



**Hindu Editorial
Analysis
(19.02.2026)**

Vocabulary

Frays – dispute, fight, riot

Cohesion – stick together, connected

Brink – edge, margin

Reap – harvest, gather, garner

Criticising – condemn, censure, denounce

Bargaining – negotiate, deal

Ploy – tactic, move, trick

Ad hoc – made or done suddenly

Resuscitating – revival, rejuvenation

Moribund – dying, expiring

Endorsed – signed, approved

Swathes – cover, wrap, envelope

Concomitant – accompanying, associated, related

No gain in bargaining

The Congress, not the DMK, stands to lose more if it frays the alliance

At a time when the opposition to the BJP has become fragmented or weakened across India, the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA) in Tamil Nadu remains the most robust multi-party anti-BJP alliance, largely because of its ideological cohesion in a State with a distinct socio-political ethos and the seamless ability of its constituent parties to transfer votes to allies. Yet, recent developments, where second-rung Congress leaders have either critiqued the DMK or demanded a direct share in power, have stretched the seams of the alliance dangerously to the brink of a fallout between the parties.

The arrangement between the SPA's partners has been clear for over a decade – the DMK forms the government with their support, and the alliance benefits collectively in terms of representation at the Centre, State and local levels through vote transfers. This arrangement helped the Congress reap a good harvest of MPs from Tamil Nadu in the 2024 general election. So why have MP Manickam Tagore and All India Professionals' Congress president Praveen Chakravarty begun criticising the DMK, even after the high command asked them not to air such views publicly?

The call for a share in power could be seen as a bargaining ploy to contest more Assembly seats. But the Congress secured a far better strike rate in 2021 (18 of 25 seats) compared to 2016 (eight of 41), suggesting that this limitation was justifiable relative to its support base. Power-sharing would be viable only if the SPA contested on a jointly drafted common minimum programme, or if the Congress had substantively increased its support base in the State, necessitating accommodation.

Unlike the VCK or the Left, which have held the DMK-led government to account on issues of labour and caste discrimination despite outside support, the Congress's critiques have been opportunistic and ad hoc, surfacing only after actor Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) has emerged as an oppositional force. If the Congress abandons the SPA for an alliance with the TVK, it would stand to lose the most, sacrificing a crucial INDIA ally that delivered the bloc its highest State

tally in 2024. A Congress exit from the SPA will tighten the contest by narrowing the gap between the DMK and the AIADMK (in alliance with the BJP), but many traditional Congress voters, principally opposed to the BJP, are likely to gravitate toward the DMK-led alliance rather than a tie-up with an untested and enigmatic force such

as the TVK. It would be a case of being pound-foolish and not even penny-wise. The Congress leadership would do better focusing on alliance cohesion, and working towards resuscitating its moribund organisational structure, rather than rocking the boat in Tamil Nadu.

Front and centre

Front-of-package labelling helps consumers to choose health foods

In a further instalment of its continuing engagement with regulating processed food products, the Supreme Court of India has, once again, staked out for the right of citizens to health. In a recent judgment, a Bench directed the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to consider introducing mandatory front-of-package warning labels on packaged food products high in sugar, salt and saturated fat. Justices

J.B. Pardiwala and K.V. Viswanathan directed the FSSAI to file its response to the proposal within four weeks. There is adequate evidence available to associate these sugar, salt and saturated fat additives in processed foods with non-communicable diseases, including diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases, all of which are inching up their way up to epidemic proportions in India. The petitioner, the NGO 3S and Our Health

Society, informed the Court that such disclosures would enable consumers to make informed decisions and choices and could help with stemming the tide of rising deaths due to diabetes and heart ailments. Earlier, in 2025, the Court had directed an expert committee under the FSSAI to submit its recommendations on the amendments required to be made to the Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020,

to implement front-of-package labelling. On the count of holding consultations with all stakeholders across the country, an extension was sought and secured, but in February 2026, the Bench expressed unhappiness at the regulator's compliance report, noting that the exercise undertaken thus far had failed to yield any "positive or

good result”. One of the elements of contention between the FSSAI and the petitioner was the former’s proposal to introduce an Indian Nutrition Rating model, an indigenous system of rating a product; the latter opposed it on the grounds that this was not in line with globally accepted standards.

The Court's persistent intervention on the issue of front-of-package labelling should lean on the massive ultra-processed food industry to implement these universally endorsed safeguards, to inform consumers of the content and additives in the packaged food, to guide choices, ultimately. Non-communicable diseases have already swept through vast swathes of the population in the country: the 2023 ICMR-INDIAB study found

that 101 million people in India (11.4% of the population) have diabetes, with an additional 136 million suffering from prediabetes. Other concomitant factors including hypertension (35.5% national average), abdominal obesity (39.5%) and high cholesterol (24%) were also estimated to be high. Introducing front-of-package labelling is an essential part of establishing a continuum of care that begins with prevention.

Thank You