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APM touts Shire Valley agriculture programme

BY JUSTIN MKWEU

PRESIDENT Peter Mutharika has said the Shire Valley Transformation Programme, which he launched yesterday in Chikwawa North, will help move Malawi from rain-fed to irrigated agriculture.

"With this programme, we are steadily moving from our dependence

on rain-fed to irrigation agriculture. The Shire Valley Transformation Programme is a game-changer. In the first phase, we will develop over 43,000 hectares. For this phase, we are investing K175 billion. This money is already available.

"When we complete phases 2 and 3, we will have put more than

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LAUNCHED THE PROGRAMME—Mutharika—Picture by Abel Ikiloni, Mana

IT'S MCP/UTM VS DPP/UDF

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• MCP calls off demos



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BY AUDREY KAPALAMULA

Mtambo, others bail ruling today

CHIEF Resident Magistrate, Violet Chipao, has reserved her ruling to today afternoon on the bail application of Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC) leaders who are in police custody.

HRDC Chairperson Timothy Mtambo, his deputy Gift Trapence and member MacDonald Sembereka are answering four counts of soliciting others to shut down all State residences contrary to section 124 of the Penal Code.

Their appearance before the court yesterday attracted heavy presence of police officers who manned the premises while controlling the crowd that had gathered to follow the case.

Nevertheless, the crowd that was detained outside the fence, cheered when the accused made their way to the court.

In the chamber, State prosecutor Nepier Chafikana indicated that they will be ready with the files for hearing in 15 days.



STILL IN CUSTODY—Trapence (left) and Mtambo—Picture by Emmanuel Simpokolwe

as investigations that are underway would last for five days.

Lead counsel for HRDC, Khwima Mchizi, who was in company of Bright Theu, applied for bail on basis that it is a right of the accused.

Chafikana, however, submitted to the court that there is likelihood that the accused will commit another offence.

"Soon after the arrest of Mtambo, the police gave him a chance to talk to

his supporters, and in his address, he indicated that even while in custody, they will shut down the State houses," he said.

He added that the objection is to protect witnesses from their

influence whom he claimed the accused are familiar with.

Chafikana also said keeping them in custody will ensure the safety of the accused from the public.

"Their acts are not pleasing some quarters of the people and they may take the law into their own hands, so it will be to their own advantage," he said.

Mchizi brushed off the arguments and said police should not think on behalf of the supporters.

"This is a democratic country and the Constitution has set standards giving the police the mandate to protect its people. If the police know the quarter of the society which has evil plans against the accused, it is their duty to provide

protection," he said.

Immediately after the court had adjourned, Mtambo complained to his legal team about physical discomfort which purportedly emanated from the vehicle that had ferried him.

The development forced the team to demand a change of the vehicle and Mtambo warned against any evil plans against him.

"If anything happens to my life, someone has to be responsible," he said.

Drama also ensued as HRDC members detained other police vehicles, demanding that all the accused should be ferried in one vehicle. This was after Sembereka was nowhere to be seen around the court premises.

Reports indicated that he had already been taken away in another vehicle.

Sembereka and Trapence were arrested on Sunday while Mtambo handed himself to Lilongwe Police Station on Tuesday after the police had obtained a warrant of arrest over their planned demonstrations on March 25 2020.

BY SERAH CHILORA

It's MCP/UTM vs DPP/UDF

MALAWI Congress Party (MCP) and UTM have lived up to expectations of their followers after finally officially announcing the formation of an electoral alliance ahead of the May 19 2020 fresh presidential election following Constitutional Court's judgement on February 3 2020.

The two parties have sealed the alliance, effectively making it the rival of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and United Democratic Front (UDF) union which was officially announced late last month.

In the February 3 judgement, the court clarified that the majority required for one to win the presidency means that a candidate must attain 50 percent-plus-one of the total valid votes counted, as opposed to a simple majority which Malawi Electoral Commission (Mec) has been using to determine the winner.

The court then went ahead to order Parliament to come up with relevant legislation to operationalise the 50 percent-plus-one arrangement.

The august House passed electoral reforms bill which await President Peter Mutharika's assent alongside Public Appointment Committee (Pac) call to fire the Jane

Ansah-led panel of Mec commissioners after deeming them, during assessments, incompetent to manage the fresh election scheduled for May 19 2020.

In the May 21 presidential election, whose results the court nullified, Mutharika was deemed to have garnered 38 percent of the votes cast followed by MCP president Lazarus Chakwera (35 percent) and UTM's Saulos Chilima (20 percent). UDF leader Atupele Muluzi earned five percent.

The alliance by MCP and UTM comes when pressure from the two parties' followers had been mounting for them to go to the polls as one entity.

In a statement issued yesterday, co-signed by UTM secretary general Patricia Kaliati and publicity secretary, Joseph Chidanti Malunga, the party says the two parties will unveil the deal on March 19 2020 at Bingú International Convention Centre in Lilongwe.

UTM says it has entered into the alliance after "appreciating the undoubted importance of unity among all Malawians, irrespective of political persuasions, to the attainment of this country's development goals."



TO UNVEIL ALLIANCE—Chilima (left) and Chakwera—Picture by Emmanuel Simpokolwe

However, the statement has not disclosed who will lead the alliance. Likewise, DPP and UDF have not announced their torchbearer but Mutharika has twice during public rallies said he was ready to stand for the presidency.

"The party's president and State Vice-President, Rt. Hon. Dr Saulos Klaus Chilima has been mandated to conclude the final details of the alliance agreement on behalf of the party," UTM's statement reads.

MCP publicity secretary, Reverend

Maurice Munthali, said they were happy with the alliance.

"We are welcoming the response from our colleagues because we issued a statement that MCP is for the alliance and we gave powers to our president and there was a committee to that effect.

"Now that UTM has issued this statement, we thank God; we can confirm this alliance is real. This is what Malawians were expecting and this will put Malawians on the right rail," he said.

Chakwera competed in the May 21 polls as MCP torchbearer with Sidik Mia as his running-mate whereas Chilima had Michael Usi as the running-mate.

Meanwhile, MCP has called off demonstrations that were scheduled for today to avoid being in contempt with the ongoing case at the Supreme Court of Appeal. Chakwera had earlier announced the demonstrations in protest against what he called the government's failure to respect rights of people.

APM touts Shire Valley agriculture programme

From front page

100,000 hectares under irrigation in Chikwawa and Nsanje. Once completed, this will be probably the biggest agriculture irrigation scheme in Southern Africa," Mutharika said.

He hailed the World Bank, African Development Bank (AfDB), Opec Fund for International Development, Nigerian Trust Fund and Global Environmental Facility for supporting the programme financially.

Speaking earlier, AfDB Acting Country Manager, Eyerusalem Fakisa, said the project was in line with the bank's strategy of turning agriculture into the driver of development.

"AfDB is partnering the World Bank and Malawi Government in a very transformational manner which changes the way agriculture takes place in Malawi and the Sub-Sahara region," Fakisa said.