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M. Karunanidhi, 94

His passing marks the end of an era in Tamil Nadu's politics, and leaves a political void

The life story of Muthuvel Karunanidhi is also a history of Tamil Nadu politics. A five-time Chief Minister, and the longest serving legislator, winning 13 terms in the Assembly and not losing even once, Karunanidhi was the engineer of many of the progressive measures adopted by the State since Independence. As the leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, an offshoot of the rationalist social reform movement, the Dravidar Kazhagam, he was an influential figure at both State and national levels, whether in or out of power. He excelled as both administrator and organiser, adopting different styles, but always displaying a clinical efficiency while interacting with bureaucrats and party workers. Although his administrative acumen was often contrasted with the welfarism of his political rival, M.G. Ramachandran, Karunanidhi was not beyond the draw of populism. Extending the Public Distribution System and increasing food subsidies were coupled with efforts at generating employment and encouraging industrial investment. Towards the latter part of his political career, he emulated his political opponents, MGR and Jayalalithaa, in handing out freebies indiscriminately to every household, rich or poor. He was a crusader for federalism, often standing up to the Centre for the State's rights. He was one of the foremost opponents of the Emergency. In 1976 and 1991, his governments were dismissed by the Centre, the first time citing corruption charges, and the second time citing support to the terror outfit, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

In his home State, he ran the DMK with an iron hand; at the same time, he provided some space for the second rung, even indulging the odd dissenter now and then, as long as there was no threat to his leadership. District secretaries and ministers had a long reign under him. His longevity permitted him the leeway to promote his immediate family members to positions of power within the party and the government. His designated successor, his younger son M.K. Stalin, had to work his way up the party ladder – from ordinary worker and youth wing leader before being accommodated in the top rungs of the party and government. But elder son M.K. Alagiri and grand-nephew Dayanidhi Maran were rewarded with Cabinet berths in their very first terms in the Lok Sabha. Karunanidhi will be remembered for being an astute politician, one with a quick wit and ready repartee; an able administrator with an uncanny eye for detail and a keen sense of the occasion; and as an elder statesman who could take the long-term view of events and issues. He straddled different generations and contrasting worlds with a reflexive ease. With his passing, less than two years after his rival Jayalalithaa succumbed to illness, Tamil Nadu is staring at a huge political void, one that that will be very hard to fill.

Pause, refresh

The GST Council does well to focus on the concerns of small firms

The Goods and Services Tax Council met last Saturday for the second time within a fortnight. However, this time it refrained from further rate rejigs. While the new indirect tax regime has expanded India's tax base and brought more firms into the formal economy, revenues have slipped somewhat after peaking at ₹1.03 lakh crore in April (for taxes accrued in March) this year. The first three months of this financial year have yielded ₹94,016 crore, ₹95,610 crore and ₹96,483 crore, respectively – this is well short of the ₹1.lakh crore revenue target a month for 2018-19. The steep rate cuts effected on several items in the last Council meeting were to kick in from July 27, so their full impact on revenue collections may take more time to unfold. Moody's Investors Service reckons that the revenue loss from the most recent tax cuts may be 0.04-0.08% of GDP annually. This is marginal at best, and could be offset by stronger consumption-led growth and better tax compliance. But it is in this context of revenue concerns that the Council's dedicated focus at its latest meeting on issues facing micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) is a creditable move.

Setting up a ministerial group to look into the problems faced by MSMEs since India moved to the GST regime last July is a signal that the government is not brushing aside the implementation issues that still trouble smaller players. Firms with an annual turnover of less than ₹5 crore constitute 93% of the registered taxpayers under the GST. At its previous meeting, the Council had decided that such businesses need no longer file cumbersome returns every month, but only on a quarterly basis. There may be more room for the ministerial panel to recommend further easing of compliance for micro firms with turnover far below ₹5 crore and enhancing the ₹50,000 threshold for mandatory use of e-way bills to track movement of taxable goods. A deeper dive to understand why 1.7 million taxpayers had registered under the GST by December 2017 although their operations were below the taxable limit could also yield some pointers. The Council meeting has also, wisely, returned to a consensual approach on decisions. While a few States had reservations about the rate cuts at the last meeting, this time their concerns on a proposal to push digital payments by offering a cash-back to consumers using RuPay cards or the UPI platform have been incorporated. Now, States will volunteer to run a pilot on these lines and a final decision will be taken after a detailed system-wide evaluation of such incentives. This indicates the Centre's keenness to retain a cooperative approach with States that has generally marked the Council's functioning.

End of an epoch

M. Karunanidhi will be remembered for his passion for Tamil and uncompromising secularism



GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI

"*Jakkirathaiya irunga,*" he said in Tamil, over which his command was legendary. "Take care" is how the phrase would translate. But in the way he said it, laying stress on the double '*kk*', I could see he meant to say, "Take every care." This was on August 13, 2000. I was on my way to Colombo to join duty as High Commissioner.

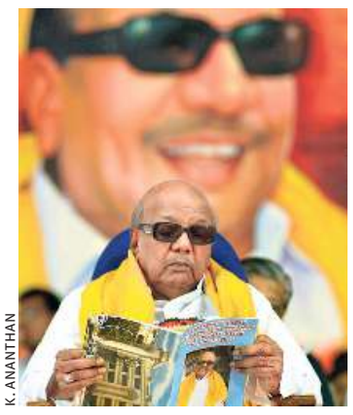
A federal mind

Calling on Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi would have been on the wish list and task list of any Indian envoy on her or his way to Sri Lanka. But, for me, this was not just about protocol. Nor was it about politics, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) then being a crucial presence in the National Democratic Alliance government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee. It was about plain common sense, sheer self-interest. There was no way I would present letters of credence in Colombo without finding out what Tamil Nadu's senior-most and completely wide-awake leader thought about the island nation's travails, the present and future state of its Tamil population and that of the Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam's supremo, Velupillai Prabhakaran. To go to Colombo without the 'input' – to use a crassly opportunistic expression – of a veteran of Tamil Nadu's political chemistry would be absurd. What I needed and was to get from him was the insight, as knowledgeable as it was detached, of 'one who knew'. The hinterland of any foreign policy is ground knowledge of the roots of that policy in the soil of its origin.

It was not easy, even for one on 'relevant' official duty, to get an appointment with the Chief Minister. He had his hands more than full with the complexities of Tamil Nadu's polity, where facing the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and its charismatic leader J. Jayalalithaa meant being alert 24x7; where running a government of which he was the alpha and the omega meant working harder than the mind and body could take. And where, to make matters more complex for him, explaining to the people of Tamil Nadu how and why India-Sri Lankan relations were a foreign policy matter and foreign policy was the prerogative of the Union government was just about impossible. He was on the cusp of India's federal dilemmas.

A lesser politician could have played politics on that fluid crest, just to remain 'on top'. But, as the direct successor-in-office to C.N. Annadurai (CNA) who had given up secession as the DMK's policy goal, he was going to do nothing of the kind.

The Chief Minister was seated in the sitting room on the first floor of his Gopalapuram residence in Chennai. He half-rose to greet me, a gesture that neither his age – he was 76 at the time – nor his high office necessitated. "Sir... sir... Please do not get up," I protested. Sitting back, he commenced what was for me a lesson on the limitations of diplomacy and of politics. He said I was going to a highly troubled land at a highly incendiary time. "Ranil Wickremesinghe [now Prime Minister of Sri Lanka] met me the other day," he said, "and we spoke for more than an hour. He is a visionary... He wants



K. ANANTHAN

to build a physical bridge from Rameswaram to Talai Mannar... I welcomed the idea and told him that our own Bharathiar [Subramania Bharati] had envisioned the very thing...*palamaippom*... But today who is going to be crossing that bridge and in which direction?" Then followed an analysis of the ethnic problem on the island which for its crisp pragmatism could not have been equalled, let alone bettered.

"Nobody knows Prabhakaran's mind," he said. "Nobody from our side is in touch with him... Nobody can be... We used to know his deputies... Amirthalingam... Now they are all dead... assassinated. But militancy is no solution... Secession will never be countenanced by Sri Lanka... And it will never be given up by Prabhakaran... We grope in the dark." And then doing a fast-forward: "Yet, we have to keep trying for our Tamil kin's *urimai* (rights) there." The insights continued for some 10 more minutes and then he rose to conclude the call, saying, as if in a summing-up: "Prabhakaran will never have a change of heart." As I thanked him and prepared to leave, he gave the advice I started this tribute with, very softly, "*Jakkirathaiya irunga*."

I had received briefings, each very helpful, very skilled, from officials, ministers, politicians, military leaders, strategists. But the one I got at Gopalapuram that afternoon covered every facet of the Sri Lankan scene in brief sentences, replete with historical, geopolitical and diplomatic nuances, topped with an intuitive sense of *urimai* being the long-shot aim and *jakkirithai* an immediate concern.

Another meeting

Seventeen years later, last year, I was to see him again, in the same room. He was seated on a wheelchair. And this time he did not – could not – get up. His son, M.K. Stalin, and his daughter, Kanimozhi, who were beside him, gave him the caller's name. The 93-year-old looked long and steadily at me. No sign of recognition appeared on his face. There was no immediate response, but a few seconds later, when everyone present was waiting for a response, a wisp of a half-smile played across his face for but a fleeting moment. I will not presume to imagine he recognised me. But that was not really necessary.

Kalaignar Karunanidhi was now a legend, an icon of the old mould, but without the patina of obsolescence on its form or features. He was a living legend, an icon of the here and now as a symbol of aspirational politics negotiating electoral quicksands. In his case the aspirational politics was Dravida self-esteem combined with social radicalism, derived from Periyar and C.N. Annadurai (CNA). And the quicksands were Tamil Nadu's political uncertainties, with his mentors having become history and rivals from a different 'stage' scripting a very new, very glitzy theatre. Here was an idealism being taunted by reality to be pragmatic, a pragmatism being haunted by history to be idealistic. Some predicaments are cruel.

And yet, he emerged from it, un-bowed, the see-saw of electoral results being another matter.

He will be long remembered for three outstanding accomplishments – his passion for Tamil as a language and a metaphor for the dignity of its users; his refusal to be bullied by political hubris during the national emergency; and his uncompromising secularism.

Such a long journey

CNA was in office for far too little for the dust of any controversy to settle on him. The Kalaignar was in office for far too long for that dust to stay away. Did he shake it off?

Did the flatterer and the tale-carrier manage to reach ear-distance? Was the sponger spurned, the money-spinner, the corrupter, family-splitter, the party-breaker turned away? Was the fear-instiller, the superstition-planter, the suspicion-sower shown the door? Equally, was the caring critic, the daring dissenter, the worried warner given welcome? Was the frank friend, the bold biographer shown in, given time, consideration?

Only his family would know.

On it – all generations of it – falls the privilege and the challenge now to stay and work together, to take the legacy of this extraordinary statesman further afield and make it a force for Tamil Nadu's redemption from localism, myopia and the power of floating cash. And beyond that, a force for India's federal intelligence, her plural wisdom and, above all, her Constitution-enshrined mandate for justice – social, economic and political.

Gopalkrishna Gandhi is a former administrator, diplomat and Governor

Confrontation in Dhaka

The Bangladesh government clamps down on dissent and democratic challenges



VIJAY PRASHAD

Students in Dhaka, Bangladesh, have long worried about their journey to school. Dangerous driving cost the lives of two students in the last week of July – they were run over by a bus – which triggered mass rallies of students across the centre of the capital. The students wanted the government to act – finally – to protect them. This was an opportunity for the government to do something following a simple plea by the students. But it did not.

Documenting violence

Instead, ruffians went along the avenues, threatening and beating protesting students. Photographs of the violence were quick to reach social media. The award-winning Bangladeshi photographer and activist, Shahidul Alam, documented the protests and also the violence with his camera. On social media, he published his pictures of what appeared to be the organisers of the violence meeting with ruffians, who were then set out to attack the students. This did not go down well with the establishment.

Mr. Alam had received a request from the media outlet, Al-Jazeera, to appear on the channel and talk about the protests. He went on air and pointed out that the protests, while about traffic safety, also indicated a far wider set of concerns – 'the looting of banks, the gagging of the media, extrajudicial killings, disappearances, bribery, corruption'. What he narrated was of little surprise to the people of Bangladesh. Protests are a constant feature of life, both in the past and in the present, in the country – over electricity supply in Kansat; over open-pit coal mining in Phulbari; against a coal plant at the rim of the Sundarbans; against stock market scandals that defrauded millions of small investors; and against quotas in government jobs for the descendants of 'freedom fighters' in the 1971 war.

Mr. Alam, who had been following the protests and the crackdown, also reported on social media: "Today, the police specifically asked for help from armed goons to combat unarmed students demanding safe roads." This struck him as an important departure for



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the government which had now publicly gone after the students. "The government has miscalculated. It thought that fear and repression would be enough, but you cannot tame an entire nation in this manner," he added.

On August 5, a group of men arrived at Mr. Alam's home in Dhaka's Dhanmondi area and took him into custody. It is said that the men taped over CCTV cameras in the area and forbade taking any photographs of his arrest. Rahnuma Ahmed, a journalist and Mr. Alam's partner, said she rushed to the local police station but it turned out that Mr. Alam had been taken away by the Detective Branch. A police officer later said, "We are interrogating him for giving false information to different media and for provocative comments." Mr. Alam's lawyer has said that the police only registered the first information report after she called him and kept up the pressure on them. There was no appetite in the Bureau to follow common procedure.

Action and reaction

Mr. Alam was arrested after being charged under Section 57(2) of the Information and Communication Technology Act for "spreading imaginary propaganda against the government." The Act is often used as a broad-brush tool to muzzle journalists. As he was taken from the court, Mr. Alam said, "I was hit (in custody). They washed my blood-stained Punjabi [kurta] and then made me wear it again." Mr. Alam, a recipient of the Shilpakala Padak, one of Bangladesh's prestigious awards, was now on a seven-day remand. . On Tuesday, the High Court ordered that the remand be suspended and that Mr. Alam be transferred to the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University for care. Whether the case against him will be pursued and whether this will send a message against such abductions in the future is to be seen.

The United Nations has said that it is "deeply concerned about the reports of violence" during the protests for road safety in Bangladesh and has appealed for calm. Dhaka's streets remain tense. Some students have braved the crackdown, but the mood is sombre. It appears that the government is unwilling to negotiate with the students. Mr. Alam's experience suggests that it is even unwilling to accept that there is a problem here – one that is bigger than road safety. Human rights groups and PEN International (a worldwide association of writers) have condemned his arrest.

This is an election year for Bangladesh. The crackdown on the students sends a very strong message – that the government will tolerate neither dissent nor democratic challenges.

It is fitting to recall that in the mass protests in Bangladesh in 1990, the longest running military junta led by General Ershad was affected after an army truck ran over a group of protesting students. When he came to power in 1982, there had been a conflagration over buses and students. It is no wonder then that the government is so sensitive to protests around the traffic.

Vijay Prashad is the Director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

M. Karunanidhi

The DMK patriarch, 'Kalaignar' M. Karunanidhi, was a mass leader who held sway over Tamil Nadu with his magnetic personality for decades. As a protégé of Periyar and Anna, he came to symbolise the Dravidian movement and stood for self-respect, social justice and women's emancipation. As a rationalist and an iconoclast, he did ruffle a few feathers. As a political leader, he was in a league of his own. The scripts he penned with felicity sowed the seeds of social change. He was a fine political orator who held audiences spellbound. His speeches were spiced with witticisms and semantically-related words. It is no wonder that people flocked to hear him speak. His advocacy of 'State autonomy' reflected his concern about safeguarding regional interests. He was also a rare political leader who accepted his party's election defeats with equanimity. Nevertheless, outpourings of praise for the great leader should not hold us back from conceding some of the spots that took a bit of the shine off his long, illustrious career.

G. DAVID MILTON,
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

■ The passing of DMK patriarch M. Karunanidhi marks the end of an era. The beacon for the poor and the downtrodden has put down his sails and oars.
It is a great loss not only for Tamil Nadu but also for the rest of India.

THARCIUS S. FERNANDO,
Chennai

■ The passing of the DMK leader has created another political vacuum in Tamil Nadu that will be difficult to fill. From free electricity to farmers to reservation for women in government services, he led the way. His electoral success was remarkable. The multi-faceted leader's contribution in the fields of politics, literature and theatre will always shine.

J. BHARATH,
Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

■ Tamil Nadu, and India in general, has lost a towering political icon. Tamil Nadu and Dravidian politics without M. Karunanidhi and J. Jayalalithaa will not be the same again.
N. Nagarajan,
Secunderabad

■ M. Karunanidhi was a leader of the masses, a seasoned politician and a statesman. He will be remembered as the architect of a number of welfare schemes. He will be noted as a multifaceted personality, an orator par excellence, a great playwright and a poet of all times. He was a leader who was committed to the uplift of the poor and the downtrodden.

A.J. RANGARAJAN,
Chennai

■ In the passing of M. Karunanidhi, one of the greatest chapters in Indian politics has come to an end. As a key player in State politics, he was noted for his political acumen. He was an outstanding intellectual – as orator, author, script and dialogue writer and humorist. He used his wit and charm to make an impact in politics and cinema. His sharing of political space with several politicians is unparalleled. He managed to emerge phoenix-like in many a political conflict.

R. SIVAKUMAR,
Chennai

■ Tamil Nadu has lost a titanic leader. His achievements in the fields of cinema, literature and politics cannot be matched. He leaves behind big shoes that cannot be filled easily.

K. PRADEEP,
Chennai

■ The DMK leader's demise is a huge loss for Indian politics. He will be remembered for his social reforms. He was perhaps one of the last links to the Dravidian movement which ushered in the rise of the backward classes.

ALBERT DEVAKARAM,
Chennai

■ The passing of the veteran politician, statesman and reformer has left a void in the national polity. Not only did he dedicate his life to the uplift of Tamil Nadu but his determination also led to many firsts in Indian politics. One hopes that his party, the DMK, is able to carry forward his ideals.

SANJIB KUMAR DAS,
Cuttack, Odisha

■ M. Karunanidhi was a politician who changed political trends. He has left an indelible mark on politics in the State. His era will be noted for his drive to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. There is a lot to learn from his ideology.

M. AMEER BASHA,
Anantapuramu, Andhra Pradesh

ITI woes

As a teacher in a polytechnic, I am in complete agreement about the problems that ITIs in India face (Editorial page, "Rebooting the system for a skills upgrade", August 7).

These institutions are the backbone of a skilled India and can contribute to the spirit of 'Make In India'. It is the lack of an institutional framework and an outdated syllabus that has led to the descent.

RAJESH LOHANI,
Nainital, Uttarakhand

Infection worry

India cannot afford to lapse to a situation where the gains in fighting the spread of HIV are lost ("Three northeastern States emerge as new HIV hotspots", August 7). The health departments should hold health camps at regular intervals. Awareness camps for young people on the dangers of unprotected intimacy and unsafe drug use practices can have a significant impact.

VIMAL VASUDEVAN,
Alathur, Palakkad, Kerala

MORE LETTERS ONLINE:
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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The first paragraph of a report, "Hearing likely today in Alchemist case" (August 7, 2018) erroneously expanded SEBI as the Securities and *Exchanged* Board of India. It is the Securities and *Exchange* Board of India.

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THE WEDNESDAY INTERVIEW | DEREK O'BRIEN

'You don't choose a captain and then choose a team'

The Trinamool Congress leader on Opposition unity and why picking a prime ministerial candidate is not important right now

SOBHANA K. NAIR

From campaigning against demonetisation to voicing its criticism of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, the Trinamool Congress has taken the lead in rallying against the Narendra Modi government. In this interview, TMC leader Derek O'Brien, who is a member of the Rajya Sabha, says the NRC is a national issue, calls the BJP a "non-starter" in West Bengal, and explains why he thinks the BJP will lose in 2019. Excerpts:



SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has been criticised for saying that the NRC exercise could lead to a "bloodbath and civil war".

■ She didn't say there is a civil war. She said that if a situation like this continues, it could lead to a civil war. People are twisting her words. The entire issue is a dirty, devious political plan of the BJP. It is not about Assam alone. It is about Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Bihar and many other States. It is a national issue. The BJP wants to polarise India. Indian citizens cannot be refugees in their own country. Unfortunately, the BJP is [indulging] in doublespeak. At one end, you have the Home Minister telling Parliament that it is only a draft list and that it will be revisited. And then you have senior BJP leaders, including the party president, thumping their chests and calling the ones excluded in the NRC list as "*ghuspetiya*" or illegal. The reason all this happening is because the BJP knows that its time is up. It's looking at using all these issues for its own devious political gains.

If it is a question of humanity, why did the West Bengal government not provide legacy data for the NRC exercise, which could have saved many from exclusion?

■ This is not about legacy data. No State government was consulted. How do they explain leaving out Army personnel, educationists, bureaucrats? It is an issue that needs to be dealt with very tactfully. Home Minister Rajnath Singh said in Parliament that some on social media are trying to stoke communal passion. He is right. Who is stoking communal passion? It is the BJP and the RSS.

During her recent visit to Delhi, Ms. Banerjee said that the BJP will be "finished" in 2019. What is your party's confidence based on?

■ Our confidence is based on only one thing: the people of India. I am absolutely certain that the people of India will know that they gave this Prime Minister a great chance in 2014. The BJP was brilliant – and still is – when it comes to advertising, marketing and propagating fake news. But it has failed on delivery. There is a great advertising guru, David Ogilvy, who said that the easiest thing to do is to sell somebody a product. So the BJP sold this *achhe din* concept in 2014. Ogilvy also said that what is more difficult is to make a person purchase the same product a second time. It is the same issue with the BJP. They sold *achhe din* in 2014 and everyone believed them. We don't have to wait till 2019; the people of India have already made up their minds. In Bengal, the Trinamool Congress will demolish them; they will lose in Odisha; M.K. Stalin and the DMK will defeat them in Tamil Nadu; they will meet the same fate in Andhra Pradesh; in Bihar, Lalu Prasadji will do the job; in Karnataka, the combination of Kumaraswamyji and the Congress will finish them. As a student of politics, I think the BJP will only manage 150 [seats].

The BJP has been asking 'Modi versus who' in 2019. Will a collective Opposition leadership be the answer to the party's presidential-style campaign?

■ The last time I checked the Constitution, it was a parliamentary democracy, so where is this presidential form coming from? For their own convenience, they [the BJP] may want to pitch it as any form of government, from dictatorship to presidential. I think leaders of my party and many other parties have made it clear that the Prime Minister will be decided after the elections end. All these like-minded parties will do very well and we can decide once the BJP and Mr. Modi are removed. For us, the common agenda is to take up people's issues. We want to bring back the India we love. Not a divisive India, not an India where promises are not delivered. It is not about who will win the election. India must win in 2019.

Ms. Banerjee has taken the lead in the campaign against the Modi government on various issues and has made frequent trips to the capital. Is she positioning herself as a prime ministerial candidate?

■ With her 25 years of experience as an MP, twice as Chief Minister, with her experience as a Cabinet Minister, and 40 years of struggle, Mamata-di doesn't need to roam around in Delhi with her CV. Her track record, experience, acceptability with everybody, and ability to manage relationships will play an important role. We are like the squirrel in the garden. The squirrel does a lot of work and is indispensable for the garden. We are not chair-hunting.

The BJP is [indulging] in doublespeak. At one end, you have the Home Minister telling Parliament that the NRC is only a draft list and will be revisited. And then you have senior BJP leaders calling the ones excluded in the NRC list as "*ghuspetiya*" or illegal.

What is India without its institutions? If its institutions are under threat, we are in real danger.

Do you see Congress president Rahul Gandhi in the driver's seat in an Opposition alliance? What will be the Congress's role in 2019?

■ It is not about individuals. India needs the BJP-RSS government out. That is the focus now. By propping names you only divide the Opposition. None of the biggest leaders in this wonderful collection of federal parties is putting up their hands to be Prime Minister. Think about it, we are talking about this in August 2018. Could you have imagined such a conversation after the U.P. elections, where despite the demonetisation *jumla*, the BJP did so well? The momentum is not with the Opposition parties, it is with like-minded parties. In 2014, the biggest ally of this government was the Shiv Sena. In 2018, in the no-confidence motion, did they vote for the government? No, they did not. The second largest ally of the BJP, the TDP – who did they vote for? Not only did they not vote for the BJP, they were the ones to move the no-confidence vote against the government! To me these are the two biggest takeaways from the present political situation. Every party will have a role, it is not about one-upmanship. You don't choose a captain and then choose a team. We are a well-balanced team, where there are all-rounders, opening batsmen and bowlers. I am saying this because Mamata-di also looks at life like this. The Congress too has an important role to play in the States where it is strong – like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Chhattisgarh.

How does the conflict between your party and the Left parties play out in this collective leadership?

■ We will work just the way we do in Parliament. The same spirit of floor coordination can happen outside Parliament.

There have been complaints that the Opposition space is shrinking within Parliament. How serious is the situation?

■ Institutions are important. What is India without its institutions? If its institutions are under threat, we are in real danger. Parliament is one of those institutions. We are not here to sit and complain. The TMC will, along with everybody else, protect these institutions. There are certain procedures, rules and conventions which must be strictly adhered to. We will not allow Parliament to turn into a private backyard of the BJP.

From bank frauds to Rafale, the Opposition has made various allegations of corruption against the Modi government. How confident are you that these allegations will stick?

■ Corruption is an issue, but it is largely an urban issue. There are bigger issues. I call it JUDGE (jobs, underperformance, demonetisation, GST and the economy). Yes, you can add 'c' for corruption also. Essentially, the larger issue that people will be looking at is delivery on promises. I can give you 500 examples of how the Modi government has failed on this account, but I will restrict myself to two. One, in 2014, the Modi government promised to double farmers' incomes. In 2018, they pushed the deadline to 2022. Even for doing that, agriculture has to grow at 12%; at present, we are growing at a rate of 2%.

Second, the 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' programme is one of the big-ticket projects of the Modi government. If you look closely, the total budget since its inception is ₹700 crore, it comes to some ₹100 crore per year and that comes to ₹3 crore per State. How many girls' lives have they touched? Now come to the Bengal government's Kanyashree. It has touched the lives of 50 lakh girls and has a budget of ₹5,500 crore for a single State. Like-minded parties have to get the message across that the Modi government has failed to deliver on its promises.

With the growing influence of the BJP in West Bengal, it seems that it is dictating the agenda for the Trinamool Congress too. Your party followed the BJP's example of taking out a Ram Navami procession. Is your party also peddling soft Hindutva?

■ Our social welfare and development schemes are not for Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains; they are for the 10 crore people of Bengal. That is the reason we did so well in the Assembly polls. We are not following their agenda at all. We have an understanding of Bengal, its culture, its ethos. The BJP is a non-starter in Bengal. I am not going to comment on who comes second or third. Their brand of bilious politics does not represent Bengal. We are not the ones who took out the procession with swords. We can discuss this ad nauseam, but if the BJP was so good, why did they win only three seats in the 2016 Assembly polls? How come in every by-poll in the last two years, their tally has gone down?

Your party has been battling corruption charges from Sarada to Narada. Will it not cast a shadow on the party's prospects in the 2019 polls?

■ Sarada and Narada are all over. The cases were a result of political vendetta. These cases were there in the 2016 Assembly elections. What happened then? We came back stronger improving our tally. When you throw mud on Ms. Banerjee's white saree, it does not stick. People have known her for 40 years.

All the like-minded parties have been mulling over requesting the Election Commission to replace EVMs with ballot papers. Wouldn't you be driving our democracy in reverse gear with this move?

■ Technology can't replace democracy. The technology has to be 100% foolproof. When we get to the situation that is 100% foolproof, then it is fine.

SINGLE FILE

Contemplating no Brexit

The EU's greatest failure is not to have quickly integrated politically with strong central controls

UDAY BALAKRISHNAN



AP

As Brexit draws closer, there is growing desperation among the British. The front-page headline in *The Sunday Times* of July 22, "Voters turn to far right, Boris – and Remain", reflected the state of confusion in people's minds.

The Brexit process is proving to be emotionally and economically wrenching for the British. The feeling that the country has been tricked into it has given rise to the chorus to let the people once again decide whether Britain should stay in the European Union or not. A second referendum, latest opinion polls indicate, could lead not just to a soft Brexit, but possibly to a dropping of the idea of quitting the EU altogether.

At the heart of Brexit is the tired argument that immigrants are stealing jobs. The ubiquity of migrant workers across the U.K. cannot be missed, while the extent to which they contribute to making the economy stronger is less obvious. A city like London cannot run for a day without them. For instance, the £8 billion sandwich industry, a homegrown mega success, runs mostly on East European labour.

It is turning out to be increasingly hard for the U.K. to contemplate divorce from the rest of Europe. It has been a member of the European Economic Community and later the EU for a greater part of the post-Second World War period. Brexit could also mean the loss of the massive and reliable EU market. Now faced with a whimsical U.S. President, hanging together with the rest of Europe seems to be the most obvious survival option.

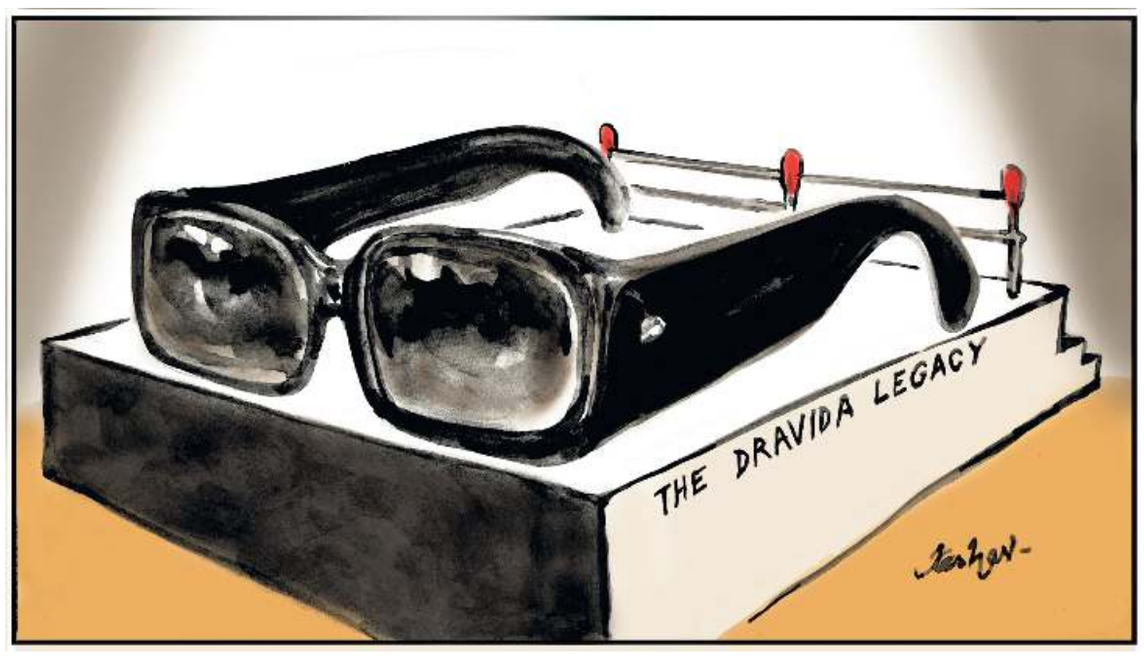
At a recent party in Oxford, I met one of those who helped found Oxfam. Now in her nineties, she wistfully recalled how, along with others, she went to Germany in 1946 to help its people cope with the disaster of defeat, vowing that such a conflict should never be allowed to recur, and that the solution lay in Europe pulling together.

This is at the heart of the European integration project, resulting in the emergence of the EU, collectively the world's largest economy. For Britain to withdraw into an isolationist hole looks too absurd to contemplate but also one that is despairingly difficult to avoid – all for the want of inspiring political leadership and a new political class less committed to the common good than its own.

Not to have quickly integrated politically with strong central controls, as India did after Independence, is the EU's greatest failure. If a key member like the U.K. should leave, one wonders how long the EU, not yet a state, will last.

By contrast we need to thank Jawaharlal Nehru. With great prescience he successfully cast India as a union – not as a federation – of States with a strong Centre, enabling us to hold together. That is something that should not be lost on those of us rooting for a federal India.

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CONCEPTUAL

Lamarckian inheritance

BIOLOGY

This refers to the hypothesis that an organism can pass on the different characteristics that it acquired during its own lifetime to its offspring. It is argued that the various changes that happen to the body of an organism in order to enable it to adapt to changes in its environment can actually be passed on to its offspring. The Lamarckian inheritance of acquired characteristics, apart from Darwin's famous theory of natural selection, has been used to explain the natural process of evolution of species. It is named after French biologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck.

MORE ON THE WEB

In pictures: M. Karunanidhi – a Titan of Tamil Nadu politics

bit.ly/KarunanidhiTitan

NOTEBOOK

Remembering Karunanidhi's wit

He will be missed by journalists

B. KOLAPPAN

Unlike many leaders, M. Karunanidhi was willing to take the most embarrassing questions in his stride during press conferences. He was extremely witty, and would pepper his comments with Tamil idioms and phrases unheard of in recent times. Sometimes, he would include references from ancient Tamil literature. Listening to him speak or intervene during debates in the Tamil Nadu Assembly was a rewarding experience for reporters. Many of his comments are still fresh in my memory.

Despite his close proximity to many national leaders, Karunanidhi chose to remain in Tamil Nadu; he was content with State politics. Once, he was sitting in the front row at a function to mark the release of the digitised album of the film *Parasakthi*, for which he had penned the dialogues. The organiser of the function, former Minister Parithi Ilavmvazhuthi, requested him to move to a seat in the centre of the row. "I don't want to come to the centre. I will remain in the state," he said.

When Congressman C. Gnanasekaran complained that the tubelights in Vellore municipality were not functioning, Karunanidhi said: "The honourable member should realise that fluorescent tubelights will take some time to burn."

Another time, when asked whether he had any problem (*sikkal*) in allotting the Nagapattinam Lok Sabha constituency to the Communist Party of India ("*Nagapattinam thoguthiayai CPI-ikku koduppathil sikkal irukkirathaa?*"), he quipped, "*Nagapattinathukku pakkathil thaan Sikkal irukkirathu* (Next to Nagapattinam is Sikkal.)" Sikkal is a town near Nagapattinam.

When BJP MP L. Ganesan once said that his party would enter into a "*siddhantha por*" (ideological war) with the DMK, Karunanidhi retorted that the BJP was indeed a "bore" in Tamil Nadu.

Journalist and writer Sa. Viswanathan, known as Saavi, once complained that the spectacles on the statue of DMK founder C.N. Annadurai were missing. Karunanidhi wondered whether the writer had looked at the statue closely. Saavi said that he had. "Did Anna hold a book in his hand?" Karunanidhi asked. "No," said Saavi. "What is the need for spectacles if he is not reading anything?" Karunanidhi smiled.

And sometimes, when provoked, Karunanidhi would also respond controversially. That was how he compared the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh to the Dravidar Kazhagam and invited criticism.

Journalists will definitely miss his wit, knowledge, and easy way with reporters.

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 8, 1968

Tribunal to go into Krishna-Godavari dispute

Dr. K.L. Rao, Union Minister for Irrigation and Power, informed the Rajya Sabha to-day [August 7, New Delhi] that the Krishna-Godavari water dispute would be referred to a Tribunal consisting of three serving Judges shortly. He was replying to the general debate on the Inter-State Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill. The amendment seeks to provide that the Tribunal would have three serving Judges instead of one as provided for in the original Act. Dr. Rao said that the Bill had been prepared in "considerable haste", because of the urgency of submitting the Krishna-Godavari dispute to a Tribunal. As soon as the amending Bill was passed by Parliament, the dispute would go to the Tribunal, he added.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 8, 1918.

Suggested European Electorate.

Mr. L.P.E. Pugh has written a lengthy letter to the Press in support of his proposal that Europeans in order to secure separated electorate should join Indians in claiming election of councillors and ministers. The letter is a reply to Mr. Welby, Secretary, European Association who opposed Mr. Pugh's views saying that Europeans should assert their just claim and preserve their convictions. Mr. Pugh in reply says: Our claim though a just claim has been rejected on at least three occasions by the Government of India. It has again been considered and rejected in the reform scheme, though it is admitted that we have interests out of all proportion to our numbers. Does experience lead us to suppose that the simple reassertion of the justice of the claim with some possible support from the Indo-British Association will lead to its recognition? The question supplies the answer "No". India is a new proposition with different conditions from any other as regards constitution building.

DATA POINT

Serving justice the longest

The judge with the longest tenure in the Supreme Court was Justice P.N.Bhagwati (13 and a half years), followed by Justices Hidayatullah and Y.V. Chandrachud (12.9 years each). Justice Chandrachud served the longest as Chief Justice (nearly seven and a half years)

Supreme Court judge	Appt. date	Retirement date	Tenure (in years)	CJI tenure (in years)
P.N. Bhagwati	17-07-'73	20-12-'86	13.4	1.4
M. Hidayatullah	12-01-'58	16-12-'70	12.9	2.8
Y.V. Chandrachud	28-08-'72	11-07-'85	12.9	7.4
R.S. Pathak	20-02-'78	18-06-'89	11.3	2.5
J.C. Shah	10-12-'59	21-01-'71	11.1	0.1
E.S. Venkataramiah	08-03-'79	17-12-'89	10.8	0.5
S. Murtaza Fazal Ali	02-04-'75	20-08-'85	10.4	0.0
S.P. Bharucha	07-01-'92	05-05-'02	10.3	0.5
A.P. Sen	17-07-'78	19/09-'88	10.2	0.0
A.S. Anand	18-11-'91	31-10-'01	10.0	3.1

Source: Supreme Court of India