



CPA Statement on the death of Professor Kumar David

16 October 2024, Colombo:

The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) notes with deep sadness the passing at the age of 83 of Professor A. Kumar David – or as he was wont to describe himself, ‘the original AKD’.

Kumar was a brilliant scholar, an accomplished academic, tireless newspaper columnist, imaginative Marxist public intellectual, and a giant of the Old Left. A fuller account of his many lives, times, and achievements can be read [here](#).

In both his conversation and his written word, Kumar had wit and wisdom as well as the ability to deal with intellectual disagreement with not only a supreme confidence and a gentlemanly civility but also with genuine and unaffected curiosity. While therefore Kumar took no prisoners and gave no quarter in debate, a deep understanding of the grammar of the political – borne of a lifetime of intelligent reading of political philosophies extending well beyond his own tradition – was in his DNA. He was, for example, enchanted by Adam Smith and perennially intrigued by Nicolo Machiavelli.

Attacking opponents with rote-learned assertions taken as post-political truths, with rabidity of tone replacing the quality of argument, is unfortunately now the increasingly dominant style of Sri Lankan political culture. It is however an approach that was far too pedestrian for the intellect and the moral gravity of Kumar and his generation of leftists, who were, moreover, possessed of a vast cultural hinterland beyond politics. An elegant dresser whether in occidental bowties or oriental linens, he was a connoisseur of fine wine, English literature, and Western classical music.

Kumar was a regular and valued contributor to CPA seminars and publications over the years. While our approaches differed, we were agreed on the basic forms of the solution for some of the biggest constitutional questions of our time. We agreed on the need for a federal-type response to ethno-territorial pluralism (or, ‘The National Question’, as Kumar would put it), and on the absolute necessity of the complete abolition of the executive presidential system if our flailing democracy was to be rescued. Kumar was also the progenitor – in 2012 – of the electoral strategy known as the ‘Single-Issue Common-Candidate’ concept which succeeded in achieving the first defenestration of the Rajapaksas in January 2015. In his last contribution to our work, Kumar reflected on this thoughtfully and candidly in CPA’s publication on the constitutional crisis of 2018.

We mourn the passing of a great Sri Lankan and offer our condolences at this difficult to time Kumar David’s family, friends, and comrades.