

THE NATION
COMMENT

Bravo for launching irrigation initiative, but...

We welcome the Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP) launched yesterday in Chikwawa District by President Peter Mutharika.

From the onset, the design of this 14-year irrigation project worth \$222.7 million (about K173 billion) seems appealing.

Under this programme, about 43 370 hectares will be irrigated in the two Lower Shire districts of Chikwawa and Nsanje. In addition, the initiative is expected to directly benefit over 220 000 farmers, both smallholder and commercial.

It is also heartening to hear that with the programme in place, authorities expect that it will contribute to national socio-economic development through increased and sustained crop production, productivity, agro-processing and value chain improvement.

Just recently, the President presided over the unveiling of another ambitious agricultural commercialisation project that also seeks to provide good financing for investing in agriculture and creating access to well-structured markets to give value to farmers' produce.

If truth be told, the country has invested billions of taxpayers' kwacha and of course from other development partners, yet the agro-based country keeps on yielding diminishing returns. Economically, this is purely a deadweight loss to the Malawi society at large.

It is heart-rending to learn that the agriculture sector has over the last four years (except for 2017) failed to attain the six percent gross domestic product (GDP) growth target due to continued structural biased allocations towards a few or less impact areas within the sector.

Nonetheless, we explore beneficiaries of the project and people living along the Shire River basin catchment to nurture the natural resources such as trees in the wake of climate changes.

We can't agree more with what the President said yesterday during the launch that Malawi has everything it takes to get out of the poverty trap.

However, for Malawi to transform the agriculture sector and the economy as a whole, it's time to walk the talk. ■

APM, launches multi-billion kwacha scheme

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Bank (\$50 million), Global Environment Facility (\$5.5 million) and Malawi Government (\$7.2 million).

In an interview on the sidelines of the launch, SVTP project coordinator Sandram Mawelu said the

total irrigable area is 43 370 hectares and it will be abstracting water from Shire River at Kapichira and conveying it by gravity.

He said 279 550 smallholder farmers and other farmers within the project area are expected to benefit from the project.

Said Mawelu: "The

objective of Phase I is to provide access to reliable irrigation and drainage services, secure land tenure for smallholder farmers and strengthen management of wetlands and protected areas in the Shire Valley.

"Phase I covers the area from Chikwawa North

to the edges of Lengwe National Park and phase 2 covers the area from South of Lengwe National Park along the main road to Bangula South."

Asked what crop will be grown under the scheme, Mawelu said

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Nankhumwa speech points to DPP infighting

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STAFF REPORTER

Governing Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) vice-president (South) Kondwani Nankhumwa yesterday condemned his fellow party members for spreading lies and fuelling infighting within the party.

Nankhumwa, who is also Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, was speaking in Chikwawa where President Peter Mutharika was launching the K167 billion Shire Valley Transformation Programme.

Upon his arrival from the United Kingdom (UK) where he attended the inaugural UK-Africa summit in January,



PHOTOGRAPH: ABEL IKILONI, MANA

Nankhumwa: This behaviour is worrisome

Mutharika also condemned political posturing in the party, telling some "camps" to stop canvassing for leadership and rather wait for a convention.

But Nankhumwa's speech yesterday indicated the divisions still exist despite Mutharika's call for tolerance within the party leadership.

Speaking in Chichewa in a speech monitored on taxpayer funded Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) Television, Nankhumwa said the party members need to put their differences aside and stop character assassination if they are to win the fresh election, claiming to be one of the targets of people that do not wish him well within the party.

He said: "This behaviour among party members is worrisome. For instance, they faulted the speech I made at Njamba [Freedom Park], thinking I want to join Malawi Congress Party [MCP] or UTM [Party]. They are creating all sorts of things against me on social

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MEC hires SA lawyers for presidential poll case

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she was not aware of how much the international legal team will cost the taxpayer to defend the May 2019 presidential election results that the High Court of Malawi sitting as the Constitutional Court (ConCourt) nullified on February 3 2020.

But a document bearing the name of the South Africa-based law firm—Mboweni Maluleke Inc Attorneys—shows that the contract sum is \$788 500 (about K600 million), half of which has to be paid in advance on or by March 13 2020.

Further authenticating the legal hires is a letter purported to be from Attorney General Kalekeni Kaphale to Umodzi Hotel Limited in Lilongwe dated March 11 2020 that shows a team of four lawyers—Dumisa Ntsebenza, SC, Elizabeth Makhanani Mere, Gideon Phalatshe and Caphus Mboweni arrived in the country on Sunday, March 8, in preparation for the case.

Reads the letter in part: "The above named lawyers arrived in the country on Sunday, March 8 2020 to assist in the preparation of the appeal case on behalf of the Malawi Electoral

Commission. They checked into Presidential Hotel."

The letter—copied to MEC chairperson, Malawi's Secretary to the Treasury and Phalatshe—further asks Umodzi Park to allow the lawyers to pay for their lodgings later as government was working on "procurement protocols".

"It had been their hope that before their departure tomorrow [Thursday], they would have been paid their deposit fee and would use the sums to settle hotel bills. Unfortunately, there have been delays in the finalisation of the



PHOTOGRAPH: NATION

Wrote Umodzi Hotel: Kaphale

procurement protocols for their legal services and it is only yesterday evening that my office received affirmative word from

the office of the Director of Public Procurement that all the procurement protocols are complete and successful," reads Kaphale's letter further.

When contacted yesterday, Kaphale declined to comment, saying he will no longer speak on any matter related to the elections case.

However, the agreement document indicates that the South African lawyers are hired for the following tasks: merit determination, advice, preparation and prosecution of the appeal case.

It reads in part: "The

agreement secures our services on a priority basis at an agreed fee of \$788 500 for the duration of the litigation process in the above-mentioned appeal matter, until same is brought to finality and or as the parties may agree to the extension of the term."

And Malawi Law Society (MLS) has applied to the Chief Justice for admission of practice for two of the four lawyers; Ntebeza, SC, and Makhanani Mere. The admission is for the presidential election case.

A letter signed by MLS honorary secretary Martha

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