**‘There’s no question of us backing a Cong-led govt again,whatever the circumstances’ | The Indian Express**

Related. In this Idea Exchange,CPM general secretary Prakash Karat talks about why BJP or Cong cant be seen as toeing the Left line,why parties should be kept out of RTI,and why market has a place in economy. The session was moderated by Special Correspondent Manoj C G. Manoj C G: Sonia Gandhi has said the UPA will come back to power. Sushma Swaraj,the leader of the Opposition,said the NDA would form the government. What do you think? If you see the 2004 and 2009 elections,the Congress and BJP together didnt touch 50 per cent of the votes polled. I think that trend will continue. Secondly,neither the Congress nor the BJP can think about getting a majority on their own,much of it is dependent on the alliances they forge…The key will lie in whichever combination emerges with the widest support. Manoj C G: Do you envisage a government without the Congress and BJP? Its difficult,unless you think of a scenario where one of these parties is supporting a government from outside,a minority government…. D K Singh: Do you regret that historical blunderas described by Jyoti Basuof keeping out of the Union government in 1996? We had 35 MPs at the time. Our assessment was that we would not be in a position to determine policies. It was true that earlier our party programme more or less prohibited us from joining a central government unless we got a majority. But we have changed that and we said that it would depend on our strength and capacity at the time. Manoj C G: But Jyoti Basu could have become the PM and dictated policies himself? Well,if you think that…Weve had prime ministers,I wont name them. But its not a question of whos PM. How can that prime minister provide direction without the requisite strength? D K Singh: After the 2008 trust vote over the nuclear deal,you said you would never break bread with the Congress again. Do you stand by it? Its not just because of that. We saw 2004 as an exceptional situation where we had had six years of a BJP-led government. We felt it was important that there should be no return of the BJP and we aimed for a secular government. And the only way such a government could be formed at that time was with the Congress leading. People ask us now: In order to keep the BJP out or even Narendra Modi out,will you support the Congress?. We say no,because you must see the context. By next year we will have 10 years of the UPA and we have fought this government on all major policy positions. Theres no question of us propping up a Congress-led government again,whatever the circumstances. D K Singh: But you dont mind getting support from the Congress,from outside or within? I dont think well be in a position to ask support from the Congress. D K Singh: As part of some third front government…. Wheres the third front? Right now it is a fact that the non-Congress,non-BJP parties… none of them has come together yet. D K Singh: Are you happy that the BJP has started taking your line on economic policy,say the pension or the insurance Bill? We know that when they are in government,they pursue the same policies. The BJP government tried to push FDI in insurance. Under their government they got 26 per cent. Now for getting 49 per cent,there are only some minor details. Ruhi Tewari: Are we headed for polarised elections? Theres going to be a higher degree of polarisationmaybe not uniformly. I think the RSS and its outfits are trying to create such communal polarisation or tension that they think would be beneficial to the BJP. Even this VHP yatra is part of this overall scheme. Pranab Dhal Samanta: What are the three lessons from your 2009 electoral setback that you dont want to repeat in 2014? 2009 saw the poorest performance by our party in its history. And the main reason for that was our defeat in the West Bengal Lok Sabha elections…As far as election understanding,we had it (in 2009) with some of the non-Congress parties in states like Tamil Nadu,Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. We plan to continue some of these alliances. We dont think there was anything wrong as such (then)…we couldnt forge a more credible and far-flung alliance. Shruti Srivastava: What has led to this economic situation? I dont see this economic crisis or rupee crash as a surprise because the economy has for long been dependent on external flows of credit,of money. The debt bubble is now bursting. Much of it is short-term credit,hot speculative money which has come into our equity market,our debt markets. It is flowing out now. We have had,I think,$12 billion of funds flowing out from June onwards. There are those who say its because the US Federal Reserve has decided on easing off. Yes,thats part of the problem,but it has also to do with our domestic economy. Theres an industrial slowdown,theres a growing trade deficit. Rakesh Sinha: What reservations did you have on the food security Bill? The Left has had a very strong approach towards having an effective public distribution system. One of the best PDS was built in Kerala from the 1970s. Our experience shows that a universal PDS is the best. It leads to less wastage,leakage. This targeting business leads to a lot of corruption,wastage and diversion of stocks. People say that this means a lot of waste of resources. We dont think so. You exclude the affluent…we moved an amendment to exclude income tax payers. Wherever states have a good PDS,people who dont need PDS dont go to it. You dont expect Mukesh Ambani to go to the PDS shop! We also felt the quantity of food grains is too little. Girish Bablani\*: How do you plan to make your party relevant to the youth today? In India,political parties pay very little attention to,say,education. We are failing in this. They pay very little attention to health care. We have done a great disservicehaving such a weak education system. Dilip Bobb: What is your assessment of Narendra Modi? I belong to a party that doesnt look at leaders individually,separated from the party they belong to or the movement they belong to or the classes they represent. But what strikes me about Modi is the overwhelming support he has from big business. I dont think any other political leader at a national level evokes such support,even admiration,from big business. Which I am saying is a significant thing. It strikes me that no other person has accomplished this… Youll see that virtually every noted industrialist has said he is the right man. The second aspect is this: dont forget he has been an RSS pracharak all his life. Therefore the pitch for the Gujarat development model underlines some other reality also. I think thats a rather dangerous mix. Arun S: There were some reports about differences between CPM Politburo member Sitaram Yechury and you. This is the first time I have heard about this. Theres nothing in it. The Bengali media used to write about differences between Karat and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee! Maneesh Chhibber: There has been a slew of orders such as the Central Information Commission (CIC)s about political parties and politicians. We have taken the lead as far as the CIC order is concerned…The role of political parties in our system is such that they cant be treated as public authorities. The CIC has termed us public authorities and contended that therefore we should come under the RTI. In our country,weve different types of political parties with very different ideologies,politics,policies and even organisational ways of functioning. Its not that we are afraid of anybody scrutinising that,but we would like to preserve our autonomy in the way we run our party. Our party is not run on a dynastic principle; our party doesnt believe in family rule. Our party has a strong inner-party system. There might be parties where members are not accountable,but we make it a point to ensure that our party consists of people who want to join it. We make them part with a percentage of their income. The definition of a public authority in the RTI Act is government agencies,government bodies,state agencies and also those wholly or substantially funded by the government. We are not wholly or substantially funded by the government. If people are saying we get 10 minutes from Doordarshan every five years for parliamentary elections and that amounts to state funding,then thats not very fair…. If there is any rule that parties must declare their accounts properly,were prepared for that. But not for queries like How did you select your candidates?. Maneesh Chhibber: The Supreme Court judgment? There are two judgments. One judgment is unreal; its bad because it says that anyone who is in police custody or jail cant contest elections. The judges need to come out of their ivory towers. In our country,there are governments and ruling parties that will just round up the opposition or opponents on the eve of elections. The other part of the judgment is okay. It says that if youve been convicted,you have to be disqualified. That is there in the law. The only thing is that there is this provision that if its appealed,then you need not vacate your seat if youre a sitting MP or MLA. For that weve suggested that since trial court decisions are often overturned by higher courts,in case of a sitting MP or MLA,let him or her be suspended from the position,pending an appeal which is time-bound. The person will not vote or draw a salary or allowance or exercise any rights of a legislator. Kaunain M Sheriff\*: UPA II is accused of stalling industrial growth,including through hurdles in land acquisition. Do you think the UPA is the new Left? Thats a simplification. In fact,we were accused in West Bengal of promoting industry and acquiring land forcibly. Thats what happened in Singur. I think the issue is deeper. That is,you have in India a real problem of large-scale displacement and dispossession of people due to land being acquired. As far as industrial development is concerned,the UPA governments policies are flawed. I dont think its because they have a Left understanding. We have neglected industry and manufacturing. Our party has not opposed FDI in manufacturing. D K Singh: I read that you were a good biker and you had to sell it to study abroad. My father was an ordinary clerk. I got a scholarship as a school student,then I got a scholarship from a private trust for my undergraduate degree,and I got a scholarship from Edinburgh University. The selling of the bike was part of that. Rakesh Sinha: You read crime fiction. Ian Rankin,for instance. You have Agatha Christie and all of that,but you have serious crime fiction and actually good crime fiction brings out the contradictions in society. So I have read a large number of crime-fiction authors who are generally left-wing also. Shekhar Gupta: What is your understanding of the Naxalite movement? Do you see them as a fellow Left movement? The Naxalite movement today is what is known as the Maoist stream and I am afraid there is nothing we have in common with that sort of activity. Our fundamental criticism is that it has abandoned politics. A party that calls itself CPI (Maoist) talks about revolution minus politics. All they think is that revolutions are accomplished by guns,and it has led to a serious degeneration of revolutionary politics. It has led to anarchist violence and indiscriminate killings. We are totally opposed to it. If there is any retrieval from this position towards a more political approach or activities,we will not hesitate to reach out. Like what happened with Nepals Maoists. Krishna Uppuluri\*: If it were not for the religion factor,what would have stopped you from working with the BJP? In India we use the word communalism; this term is used only in India. Its the use of religion for political purposes. Mobilisation on religious issues for political purposes is one aspect. Apart from that,the BJP is a party with which we have differences on other issues,for example,economic… The BJP is also invested with something more because of its organic link with the RSS. Anindiya Thakuria\*: Fundamentally,socialism is that the state has a role from cradle to grave. How do you explain the dichotomy between the Left not getting much support and people in India generally agreeing that the government has a role in the life of people? Learning from the experience of countries where Communist parties have ruled,we realised that not having the market play any role in the economy is not correct. It does not mean that all economic activities have to be controlled by the state. But I think in India,those who are right-wing do not call themselves right-wing. The understanding is there,but they dont call themselves right-wing. Arindam Das Ghosh\*: I was part of the SFI. It was demoralising to not see party leaders in Parliament. In our party organisation,some people specialise in organisational work. In my case,it was decided I should be in organisation. Of course,we can switch roles,but our party sees parliamentary activity as one wing of our political activity. Rakesh Sinha: Is the government making a mistake by not pushing through the pact on enclaves with Bangladesh? This is a necessary agreement. But since it requires a constitutional amendment and since the BJP and some parties have said they wont accept this,its not being pushed enough. This is shortsighted. There is already a lot of turmoil in Bangladesh and this will be another anti-India thing…. Manoj C G: What are your views on Pakistan? It will be extremely shortsighted to stop talking now. You cant talk to China,you cant talk to Pakistan,you cant do anything for Bangladesh,everybody is your enemy! I am very puzzled. Because every time you ask the Indian side or the Chinese side,both say we dont see any problems.