

Blantyre Newspapers dismisses 44 employees

The month of August seemed to have casted a bad spell on Malawi media as on the day that state broadcaster, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) retained over 400 employees out of over 700, Malawi's oldest newspaper company, the Blantyre Newspapers Limited (BNL) fired 44 employees.



By [Gregory Gondwe](#) 1 Sep 2011

Like a bolt from the blues, employees were called to an emergency meeting by Leonard Chikadya, the managing director the Blantyre Print and Packaging (BP&P), under which BNL belongs, where he announced the dismissal of one third of the company due to financial woes.

Chikadya told employees at the company which publishes four titles namely; *The Daily Times*, *Weekend Times*, *Malawi News*, *Sunday Times* and a quarterly magazine *Times Life Styles*, that the country's tax collecting body the Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA) has imposed strict measures on the company that has brought it financial woes.

Among other things, MRA is said to be demanding 180 million kwacha that the company owes it as it is also operating under pressure from government, which is trying to implement a zero deficit budget after donors froze aid due to President Bingu wa Mutharika's undemocratic rule and bad economic policies.

MRA is also demanding that BNL remit all the Value Added Tax collected from newspapers sales since the national budget was passed.

Economic turbulence

The current economic turbulence Malawi is trying to wade through has hurt newspaper industries more.

BNL has been importing its newsprint from Zimbabwe at three times the normal cost, and with forex shortage the company has had to get forex to buy newsprint at about K60m per US dollar per week from the black market in order to buy the newsprint.

Since the media has not spared government due to its failure to perform, commentators have said government is deliberately using state apparatus to clamp down on the media in order to silence it.

A highly placed source at BP&P revealed to Bizcommunity that although MRA is demanding the 180 million kwacha BNL owes it, there is a written agreement between BP&P and MRA to the effect that the media company would be remitting K30 million per month in respect of repayment, but suddenly MRA is demanding the total amount which is suspicious.

BNL has fired some of its journalists including *Sunday Times* editor James Mphande, investigative journalist MacDonald Chapalapata, Rex Chikoko and newly hired scribes Howard Mlozi and Watipaso Mzungu. It has also fired its advertising manager Harold Nasoro.

ABOUT GREGORY GONDWE

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