

A FORCED UNION: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON AIADMK FACTIONAL FEUD

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The [Madras High Court has restored 'dual leadership' in the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam \(AIADMK\)](#) in an order that amounts to forcing the party's recently elected 'interim general secretary', Edappadi K. Palaniswami, to work jointly with O. Panneerselvam, who was 'expelled' at a general council meeting on July 11. On the face of it, the order of Justice G. Jayachandran, declaring the July 11 meeting void, because it was not convened by one authorised to do so, seems to be an impractical measure. The court has ordered restoration of status quo ante as on June 23, the day an earlier general council meeting was held without any decision on the leadership question. This pushes the party into a deadlock. The order says categorically that there shall be no general council or executive committee meeting without the joint consent of the Coordinator (Mr. Panneerselvam) and the Joint Coordinator (Mr. Palaniswami). It also says there will be no impediment in their convening a general council meeting jointly and deciding on its affairs, including the issue of restoring 'single leadership'. Such a scenario does not look likely as Mr. Panneerselvam may not allow the issue to be taken up. The outcome is a setback to Mr. Palaniswami, who may have thought he has taken full control with the support of an overwhelming majority among general council members. It is a major boost for Mr. Panneerselvam as he gets back his shared leadership after he was unseated and expelled.

The court's order is based on three grounds: that the July 11 meeting could not have been called by the acting presidium chairman, when the party rules say only the two coordinators can do so; that it was done without giving 15 days' advance notice, and the claim that the post of coordinators had lapsed after June 23 was without any basis. However, a moot question is whether a party can be run with two leaders who have fallen out and hold a de facto veto power over each other's decisions. At one point, the court seems to question the general council's power to make decisions based on majority when it asks how a party with 1.50 crore members can suddenly seek a change in dispensation with just 2,500 general council members; and says whether these 2,500 people truly reflect the views of all primary members is something to be examined. The implications of this observation are not wholly clear, but it may be used to stall or reject any decision made in this forum. As the litigation deepens the AIADMK's internal crisis, Mr. [Palaniswami has filed an appeal in the High Court](#). A question that arises is whether warring factions, especially when one of them is clearly dominant, can be yoked together by judicial diktat.

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