

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Madagascar Monthly Briefing March 2021

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#### Madagascar Summary 18 March 2021

*President Andry Rajoelina (2019-present) faces pressure from the opposition as hundreds of anti-government protesters take to the streets of Antananarivo, protesting the government's mismanagement of Covid-19 funds. The rally marks the first authorised opposition protest since the presidential elections in 2018. Covid-19 cases are on the rise, with more than 100 cases registered every day, and the government is reintroducing restrictions to curb the spread. Restrictions include reinstatement of the Bataillon d'intervention spéciale (BIS) (special intervention batallion), composed of military doctors and staff, to oversee the situation. A United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report says the number of child marriages in Madagascar is increasing due to Covid-19 developments. The Southern African Development Community supports Madagascar's claim to Les îles Éparses (the Scattered Islands), which is disputed with France.*

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#### Opposition takes to the streets...

Tension between President **Andry Rajoelina** (2019-present) and the opposition is growing. Hundreds of anti-government demonstrators took to the streets of the capital, **Antananarivo**, on 6 March, protesting the government's **Covid-19** response and denouncing its mismanagement of funds intended to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Main opposition party **Tiako I Madagasikara (TIM)** (I love Madagascar) led the protest, and TIM spokesperson **Me Hanitra Razafimanantsoa**, the elected official to the 1<sup>st</sup> district of the capital, addressed around 1,000 demonstrators from a stage saying the Malagasy population has not benefitted from the Covid-19 aid.<sup>2</sup> The opposition and anti-government protesters accuse the government of embezzling \$600m in donations to Madagascar to fight the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> Razafimanantsoa claims:

*"We have been victims of exclusion... None of us have been able to benefit from this aid."*<sup>4</sup>

Antananarivo prefect **General Angelo Ravelonarivo** gave authorisation for the 6 March rally, the first opposition protest authorised since the presidential elections in 2018.<sup>5</sup> Ravelonarivo said he gave the authorisation "*in the name of democracy*", to listen to minorities and respect freedom of opinion.<sup>6</sup> However, Ravelonarivo warned protesters that they needed to show restraint and avoid incitement to hatred. Authorities deployed heavy military and police presence at the protest and flew a drone over the crowds to monitor the event.<sup>7</sup>

The opposition was likely hoping for a larger turnout, with Razafimanantsoa saying "*we await your arrival in great numbers*",<sup>8</sup> but the protest is a significant development signalling a strengthened opposition. The protest march and the mobilisation of the **Miara-manonja** movement in February brought together an opposition coalition of some 20 parties around TIM known as **Rodoben'ny Mpanohitra ho an'ny Demokrasia eto Madagasikara (RMDM)** (the opposition for democracy) (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar February 2021*).

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<sup>1</sup> Seychelles News Agency, 7 Mar 2021

<sup>2</sup> Seychelles News Agency, 7 Mar 2021

<sup>3</sup> Seychelles News Agency, 7 Mar 2021

<sup>4</sup> Seychelles News Agency, 7 Mar 2021

<sup>5</sup> Seychelles News Agency, 7 Mar 2021

<sup>6</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 6 Mar 2021

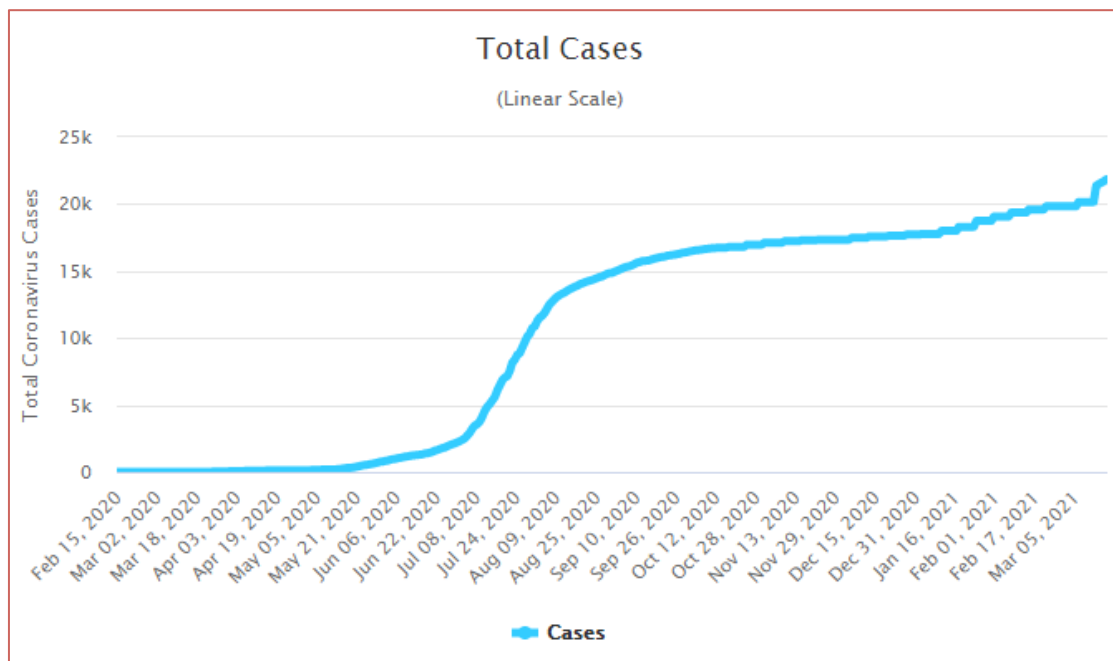
<sup>7</sup> Seychelles News Agency, 7 Mar 2021

<sup>8</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 6 Mar 2021

The authorisation of the protest is also a positive development in Madagascar's democratic environment. As recently as July, former communications minister **Harry Laurent Rahajason** was detained for criticising the government's handling of the Covid-19 response, and in October was sentenced to three years in prison (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar October 2020*).

### ... as new restrictions aim to curb rising Covid-19 cases

The protests against the government's handling of Covid-19 funds comes against the background of an increased rate in new infections. Between 27 February and 13 March the public health ministry recorded 1,327 new Covid-19 cases and 29 Covid-19 related deaths. As of 18 March, the health ministry had recorded 21,826 cases of Covid-19 in Madagascar's population of approximately 28 million, with 337 deaths and 20,670 recoveries.<sup>9</sup> The **Analamanga** area of Antananarivo is the epicentre of the pandemic in Madagascar and continues to record the highest number of new cases, with 101 of 173 new cases (58%) recorded on 17 March.<sup>10</sup> **Diana** in the north, **Boeny** in the west and **Atsinanana** in the east have recorded the next highest numbers. The health ministry announced it would broadcast the evolution of the pandemic daily instead of weekly "for the sake of transparency", given the currently higher infection rates.<sup>11</sup>



### Total Coronavirus Cases in Madagascar<sup>12</sup>

The government announced the return of restrictive measures to curb the spread of the virus following a cabinet meeting on 17 March.<sup>13</sup> Gatherings of more than 200 people are now prohibited and tourism from high-risk countries is suspended. The government has reinstated the **Bataillon d'intervention spéciale (BIS)** (special intervention batallion), composed of military doctors and staff, to oversee and assist with monitoring of patients.<sup>14</sup> The BIS was discontinued in September amid decreasing Covid-19 infections. The government will once again distribute **CVO**, the national herbal drink made from the artemisia plant and meant to limit the spread of the virus, to the population.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Worldometer Covid-19, accessed 18 Mar 2021

<sup>10</sup> TVM, 17 Mar 2021

<sup>11</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 15 Mar 2021

<sup>12</sup> Worldometer Covid-19, accessed 18 Mar 2021

<sup>13</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 18 Mar 2021

<sup>14</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 18 Mar 2021

<sup>15</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 18 Mar 2021

The government says it will continue to rely on CVO until it has more information about the vaccines used across the world. Speaking on state-owned television channel **Télévision Malagasy (TVM)** on 16 March, public health minister **Jean Louis Rakotovo** said the government is not refusing Covid-19 vaccines but is awaiting more research on their effectiveness and safety.<sup>16</sup> Madagascar had the opportunity to take part in the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**-led **COVAX** global initiative for access to the Covid-19 vaccine for poorer countries and areas, and the opposition has denounced the government's hesitation to participate in the initiative. Civil society organisations have encouraged public discussion on the matter,<sup>17</sup> and the government may be forced to resort to a new strategy to avoid further opposition rallies.

**United Kingdom (UK)**-based data access project **Our World in Data** claims the actual number of Covid-19 cases may be higher than recorded due to limited testing in the country, with only 5,800 people tested in the two-week period between 27 February and 13 March.<sup>18</sup> The testing showed that 23% of people tested positive, and with higher testing numbers the active cases of Covid-19 could increase significantly.<sup>19</sup>

Covid-19 restrictions continue to dampen the country's economic outlook. The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** representative in Madagascar, **Marc Gérard**, said Madagascar has been particularly hard hit by the drop in tourism and trade:

*"The economic crisis is severely affecting Malagasy people in a country where social safety nets are very thin."*<sup>20</sup>

Despite these challenges, Gérard praises Madagascar for demonstrating resilience in falling back on subsistence farming. The IMF is currently in the process of negotiating a new aid programme to Madagascar through the **Extended Credit Facility (ECF)** for 2021-2024, which should be confirmed by the end of March.<sup>21</sup> The outcome of the new ECF will be important for Madagascar's socio-economic development, as the **World Food Programme (WFP)** estimates that almost 70% of the population lives in poverty on less than \$1.90 a day.<sup>22</sup> The drought in the southern regions of the country (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar November 2020-February 2021*) continue to affect food supply and water access, with chronic malnutrition now estimated at 42%.<sup>23</sup>

### Child marriages on the rise ...

In its most recent report "*COVID-19: A threat to progress against child marriage*", published on International Women's Day on 8 March, the **United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)** says the number of women married below the age of majority (18) in Madagascar has increased as a result of pandemic-induced hardship.<sup>24</sup> According to UNICEF studies, 81% of respondents reported an increase in the incidence of child marriages, which now stands at 44.4%. The economic fallout from Covid-19 restrictions combined with the drought has forced households to reduce expenses and increase family income through collecting dowries.<sup>25</sup> The rate of minority-aged marriages is above 50% in south and west of the country, which are experiencing drought (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar January 2021*). Countrywide, 13% of women are married below the age of 15.<sup>26</sup> Malagasy law prohibits marriage of minors below 18 years old.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 15 Mar 2021

<sup>17</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 15 Mar 2021

<sup>18</sup> Our World in Data, 18 Mar 2021

<sup>19</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 15 Mar 2021

<sup>20</sup> The Africa Report, 19 Feb 2021

<sup>21</sup> The Africa Report, 19 Feb 2021

<sup>22</sup> WFP, February 2021

<sup>23</sup> WFP, February 2021

<sup>24</sup> UNICEF, 8 Mar 2021

<sup>25</sup> UNICEF, 8 Mar 2021

<sup>26</sup> UNICEF, 8 Mar 2021

<sup>27</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 8 Mar 2021

### ... as activists highlight asymmetrical benefits of extractive industry

Alongside these developments, there has been an increase in women-led movements against the asymmetrical benefits of the extractive industry in the country.<sup>28</sup> UK-based **Business and Human Rights Centre**, the **Danish Institute for Human Rights** and international **OpenGlobalRights** write that local and indigenous communities, spearheaded by the women-led collective **Centre de Recherches et d'Appui pour les Alternatives de Développement-Océan Indie (CRAAD-OI)** and **Femmes en Action Rurale de Madagascar (FARM)**, have protested that mining licences continue to benefit transnational companies and the Malagasy state, but not the local communities that the extractive industry affects.<sup>29</sup>

The mining sector continues to grow in Madagascar. Graphite is claimed to have the potential to become Madagascar's "new gold" as global demand for electric vehicle batteries surges (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar February 2021*). Although mining in Madagascar has been identified as a possible accelerator of national GDP and socio-economic growth, the CRAAD-OI and FARM movements highlight the threat that mining activities pose to indigenous communities such as the **Mikea** people and their way of life.<sup>30</sup> Anti-mining activists note that local communities continue to live in poverty with limited access to education, medical care and public services, while mining companies and other mining sector stakeholders profit.<sup>31</sup>

### SADC supports Madagascar in sovereignty dispute with France

The **Southern African Development Community (SADC)** has stated its support for Madagascar's claim to **Les îles Éparses** (the Scattered Islands). The Malagasy government is disputing the possession of the islands, which include the **Glorious Islands, Juan de Nova, Europa and Bassaes da India**, with **France**.<sup>32</sup> SADC announced its support for Madagascar during its latest council of ministers meeting on 15 March.<sup>33</sup>

Negotiations between President Rajoelina and French president **Emmanuel Macron** (2017-present) began in 2019. In May 2020, the French government submitted its intention to create a nature reserve on one of the Glorious Islands through a public consultation,<sup>34</sup> signalling it has no intention of giving up its possession. The **African Union (AU)** showed its support for Madagascar's claim in December 2020, but negotiations are currently at a standstill. It is now up to the Malagasy government and President Rajoelina to capitalise on the support from SADC and AU to continue the negotiations with Madagascar's former colonial power.

<sup>28</sup> OpenGlobalRights, 24 Feb 2021

<sup>29</sup> OpenGlobalRights, 24 Feb 2021

<sup>30</sup> OpenGlobalRights, 24 Feb 2021

<sup>31</sup> OpenGlobalRights, 24 Feb 2021

<sup>32</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 15 Mar 2021

<sup>33</sup> Africa News, 15 Mar 2021

<sup>34</sup> Madagascar Tribune, 15 Mar 2021

## Planner

2023 **(Madagascar)** Potential presidential elections.

## Chronology

12 Mar 2021 **(Africa)** *AfDB*. Multinational financial institution **African Development Bank Group** forecasts **African** economies to rebound by 3.4% on an average in 2021, following an average contraction of 2.1% last year;

11 Mar 2021 **(Africa)** *Times*. Group of 40 charities in **Africa**, including, **Amnesty International** and **Christian Aid**, slam a move by richer members of the **World Trade Organisation** to block a push by some 80 developing countries - led by **India** and **South Africa** - to waive its **Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property** agreement rules on patents;

3 Mar 2021 **(Africa)** *Africa Global Funds*. **Pan-African** infrastructure developer and operator **ARISE Industrial Services** acquires 35% stake in trader of environmental certificates in **Africa**, **Aera Group**, based on a valuation of €28.5m (\$34m);

2 Mar 2021 **(Africa)** *Irish Times*. **London Stock Exchange**-listed **Tullow Oil** to ask shareholders to vote on 18 March over the \$180m sale of its two **African** reservoirs, in **Gabon** and **Equatorial Guinea**, which will cut spending by around \$10m;

1 Mar 2021 **(Africa)** *Creamer Media's Engineering News*. **Africa Energy Indaba** panel, moderated by **Standard Bank** renewable energy head **Rentia van Tonder**, highlights that a lack of financing remains a major prohibitor for power generation project development in **Africa**;

18 Feb 2021 **(Africa)** *Africa Global Funds*. **South Africa**-based **African Alliance Asset Management** partners with social investment manager and advisor **Tshikululu Social Investments** to offer global investors **Thrive Africa** an impact investment offering for **Africa**.

### About Africa Risk Consulting:

**Africa Risk Consulting (ARC)** is a pan-African consulting company that provides timely, relevant information and advice that enables its clients to take informed investment decisions and to safeguard their reputations.

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