

CONFLICT OVER CIVIC CHIEFS

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Devolution of Powers & Finances up to Local Levels and Challenges therein - Panchayats & Municipalities

Cadres of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi blocking traffic on the Panruti-Cuddalore Road to register their protest against the defeat of the party nominee in the indirect elections to Nellikuppam municipality. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

A conflict between honouring promises made to allies during seat allocation talks and upholding grassroots democracy came to the fore recently in Tamil Nadu following the indirect election of civic chiefs in urban local bodies. In many municipalities and town panchayats, where the posts of chairperson or deputy chairperson were allocated to the allies, contestants from the DMK's local units entered the fray and defeated the official alliance candidates with the support of a majority of the elected councillors. Amid protests from alliance party leaders, DMK president and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin directed all such elected civic chiefs of his party to resign from their posts. He suspended district unit leaders including the Cuddalore MLA from the party for having acted against the official candidates of the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance. Eventually, a section of the elected civic chiefs resigned to accommodate the allies, while some defied Mr. Stalin's diktat. He refused to meet rebels who sought an audience to explain their positions/ the ground situation and removed some party functionaries from key positions.

Such violations are not new. In 2006, DMK rebels ousted candidates of the PMK, then an ally, in indirect elections in many places. The DMK under M. Karunanidhi was then heading a minority government with external support from the allies. PMK leader S. Ramadoss declared then that his party would only extend "issue-based" support to the DMK. However, Karunanidhi, who still had a near full five-year term to complete, largely did not go beyond censuring his party functionaries and sought to pass off the breach of agreement as an "aberration" at the local level.

In contrast, Mr. Stalin, despite heading a majority government and being firmly in command of the alliance, came across as someone who did not want his smaller allies to feel the slightest discomfort and who wanted to present himself as a 'supreme leader' within the DMK. In doing so, he inadvertently triggered a debate on the righteousness of his action in a democracy where the choice of the majority prevails.

Votaries of the current grassroots democratic system argue that the election of the DMK 'rebels' was a "legitimate act" since these 'rebels' enjoyed the support of the majority of the members in the newly formed councils. This section feels a candidate of an alliance partner, who does not have the political wherewithal to garner majority support in a council, cannot be thrust on the members against their collective will.

Some others believe in the traditional political system, which requires compromises and adjustments with allies irrespective of their individual strength on the ground. They feel councillors, elected on the ticket of a political party, must be bound by the diktats of the leadership of the organisation and respect the terms of an alliance. They argue that most elected councillors owe their position to the organisation rather than their personal standing.

However, a practical question arises: can the head of a local body, who represents a party with fewer members in the council, function effectively during a five-year term? The answer to this perhaps lies in the context under which the DMK government in 2006 switched over to the indirect election system. The policy decision was influenced by Mr. Stalin's experience as a

directly elected Mayor (Chennai) in 2001 when he faced non-cooperation in the Corporation Council dominated by the AIADMK-led alliance's councillors. With the DMK councillors now dominating most local bodies, it remains to be seen if civic chiefs representing alliance parties will have a smooth ride despite the uneasy truce.

sureshkumar.d@thehindu.co.in

[Our code of editorial values](#)

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

CrackIAS.com