

"The MSM's list of scandals is truly baffling: The mishandling of the BAI case, the Rs19 billion Safe City project and the creation of a surveillance state, the generous incentives in terms of tax rebates to promoters of Smart Cities, the leeway given to one betting company in particular and the acute drug problem."

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1976. The advantage is that we will have an honest assessment of what each faction carries in terms of votes but this particular election year is likely to be marked by several below the belt hits. Imagine having completely annihilated your opponent's credibility during the campaign and then entering a pact with it after the results are announced. That could be troubling for the electorate. I would hope that the prospect of a post-electoral alliance would force parties to adopt a more dispassionate stance but this is unlikely.

● **Who is the MMM likely to strike an alliance with should there be no clear majority for any party?**

Impossible to answer that question at this stage. Some days back, the MMM averred that it had no intention of going with the Labour Party (LP) and even less with the MSM. But this could easily change.

● **Some people, including Bérenger himself, predict even more resignations from his party. Who is likely to leave from the pool left at the MMM?**

The MSM seems to be eager to attract anyone and everyone who is ready to cross the floor. Anyone tired of the wilderness in which the MMM is and wishing for some form of involvement if the MSM gains power could make the switch. Those close to power have clearly expressed their shopping list in regressive ethnic terms. The bets are on.

● **The argument of those who have left is in a nutshell: "We can't spend the rest of political life in the opposition if we want to help the country progress". Do you see where they are coming from?**

I cannot put myself in their shoes. I believe they should have tried to reform the party from within or attempted to rock the boat so that the party would no



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longer settle for *koz-kozer* attempts prior to elections. Those who have left on a question of principle are now joining a party that is a fervent adherent of dynasty politics and is neck deep in scandals. In short, I can understand why they are leaving the MMM but cannot understand why they would choose to join the MSM.

● **How about economic philosophy?**

The MSM and the MMM are aligned on the same economic philosophy: protecting the interests of the historic bourgeoisie and an acceptance of the role of the state as a mere doormat for private sector interests. The *'mari deal Illovo'* is after all their doing. Our mainstream parties are interchangeable these days. That is worrying.

● **A large chunk of the population has been expressing its disgust with the reaction of those who ratted on their party. Do you think that will show in the ballot box?**

It is an encouraging sign that people are not merely playing to

their tunes. It remains to be seen whether the MSM will be handing them tickets for the next election. The best position in politics is that of the victim. The MMM is acting the part most eloquently and will probably earn sympathy. You will note that the two most hyped additions to the MSM have been prompt to say that they are only collaborating with the MSM at this stage and not joining its ranks. That says a lot about their perception of the MSM.

● **When members of big political parties walk away from their party, their political death is usually round the corner. Is that likely to happen in this case or will the dissidents take their vote bank with them to the MSM?**

Not in all cases. There are some exceptions. The MSM has seemingly improved its visibility and presence in constituencies No. 16 and 18 in particular. But that is about it. Others have never had a vote base strong enough and would not add much to the MSM. The idea being sold to us is that the *'valeurs militantes'* will shine with the MSM. Hard to see how meritocracy, equal opportunities and integrity will thrive

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after what we have witnessed over the last five years. Politics is everything but an exact science. It will potentially cause unrest within the MSM and could trigger a form of rejection for those who have sided with it.

● **What exactly is the MSM's strategy?**

The best strategy is the one that ensures victory without fighting. Pravind Jugnauth's advisers know that he will not be able to go *mano a mano* with Navin Ramgoolam. They want to show that many are rallying their forces to support a 'young' prime minister. The message being communicated here is since they will never be able to beat them, they might as well join them. They want the population to start buying the idea that the unchosen one has already won. We should do our best to help people to see through the maze. That is what we, as acting citizens have to do.

● **Will this strategy work?**

The risk of backlash is very much here. There is a whiff of clientelism emanating from the many moves. Does it in any way curb Jugnauth's lack of leadership, charisma and vision? No, people are increasingly cautious about what is being fed to them. The overtly staged shows and PR coups sound artificial and out of touch with the needs of the people.

● **Any idea how things are likely to evolve?**

The narrative of the government is easy to read. It will surf on the papal visit, the launch of the tramway and some new projects. The opposition parties can sit and watch and ultimately lose. Or they can puncture the MSM's storytelling and expose the manipulations. They can oppose to the artificiality of this regime something more authentic with real measures to uplift the population. It depends how each plays their cards. ■