

IUML women candidates face uphill poll battle in LDF strongholds

While the nomination of Jayanthi Rajan and Fatima Tahilia signals an attempt to address criticism over gender imbalance, the choice of constituencies reveals the party's electoral pragmatism

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KOZHIKODE

The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), a key ally in the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF), may have taken a paradoxical and much-hyped step towards gender inclusion by fielding two women candidates for the Assembly elections.

However, the party still requires a level of political alchemy and electoral shrewdness to bridge the long-standing chasm that has left it without a single woman representative in the Legislature to date.

While the nomination of Jayanthi Rajan in the Koothuparamba segment in Kannur and Fatima Tahilia in Perambra in Kozhikode signals an attempt to address persistent criticism over gender imbalance, the choice of constituencies reveals the party's underlying electoral pragmatism. Both seats are held by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and are widely regarded as its strongholds, making them challenging battlegrounds rather than winnable opportunities.



Jayanthi Rajan



Fatima Tahilia

The strategy suggests that the IUML is balancing symbolic inclusion with electoral caution. By fielding women in difficult constituencies, the party appears to avoid risking its core seats while still projecting a commitment to inclusivity. The move also reflects lessons from past experiences. In 2021, the IUML fielded Noorbina Rasheed in Kozhikode South, a sitting seat, but failed to retain it—echoing an earlier setback in 1996 when Qamarunnisa Anvar lost from the same constituency, then known as Kozhikode II.

A closer look at the constituencies reinforces this reading. Koothuparamba has historically leaned towards Left and socialist

parties, with the LDF maintaining its hold over the seat in between a brief UDF victory in 2011 when K.P. Mohanan of the Socialist Janata (Democratic) emerged victorious. Similarly, Perambra has remained a CPI(M) bastion for over four decades, with uninterrupted Left victories since 1980.

The candidates, however, carry their own significance. Ms. Rajan, a Dalit leader and national assistant secretary of the IUML, reflects an effort to broaden the party's social outreach beyond its traditional base. She is up against LDF nominee P.K. Praveen of the Rashtriya Janata Dal and National Democratic Alliance candidate Shijilal of the BJP. "Koothuparam-

ba is considered a Left stronghold, but I am confident of a thumping victory," said Ms. Rajan.

Ms. Tahilia, a Kozhikode Corporation Councillor and advocate of gender equity, reinforces the party's messaging on representation. She is contesting against the incumbent and LDF State convener T.P. Ramakrishnan of the CPI (M) and BJP candidate M. Mohanan Master.

Sources said that while the party recognises the need to improve its image on inclusivity, its overriding priority remains increasing its number of MLAs. This has led it to avoid "riskier" experiments — such as fielding women in safe or incumbent seats — and instead opt for a more cautious, optics-driven approach.

When contacted, IUML State general secretary P.M.A. Salam said the decision to field women in two Left strongholds was aimed at winning both seats. "In the recent three-tier local body polls, the UDF had the upper hand in these constituencies. Both our women candidates will emerge victorious," he said.

Avian influenza: culling of birds to begin tomorrow

The Hindu Bureau
KOZHIKODE

Culling of 14,228 birds in areas affected by the H5N1 strain of avian influenza in Kozhikode district will start on Saturday.

This was declared by District Collector Snehil Kumar Singh after a review meeting held at the collectorate on Thursday. Mr. Singh said that domestic birds within a one-km radii of the identified epicentres in Panangad, Kakodi, Olavanna and Perumanna grama panchayats and Nallalam area in the Kozhikode Corporation would be killed. The respective local bodies, the district administration, and the Department of Animal Husbandry would be part of the operation. In the second phase, the birds not included in the culling would be eliminated through a "mopping" exercise, and hidden or shifted birds would be eliminated through a "combing" operation. The authorities have also banned the sale and transport of domestic birds within a 10-km radius. Four rapid response teams each had been deployed in the affected areas.

So far, five samples sent to the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases have tested positive for the highly pathogenic avian influenza. They were sent for testing after the death of a large number of birds was reported in the district. Right now, the infection has been confirmed only in birds. The district administration has set up a control room at 0495-2762050 to clear the people's doubts.

Tough contest awaits rivals in LDF bastion

Mithosh Joseph
KOZHIKODE

A constituency reserved for the Scheduled Caste (SC) community, Balussery remains one of the few segments in north Kerala where ideological continuity has largely defined electoral outcomes, even as shifting voter preferences in the Lok Sabha elections point to an undercurrent of change. With the 2026 Assembly elections approaching, the electorate presents a familiar yet slowly evolving landscape.

The constituency, largely redefined by the 2008 delimitation, comprises nine grama panchayats — Atholi, Balussery, Kayanna, Koorachundu, Kottur, Naduvannur, Ulliyeri, Panangad, and Unnikulam. The inclusion of areas from the neighbouring regions, particularly those with a strong Left presence, has helped consolidate the base of the LDF.

Historically, Balussery has been a socialist stronghold. The constituency repeatedly elected A.C. Shanmughadas, who represented it seven times under different party labels within the socialist fold. The gradual shift of these factions towards the Left entrenched the LDF's dominance.

After him, A.K. Saseendran carried forward the legacy before the constituency was reserved for SC.

Post-delimitation, the CPI(M) assumed direct control of the seat, with Purushan Kadalundy winning in 2011 and retaining it in 2016 with an increased margin.

The victory of K.M. Sachin Dev in 2021 ensured

Constituency profile

Electorate 2026

Male 1,11,061 Female 1,17,318 Transgender 4 Total 2,28,383

Vote polled by major candidates in the Assembly election

2021	2016
K.M. Sachin Dev 91,839	Purushan Kadalundi 82,914
Dharmajan Bolgatty 71,467	U.C. Raman 67,450
Libin Balussery 16,490	P.K. Supran 19,324
Victory margin 20,372	Victory margin 15,464

LDF UDF

the continuation of the Left's uninterrupted hold on the constituency for over three decades, underscoring the enduring appeal of its organisational strength and ideological base.

Yet, this electorate's voting pattern has not been entirely uniform.

As part of the Kozhikode Lok Sabha constituency, it alternated between the LDF and the UDF in the Lok Sabha elections, favouring the latter in 2014 and 2019.

This divergence suggests that local and national considerations often shape voter choices differently.

At the grassroots level, the LDF continues to enjoy an advantage across a majority of panchayats, though it suffered some setbacks in the recent local body elections.

The traditional strongholds of the UDF in panchayats like Atholi, Koorachundu, and Unnikulam appear to be expanded to more local bodies with the anti-incumbency trend. The LDF has fielded sitting MLA K.M. Sachin Dev again, banking on continuity and performance of the incumbent.

The UDF has opted for a generational shift by nomi-

nating KSU leader V.T. Sooraj, while the BJP-led NDA has fielded C.P. Sathesnan, as it seeks to expand its presence in a constituency where its vote share has shown incremental growth.

Developmental concerns are likely to remain central to the campaign. Despite its natural advantages, including scenic locations such as Vayalada and Kakkayam, Balussery has not fully tapped its ecotourism potential.

A major concern raised by many is the absence of any major industrial venture, which limits the prospect of generating more employment for the rural population.

Development projects

The yet-to-be-completed development projects for a large number of SC colonies in the constituency also emerge as a question and a hot campaign issue to be faced by the contestants in the upcoming election.

While the LDF's unchallenged position gives it an advantage, the outcome of the voters' verdict will depend on how effectively the UDF and NDA mobilise local discontent and address long-standing development issues.

In campaign mode



UDF candidate for Kozhikode North Assembly constituency K. Jayanth being felicitated by front leaders, including M.K. Raghavan, MP, and M.K. Muneer, MLA, at an election convention in Kozhikode on Thursday. K. RAGESH

Alert issued against water-borne diseases

The Hindu Bureau
KOZHIKODE

The Health department has issued an alert against water-borne diseases in the wake of the recent death of a three-and-a-half-year-old girl from Kutikkattoor due to shigella infection. A release quoting District Medical Officer K.K. Rajaram said on Thursday that diarrhoea, fever, stomach pain, vomiting, fatigue, and the presence of blood in stools are the main symptoms of shigellosis, an intestinal infection caused by the shigella bacteria. For hepatitis 'A', fever with body pain, headache, fatigue, and nausea are the symptoms. Mr. Rajaram said that only boiled water should be used for cooking, and hand hygiene is a must.

Panchayat to issue stop memo to Ambayathode waste treatment plant

The Hindu Bureau
KOZHIKODE

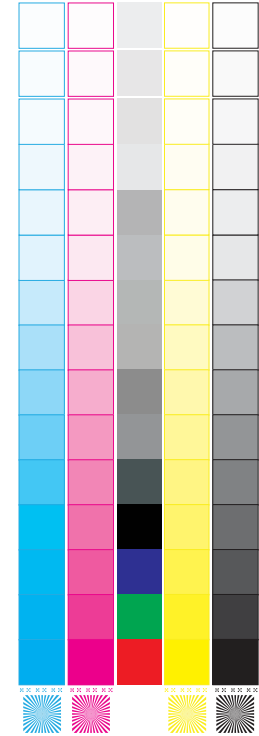
Kattippara grama panchayat has decided to issue a formal stop memo to Freshcut Organic Products Private Limited, the poultry waste rendering unit at Ambayathode, considering local protests alleging environmental pollution. The move follows renewed agitation by a few residents who have taken it up as a campaign issue ahead of the Assembly elections.

Sources said the panchayat secretary had been asked to explore further legal measures in compliance with the panchayat's decision. Meanwhile, officials said action would be taken only after examining provisions of the Panchayat Raj Act. It was on October 21 last

year that a local protest turned violent, leading to an arson attack and temporary closure of the factory.

Several people, including the agitators and police personnel, had sustained injuries in the incident. Following a complaint by the factory owners, the police initiated legal action against over 400 protesters. The National Green Tribunal had taken up the matter and impleaded the local authorities, Pollution Control Board (PCB), and relevant departments as respondents to facilitate a thorough investigation into the incident.

The residents had mainly protested against air pollution caused by the treatment plant. The factory owners had denied the claims.



THE HINDU
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Vandana murder: court to deliver sentence tomorrow

The Hindu Bureau
KOLLAM

Kollam Additional Sessions Court is set to deliver the sentence for Sandeep, the convict in the brutal murder of Dr. Vandana Das, on Saturday.

Judge P.N. Vinod had previously found Sandeep of Kudavattoor, guilty of multiple charges including homicide, causing grievous hurt, obstructing government officials from performing their duties, and destruction of evidence. The final arguments regarding the quantum of punishment were concluded on Thursday, marking a

critical turning point in a case that shook the medical community and the State. During the proceedings, the prosecution pushed for the maximum possible penalty, categorising the crime as rarest of rare. They emphasised the heinous nature of the act, noting that a 22-year-old house surgeon was mercilessly killed while on duty. In contrast, the defense sought leniency by highlighting Sandeep's age and his responsibility towards his elderly mother. After considering the points raised by both sides, the court scheduled the final sentencing for Saturday.

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