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EXPT

Communal forces will not get an inch in Tamil Nadu... law will take care of AIADMK: CM MK Stalin

Jose Yesudy | PANI | Aug 4, 2021, 08:24 IST

Tamil Nadu chief minister MK Stalin

He may have completed just 100 days in office, but for first-time chief minister MK Stalin, it has been an action-packed stint. As the DMK government gears up for the rest of its tenure, the chief minister, replying to a questionnaire from TOI, spoke on a range of issues, including the crackdown on alleged corruption of former AIADMK ministers and his inclusive style of governance:

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How did you feel when you took oath and said, 'I, Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin...'?

When I said Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin, it marked the continuation of about 150 years of history. Born in Tiruvarur, Thiruvalluvar, Muthuvelar gave Tamil Nadu a great leader, poet and sangamitar himself. He was the son of Kalaignar. Born into a backward community, he rose to be a leader of the oppressed. I am a continuation of this history. Stalin is not a mere name. It's a continuation of this history. I felt great saying it aloud while taking the oath.

It was not just me, crores of DMK cadres too felt as if they were taking the oath along with me. I consider it an achievement, having given them such joy. Kalaignar had said, 'only if you sprint long, you can leap to greater heights'.

As you complete 100 days, how many promises have you fulfilled?

We protected the people of Tamil Nadu from the deadly effects of a second wave. As promised, we disbursed 4,000 Covid-19 relief to all ration card-holders in two instalments. And, though it was not a promise, we provided a hamper of 13 grocery items. Women can now ride free in buses. Under the 'Ungal Thoguthiyil Muthalamaichar' (Chief Minister in your Constituency) scheme, we have redressed the grievances of several people...

What about the opposition charge that you haven't delivered on several promises?

This is just a tactic of the AIADMK to divert the attention of the people from the earlier corrupt regime. People are keenly observing, acknowledging it and praising the achievements of our government. Law will take care of the AIADMK men who had indulged in corruption.

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How different from the previous government was your approach to dealing with Covid?

I took up Covid-19 containment and relief measures even before I assumed office. Soon after being sworn in chief minister, my government worked 24x7 to ensure people's welfare. We set up a war room. We worked on a war footing to tackle the oxygen shortage and tide over the crisis. We ensured there was no shortage of oxygen beds. We made the vaccination a mass movement. We significantly brought down Covid mortality. Even amidst lockdown, we ensured people's livelihood was not greatly affected. But proof of the way the AIADMK government handled the pandemic is evident in the corruption even in the purchase of bleaching powder and masks.

How cooperative has the Centre been with the state on Covid management in releasing funds and vaccines? Is TN getting its due share of vaccines?

We had to pressure the Union government for everything the state required. Even the vaccine allocation for us was very low. We had to escalate the issue right up to the Prime Minister to get our due share. Even today, the situation is such that we continue to fight relentlessly even for life-saving matters.

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On GST, another point of contention with the Centre, what are your plans?

The GST policy snatches the rights of the states, and this has been the DMK's stand. The Union government does not give states due share as per agreed schedule. Tamil Nadu should be given its full share of taxes for the pandemic period. We should get back the situation wherein states should handle their own revenues and taxes.

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As for Centre-state relationship, why did you start off on a confrontationist note — First 'Onaiya Asaur', then the draft Indian Ports Bill?

We use the term Union government only as per the principles of federalism. That is how it has been defined in the Constitution. How can that be wrong? We will continue to oppose schemes that snatch the rights of states. They only weaken the federal structure, not strengthen it.

Would such a stand make it difficult for TN? Did the Palaniswami government's friendly ties with the Centre help the state?

To protect his chair, Palaniswamy preferred to remain a bonded labourer to the Union government. It is wrong to consider that as friendship. This is a selfish, deceitful act. Indira Gandhi once said that in support and opposition, Kalaignar will remain firm in his stand. We will follow that. We will be vocal for Tamil Nadu's rights. We will fight to ensure the country's federal structure remain strong.

What will be your role in bringing together the opposition parties across the country, something which Mamata Banerjee has been calling for?

In the last Lok Sabha election itself, DMK's victorious Tamil Nadu formula (an alliance forged with Congress and other parties, including the Communists) created ripples in Indian political circles. That formula is still being talked about. When such talks translate into action, the desired change will happen.

How are TN's finances? What's its total debt?

For the last 10 years, especially the last seven years, TN has been pushed deep into trouble due to fiscal mismanagement. Our finance minister's white paper exposed that... Tamil Nadu has been burdened with 5 lakh crore debt. The DMK government's objective is to reduce the debt burden imposed on every Tamil by the AIADMK government. This will be achieved by increasing productivity, attracting investments, streamlining taxes, ensuring that the state gets its dues from the Centre on time, and getting the funds sanctioned in tune with the state's development. This Budget is a precursor to

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