



Opinion

Seychelles and its neighbouring islands: Donald Trump ushered in a new phase in the realm of international relations

by Dr. Srimal Fernando

Donald Trump secured victory in the US presidential election held in November and is set to be inaugurated as the president of the United States on Monday, marking the commencement of his second term in office. Donald Trump is scheduled to return to the White House on January 20 following his victory in the 2024 United States presidential election. President-elect Donald Trump and his principal advisors have adopted the philosophy of "Return to Peace through Strength," which is also referred to as "America First." Trump strongly champions the expansion of relations within the broader Middle East. The international relations strategy implemented by Donald Trump has initiated significant transformations that are anticipated to shape the future of global diplomacy. His focus on nationalism, trade protectionism, bilateral agreements, and unorthodox diplomatic practices has established a challenging landscape for future leaders. While this approach may escalate tensions and competition among countries, it also offers the potential for fostering creative diplomatic solutions. The Indian Ocean region has become a central element in the evolving partnership, encompassing strategically important islands such as the Seychelles, Mauritius, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka. These locations play a crucial role in ensuring both regional stability and the broader objectives of the two nations. Ultimately, the alliance between the United States and India has significantly influenced the geopolitical landscape of the Indian Ocean. The strategic relationships established with the Seychelles, Mauritius, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka underscore the

mutual interests of both countries in promoting stability and security. As these collaborations progress, they present substantial opportunities for enhanced cooperation and regional development in the future

Trump's leadership—US-Seychelles diplomacy

Donald Trump's recent election as President of the United States has significant consequences not only for the U.S. but also for its relations with various nations, including the Seychelles. The historical relationship between Seychelles and the United States has been largely positive, with the Seychelles often seeking U.S. support in areas like security, trade, and environmental issues. However, the 'America First' policy of the Trump administration may lead to a shift in this relationship. The

ongoing struggle against illegal fishing and the efforts to safeguard marine biodiversity may also be influenced by the extent of support that the United States is prepared to offer. Although the relationship has been largely positive, any potential changes in U.S. foreign policy necessitate that the Seychelles proceed with caution to preserve advantageous relations. It is essential for the Seychelles to advocate for its interests while adjusting to the shifting international dynamics shaped by American leadership.

UniSey - The Department of Tourism Cultural Heritage

The year 2025 is anticipated to be a pivotal moment for the Seychelles, an exquisite archipelago located in the Indian Ocean, celebrated for its breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural heritage. The University of Seychelles plays a vital role in this evolution, serving as a link between education and industry. By dedicating itself to the development of skilled professionals and the promotion of sustainable tourism, Uni Sey is poised to influence the future of tourism in the Seychelles, ensuring it remains a premier destination while preserving its cultural and natural assets for future generations. The partnership between Uni Sey and the Department of Tourism and Cultural Heritage is essential in strengthening the educational framework that supports the tourism industry. Recognised for its outstanding tourism studies, the university provides a Bachelor of Science Honours degree in Travel, Tourism, and Economics (BTTE) through its Department of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, equipping students with the essential skills required for thriving careers in the tourism field.

Trump: Mauritius, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka

The administration of President Donald Trump introduces both new opportunities and challenges for nations such as Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. As these countries strive to manoeuvre through a landscape influenced by Trump's policies, they are required to adjust in order to fulfil their domestic requirements and maintain international partnerships.

Current administration of the United States

The Indian Ocean region has increasingly become a focal point in international relations, particularly due to its strategic significance. The developing relationship between the United States and India plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of international relations within this region. As the new U.S. administration emphasises partnerships aimed at fostering regional stability, India's strategic influence is expected to grow.

About the author:

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Biodiversity

Madagascar supports more unique plant life than any other island in the world

Source: The Conversation
- Julian Schrader*

Researchers have long known that islands are hotspots for species diversity. But, until recently, there weren't precise figures to quantify the diversity of plant life on islands. A study involving an international team of scientists has filled this gap. The researchers developed a database of vegetation information from more than 3,400 geographical regions worldwide, including about 2,000 islands. The Conversation Africa chatted with the study's lead author, Julian Schrader, about the findings on African islands' plant life, including the fact that Madagascar has the world's highest percentage of plant species endemic to a single island.

Why did you want to map plant diversity on islands?

Until now we didn't know much about the global distribution of plants on islands. We didn't have the answers to questions like: how many plant species are native and endemic to islands worldwide? What is their threat status, and which evolutionary lineages do these species come from? It's surprising that we didn't know; many islands

are very appealing to researchers and they have always played an important role in ecology and biogeography. Beyond being inherently interesting questions, these topics are also crucial from scientific and conservation perspectives. Only by understanding what exists can specific and effective conservation strategies be developed.

Asking these questions and uncovering the answers has been thrilling for me. I still remember the moment when the numbers first appeared on my screen, after we had assembled all the necessary data. I didn't expect that about 20% of all plants globally were endemic to islands. I was also surprised that most of these – about 44,000 species – were endemic to a single island only, such as Madagascar or New Guinea. These numbers were far higher than expected, given that islands make up only about 6% of terrestrial land.

What makes islands so rich for plant biodiversity?

Some, like New Guinea, Cuba, Borneo and Madagascar, have many endemic species because they are large, tropical and have a lot of different habitats. Others have a high proportion of endemic plants because they are isolated from the mainland or other islands. This causes spe-

cies to evolve into new species due to limited genetic exchange with other populations, as is the case for Hawaii and La Réunion (an island in the western Indian Ocean about 700km east of Madagascar).

And then there are the fragment islands, of which Madagascar is also an example. These islands have, at some point in the distant past, been connected to the mainland. They then broke off, drifting away and taking their species with them. These species then either evolved in isolation or went extinct on the mainland, making them what scientists call paleo-endemics. Madagascar ticks all these boxes. That's what makes it so diverse in sheer species numbers and

number of endemic plants.

You found that 83% of the plants growing on Madagascar are endemic to the island. Is that the highest rate of endemic plants on any island?

Yes, Madagascar tops the list globally in terms of the percentage of plant species endemic to a single island. This is because, as I've said, Madagascar is highly species-rich. It is an ancient fragment of a larger continent that drifted away from Africa millions of years ago, carrying with it many species that subsequently went extinct or evolved into new species on the mainland. This long isolation has led to very high endemism, which is

still evident at higher taxonomic levels, such as genera and families. In fact, of all plant families globally, 17 are entirely endemic to islands, and Madagascar contributes the most.

The islands in the Gulf of Guinea also yielded some interesting results. Which in particular stood out?

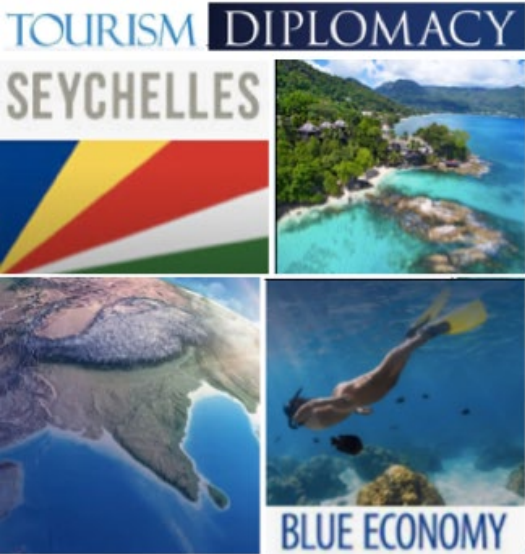
In the Gulf of Guinea, the islands of Bioko, São Tomé and Príncipe host a high diversity of endemic plant species. These islands offer diverse habitats, supporting high niche differentiation for species. However, I am uncertain about their uniqueness in a global context – São Tomé and Príncipe are clas-

sic oceanic islands populated through long-distance dispersal from the mainland. Once species arrived, they could evolve in isolation into new species – a process that generally drives high endemism on oceanic islands.

How does knowing this information help researchers, conservationists and governments?

This work is highly valuable for future research. Having comprehensive data on the global distribution of plants can enhance our understanding of evolutionary drivers and why species occur where they do. From a conservation perspective, this dataset offers a clearer picture of where threatened species are located, which can help in designing targeted conservation strategies and may even raise international awareness of islands' global significance for biodiversity preservation. For governments, it's crucial to understand the importance and natural heritage that they are responsible for protecting. While it's hard to predict the direct effect on conservation efforts, I sincerely hope this work will help place islands firmly on international conservation and biodiversity agendas.

**Julian Schrader is a Lecturer in Plant Ecology, Macquarie University*



• Madagascar is rich in species, including plants

