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No money for Admarc workers retrenchment

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IMF slashes Malawi's 2022 GDP prospects

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Chakwera hopeful on food security, power supply

By Jameson Chauluka

President Lazarus Chakwera yesterday said Malawi is on course to generating enough power for domestic and industry use as well as attain goals on the food security front.

He said this when he inspected Shire Valley Transformation Programme works, which he described as a game-

changer in the fight against hunger in the country.

The President also appreciated reconstruction works at Kapichira Hydro Electricity Generation Plant, expressing hope that it will be up and running by December this year.

"Nobody is, and in particular I am not, happy with these persistent

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SEEING IS BELIEVING— Chakwera (2nd left) listens as an Engenco official briefs him on progress— Picture courtesy of the State House

GOVT IN FIX ON OMAN WORKERS

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• Yet to formalise ties with country • Tracing proving difficult



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The Bank of the Nation

By **Patience Lunda & Feston Malekezo**

Government in Oman nightmare

Months after some Malawian women claimed that about 300 of them are stuck in Oman and asked the Malawi Government to repatriate them as they are trapped in inhumane conditions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said it is facing challenges to trace the women.

It further indicates that Malawi has no bilateral ties with the middle-eastern country, hence processing of travelling documents is proving to be a problem.

This means Malawians stuck there will have to wait a little longer as the government formalises ties to facilitate their repatriation.

Reports indicate that the closest authorities that can assist the women are based at the Malawi Embassy in Kuwait, but approval for their entry into Oman has not been easy.

The distance from Kuwait to Oman is 1,211 kilometres (km) while the distance from Malawi to Oman is 4,514km.

According to Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson John Kabaghe, tracing the women is proving difficult because many of them used unregistered recruitment agencies and landed themselves in bad working conditions.

He said the development has prompted the government to deploy a delegation of officers that will go to Oman to request that they sign a formal bilateral agreement and then ask the Oman officials to help Malawi rescue the affected Malawians.

Kabaghe then urged Malawians to furnish the ministry with information of relatives who are stranded in Oman so that they can easily be traced.

“We want to engage the Oman government on how to address allegations of labour abuse and to have a formal bilateral agreement. We want to do this.

“However, most of them used unregistered recruitment agencies which has made it hard for us to know how many are suffering but the government will do everything it can to help them,” Kabaghe said.

Meanwhile, the ministry has disclosed that they are receiving support from the International Organisation for Migration to fast-track processes of identifying the victims and repatriating them to the country.

A statement which the Malawi Human Rights Commission released yesterday, signed by chairperson Scader Louis, calls upon the

government to ensure that victims of human trafficking stuck in foreign countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Oman are brought home safely.

The statement has further asked the government to “investigate and prosecute agents” facilitating human trafficking as they seem to have been left unchecked for a long time.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, most of the Malawians are being ill-treated at their workplaces as they are not allowed to rest while others work overtime without being paid.

Meanwhile, labour relations commentator Shakespeare Sesani has cited high levels of employment as one of the factors contributing to the movement of Malawians

to countries where their labour rights are abused.

“There are a lot of people who are trapped in unemployment in Malawi; as such, all they want is to secure a job. The second thing is low pay. People are looking for greener pastures but, sadly, they cannot find them here in Malawi. The alternative is going outside the country.

“However, we need more awareness on scams that are happening. Most of the people who are falling prey to such scams are the graduates. We need to intensify sensitisation campaigns to address the problem,” he said.

Recently, Labour Minister Vera Kamtukule said some of the women trapped in Oman travelled illegally.

She, however, expressed hope that, through meetings that Malawi’s officials have initiated on the matter, a lasting solution to the problem will be found.

Development projects impress Chakwera

FROM FRONT PAGE

electricity blackouts. At a time we are targeting 1,000 megawatts by 2025, we ended up losing the generation capacity we had due to Cyclone Ana. I specifically asked the Egenco [Electricity Generation Company] team [about] when the Kapichira plant will be up and running and I am convinced that it will be ready by December,” he said.

Egenco Chief Executive Officer William Liabunya told Chakwera that, under phase one of construction works, opening of the water channel is at 90 percent while repair of spillway gates is at 40 percent.

On the Shire Valley Transformation Project, Chakwera said this is the type of long-term investment which Malawi needs for sustainable development and food sufficiency, which are some of the goals in the Malawi 2063 vision.

Chakwera said subsidies with no exit strategy will not take the country anywhere as it will continue crying out for help every time it is faced with disasters.

“Malawi has to wean itself from donor dependence but that requires all Malawians to make painful sacrifices for the greater good. It requires patriotism, not putting personal selfish interest by stealing public resources allocated to investments like the Shire Valley Transformation Programme. Long-term sustainable investments which go beyond our life expectancies are key to the realisation of our aspirations. When completed, the Shire Valley Transformation Programme, which covers 43,570 and is the biggest in this side of Africa, will turn Malawi into a food basket and a real economic hub,” he said.

By **Mandy Pondani**

No money for Admarc workers retrenchment

The government says it does not have readily available funds to finance the retrenchment exercise at the cash-strapped Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (Admarc), a month-and-a-half after it was shut down.

Admarc Head of Administration and Human Resources Ethel Zilirakhasu has said in a circular to all Admarc employees on October 11 2022, that the exercise will be done in phases and that all affected members of staff will get their retrenchment packages.

Last week, Zilirakhasu told the Parliamentary Committee on Commissions, Statutory Corporations and State Enterprises that the exercise will cost about K8.9 billion.

But Secretary to the Treasury McDonald Mafuta Mwale said in a written response to our questionnaire that the Ministry of Finance is targeting the mid-year budget review to see how the Admarc retrenchment budget would be slotted in.

“Yes we got the figure of K8.9 billion. It’s



MAFUTA MWALE— Yes, we got the figure of K8.9 billion— File photo

currently not in the budget as you would expect. So we will have to look at our numbers during the mid-term budget review and have Parliament’s approval,” Mwale said.

He said the Treasury is in talks with the Ministry of Agriculture, whose minister Lobin Lowe shut down the corporation on

August 31 2022, to ensure that the restructured Admarc will be based on a business model that will ensure financial sustainability and self reliance.

Mwale said the country needs a well-functioning Admarc and that time has come to restore the corporation glory.

“We, as Treasury, will make sure that any public resources invested in Admarc are based on [a] sound business model that will safeguard value for money,” he said.

Zilirakhasu has said in her circular that retrenchment is part of the restructuring process following a functional review carried out in 2018.

She has said some of the positions will be abolished and new ones might be created ahead of a fresh recruitment exercise.

“As a result of this restructuring, the company intends to retrench all its employees and will ensure that all retrenchment procedures are followed. The retrenchment exercise will be carried out in a phased manner.

“After retrenchment, recruitment will be based on the new structure. Former employees of Admarc will be accorded an opportunity to apply

and compete for positions they have relevant qualifications, experience and clout in,” her communication reads.

Zilirakhasu said in earlier interviews that they plan to complete the retrenchment and recruitment exercise by March 2023, so that the State-owned grain trader starts on a new slate.

After shutting down the corporation, Lowe sent on forced leave all the 4,687 workers on its books.

Later, the now-dissolved board of directors, led by Alexander Kusamba Dzonzi, announced that it would be laying off all of the employees, a departure from the earlier plan of firing 3,122 in order to remain with just 1,565 at the establishment.

Dzonzi lamented the purported lack of corporate culture within Admarc, fraud syndicates and inefficiencies, among other things.