

Newsletter

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Society news

The first Society meeting of 2020, set for 2nd April, was cancelled given the restrictions required to combat the recent coronavirus epidemic. On the assumption that there will be no such restrictions at the time and that it is appropriate to meet then the proposed date for the next meeting will be in the evening of Wednesday 24th June followed by a further daytime event on Saturday 19th October.

Details of this event and other are on our website at www.anglo-malagasysociety.co.uk and on Facebook. The website also has a summary of some of the previous talks for those unable to attend, together with much other useful information. This includes directions to the venue for our meetings, which is the Upper Vestry Hall of St George's Church, Bloomsbury, London WC1A 2HR, which is two minutes' walk from the British Museum.

We shall publish the next newsletter as of June 2020. Please send any material for inclusion as well as any changes in your contact details to the editor Julian Cooke, whose e-mail address is juliancooke@yahoo.co.uk.

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Politics in Madagascar

As in all countries, the spread of the coronavirus Covid-19 has dominated recent events in Madagascar, which moved quickly to contain the threat but has still had to contend with the substantial impact.

At the start of 2020, when the world was a different place, President Andry Rajoelina in his new year address announced an increase of 13% in the pay for civil servants, a move that was seen as likely to help in the fight against corruption if also to contribute to increased demand and therefore prices for key necessities. However, the promise of an extra 65,000 ariary (£15

approx.) to each led to some disputes over entitlement, especially in the education sector, and to criticism on how fully the sums had been distributed.

Rajoelina's predecessor as president, Hery Rajaonarimampianina, used social media to send his own speech from overseas in which he hinted at a political come-back from his poor showing in the elections for head of state. This had seemed to be helped by an accord reached in Paris in December with another former president Marc Ravalomanana, whose TIM party boycotted Rajoelina's speech. Rina Randriamasinoro, their unsuccessful candidate in the mayoral election in the capital, saw his claims of electoral fraud rejected by a tribunal on 9th January and said he would pursue the matter further. The civil society Safidy also said it would appeal to the Conseil d'État on irregularities in the campaign and voting.

The government started in January a recruitment drive for its Plan Emergence Madagascar, which by the end of the month had heard from some 7,850 applicants of whom 6% were reported to hold the required qualifications. The new year also saw the start of work on the refurbishment of the Mahamasina stadium in the capital, a project entrusted to a Chinese construction company, set to cost \$77m and due to finish in time to celebrate the country's 60th anniversary of independence in June.

The final results for the November municipal elections showed the success of the pro-Rajoelina IKK platform, which took six of the provincial capitals, Antsiranana going to an independent. Naina Andriantsitohaina was declared mayor of Antananarivo. Although the platform held twenty-five council seats that was the same as Ravalomanana's TIM leaving the balance of power with five independents. IKK took the four council offices. As part of a commitment to revitalise the city the new mayor gave its 'phantom' employees ten days to resume work or resign, while his efforts to sanitise the capital met with protests from street vendors.

A meeting at the end of January reviewed the various elections held over the previous two years. The head of the Haute Cour Constitutionnelle (HCC) took the opportunity to say that the elections needed to take place for the governors of regions, however defined, in line with the constitution while the electoral commission CENI noted that it was aware of continued concerns over the quality of the electoral list. The president had appointed eleven of the planned twenty-two governors in September and had since increased the budget for each to 5bn ariary.

On 30th January there was a government re-shuffle which saw six of the twenty ministers dismissed ostensibly for having failed to meet the targets set them. Two new posts were created, for a Minister of Health and Sanitation and for a deputy prime minister responsible for new towns, in particular the Tana-Masoandro project. The new Minister of Foreign Affairs was Djacoba Tehindrazanarivelo, in a post that had been empty for four months since the election of Naina Andriantsitohaina as mayor of Antananarivo. The new Minister of Justice, Johnny Richard Andriamahefarivo, had been close to Marc Ravalomanana and later consul-general in Marseilles from 2003 to 2009; he pledged to fight corruption although his predecessor, Jacques Randrianasolo, noted the pressures he had faced to compromise court proceedings.

On 10th February Andry Rajoelina participated in the 33rd summit of the African Union in Addis Ababa, where he held talks with the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, and was congratulated on his efforts to counter malnutrition in the south of Madagascar.

On 12th February two of the vacant eleven posts as governor were filled, for the regions of Vakinankaratra and Vatovavy-Fitovinany, the latter remaining as a single entity for now rather than being split to create a twenty-third region. The government decided not to hold elections for the Senate until the end of the current five-year mandate in 2021, so deferring the proposed reform of the upper house to a reduced number of eighteen senators, two elected by each of the six regions and six to be appointed by the president. In March the Senate countered with a proposal that the number be forty-five, of whom a third would be appointed by the president.

A date remained elusive for the elections for the heads of the *fokontany* or communes, due within three months of those for mayors. The latter part of February saw the creation of a new electoral list, with a surprisingly small increase given the number of people reaching the age of eighteen since the previous edition and with some continued anomalies, which included 110,629 duplications and 1,162,512 voters appearing to have an identical national identification number. The confirmation of these details in early March by Thierry Rakotonarivo, vice-president of the electoral commission CENI, prompted an aggravation of concerns: supporters of the government saw the issue as a move to destabilise it, Ravalomanana called it an electoral scandal that should see recent results cancelled and Rajoelina insisted on the validity of his mandate. The commission's president, Hery Rakotomanana, called for Rakotonarivo's dismissal and he pre-empted this by resigning on 11th March. He said that he had been motivated by the need for transparency; Rakotomanana conceded that the details were correct but said that the defects had not affected any results and called for a co-operative approach.

In mid-February there was an escalation in the series of events relating to the affair of Ludovic Raveloson, the deputy for Toliara who had avoided arrest on charges of corruption; his wife was appointed to deputise but was arrested in turn. In February the anti-corruption body BIANCO reported that three ministers and eighty-one members of parliament had been subject to arrest warrants, with all but one given a provisional release.

The French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, undertook a visit to Mauritius, Madagascar and Mozambique. On 21st February he noted that there would be a second set of discussions on the Iles Eparses, at a date yet to be announced; President Emanuel Macron of France had committed again to the creation of a natural reserve around them further to his visit to Ile Glorieuse in October 2019. M. Le Drian announced funding for education in Madagascar and €240m of financing over four years, half as loan and half a gift, towards the Plan Emergence Madagascar, while taking pains to explain that this had no bearing on the talks. The French government did announce that no further oil exploration would take place, which was one of Madagascar's demands if also in line with a revised French policy from 2017.

An extraordinary session of parliament convened on 4th March to pass formally into law various presidential decrees from 2019. There was tension between Christine Razanamahasoa, the president of the National Assembly, and Rivo Rakotovao, the head of the Senate, which rejected several of the laws (which included still the proposal to reduce its size). The National

Assembly promptly passed all acts by seventy-eight votes to three while the Senate voted against three; it did later approve the decree concerning the recovery of illicit goods on a second reading.

The coronavirus first arose in February when there was some dispute over the position of fifty-two Malagasy students caught in the quarantine in Wuhan, who challenged the assertion from the Malagasy ambassador to China, Jean-Louis Robinson, that he had been liaising with them. Madagascar banned arrivals from China then at end February excluded those from the three other countries that had high reported incidences of the virus, Iran, Italy and South Korea. The eighty-five people who had returned from China before the flight embargo were put under surveillance.

On 10th March the World Bank offered \$3.7m of financial aid as part of a wider package of \$12m, which was intended to help in the sanitation of imports. The council of ministers decided against closing the country's frontiers entirely given the importance of imported food and the difficulty of re-establishing trade. In mid-March, however, the government decided to ban all flights to and from Europe for a period of thirty days from 20th March; regional airports were closed and cruise ships banned from docking. Those arriving before the deadline underwent two weeks of isolation, including a team of Chinese due to work on the national stadium.

On the weekend of 21st March Andry Rajoelina announced the first three cases of the virus, all in people who had arrived from France and who were confined to hospital in Andohatapenaka. The government declared a national emergency for a fortnight under a law of 1991 that would give the president wider powers; he announced the closure of schools and universities while residents of the capital and Toamasina were subject to total confinement for a fortnight. By 23rd March a further nine people had tested positive while the death was announced in France of Dr Jean-Jacques Razafindranazy, who had been working at a hospital in Compiègne. The number of cases increased and there were concerns that crowded conditions in the streets and at food distribution points would complicate the position, as did the fact that certain enterprises including a call-centre continued to operate without safety measures. Some two thousand homeless people were moved to temporary shelters in the capital, where the authorities had to be sensitive about limiting movement for those who needed to find food. On 24th March the central bank injected 420bn ariary (£100m) of cash to support the economy.

By 25th March there had been a further two cases taking the total to nineteen and Rajoelina announced an emergency social package worth 10bn ariary. On 26th March a flight from China brought the first of 100,000 masks and 20,000 testing kits which were a gift from the foundation established by Jack Ma of Alibaba. A number of flights were due to take 3,346 Europeans back to France or to its dominions. The number of cases increased by four and then on the 27th by three, but this included the first apparent case of transmission within Madagascar. On 28th March the Minister of the Interior announced a tightening of measures with controls on the roads and a curfew at night in the capital's region of Anamalanga and in Toamasina; the authorities needed to use tear-gas to disperse crowds and ended temporarily in the capital and other cities the *tsena mora*, a regular distribution of basic foodstuffs. Eleven new cases on the 29th took the total to thirty-seven, with the contact case a tourist guide infected by his client, while Rajoelina himself tested negative.

The celebrations of 29th March were muted, the total cases reached forty-three and the authorities used tear-gas again in incidences arising from the blockading of trunk roads into the capital. By the 30th the first incidences were recorded in Fianarantsoa and Toamasina.

Madagascar has relied to an extent on a somewhat controversial herbal remedy as a cure and there has been a focus on traditional remedies; France 24 carried a report on the topic at <https://www.france24.com/en/20200326-madagascar-anti-virus-brews-sell-like-hot-cakes-in-local-markets>.

Economic and social matters

Finance and aid

The January bonus to civil servants and the campaign against phantom employees highlighted an issue addressed by a new computer system Augure, funded with the help of some €500,000 from the European Union. The system calculated that there were 23,437 such employees out of a total of 187,998 people employed by the state, which paid a total of 2.4bn ariary annually in salaries, equivalent to 29% of its total budget.

In January the EU provided funding of €65m to help to provide better sanitation and water supplies in the capital, which was estimated to be 30% short of its daily need. The EU and the African Development Bank (AfDB) agreed funding of €39.2m to help economic development in the country through improved market access. The IMF agreed a final disbursement of \$43.3m under its credit facility to take the total provided to \$438m. The AfDB released in February \$38.4m of funds as a first phase of its investment to improve electricity supplies, starting with an inter-connect project between the capital and Toamasina. Saudi Arabia provided \$20m to help finance the Mangoky bridge on the RN9, to be the country's longest at 880m and costly, with committed funds already of a further \$45m.

A report from the World Bank made public in February estimated that 5% of aid to the poorest 22 countries (nineteen of them in Africa) had ended up in tax havens, a sum that was calculated as to \$193m for Madagascar.

In February, before the coronavirus crisis, the World Bank had noted positive and encouraging aspects to the economic outlook, including recent growth and reforms as well as a smooth transfer of power, in spite of considerable challenges. The Bank noted the dominance in certain industries that restricted competition and it called for greater investment in education, health and social protection. The government's own expectation under the new Plan Émergence Madagascar was for 7% economic growth by 2023 following plans to invest some \$35bn, half of which it would seek from outside the country.

In March the World Bank released \$100m of funds to help with human development in areas such as health and education. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Russia each provided \$2m of aid for rural development in the south. The World Bank also called on donors to show lenience in terms of debt repayments for poorer countries given the



impact of the crisis; in Madagascar the budget for 2020 included 428bn ariary of which 295bn was principal and 133bn in interest.

Health

In February there were a reported 32 deaths from 81 victims of plague, mostly bubonic.

Reports

Madagascar was ranked 162nd out of 189 nations in the world in the UNDP Development index for 2019. Madagascar was ranked 158th in Transparency International's annual survey, down from 152nd place in 2018 and the lowest position since 2012, which was attributed to a lack of political integrity as well as opaqueness on political financing.

The country scored better in a survey of democracy by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), ranking 85th in the world and in the top ten countries in Africa following the holding of elections and the peaceful transition in its presidency. In February the *Global Power Index 2020* placed Madagascar 29th of 35 countries in Africa and 125th in the world in terms of military capabilities.

In March Madagascar was classified in 13th position among countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in terms of financial inclusion, with only 12% of the population having a bank account compared 94% in the Seychelles and 85% in Mauritius.

In terms of internet speed, however, Madagascar was in March again ranked first among African countries, at twice that of its nearest competitor Kenya, and was 22nd in the world. The cost remains high, however, and in March the government reversed an initial cut in its tax on telecoms.

Climate



The government launched an appeal to help victims of storms in January that caused over thirty deaths and considerable damage in the east of the country, including to important rice paddies in the Boeny region. The rains also led to an increased incidence of malaria and flooding in the capital. The Indian government provided aid including 600 tonnes of rice.

Agriculture

A plan to lease 60,000 ha of land at Bas Mangoky in the district of Menabe to Elite Agro LLC of Abu Dhabi raised concerns linked to the contentious Daewoo deal in 2008. The company, reported to be the largest agricultural entity in the UAE, was expected to produce 350,000 tonnes of rice as well as maize, wheat, soya and more. The National Assembly approved the project in February and the first work was expected to start by June.

In January a workshop considered the use of the Chinese technology to use grass to help to grow mushrooms, established elsewhere and known as *juncao*.

The UN ReliefWeb update at end March confirmed the drought in the south given further abnormally low levels of rainfall since end 2019. It noted sharp increases in the price of maize, cassava and water.

Insecurity

The incidents of bandit attacks, summary justice and kidnappings continued through the first quarter of the year. In January Christian Ntsay, the prime minister, said that the army would continue to have a role in dealing with the issue, while also noting that the institution would need to see reform to enable it to be more effective.

Prisons

In January President Rajoelina offered a reduction in the length of sentences for various categories of prisoner, which allowed the early release of some 1,100 inmates.

Energy

The energy utility JIRAMA remained heavily indebted and loss-making; it reported 800 cases of the theft of electricity or water in 2019, which cost it substantial amounts of income.

Business

The BBC carried a report in January on the entrepreneurial approach of two companies, one which has revived the Karenjy SUV and another that provides AI solutions to businesses; the report is at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/business-51136293/from-suvs-to-ai-investing-in-madagascar>.

Reuters reported in January on the initial success of specialist coffee from Madagascar's Itasy province where the introduction of bourbon pointu plants and the extra benefit of bat spit can see prices reach almost £100/lb; there are details at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-madagascar-coffee/bat-spit-coffee-is-a-hit-with-madagascar-consumers-idUSKBN1ZQ0V3>.

An Omani company, Raysut Cement, announced plans in March to build a new plant with a capacity of 750,000 tonnes pa at Toamasina; the operation was due to be operational in 2022 and to create 150 direct jobs.

In March three second-hand trains were shipped to Toamasina to serve on the Fianarantsoa Côte-Est line.

Tourism

Air Madagascar was reported to be on the brink of ending its agreement with Air Austral even before the coronavirus crisis, which will have had a devastating impact on tourism in the country.

A report in March indicated that the rehabilitation of the Pangalanes Canal was 70% complete on the first stretch from Toamasina but would need to await a revised budget as to funding of the stretch from Mananjary to Manakara.

Minerals and mining

The national gold agency reported in January that official exports had decreased by almost a third in 2019 to 2,423kg compared to 3,051kg in 2018, while informal production continued apace. A report under the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) had indicated that gold exports in 2018 had a value of \$97m with the main markets Dubai, Singapore and Hong Kong.

The state-owned and heavily-indebted chromite company Kraomita Malagasy was reported in January to be struggling, with no benefit from an accord finalised in March 2019 with the Russian firm Ferrum Mining, prompting a search for other partners. Its former director-general, Arsène Rakotoarisoa, was reported to be under investigation in relation to incidences of theft of stock and illegal exports, inter alia.

In early March there were renewed efforts to arrange a full audit of the Rio Tinto ilmenite mine operated by QMM, a review which would be expected to cover operations at the company. Dependent on the audit is a proposed recapitalisation of the mine, under which the Malagasy government, which is a 20% shareholder, would provide \$16m of additional funds.

Sherritt International announced in March that it would not provide any further capital and so would see its residual 12% shareholding in the Ambatovy nickel and cobalt mine it developed pass to its partners Sumitomo and Kores.

Wildlife and conservation

Forests and protected areas

In January Andry Rajoelina launched a campaign intended to plant 60 million trees to mark the country's 60th anniversary of independence, on 40,000 hectares of land prepared for the purpose and using drones in certain areas. The ambitious project started with 1.2m trees in the district of Ankazobe. USAID has helped with funding, as part of a commitment of \$57m to the preservation of forests and biodiversity. In early March the Ministry of the Environment said that 18m had been planted to date on 18,000 ha.

A study of 140 countries published in February from the WWF on Global Futures estimated that Madagascar's GDP would be 4.2% lower up to 2050 if the degradation of its natural resources continued at the same rate as before.

Species



A study led by Thomas Hadjikyriakou published in the journal *Landscape Ecology* in January indicated that the Eleonora's falcon faced threats from the loss of habitat in Madagascar during its migration there from Europe; there are details at <http://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20200113-eleonoras-falcon-faces-deforestation-threat-madagascar-conservation-sardinia-judge>.

Charities and NGOs

Money for Madagascar has launched an appeal to help those in the country vulnerable to the impact of the coronavirus. The pressures on an impoverished nation have been compounded by the economic impact of restrictions while the health infrastructure is modest. MfM will start by providing food and basic medical assistance to the most vulnerable in their own project communities as well as where possible strengthening public information campaigns and also reinforcing sanitation to help protect the communities they serve. Their website has more details including on how to donate at <https://moneyformadagascar.org/>.

In January the MacLean brothers became the fastest trio to row across the Atlantic, in under thirty-six days, and the youngest; by then they had raised over half of their target of £250,000 to support Feedback Madagascar and Children First.