

Weekend NATION
COMMENT

Cabinet bloated

President Lazarus Chakwera's 32-member Cabinet list announced this week is bigger than his July 2020 maiden team by one, confounding critics who have been agitating for a leaner but more effective team.

A smaller Cabinet team has become more desirable because of the country's poor economic state brought about, among other things, by the Covid-19 pandemic. A leaner team would have enabled government to save money for the much-needed drugs and hospital equipment to save lives.

There is no disputing that a Cabinet reshuffle is something the President should have done in December last year as per his own promise to drop non-performing members and bring in more effective people by the turn of 2022.

What we have seen in the new team is that some members who were best thought left out have just been moved around. Some lucky ones are still in, albeit demoted. This should be a warning to them that next time they don't perform according to script, they will be thrown out.

The gender-balance, well aligned to Section 11(1) of the Gender Equality Act, 2013, is definitely an improvement over the previous Cabinet team. But the Act does not mean that female Cabinet members should be less than their male counterparts. With no evidence that male Cabinet members are more effective than their female counterparts and with many qualified women and the country's female population tipping that of males, the best Cabinet gender combination is 50-50, as gender activists have been advocating for. Going forward that is what we should be hoping for.

All said, we congratulate all Cabinet appointees and wish the team the best. Their job is cut out for them and there is no honeymoon for them. ■

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Cyclone Ana affects \$223m SVTP in Chikwawa

MARTIN GELA JNR
CORRESPONDENT

Cyclone Ana has damaged part of the infrastructure for the multi-billion kwacha Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP) in Chikwawa District.

Speaking in an interview on Thursday, SVTP engineer Martin Chizalema said the roads to the site where they are constructing the intake have been rendered impassable after Mwambezi Bridge and some parts of the Chikwawa-Kapichira road were washed away while the damage to Majete Road compelled them to use drones for preliminary damage assessments.

He said apart from using the drones, engineers from the project, the contractor, and the consulting engineer, KRC, walked to the site to make a physical assessment. The assessment is ongoing and recovery measures are being discussed to ensure resumption of works.

Chizalema said: "The flooding that took place at Kapichira Dam affected our infrastructure. The excess water that was coming through the Shire River completely washed away the dyke which is supposed to drain the river course for the Shire River.



Part of the damaged area after the overflow



PHOTOGRAPHS: MARTIN GELA

Chizalema: Cyclone Ana has affected us

"Because of the washing away of the dyke, the flow went straight to our intake structure, thereby also washing away the coffer dam which is supposed to protect the construction works at the intake. As a result, one of the newly-constructed wing walls collapsed because of excess sedimentation from

the water."

He said the intake foundation is intact although there is some damage to the right-wing wall and the siphon works which have shifted.

"The main canal which is almost completed is intact with very minimal damages; the flume has not been affected, two bridges along the canal are intact and crosses have not been affected," he said.

The engineer said the project team met with officials from Electricity Generation Company (Egenco), the contractor and the consultant to map the way forward in terms of recovery. They have agreed to first repair the roads to allow access to the dam and repair the Kapichira Dam.

The first phase of the project covers 52 kilometres from the intake at Kapichira Dam to Lengwe in Chikwawa District and it is expected to be completed by December 2023. The intake of the main canal is being constructed by Conduril Egenharia while Sinohydro will construct the main canals for 46 kilometres.

The first phase of SVTP is being funded by the World Bank, Africa Development Bank, the Global Environment Facility, the Opec Fund for International Development and the Malawi Government to the tune of \$223 million.

Once completed, 43 370 hectares are expected to benefit about 223 000 farmers in Chikwawa and Nsanje. ■

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drafting in four ministers as well as five deputies. Out of the nine fresh brains in the Cabinet seven are members of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP).

The casualties are Felix Mlusu, who was Minister of Finance, Ulemu Msungama (Youth and Sports), Roy Kachale, son to former president Joyce Banda (Industry), Kezzie Msukwa (Lands) and business tycoon Rashid Gaffar (Mining). The President has also fired Chrissie Kalamula Kanyasho who was deputy minister of Health.

Chakwera has brought into his cabinet People's Progressive Movement leader and Neno South legislator Mark Katsonga Phiri who is the new Minister of Trade

and Industry, a combination of two portfolios which were previously separate entities.

The President has also entrusted Dowa North East (MCP) legislator Sam Kawale to head the Ministry of Lands, replacing the Chitipa East (MCP) MP Msukwa who the President said he had fired over his alleged connection to a corruption case.

Other newcomers are MCP treasurer general and Ntcheu Central Parliamentarian Albert Mbwala who will head the Mining Ministry and People's Party secretary general Ibrahim Matola who goes to the Energy ministry.



PHOTOGRAPH: NANTON

Elevated to full Labour Minister: Kamtukule

The new deputy ministers include seasoned politician Harry Mkandawire (MCP vice-president

for the North, who has gone to Defence, Mchinji South West MP (MCP) Deus Gumba will deputise Kawale at Lands while Enock Phale (MCP MP for Salima North West) is the new Deputy Minister of Health.

After some years, Blantyre City East legislator (MCP) John Bande has bounced back in Cabinet as Deputy Minister of Water and Sanitation while little known Monica Chang'anamuno has been assigned to deputise Agness Nyalonje at the Education Ministry.

Chakwera has also rearranged some ministries dropping his vice Saulos Chilima as Minister

of Economic Planning, a portfolio that has now been combined with Finance and will be headed by Sosten Gwengwe.

However, Chilima will remain responsible for Public Sector Reforms, just like the President who remains Minister of Defence.

The President has also created a new ministry responsible for Water and Sanitation to be headed by Abida Mia while Timothy Mtambo's powers have been reduced after removing civic education and his ministry will now be called National Unity.

Chakwera has maintained Lobin

Chakwera appoints ballooned Cabinet