



Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita/REUTERS

The President of Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, appointed a number of new cabinet ministers to fill the posts of the defence, mines and foreign ministers. This appointment was followed by his recent win in the re-election for the highest office in the country.

Mali is the eighth-largest African country with a population of 18 million. It is also the 3rd largest gold producer in the continent. This has led to the development of major investors including Randgold Resources Ltd and AngloGold Ashanti Ltd. Although Mali has experienced a reasonably good inter-ethnic relationship, some hereditary enslavement and bondage relationship exists, as well as the ethnic tension between settled Songhai and nomadic Tuaregs of the north. Due to criticism against the northern population after independence, Mali is now in a situation where both groups complain about discrimination on the part of the other group. This conflict also plays a role in the continuing Northern Mali conflict where there is a tension between both Tuaregs and the Malian government, and the Tuaregs and radical Islamists who are trying to establish sharia law. The pastoral way of life is also under threat. Armed conflict, trafficking and terrorism have made vast areas off-limits. Desertification and climate-induced changes have wiped out grazing areas.

However, even after all these hurdles, Keita was elected in a landslide victory for the second time. The original 33-member cabinet of the Malian Government remained mostly unchanged; although Keita did tweak a couple of posts. The previous Prime Minister, Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga, will maintain his post going forward. But the former mines minister, Tiemoko Sangare, was appointed as the new defence minister. Similarly, the previous defence minister, Tiena Coulibaly, was made the justice minister. Lelenta Hawa Baba Bah, now the mines minister has previously led the National Directorate of Geology and Mines. Her many duties will include overseeing the government's bid to revise the mining code, potentially by reducing the length of operators' exemptions from changes to the fiscal regime. Kamissa Camara will assume the post of foreign minister. She has worked with Keita as his former foreign policy advisor.

Mali has maintained great relations with the Western world, particularly the United States ever since it formed a democratic government in 2002. Even France, in spite of being a former colonial ruler, has a longstanding relationship with Mali. The recent violent episodes, owing to the ethnic violence and deaths of hundreds of civilians has concerned these

superpowers. The spread of vehemence to the neighbouring Niger and Burkina Faso has prompted the US & France to send troops and air power to Mali, a country that has a major desert spread.

The newly elected ministers, as well as the existing cabinet, will join heads with the President to work out lasting solutions for the daily vicious clashes and put a stopper in the pastoralists' war.

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