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Madagascar Summary 8 September 2021

President Andry Rajoelina (2019-present) appoints a new cabinet with 32 members, prioritising gender equality and regional balance. Prime minister Christian Ntsay retains his position and is appointed as interim minister for mines, replacing Brice Randrianasolo who resigns after four days in the position following public backlash. New finance minister Rindra Hasimbelo Rabarinirinarison removes director general of the treasury Ihaja Ranjalahy and implements administrative reform. The Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI) (independent electoral commission) issues a call for nominations for CENI representatives. President Rajoelina attends the Rencontre des Entrepreneurs de France (REF) (meeting of entrepreneurs from France) and courts prospective investors from Morocco and Belgium. South Africa-based supermarket chain Shoprite Holdings confirms an exit from Madagascar and Ugandan markets. State-owned Air Madagascar reports it suffered a \$70m loss before the Covid-19 pandemic arrived in Madagascar. President Rajoelina and the council of ministers announce the end of the 17-month-long national state of health emergency.

Rajoelina appoints new cabinet...

President **Andry Rajoelina** (2019-present) has appointed a new cabinet, prioritising gender equality and regional balance.¹ In a televised address on 15 August, Rajoelina justified the dismissal of the previous cabinet on 12 August on the basis of poor results and announced a new cabinet of 32 ministers, vice ministers and secretaries of state.² The new cabinet was sworn in at the presidential palace in **Antananarivo** on 15 August, with Rajoelina cautioning the new ministers:

“Ministers are not made to sit in the office and indulge in theories. Ministers must go out to meet the people [...] The population will closely follow the activities of members of the government.”³

Ten ministers survived the reshuffle, including prime minister **Christian Ntsay**, despite reports in January that Rajoelina was searching to replace him (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar February 2021*) and rumours in May that Ntsay was eyeing a diplomatic position with the **United Nations (UN)**.⁴ Amongst those reappointed are the ministers of defence, security and communication, considered to be key supporters of the president following a failed assassination attempt in August (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar August 2021*).⁵ However, Major General **Andriatsarafara Andriamitovy Rakotondrazaka** replaces General **Florens Rakotomahanina** as head of the **National Gendarmerie** (police force).⁶

Prime minister Ntsay will serve as interim minister for mines and strategic resources, replacing **Brice Randrianasolo**, who served as minister for mines and strategic resources for just four days.⁷ Randrianasolo resigned on 19 August following public outcry against his appointment.⁸ Public discontent cited charges of fraud brought against Randrianasolo in 2018, which were later dismissed.⁹

¹ [Xinhua](#), 16 Aug 2021

² [Prensa Latina](#), 16 Aug 2021

³ [NewsMada](#), 16 Aug 2021

⁴ [Africa Intelligence](#), 6 May 2021

⁵ [Seychelles News Agency](#), 17 Aug 2021

⁶ [NewsMada](#), 19 Aug 2021

⁷ [NewsMada](#), 24 Aug 2021

⁸ [Nasdaq](#), 20 Aug 2021

⁹ [Mining Weekly](#), 20 Aug 2021

Randrianasolo labelled the outcry “*online slander*” and threatened to file legal action against the complainants:

*“This decision [resignation] has been rough, but it proves to be the most reasonable and in the interest of the nation.”*¹⁰

Of Rajoelina’s 32-member cabinet, 11 are women, including new crafts minister **Sofia Ratsiraka**, daughter of former president **Didier Ratsiraka** (1975-1993 & 1997-2002).¹¹ **Rindra Hasimbelo Rabarinirinarison**, formerly a senior official at the finance ministry and head of the **Commission Nationale des Marchés** (public procurement commission), is the new finance minister.¹² Rabarinirinarison announced a series of targets at a handover meeting with her predecessor on 17 August, including:

- Continuing to restructure the administration;
- Digitising financial management systems; and
- Improving procedures.¹³

Rabarinirinarison also mentioned potential reforms to laws governing public procurement and public financial management, including halting “*financial drift*” of civil servants’ salaries and pensions awarded to state employees.¹⁴ Rabarinirinarison noted that a quarter of the Madagascar budget is now allocated to salaries and pensions of public sector employees.¹⁵ Her observation is in contrast to Rajoelina’s decision to enlarge his cabinet to 32 from the 22 members he appointed in January 2019 under “*austerity measures*” implemented when he secured the presidency.¹⁶

The new council of ministers ruled on 18 August to dismiss director general of the treasury **Ihaja Ranjalahy**.¹⁷ It is unclear whether the suspension indicates an investigation into the use of public finances. However, Ranjalahy’s suspension halted all payments from the treasury, with the exception of public sector salaries and pensions.¹⁸

Patrick Rajoelina (no relation to President Rajoelina) will serve as minister of foreign affairs. Patrick Rajoelina was appointed to advise the president on diplomatic and matters of economic cooperation in April (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar May 2021*).¹⁹

... as CENI issues call for representative nominations

The **Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI)** issued a call on 1 September for nominees for the independent electoral commission, as current members’ mandates will expire at the end of October.²⁰ CENI issued letters to bodies including the presidency, senate, national assembly, high constitutional court, supreme court, bar association, order of journalists and other civil society organisations inviting the nomination of representatives:

*“The permanent office of the Ceni, 60 days before the end of its mandate, invites each entity provided for in article 15 [of law 2015-020 [19 Oct 2015]] to designate or elect its representative for the next mandate.”*²¹

The new commission will serve for six years. Responsibilities will include the administration of the 2023 presidential elections and legislative elections, which are anticipated to be hotly contested.

¹⁰ [Mining Weekly](#), 20 Aug 2021

¹¹ [Seychelles News Agency](#), 17 Aug 2021

¹² [Reuters](#), 16 Aug 2021

¹³ [Orange](#), 17 Aug 2021

¹⁴ [Orange](#), 17 Aug 2021

¹⁵ [Orange](#), 17 Aug 2021

¹⁶ [Reuters](#), 24 Jan 2019

¹⁷ [NewsMada](#), 19 Aug 2021

¹⁸ [NewsMada](#), 19 Aug 2021

¹⁹ [Seychelles News Agency](#), 17 Aug 2021

²⁰ [Haut Cour Constitutionnelle](#), 1 Sep 2021

²¹ [NewsMada](#), 31 Aug 2021

President Rajoelina won the 2019 presidential election with 55.7% of the vote and was met with post-election riots in Antananarivo and allegations of electoral fraud.²²

While speaking at an event in **Paris (France)**, President Rajoelina promised on 28 August to extend the vote to the Malagasy diaspora.²³ Madagascar law currently does not allow citizens abroad to participate in legislative or presidential elections without returning to the island.²⁴ Rajoelina indicated that a consular registration system and issue of a *carte consulaire* (consular card) aims to permit participation in the electoral process.²⁵ The Madagascar diaspora in France is estimated to be 150,000; however, few Malagasy citizens are registered with their local consulate.²⁶

Amendments to electoral law in Madagascar ahead of the 2023 election may prove controversial and be plagued by delay. The **Haut Cour Constitutionnelle (HCC)** (high constitutional court) has several pending cases from mid-August, including **Loi n°2021-024**, which will create a **Fonds Souverains Malagasy (FSM)** (sovereign fund of Madagascar).²⁷

Rajoelina attends meeting of French entrepreneurs ...

La Rencontre des Entrepreneurs de France (REF) (meeting of entrepreneurs from France) hosted President Andry Rajoelina as its guest of honour in Paris on 24 August.²⁸ Rajoelina noted Madagascar's economic potential for francophone entrepreneurs, particularly in the area of public-private partnerships.²⁹ Rajoelina highlighted Madagascar's economic assets, from minerals and mining resources to human capital, as well as the geopolitical benefits of Madagascar's position at the 'crossroads' between the **Indian Ocean, Africa, Asia and Europe**. Rajoelina outlined priority sectors including:

*“renewable energies, agro-business to achieve food sufficiency or industrialisation to produce locally everything that the Malagasy people need in their daily life”.*³⁰

The REF reception struck a warmer note than recent state-to-state relations between France and Madagascar, which saw President Rajoelina reject an invitation to attend President **Emmanuel Macron's** (2017-present) Africa summit for post-**Covid-19** recovery on 18 May (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar June 2021*).³¹

Following the REF meeting, the French embassy in Madagascar launched the **Entrepreneurship-Service de Coopération et d'Action Culturelle (SCAC)** programme, calling for internship applications from 30 August to 3 September in Antananarivo and for applications from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to apply for financial and administrative support.³²

President Rajoelina met with President Macron on 27 August, issuing a joint statement of their commitment to the development of Francophonie economies.³³ Macron stated that France remains a committed partner to Madagascar, tackling humanitarian challenges in the South and delivering 200,000 Covid-19 vaccinations to Madagascar in mid-August.³⁴ Macron urged for the work of the joint-commission on the **Îles Éparses** (scattered islands) be allowed to continue, highlighting the role France will play as president of the French speaking international organisation of Indian Ocean islands, the **Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)**, where France intends to champion issues of the blue

²² [France24](#), 2 Jan 2019

²³ [Madagascar Tribune](#), 30 Aug 2021

²⁴ [Madagascar Tribune](#), 30 Aug 2021

²⁵ [Madagascar Tribune](#), 30 Aug 2021

²⁶ [Madagascar Tribune](#), 30 Aug 2021

²⁷ [Haut Cour Constitutionnelle](#), 18 Aug 2021

²⁸ [La Rencontre des Entrepreneurs de France](#), 24 Aug 2021

²⁹ [NewsMada](#), 25 Aug 2021

³⁰ [NewsMada](#), 25 Aug 2021

³¹ [al Jazeera](#), 18 May 2021

³² [NewsMada](#), 23 Aug 2021

³³ [Elysee](#), 27 Aug 2021

³⁴ [Elysee](#), 27 Aug 2021

economy and maritime security.³⁵ Macron's mention of maritime security is of particular interest, as France recently facilitated the introduction of **Rwandan** troops to tackle the **Islamic State in Mozambique (IS-M)** insurgency in **Mozambique**.³⁶

Whilst in France, Rajoelina also courted potential investment from **Belgium** and **Morocco** at the REF meeting, noting

*"The histories ties that unite our two countries [Madagascar and Morocco] could also be a lever for industrial and economic cooperation."*³⁷

Shoprite announces exit from Madagascar...

South Africa-based supermarket chain **Shoprite Holdings** has indicated a desire to sell its assets in Madagascar and **Uganda**. Announcing the company's annual results on 7 September, chief financial officer **Anton de Bruyn** confirmed that the supermarket chain has received two binding offers for operations in Madagascar and Uganda.³⁸ Shoprite posted a 20.3% rise in annual earnings for the financial year, despite the sale and closure of operations in **Nigeria, Kenya, Madagascar** and **Uganda**. Shoprite was allegedly in talks with **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**-based **Majid Al Futtaim Group (MAF)** in May to acquire Shoprite's assets in Uganda.³⁹ MAF are partnered with France-based supermarket **Carrefour** as its representative in the **Middle East, Egypt** and **East Africa**.⁴⁰

Shoprite entered the Madagascan market in 2002 through the purchase of Madagascar-based supermarket group **Champion** and in 2020 owned ten stores across the island.⁴¹ **United Kingdom (UK)**-based market research company **Euromonitor International** senior analyst **Peter Hirst** noted a decline in footfall in Shoprite's East African outlets as consumers opted to buy locally, saving money and insulating themselves from the economic downturn sparked by the Covid-19 pandemic.⁴²

Will anyone save Air Madagascar..?

The closure of Madagascan airspace and borders to foreign nationals under the national **État d'urgence sanitaire** (state of health emergency) since March 2020 has exacerbated Madagascar's financial crisis and placed pressure on national airline **Air Madagascar**.⁴³ Chairman of the board **Mamy Rakotondraibe** announced on 3 September that the airline had "suffered a loss of about \$70m, before the health crisis [March 2020]".⁴⁴ Rakotondraibe called on the government and the airline to implement a recovery plan, to make Air Madagascar an asset for the Madagascan state, rather than an "Achilles heel".⁴⁵ Newly appointed minister for transport, tourism and meteorology **Tinoka Roberto** announced upon his appointment in August a plan to revive the struggling national air carrier, but has yet to reveal details of the plan.⁴⁶

Air Madagascar was forced to postpone repatriation flights of Malagasy after the French government requisitioned the **Air Caraïbes A330-200** aircraft the Malagasy government had chartered as part of France's deployment of its Covid-19 health operations in the **West Indies**.⁴⁷ The Malagasy repatriation mission was scheduled to take place on 22-23 August, but the **United States (US)** evacuation of **Afghanistan** impacted the availability and affordability of charter aircraft.⁴⁸ Air

³⁵ [Elysee](#), 27 Aug 2021

³⁶ [News Central](#), 6 Sep 2021

³⁷ [NewsMada](#), 25 Aug 2021

³⁸ [Reuters](#), 7 Sep 2021

³⁹ [Uganda Standard](#), 31 May 2021

⁴⁰ [Majid al Futtaim](#), accessed 8 Sep 2021

⁴¹ [Afrikanheroes](#), 28 Aug 2021

⁴² [Afrikanheroes](#), 28 Aug 2021

⁴³ [Madagascar Tribune](#), 4 Sep 2021

⁴⁴ [Madagascar Tribune](#), 4 Sep 2021

⁴⁵ [Madagascar Tribune](#), 4 Sep 2021

⁴⁶ [Madagascar Tribune](#), 4 Sep 2021

⁴⁷ [NewsMada](#), 27 Aug 2021

⁴⁸ [NewsMada](#), 27 Aug 2021

Madagascar struck an agreement to charter an **Air Europa Boeing 787-900 Dreamliner** and pushed the repatriation flight to 28-29 August.

State of Emergency ends...

President Rajoelina and the new council of ministers announced on 3 September the end of the national state of health emergency, in effect for 17 months since March 2020.⁴⁹ The presidency posted a statement on its website on 3 September, noting that the state health emergency was no longer required following the successful suppression of a second wave of Covid-19 infections (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar August 2021*):⁵⁰

*"In view of the development of the Covid-19 epidemic in the Republic of Madagascar [...] the number of people infected with Covid-19 has dropped to a minimum."*⁵¹

As of 8 September, Madagascar had registered a total of 42,884 cases of Covid-19 in its population of 26.97 million, with 957 Covid-19-related deaths and 41,311 recoveries.⁵² According to Malagasy newspaper **Tribune de Madagascar**, only five of the 1,500 tests conducted between 1 and 2 September were positive for Covid-19.⁵³

Madagascar joined the **World Health Organisation (WHO)** vaccination access scheme **COVAX** in April after initially opting out of the vaccination programme and instead using a local herbal remedy named "**Covid-Organics**" (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar April 2021*).⁵⁴ As of 6 September, 0.8% of the Madagascan population, 210,666 individuals, have received at least one dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, while 0.3% or 86,090 individuals are fully vaccinated.⁵⁵

The lifting of the state of health emergency is good news for France-based non-governmental organisation **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)** (doctors without borders). MSF issued a statement on 12 August cautioning that it would struggle to continue working in Madagascar while staff were denied entry visas due to Covid-19 restrictions under the state of health emergency.⁵⁶ MSF has operations at 20 sites in the **Amboasary** and **Ambovombe** districts, caring for 6,000 children with malnutrition.⁵⁷ The **United Nations (UN) World Food Programme (WFP)** cautioned Madagascar in June that 400,000 people were at acute risk of starvation, due to increasingly harsh drought conditions (see *ARC Briefing Madagascar June 2021*).⁵⁸ MSF said it had received new visas on 20 August but cautioned that the 'lean season', a period between the end of this year's harvest and the beginning of the next harvest, will begin in October.⁵⁹

⁴⁹ [Bloomberg](#), 4 Sep 2021

⁵⁰ [Linfo](#), 9 Aug 2021

⁵¹ [Presidence Repoblikan'I Madagasikara](#), 3 Sep 2021

⁵² [Johns Hopkins University](#), accessed 8 Sep 2021

⁵³ [Linfo](#), 4 Sep 2021

⁵⁴ [VON](#), 1 Apr 2021

⁵⁵ [Our World in Data](#), accessed 8 Sep 2021

⁵⁶ [Médecins Sans Frontières](#), 12 Aug 2021

⁵⁷ [Médecins Sans Frontières](#), 12 Aug 2021

⁵⁸ [Deutsche Welle](#), 27 Jun 2021

⁵⁹ [L'Express](#), 20 Aug 2021

Planner

2023 (Madagascar) Potential presidential elections

Chronology

4 Sep 2021 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Madagascar Tribune*. Malagasy state-owned **Air Madagascar** chairman of the board **Mamy Rakotondraibe** reveals that the airline suffered a \$70m loss before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, and urges the implementation of a recovery plan;

31 Aug 2021 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *News Mada*. The **Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI)** (independent electoral commission) issues a press release announcing the launch of a members' renewal procedure as some members of the standing committee near a six-year term, inviting the president, supreme court, national assembly, high constitutional court, bar association, order of journalists and civil society organisations to nominate a representative;

28 Aug 2021 **Paris (France)** *News Mada*. President **Andry Rajoelina** meets with Malagasy diaspora in **France** and attends the "*Made in Madagascar*" showcase of Malagasy products at the Madagascar embassy in **Paris**;

25 Aug 2021 **Paris (France)** *News Mada*. President **Andry Rajoelina** is guest of honour and speaker at **la Rencontre des Entrepreneurs de France** (meeting of entrepreneurs from France) in **Paris**;

24 Aug 2021 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Madagascar Tribune*. Prime minister **Christian Ntsay** will serve as interim minister of mines and strategic resources, following the four-day tenure and resignation of **Brice Andrianasolo**;

22 Aug 2021 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *Business Day*. **South Africa's** largest food retailer, **Shoprite**, signals exit from **Uganda** and **Madagascar**, as it focuses increasingly on South Africa;

20 Aug 2021 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Mining Weekly*. New mining minister **Brice Randrianasolo** resigns, citing online "slander" related to charges of fraud against him in 2018;

18 Aug 2021 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *News Mada*. The Madagascan council of ministers rules to dismiss **Ihanja Ranjalahy** as director general of the treasury, suspending all payments from the treasury with the exception of salaries and pensions;

17 Aug 2021 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Seychelles News Agency*. President **Andry Rajoelina** appoints a new council of 32 ministers, retaining **Christian Ntsay** as prime minister;

16 Aug 2021 **Antananarivo (Madagascar)** *Reuters*. President **Andry Rajoelina** appoints **Rindra Hasimbelo Rabarinirinarison** as the new minister of finance;

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