

Madagascar national day

Madagascar, an island of opportunities

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Today, June 26, The Malagasy people will proudly celebrate the 54th Anniversary of regaining their full independence. On this auspicious occasion, on behalf of the people and government of the Republic of Madagascar, the entire staff of the Embassy of Madagascar and myself, I would like to extend my warmest and sincere greetings to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, members of the Imperial family and the friendly government and people of Japan, as well as the Malagasy community in Japan.



I would also like to cordially thank The Japan Times for their always generous cooperation with the embassy. Our heartfelt thanks also go to Sumitomo Co., Toyota Tsusho Co., Takasago Co. and GS Yuasa for their valuable contributions.

People should remember the resolution of the five-year crisis in Madagascar ended in a peaceful and democratic way and our population is now aspiring for a "Madagascar as a Modern and Prosperous Nation." This very important step in our history marks the return of Madagascar to the concert of nations, allowing us to actively participate again on the international stage such as the United Nations, African Union, International Olympic Committee, Southern African Development Community, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

There is now a need for consistent recovery activities in order for Madagascar to avoid the trap of becoming a fragile state. H.E. Hery Rajaonarimampianina, during his inauguration as the new president of

Madagascar, has made strong commitments to the population and international community for the good foundation of real nation building toward the sustainable development of Madagascar. Restoration of the rule of law, fighting corruption, ensuring the security of people and goods and returning trust among partners are the very first priorities. Ensuring a secure business environment and investment are indeed paramount and the motto of the new president. These are Madagascar's new commitments and aspirations that need to be supported by all of our partners and we would hope that Japan can play an important role bilaterally and multilaterally to accompany Madagascar in its development.

Since the establishment of our first diplomatic relations in 1962, Madagascar and Japan have maintained cordial relations and we are now looking forward to leveraging this sustained friendship into the mutual prosperity of our two nations. We particularly appreciate that Japan has stood beside Madagascar and its population during the time of difficulties during the five-year crisis. Unsurprisingly, Japan was one of the first countries to express its appreciation and willingness to cooperate after the election of Rajaonarimampianina as the new president of the Republic of Madagascar on Jan. 25. The presence of the Japanese envoy, H.E. Hirohito Ishihara, parliamentary vice minister for foreign affairs in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, during the inauguration ceremony was well received and deeply appreciated by our population and the president.

Apart from the vast challenges of re-establishing the rule of law, good governance and security insurance in the territory of Madagascar, the inclusive development of Madagascar requires the involvement of all of its citizens in creating a massive employment program notably through



His Excellency Hery Rajaonarimampianina, new president of the Republic of Madagascar

catching up on building basic social infrastructure such as that for education, health, nutrition, water and hygiene.

The prosperous and modern nation that Madagascar aspires to be will be based on the sustainable exploitation of its natural resources and its rich and diverse human resources. First, by setting up a green energy program needed for the economy to grow securely. Second, by revitalizing our agriculture infrastructure as the key pillar to ensure food security and employment for the majority of Malagasy people. Third, by modernizing our strategic in-

frastructure (roads, ports, telecommunications, etc.) for our products to be able to access competitive local and international markets.

According to the new president's vision and the government policy plan, Madagascar would like to count on the strong involvement of the private sector as the engine of the relaunch and the sustainer of our growth. To do this, special programs on private sector development and special efforts on business facilitation will be put in place in order to attract local and foreign direct investment. These will include economic free zones, special economic zones, one-stop shops for investment and one-stop shops for export. Japan and its investors will be hand-in-hand on the forefront as strategic partners of Madagascar to replicate and diversify the mutual benefit and success of the Nickel and Cobalt Ambatovy Project, which is one of the biggest investments by Japan in Sub-Saharan Africa.

If we consider opportunities and prospects, there are thousands, but it should be noted that this is the right time to invest in Madagascar and enjoy this new start. The election of the first president of the Fourth Republic of Madagascar and the desire for a rapid and sustainable development will en-



Six out of eight species of baobab are found only in Madagascar. TSUNEO YAMAMOTO

sure political stability and a secure business environment.

Concretely, the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation and our ministry in charge of mines is an important step in accompanying Madagascar for the sustainable exploitation of its natural resources. Capacity building and the transfer of technology,

but most importantly, the possibility of joint ventures with Japanese corporations will be the centerpieces of this win-win partnership. So I particularly invite Japanese corporations to visit Madagascar more frequently to seize these opportunities.

Beyond all these business opportunities, as the television program BBC Earth has shown, Madagascar is definitely a

country to visit. As an island, the country's nature is highly endemic, with the fauna and flora about 80 percent unique to Madagascar. Especially for Japanese tourists, the Baobab in the southwest region of Madagascar and the three UNESCO World Heritage sites are the most attractive places.

Moreover, Madagascar and Japanese authorities expressed their optimism and willingness to partner to increase Japanese tourists from 4,000 to 50,000 in five years. The creation of a Madagascar-Japan direct flight, which has been under discussion for a decade, could be a lever for growth. The national airline, Air Madagascar, which is already present in Japan, is ready for the development of partnerships with travel agencies and tour operators in Japan.

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