

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Madagascar Monthly Briefing April 2024

Madagascar Summary 24 April 2024

Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI) (electoral commission) on 16 April releases the final candidate lists ahead of the 29 May Assemblée Nationale (national assembly) elections. Seven cabinet ministers who are contesting the election resign as mandated under Malagasy law. The pro-President Andry Rajoelina (2019-present) coalition, Isika Rehetra Miaraka amin'i Andry Rajoelina (IRD), successfully removes national assembly president Christine Razanamahasoa from her position. A senior delegation attends the annual World Bank Group spring meetings between 14 and 20 April, highlighting Madagascar's dependence on foreign financial assistance. The passage of Tropical Storm Gamane kills 19 people.

Final candidate list reveals a showdown between coalitions

The **Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI)** (electoral commission) on 16 April released the candidate lists for the upcoming 29 May **Assemblée Nationale** (national assembly) election.¹ The 163-seat national assembly comprises members elected from both single-member and dual-member constituencies.

The finalised list confirmed that the upcoming election will primarily be contested between three electoral coalitions. The largest of these is the pro-President **Andry Rajoelina** (2019-present) coalition, **Isika Rehetra Miaraka amin'i Andry Rajoelina (IRD)**. IDR leads a larger, less formal grouping, referred to as the **Coalition for the Presidential Majority (CMP)**. The CMP comprises the core IRD members as well as non-IRD parties which supported Rajoelina in last year's presidential election.²

The largest opposition coalition contesting the 29 May election is the **Firaisankina Platform**. This new five-party alliance was announced in **Antananarivo** on 23 February and comprises the country's largest opposition party, **Tiako I Madagasikara**, the **Hery Vaovao ho an'i Madagasikara (HVM)**, **Tsara, Tahafina**, the **Antoko Politika Madio (APM)**, and the **Pro Siteny** movement which backs **Toliara MP Siteny Randrianasoloniaiko** (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar Mar 2024*).³

However, in a development that will irritate the Firaisankina Platform's de facto leader, former president **Marc Ravalomanana** (2002-2009), a second opposition coalition is also contesting the legislative elections called **Kôlekitifa an'i Malagasy**.⁴ This smaller opposition grouping comprises the **Malagasy Miara Miainga (MMM)**, the **Anjomara sy Rivo-baovao (ARB)**, the **Malagasy Tonga Saina (MTS)**, the **Firaisankinan'ny Tia Tanindrazana (FTT)**, and **FMI Malagasy** parties.

Although the Kôlekitifa an'i Malagasy coalition will be less impactful than the Firaisankina Platform, it will still split the opposition vote and increase the likelihood that the IRD retains a dominant majority in the national assembly.

Ahead of the election, the outcome appears to be more of a question of how large the IRD's majority will be rather than if Rajoelina's supporters will lose control of the legislature. The Firaisankina Platform is only contesting 68 out of the available 163 seats and the Kôlekitifa an'i Malagasy has only

¹ CENI, 16 Apr 2024

² L'Express, 19 Mar 2024

³ L'Express, 24 Feb 2024

⁴ Midi Madagasikara, 16 Mar 2024.

fielded a total of 16 candidates.⁵ In contrast, the IRD has put forward a candidate in nearly every seat race. Accordingly, the opposition will be relying on independent candidates with strong localised support to overperform in this election in order to limit the scale of the IRD's victory.

Ministers resign ahead of election

The finalisation of the candidate lists also triggered the clause under Madagascar's electoral laws mandating that any cabinet minister contesting the election must resign from the council of ministers. As such, seven cabinet ministers submitted their resignations on 17 April namely,

- Higher education and scientific research minister - **Andriamanantena Razafiarison**;
- National education minister - **Marie Michelle Sahondrarimalala**;
- Technical education and professional training minister - **Lalatiana Rakotondrazafy**;
- Population minister - **Haingo Elisette Fomendraza**;
- Communication and culture minister - **Augustin Andriamananoro**;
- Youth and sports minister - **André Haja Resampa**;
- Interior minister - **Justin Tokely**.⁶

Rajoelina subsequently assigned these portfolios to other members of the council of ministers on an interim basis. The fact that he opted for incumbent ministers to temporarily oversee two portfolios for the duration of the election campaign indicates that Rajoelina intends to reappoint these individuals back to their portfolios after the election and as such, minimal disruptions are expected at the impacted government departments.

The finalisation of the candidate lists will enable CENI to proceed with other essential electoral preparations, most notably, the printing of the electoral lists. CENI confirmed on 23 April that it had begun printing the ballot papers in **South Africa** and that a team from CENI and the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is in that country overseeing the process. The ballots are being printed in South Africa at the urging of the UNDP as Madagascar lacks the capacity to produce ballots that meet the requisite security standard.

National assembly president removed

In a development creating further political intrigue ahead of the upcoming legislative election, **Christine Razanamahasoa** was removed as national assembly president following the IDR parliamentary caucus' filing of a legal petition with the **Haut Cour Constitutionnelle (HCC)** (constitutional court) on 27 March.⁷ The IRD caucus claimed that Razanamahasoa's willingness to engage with the opposition presidential candidates ahead of the November presidential election and her call for the election to be delayed violated the official position of the IRD of which she was a member.⁸

In a significant move, the HCC ruled in favour of the IRD's petition and dismissed Razanamahasoa as a national assembly deputy and, by extension, as the president of the lower house. This ruling has profound consequences for Malagasy democracy as it essentially confirms that the national assembly president cannot be an impartial arbiter but must adhere to their political party's position. Accordingly, this will undermine the fair operation of the legislature and weaken Madagascar's democracy.

Razanamahasoa formally handed over her position to **Jean-Jacques Rabenirina** who will act as interim national assembly president until a new assembly is sworn in after the 29 May elections.⁹ Rabenirina is one of the longest-serving members of the national assembly and a senior IRD legislator.

⁵ L'Express, 22 Apr 2024

⁶ News Mada, 18 Apr 2024

⁷ L'Express, 19 Apr 2024.

⁸ 2424, 28 Mar 2024

⁹ L'Express, 19 Apr 2024

For her part, Razanamahasoa will now contest the 29 May election as an independent candidate seeking to retain her seat from the **Ambatofinandrahana** district.¹⁰

This is a remarkable development as Razanamahasoa has been one of Rajoelina's oldest and most steadfast allies. Her removal as both national assembly president and a deputy underscores the fact that the Rajoelina and the IRD will not tolerate any dissent even from long-serving senior allies.

Madagascar participates in World Bank Group meetings

Director general of the treasury **Andry Rajaofetra** led a delegation comprising **Banky Foiben'i Madagasikara (BFM)** (central bank) governor **Aivo Andrianarivelo**, and foreign affairs minister **Rafaravavitafika Rasata** to attend the Spring meetings of the **World Bank Group** in **Washington D.C. (United States)** between 14 and 20 April.¹¹ These annual meetings involve delegates from countries across the globe holding consultations with senior executives from both the World Bank (including its various subsidiaries) and the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**.

In her meeting with the World Bank, Rasata requested that the global financial institution provide increased assistance for Madagascar to address the challenges presented by climate change, including support for both Madagascar's green transition as well as funding to boost the country's climate resiliency.¹² Madagascar is considered to be highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change; the country is susceptible to worsening extreme weather events such as tropical storms and droughts. At present, Madagascar does not have the financial wherewithal to fund the necessary climate resilience and reforestation projects.

In another important meeting, Rajaofetra and Andrianarivelo discussed Madagascar's ongoing engagement with the IMF, specifically Madagascar's current **Extended Credit Facility (ECF)** arrangement with the IMF. Madagascar's current 40-month ECF arrangement commenced in February 2021 and is valued at \$312m. This meeting in Washington D.C. occurred just prior to the IMF staff mission arriving in Madagascar on 22 April. This team will remain in the country until 3 May conducting the final review of Madagascar's progress under the ECF programme.

As the current ECF arrangement is nearing its conclusion, Madagascar's delegation to Washington D.C. was eager to continue discussions on a new arrangement. The IMF appeared open to this prospect but noted that a final determination will be dependent on the findings of the now ongoing review.

Madagascar is heavily dependent on external funders such as the IMF and the World Bank to finance its budget, institutional reforms, and developmental agenda. This reality was highlighted at these recent meetings and the urgency with which the government is pursuing a new ECF arrangement.

Cyclone causes death and displacements in northeastern regions

Highlighting Madagascar's aforementioned concerns about climate change intensifying weather phenomena, the passage of **Tropical Storm Gamane** killed at least 19 people between 25 and 28 March.¹³ The cyclone began impacting northeastern Madagascar on 25 March but made landfall on 27 March in **Sava** region as a category 2 tropical storm. The cyclone proceeded inland impacting the **Sava, Diana, Sofia, Analjirofo, and Antsinanana** regions before being downgraded to a tropical depression and eventually dissipating.

According to the **Bureau National de Gestion des Risques et des Catastrophes (BNGRC)** (national bureau of risk and disaster management), over 90,000 people were negatively impacted, approximately 24,000 of whom were displaced. In addition, to these widespread displacements and the 19 confirmed fatalities, the cyclone also caused substantial infrastructure damage. The most notable example of such damage was the collapse of the **Mahavavy** bridge in **Ambilobe** (Diana region). This bridge is located on the **RN6** national road and its collapse resulted in substantial travel

¹⁰ CENI, 16 Apr 2024

¹¹ Madagascar Tribune, 17 Apr 2024

¹² L'Express, 20 Apr 2024

¹³ 2424, 2 Apr 2024

disruptions along this road which connects **Antsiranana** (Diana region) in the north to **Ambondromamy** (**Boeny** region) in the south. Authorities eventually erected an emergency temporary bridge by 10 April allowing travel along this essential route to resume.

The widespread damage caused by Tropical Storm Gamane highlights Madagascar's vulnerability to such weather systems and the increasing intensity of the **South-West Indian Ocean** tropical storm season which typically occurs between November and May. These storms regularly cause substantial structural damage and widespread displacements. Negative impacts are exacerbated by Madagascar's poor resiliency these events due to a lack of sufficient infrastructure such as proper storm drainage. The high number of displacements and widespread flooding resulting from such storms also increase health risks in the country including the threat of the spread of diseases such as cholera, dysentery, malaria, dengue fever, and the plague.

Planner

29 May 2024 **Madagascar Assemblée Nationale** (national assembly) elections;
16 Oct 2024 **Madagascar** municipal elections (anticipated);

Chronology

18 Apr 2024 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Midi Madagasikara*. The resident **United Nations Development Program (UNDP)** representative **Natasha van Rijn** issues veiled criticism of the Malagasy government noting that the country "*is not on the right track in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals*";

18 Apr 2024 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. The **Direction Générale des Impôts** (general tax director) announces that it has issued notices to third-party holders in an effort to recover outstanding tax arrears;

17 Apr 2024 **Toamasina (Madagascar)** *Midi Madagasikara*. Council of ministers approves fifty senior civil servant posts including ten appointments to the upper ranks of the **National Police**;

17 Apr 2024 **Toamasina (Madagascar)** *Midi Madagasikara*. Council of ministers dismisses the governors of the **Bongolava**, **Ihorombe**, and **Atsinanana** regions as all three incumbents are candidates in the upcoming **Assemblée Nationale** (national assembly) elections;

17 Apr 2024 **Toamasina (Madagascar)** *Madagascar Tribune*. Council of ministers temporarily relocates to Toamasina;

11 April 2024 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. Digital development, digital transformation, posts and telecommunications ministry reveals that **United States (US)** satellite internet provider **Starlink** will soon commence operations in Madagascar;

11 Apr 2024 **Ankazobe (Madagascar)** *News Mada*. Two soldiers are killed in a shootout with bandits in **Antanitri**, **Analamanga** region;

10 Apr 2024 **Toamasina (Madagascar)** *2424*. Three **Chinese** naval ships dock in Toamasina on a goodwill visit while en route to the **Gulf of Aden**;

9 Apr 2024 **Mananjary (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. A child with albinism is kidnapped in **Vatovavy** region highlighting fears over the growing illegal trade in human body parts in Madagascar;

6 April 2024 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. Security officials announce that 21 suspected kidnappers were killed during a gendarmerie operation in **Analamanga** region's **Ankazobe** district;

3 Apr 2024 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Leigh Day and Co*. A group of villagers living near the **QIT Minerals Madagascar (QMM)** mine in **Fort Dauphin**, which is 80% owned

by **Australia**-headquartered **Rio Tinto**, launches a legal claim against Rio Tinto over claims of pollution from the mine that has led them to ingest high levels of uranium and lead;

31 Mar 2024 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *2424*. Madagascar falls six places to 97th out of 176 countries on the **Heritage Foundation's 2024 Economic Freedom Index**;

25 Mar 2024 **Ankazobe (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. Bandits kidnap three people in the **Manontanitsiloza** area of **Ankazobe (Analamanga region)**;

23 Mar 2024 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Midi Madagasikara*. Madagascar is ranked 123rd out of 143 countries on the **World Happiness Report** compiled in partnership between **Gallup**, the **Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre**, and the **United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network**;

22 Mar 2024 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *L'Express*. **Madagascar Airlines** general director **Thierry de Bailleul** reveals that the airline has regained its standing with the **International Air Transport Association (IATA)**;

21 Mar 2024 **Toamasina (Madagascar)** *Midi Madagasikara*. Council of ministers discusses a proposal to close and sell Madagascar's consulate in **Cape Town (South Africa)**;

20 Mar 2024 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Madagascar Tribune*. Madagascar remains a member of the **Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)** despite receiving a comparatively low score of 67 out of 100;

20 Mar 2024 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Madagascar Tribune*. Council of ministers announce a 10% minimum wage increase for the private sector.

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