

MACRA issues TV licences

By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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Malawi Communication Regulatory Authority (MACRA) has taken three years to deny 30 plus applicants of television operating licences and only gave the licences to President Bingu wa Mutharika. Only four radio licences and four television licences were issued.

President Mutharika's tribal grouping Mulhakho wa Alhomwe was given a radio licence alongside Maziko, Usisya Community and Galaxy which is allegedly owned by President Mutharika.

MACRA director general, Charles Nsaliwa made the licence issuance announcement on Friday, 4 November 2011 and said the licence awardees will roll out immediately.

The announcement which was made during a meeting the regulator had organised to meet media managers only sparked an angry reaction from the audience among the applicants of radio and television licences.

Owner of Zodiak Broadcasting Station (ZBS), Gospel Kazako whose company also applied for a television licence had no kind words for MACRA in the manner it handled the process.

Kazako told MACRA during the meeting, that while waiting patiently all these years, the station did not manage to get a broadcasting license.

"Now that you have not given us the licence we say you are being unfair to young people out there whom we could have employed," said Kazako, who revealed that over 250 people were to be employed by the television station.

Kazako said they hope that maybe they will be considered next time.

BNL Times, publishers of *The Daily Times*, *Weekend Times*, *Malawi News* and *Sunday Times* who put in a bid, equally expressed disappointment when they were not issued with licenses.

Managing director of BNL Times, Leonard Chikadya said that if *The Sunday Times* had they been awarded a television licence, they would have rolled out what would have been the country's first independent national TV station.

"We are extremely disappointed because we were pinning our hopes on becoming the first to roll out an independent television station," he is quoted as saying.

Chikadya said that his company had submitted a comprehensive tender document to MACRA which took a copious amount of time and resources to put together.

"We have been networking with international and independent networks in anticipation of being awarded the licence," Chikadya said, "This was going to give the opportunity to the company to maximise the synergy we have and to match with some of the leading media houses in Africa, like the Nation Group in Kenya who also own newspapers, a radio and a television station."

Like Kazako, Chikadya also said all was not lost and his company was still hoping MACRA would issue them with a licence during the second phase.

"As Times Group, we are determined to introduce an independent and professional television station whenever the opportunity arises," Chikadya emphasised.

Television licences were also issued to Channel for All Nations (CAN), Africa Bible College (ABC) and Gateway.

MACRA has placed a tight lid on who is behind Galaxy, however sources at the State House say that this is president Mutharika's venture. The president has shown desire to establish a media empire although his initial attempt never gave him the desired results. He established Guardian Publications Limited (GPL) which was set to become a daily but it is now failing to break even, six years after it started.

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