

Small Island Developing States are in hot water: Here's what the international community must do to help



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THE world's small island developing States (SIDS) are among the most vulnerable countries on the planet. And they are in trouble. Some of them are literally sinking. Or, to be more exact, the waters that surround them are inching higher, threatening to swallow them up.

Those same waters, which for millennia have been their source of food and their channel for transport, is also getting warmer and more acidic, killing fish and coral, and becoming more chaotic in its movements.

SIDS are, in fact, large ocean states: Only 3.5 per cent of the area they control is land, while 96.5 per cent is ocean. The deteriorating state of oceans represent an existential threat to the entire planet and SIDS are at the front-line of this war. If we do not help them turn the tide, then the battle for our future on this planet will be lost.

Island nations face a unique set of challenges due to their small size, remoteness, exposure to natural disasters, and dependence on faraway markets and resources. These challenges are compounded by climate change, volatile global markets and the ongoing repercussions of the pandemic further. The cumulative impact of these challenges undermines SIDS capacity to cope with current challenges, future shocks and crises, and their efforts to build equitable societies.

Next year, in Antigua and Barbuda, the United Nations will convene an international conference on the small island developing States. The agenda gives a sense of the urgency of the problem. It will tackle issues

like climate change, sea-level rise, and biodiversity loss side-by-side with the global debt crisis and rising inequality. The result will be a new 10-year plan of action for SIDS, one agreed between the small island nations and international partners.

We must use the opportunity of the fourth International Conference on SIDS to help these nations overcome the barriers that hinder their progress and potential. It is our responsibility to help them survive this existential crisis thrust upon them by climate change and outdated global-level systems.

That is why this week in Mauritius, we are gathering with the governments from small islands in the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and

South China Seas (AIS) region, to hear firsthand an assessment of regional progress and their priorities for the new plan.

These assessments will be the foundation for a more ambitious, coherent, and effective global response that recognizes the special needs and circumstances of these countries and provides them with adequate means of implementation, including access to finance, data, technology, capacity-building, and trade.

The United Nations is committed to supporting SIDS in their quest for a more resilient and sustainable future. We must remember that the problems that SIDS face today are the ones that the rest of the world must confront tomorrow.



When the Chihuahua roars

You can always tell when a government has overstayed its welcome; except in the case of our government because it was never particularly welcome in the first place. The current prime minister came to power first through a legally acceptable but morally abhorrent arrangement between father and son and consolidated it through a 'system' that allows 28 per cent of the vote of eligible electors (38% of actual voters) to monopolise the national assembly.

What is clear however is that there is a lot of frustration and anger out there and that these are beginning to be heard in-house, slowly but surely. In this context, Ivan Collendavelloo's unexpected bout of anger in parliament should not be dismissed as a backbencher doing the job he is paid to do. That particular form of parliamentary democracy is gone. A totally new culture is in place. Nor should the fact that the anger came out at the same time as the formalisation of the Labour/MMM/PMSD alliance be dismissed as a mere coincidence.

No one is suggesting that Collendavelloo is packing up to leave government. If he had wanted to leave, he would have left immediately after being humiliated in the Saint Louis saga, "on a mere piece of paper" evidence, while his colleagues from the MSM have been getting away with murder. He would have saved his dignity then. It is too late now. Whether he stays or leaves, he is damaged goods and the MSM perfectly knows that.

Besides, the *Mouveman Liberator* only exists on paper now. In parliament, Ismaël Rawoo already has one foot in the MSM and is reaping all the benefits, including state land on the beach. So do not expect him to do anything on "a matter of principle" when he can't afford to. Zahid Nazurally is unlikely to do the honourable thing if his leader resigned either. He has never protested against any of the ills he has seen going on and has systematically voted for all the repressive bills presented without blinking. His occasional 'protests' are restricted to his Facebook page. Every time I have read them, I prayed that he understood what he himself wrote so that the number of people who have made sense out of his posts rises from zero to one.

But Collendavelloo can still contemplate to leave the government perhaps to extract revenge because he can no longer take the frustration which must be gnawing at him, particularly after the support given by cabinet to Manish Gobin and Rajanah Dallah in the Black Label & Stag Party saga, where the circumstances pointing towards their guilt are more than just "a piece of paper". Collendavelloo was let go of for much less. The only way he can do that is by resigning at a most inconvenient time for the government. Which is what former Minister of Finance Vishnu Lutchmeenaraidoo did a few years ago. Like Collendavelloo, Lutchmeenaraidoo spent a few years stewing in frustration and he expressed it every now and then by publicly criticising the government's track record and going to the extent of attacking ministers for bragging about such a poor performance. Then he chose the right time to resign, pushing the government to choose between a very risky by-election and calling general elections at a time it wasn't quite ready for it. It chose the latter.

Collendavelloo has the opportunity to choose that option. The MSM is banking on another budget to dish out more goodies. He can cause a lot of harm by preventing that. The opposition alliance has already been cobbled up and there are signs of fear and unease within the government ranks. A surprise attack may well scupper any ploys the latter might have under their sleeves to appropriate victory by means foul and fair.

So let's see if the Chihuahua is capable of a blood-curdling roar or of only a timid whimper. ■

A third edition of Touria Prayag's book *Provisional Charges: The Untold Human Stories* and her second book: *#BLD: When Mauritius Lost its Bedside Manners* are now available at Librairie *Le Cygne*, *Le Printemps* and all the Bookcourt outlets.

Free, fair, credible and transparent elections

By Michael BELLINGCAT

LIBERAL Democracies are characterised by holding periodic elections organised by independent electoral administrators. Who is eligible to vote, how and when are they registered, is the sanctity of the register and ballot guaranteed, is the electoral process free, fair, credible and transparent, is the electorate not being fooled in the process, are the electoral administrators sufficiently trained to conduct elections and isn't there a risk the electoral process is fraught with irregularities that render it a travesty? And in case of disputes, are they resolved by an independent judiciary expeditiously? These are some of the fundamental issues raised whenever reference is made to liberal democracies. There is consensus among scholars as to what 'liberal democracy' implies and the best summary is probably provided by US expert Larry Diamond in the *Journal of Democracy* 13, No.2, 2006.

According to Diamond, elections are free, fair, credible and transparent when: (a) they are administered by an independent and neutral body; otherwise the quality of the poll may

be compromised as losers may legitimately claim to have been disadvantaged by partisan officers favouring the incumbent as in Belarus, where Lukashenko summoned election officers to decide the % of votes he should win and in Equatorial Guinea where the returning officer was compelled to announce fake results with a pistol behind his back; (b) the electoral administration is sufficiently competent and resourceful to take specific precautions against fraud in the voting and vote counting process. The electoral administrators need to ensure the integrity of the officers recruited for conducting the exercise by appointing 'tried and tested' officers rather than politically tainted nominees; (c) the police, military and courts treat competing candidates and parties impartially throughout the process. In backward societies, these institutions are often instrumented to harass the opposition to ensure the incumbent's victory; (d) contenders all have access to public media. All candidates need to have equal opportunity to address the electorate.

The media shouldn't be seen to favour one party against the rest; (e) electoral districts and rules do not systematically disadvantage opposition. Gerrymandering is a subtle way of redrawing the constituency boundaries to favour one party against another, as in Zimbabwe; (f) independent monitoring of voting and vote counting is allowed at all locations. Specialist teams are allowed to conduct the exercise, over and above foreign observer missions; (g) the secrecy of the ballot is protected. Openness in voting led to exercise of pressure on voters and eventually led to secret ballot in Britain in 1872 and later in the Dominions and Colonies. Its modern version is ballot photocopy as in South Africa, now outlawed; (h) virtually all adults can vote. With the exception of those legally debarred, adults aren't fraudulently disenfranchised; (i) the procedures for organising and counting the vote are transparent and known to all in advance. Stakeholders know beforehand the procedures adopted by the election administrators and there

is no backyard underhand dealings; and (j) there are clear and impartial procedures for resolving complaints and disputes in courts. These are vital adjuncts to enhancing democracy mostly in the Third World where costly election petitions often take years to be resolved.

The above may not be an exhaustive list but it does provide working guidelines as to what one can expect in democracies. If the West together with Australia, Canada and New Zealand come close to the ideal, haven't the newly emerging countries made a travesty of democracy? The conduct of 'free, fair, transparent and credible' elections rests squarely on the shoulders of the countries' electoral commissions.

Unless they take the bull by the horns, elections risk being a charade with gerrymandering, voter suppression, ballot box stuffing and/or swapping, manipulation of vote tally, use of electronic devices and alleged rape of local democracy by foreign powers and mercenary organisations risk being a common feature of Third World Democracy.