years the nation has experienced a relief in the energy sector as consumers enjoyed less blackouts than before or no blackouts at all. While people are enjoying this, there has been increases in electricity tariffs raising fears that this is not a good situation for the environment. Already there are fears that this scenario makes it worse for the environment as many people resort to use firewood and charcoal which they feel is cheaper.

The fact that there is no alternative source of energy has been the reason why there is a lot of damage to the environment through the cutting down of trees. Firewood and charcoal seem to be a cheaper source of energy compared to electricity. Almost every other morning there are truckloads of charcoal getting into cities where there is always a ready market. This scenario is making it worse for the forests in many areas. While in some countries electricity is expected to ease the pressure on the use of trees for energy, in Malawi the situation is the opposite because electricity is very expensive and forest products are cheaper. If nothing is done about this we should expect more damage to the environment in the years to come.

It is therefore not surprising that the environmentalists are asking for the restoration of the vegetation. It is not a secret that most of the areas that used to be green with trees are now bare because people, have wiped the forests clean. A good example is that of Soche Hill which is now bare due to urbanisation and people are now building houses in these areas. Against such a background the environmentalists would like to have more trees planted in order to restore the vegetation cover.

It seems government must have taken heed of the advice some civil society and other stakeholders have given regarding mining in Malawi. After coming under heavy attacks on the mining deal with the defunct Kayerekera Mine in Karonga, the government reported it had shelved signing of mining agreement. It all started on a wrong note with many people asking government to look into environmental issues in Karonga because of Lake Malawi. Environmentalists really spoke at length about environmental issues surrounding the lake. It could be a good sign that government has announced that it has shelved signing of mining agreement.

GENDER

Poor, this is how we can rate the performance of women in the just ended tripartite elections. It all started with the presidential candidates, only two female candidates out of the twelve. Both did not make it. A situation that is not healthy for the fight for women empowerment. As if this is not enough the female aspiring members of parliament fared badly increasing fears that Malawi may never achieve the ambitions to have 50% of women National Assembly. People had great expectations that this time around many women will make it to parliament but this was not the case.

It must have come as a shock to the partners and organisations who fought day and night preaching about choosing female leaders. But the results of both the parliamentary and local government elections have shown that Malawians have given women a vote of no confidence. In the house of 193 seats candidates women have only managed to take 30 seats leaving 163 to male candidates. In this male dominated house there is little hope for women parliamentarians. Already many women in Malawi are said to lack public speaking skills one rare trait that is very important in such a decision making position. Without good public speaking skills there is no way one can contribute effectively to the debate in the August House.

Coming from a background of a female president where Malawi gained recognition on the international scene, it does not begin to sink in how women could have possibly failed to make it in the May 20 tripartite elections. With a lot of funding and time given to the promotion of women into decision making positions the outcome is disappointing. In one way the nation which is has a population of more women than men is indirectly communicating that they have no confidence in female leaders. These results also indicate that even women themselves do not have confidence in fellow women.

With such results one can easily say that it is very difficult to change people's attitudes and mind set. This poor showing during the elections gives stakeholders a lot of work to see what really went wrong and how they can improve the situation. With a lot of advocacy and campaigning for sure people must have expected an improvement in the elections but since this has not been the case there is need to change the strategy. If Malawi is to achieve the 50-50 campaign surely it has to do a lot more.