

# Shire Valley project takes shape

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Minister of Irrigation and Water Development Charles Mchacha has commended the contractor of the K175 billion Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP), Conduril, for starting groundwork amid the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak.

The minister, speaking yesterday when he toured the first batch of phase one programme site in Chikwawa District, expressed optimism that the project would be completed on time.

He said: "When President Peter Mutharika launched the programme last month, he said it would move Malawi from rain-fed to irrigated agriculture.

"At the rate the works are going at the site, I am sure that people will benefit from the project soon."

Mchacha also said compensation is going on well as government has already paid out about K1.13 billion to affected people.

On his part, Conduril



Mchacha (2nd R) at the project site

project manager Aires Enosse said works at the project started last month with mobilisation of equipment.

He said they have so far cleared 95 percent of the main canal route.

However, Enosse said Covid-19 has affected construction works as they have just brought in 10 percent of the required equipment. He said they cannot bring in additional equipment because the borders are closed with most countries on lockdown.

"Some of the key people that we need to hire are also not in the country because of the same problems," he said.

SVTP project coordinator Sandram Maweru said they are engaging the contractor to ensure that no time is lost amid Covid-19 pandemic since the first phase is expected to take place within 30 months.

"We are working out a plan to ensure that we don't lose much time because that [losing time] is costly since we might end up spending more than planned," he

said. The SVTP is expected to irrigate 43 370 hectares by extracting water from Shire River at Kapichira Falls and conveying it by gravity through canals to the irrigable area in Chikwawa and Nsanje districts.

The programme seeks to increase agricultural productivity and commercialisation for targeted households in the Shire Valley and to improve sustainable management and utilisation of natural resources. ■

PHOTOGRAPH: MERCY MALIKWA

# Must unveils e-learning innovation for schools

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Malawi University of Science and Technology (Must) has introduced a free e-learning innovation to be used in primary and secondary schools to ensure learning continues amid the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

The innovator, Bennet Kankuzi, says the initiative seeks to level the playing field for learners from different backgrounds.

He said the innovation has been designed to be user-friendly and is available both on the web browser and in form of a mobile application.

He said: "It is a free learning platform that does not require advanced technological knowledge and handsets. It works on a minimum of Android 4, and its interfacing is not very complicated such that anyone who can use social media applications such as WhatsApp can use it."

"We have evidence of the platform being used by teachers from as far as Misuku in Chitipa,



Supports e-learning  
Susuwele Banda

Manyamula in Mzimba District, Phalombe, Neno, Nkhoswe and many other districts and out of these people we have not received any complaints challenging user-friendliness."

In support of e-learning initiatives, last month Minister of Education, Science and Technology, William Susuwele Banda, launched online learning. He signed a memorandum of understanding with mobile phone service providers to complement government efforts to deliver education to learners who are affected due to Covid-19 pandemic.

# Voices are ringing, Malawi to give vulnerable families cash transfers

Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations. - Isaiah 62:10

Former US president Abraham Lincoln once said: "You can fool all the people some of the time and you can fool some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time."

This surely is ringing true for Malawi. It has been a packed week, with leaders from the ruling party and opposition parties making statements on the Covid-19 and other things; the week has also been spiced up with ministers caught on the microphone counting ill-begotten gains and elections monitoring agencies loading the country's voter register with extremely old and extremely young voters. However, amid

all the to-dos, vulnerable Malawian families will get cash transfers.

As Covid-19 reached Malawi, this column advised that all the leaders must speak, underscoring that leaders of big and small entities, ruling or opposition, have captive audiences, and, therefore, their voices are vital in reaching every corner of the country.

First up on the call was the address on Sunday by UTM Party leader, who is also the country's Vice-President, Dr. Saulos Chilima. A well-rounded statement on all current concerns in the hearts of Malawians.

Then Tuesday evening, President Mutharika's address. This was the third time the President spoke to Malawians during the pandemic since April 2.

During a meeting with Public Affairs Committee on Wednesday, the President accused the religious group



WITH JANET KARIM

of not condemning the political violence that has rocked the country for the past nine months. He also talked about his opponents not accepting the election results, triggering violence in the country; and then turned his ire toward the High Court, blaming it for failing to bring justice to the country.

After a 13-paragraph diatribe about what he expects from the group, he told PAC that he has reconstituted the Covid-19 ministerial committee to be Presidential Task Force on Coronavirus, which he said will also have a

continue to crescendo, the pause button is pushed to take in the press conference of MCP president Dr. Lazarus Chakwera, whose presser was enhanced with a presentation on findings on the ongoing voter registration process managed by the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and National Registration Bureau (NRB).

The presentation highlighted the alleged dubious and sometimes outright ludicrous activities by MEC and NRB in the registration process dating back to 2017 and 2018. The presentation showed that NRB and MEC registered people that were born in 1897, some whose sexes changed between the time they were getting the national IDs from the NRB to the time they were receiving their registration certificates from MEC. It also showed that some registered voters were minors or had name

changes.

Who is running this sideshow circus? Malawi has a fresh presidential election in two months. In closing, there are some crucial items for Malawi leadership and Presidential Task Force on Coronavirus to consider. The first is in line with what Dr. Nyengo Mkwandawire said this week: Malawi must be serious in fighting the pandemic. Doctors, nurses, and other hospital officials, militia police, sanitation workers are the frontline workers and the ones at real risk of the pandemic. Secondly, Malawi's natural resources such as *masuku*, *mpinimbi*, and neem trees must be urgently and jealously protected. We should not wake up one day to find these carted off to some distant lands, only to be used as pills and drink portulaca very expensive bottles