

Assembly Polls (2011) in Kerala: Narrow Victory for the UDF

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Kerala is one of the highly politicised States in India. The political sensibility of the State is the result of decades of political movements, social reform movements, and massive participation of the people in the electoral process. Kerala was the first State in India to have elections on the basis of universal adult franchise in the erstwhile state of Travancore held in 1948. After the formation of the State in 1956, the first general election to the Legislative Assembly was held in 1957. Through this election Kerala came on the map of global politics by becoming the first State in Asia to have Communists coming to power through the parliamentary process. The State witnessed 14 Legislative Assembly elections and the same number of Lok Sabha polls. Elections to the State Legislative Assembly were held in 1957, 1960, 1965, 1967, 1970, 1977, 1980, 1982, 1987, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2011.

Announcement of the Polls

The political parties in Kerala welcomed single-phase elections to the State Assembly, announced on March 1, 2011. The date of polling, April 13, 2011, however, came as a surprise to some of the political parties which were expecting the polls in the second half of April, after Vishu and Easter. The State has always had a tradition of holding single-phase elections. The only exception was in 2006 when it witnessed elections in three phases.

The State has an electorate of 2,29,40,408. There are 20,758 polling stations with more than 1000 polling stations classified as sensitive. One important aspect of the 2011 polls was with regard to the voting rights of Non-Resident Indians. A sizeable population of NRIs got an opportunity to vote this time and this changed the voting pattern and proved decisive.

Population in Kerala—Latest Figures

According to the provisional figures of Census 2011, the State has a total population of 3,33,87,677 with 1,60,21,290 men and 1,73,66,387 women. In 2001, the population stood at 3,18,41,374 with 1,54,68,614 men and 1,63,72,760 women. Kerala's population has increased by 15.46 lakh people since 2001 to touch 3.33 crores, but the decadal growth has been slow and the total population in 2011 is lower than projected. The population has grown by only 4.86 per cent during the last decade compared to 9.43 per cent during 1991-2001.

According to projections, the State's population should have touched 3.45 crores in 2011. Kerala stands first in the country in sex ratio, general literacy and female literacy rates and is also in the forefront in the sex ratio of those aged between 0 and 6. Kerala is second only to Naga-land in the matter of slow growth rate.

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Pre-Poll Scene-2011

OVER the last decade, Kerala has witnessed wild swings from one alliance to the other, giving the UDF and LDF huge margins of victory. In the 2001 Assembly elections, the UDF scored a thumping victory securing 99 seats (plus one independent seat) in the 140-member House. In 2006, it was the LDF's turn to return the compliment by the same margin. In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, the UDF hit back strongly, garnering 16 of the 20 seats. As the 2.28 crore voters in the State made their electoral choice on April 13, 2011, the question was whether the State will buck the decadal trend and throw up a photo-finish.

Anti-incumbency has been a constant factor in the Kerala Assembly elections. Although the ruling LDF did not appear to face an anti-incumbency wave—at least in relation to its governance record—it was locked against a highly charged UDF in the polls. The UDF made it a habit to rip

open the divisions in the ruling dispensation and expose the many contradictions between intent and practice. The UDF had recovered from the humiliating defeat of 2006 thanks mainly to the self-financing colleges row during the LDF's early days in office, the lottery row towards the final months of its tenure, and the schisms in the CPI-M that have refused to go away. While the row over the self-financing colleges helped the UDF to claw its way back, the failed Munnar demolition drive helped it to consolidate its position.

The massive win in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections signalled its return to the centre-stage. The panchayat-municipal elections in October 2010, in which the UDF won almost 60 per cent of the local bodies, was proof, if any were needed, that the UDF was racing ahead of the LDF in the final lap. However, a series of sudden developments, including the sentencing of former UDF Minister R. Balakrishna Pillai for one year's rigorous imprisonment for corruption, appeared to stop it in its tracks. To the surprise of all, 89-year-old Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan has been propelled back into the reckoning. As in 2006, there was a furore over the "denial" of a ticket to him, triggering sporadic demonstrations in his support; he was reportedly given the party ticket only after the CPI-M Polit-Bureau intervened.

Test for Minor Parties

Assembly Poll 2011 in Kerala was treated as an acid test for minor partners in both the LDF and UDF.

The CPI, the second largest party in the LDF, was under pressure to reflect the leadership change in the result, while the Muslim League, the second largest party in the UDF, had to prove that it had not been rocked by contro-versies surrounding its supremo, P.K. Kunjhali-kutty. For K.M. Mani, the battle was to prove in front of his own partymen and other UDF constituents that the merger between the Kerala Congress (M) and Kerala Congress (J) has expanded its vote-base.

One of the reasons for the CPI to offer the golden handshake to Veliyam Bhargavan and elect C.K. Chandrappan in November as the State Secretary was the poor performance of the party in the Lok Sabha elections and LSG polls. While the CPI was washed out in the LS polls, it lost a considerable number of seats across the State during panchayat elections. The hard bargain by Veliyam Bhargavan for the Ponnani Lok Sabha seat during the 2009 parliamentary elections had worsened the relationship between the CPM and CPI. Later, both parties observed that the ugly spat had spoilt their chances. During the panchayat elections, the CPI really felt a leadership vacuum as Veliyam Bhargavan was not active during the campaigning.

The CPI State Executive later rated Veliyam's inactive leadership as one of the reasons for the party's poor performance in the polls. After Chandrappan took over, there was a deliberate attempt by the party centre to rejuvenate the cadre. The guidelines, such as not to field those who registered two consecutive victories in the Assembly polls, were issued by the CPI leadership in a bid to galvanise the cadre. A promise of better performance by the party was also needed to convince the LDF of its demand for 30 seats to contest.

For the Muslim League, these elections were a defining event. As the party went to polls under the leadership of P.K. Kunhalikutty, nothing short of a thumping win could have saved the party and its General Secretary. Out of the 23 seats that the party contested, a win was required in 16 to 18 seats for retaining the second slot in the UDF. A failure in at least half the seats could have ignited another round of inner-party battle in the League.

K.M. Mani's claim that the Kerala Congress (M) was now a bigger party that can even match the Muslim League needed to be proven in these polls. Though Mani dreamt big, his party had to be content with 15 or 16 seats. If he wanted to make the desired impact in the Front, a win in at least 80 per cent of seats was necessary.

Any setback in the central Travancore stronghold would have also indicated that traditional voters had ditched the party following its merger with the P.J. Joseph faction. For smaller parties in both Fronts—the JSS, Socialist Janata (Democratic), Kerala Congress (B), Kerala Congress (Thomas), NCP, JD(S) and Congress(S)—the 2011 elections were nothing short of a struggle for existence.

Poll Manifestos:

UDF

The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) in Kerala promised 36 lakh jobs, Re 1 kg rice for below poverty line (BPL) families, farm loans at three per cent interest and free bicycles to class X students in its manifesto for the April 13 Assembly elections.

The manifesto also promised 25 kg of rice at Re 1 only to BPL families and Rs 2 per kg rice to other ration cardholders.

Other salient features of the manifesto were setting up of pepper and horticulture boards, reconsideration of backdoor appointments, interest-free loans for purchasing computers and motor-bikes for students, making the Kochi metro project a reality, ensuring electricity connections to all households within a year and stopping the exploitation by operators of other State lotteries.

LDF

The ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) had promised 25 lakh new jobs, 'cradle-to-grave' social security for all, a welfare fund and pension for the staff of all places of worship and a law to unearth concealed wealth of public persons.

Unveiling a comprehensive social welfare package, the LDF manifesto promised one month's maternity leave with wages for women working in the unorganised sector, free education with books, noon meal and uniforms for all children and Rs 400 pension for all aged persons with the additional promise to raise the maternity leave with wages to three months and all welfare pensions to Rs 1000 over five years.

The manifesto, released by Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan in the presence of the leaders of all LDF constituents, also promised to recognise 35 to 40 lakh families as below poverty line (BPL) families, provide rice at Rs 2 a kg to all ration cardholders, constitute a welfare fund for domestic workers and employees of unaided educational institutions, including special schools, convert all ration shops into franchisees of the Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation (Supplyco), offer kerosene subsidy at the rate of Rs 20 a litre, implement a Rs 7500 crore scheme for women's empowerment over the coming five years and a Rs 5000-crore special package for the coastal areas.

The manifesto said that even as it stood for securing the reservation benefits of all socially and economically backward communities, the LDF would strive for a constitutional amendment that would make 10 per cent reservation benefits available to the poorest in the forward communities. It further said that the alliance would also work to ensure that Dalit Christians and Christian converts received the reservation benefits at present available to the Scheduled Castes.

The manifesto promised to bring forward a right to service law, introduce a law to govern inter-State migrant workers, implement the Sabarimala master plan, form a State-level industrial security force, increase the percentage of women in the police force to 15 per cent, enforce stringent controls on foreign liquor shops, enhance the extent of land under paddy by 1000 hectares every year, implement a comprehensive pension scheme for farmers, strive for self-sufficiency in vegetable, milk and egg production, implement a Rs 40,000-crore comprehensive road construction project, double the area of software technology parks and achieve 100 per cent Internet connectivity in schools.

II Polling

THE final figures released by the Election Commission show that 75.12 per cent votes were polled in the elections held on April 13. This marks a 2.95 per cent point increase in the voter turnout over that in the 2006 Assembly elections. The highest voter turnout was recorded in Kozhikode where 81.3 per cent of the voters exercised their franchise. Kozhikode was closely followed by Kannur with 80.7 per cent turnout. The polling percentages in the different districts are presented in the following page.

<i>District</i>	<i>Assembly Polls 2011</i>	<i>Local body polls 2010</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Thiruvananthapuram	68.3	69.27	-0.97
Kollam	72.8	73.58	-0.78
Pathanamthitta	68.2	70.54	-2.34
Alappuzha	79.1	77.75	+1.6
Kottayam	73.8	75.64	-1.84
Idukki	71.1	73.00	-1.9

Ernakulam	77.6	75.00	-2.6
Thrissur	74.9	73.00	-1.9
Palakkad	75.6	75.00	-.6
Malappuram	74.6	75.60	-1
Kozhikode	81.3	76.99	+4.31
Wayanad	73.8	79.78	-5.98
Kannur	80.7	79.48	+1.22
Kasargod	76.3	77.68	-1.38

The Election Commission's figures further show that as many as 18 constituencies recorded less than 70 per cent voter turnout, seven of them in Thiruvananthapuram. The lowest turnout in the State was in the Thiruvananthapuram constituency where only 60.2 per cent of the voters cast their votes. The highest turnout was in Kuttiyadi, where the 87.2 per cent voters turned up to exercise their franchise. As significant as the sub 70 per cent turnout was the phenomenon of several constituencies deviating from the general trends in the respective districts and recording turnout below the district averages.

The elections, though punctuated by minor bursts of violence, were generally free and fair. The Central Election Commission ordered repoll in two of the 20, 578 polling stations set up across the State—one in the Pattambi constituency and the other in the Chalakudy constituency in Thrissur district. At booth No. 118 set up in Vallapuzha of the Pattambi Assembly constituency, the charge was that stickers of party symbols were interchanged to confuse the voters. At booth No. 88 arranged at the FAS Auditorium in the Chalakkudy constituency, it was found that the names of 27 voters were missing from the electronic database.

III People's Verdict

In the closest electoral battle in recent decades that Kerala has seen, the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) has scraped past the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) in the 2011 Assembly elections. In a House of 140, the UDF has bagged 72 seats, just four seats more than the CPI-M-led ruling alliance.

The final tally shows 38 seats for the Congress, 20 for the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), nine for the Kerala Congress (Mani), two for the Socialist Janata (Democratic), and one each for the Kerala Congress (Balakrishna Pillai), the Kerala Congress (Jacob), and the RSP (Bolshevik). Even in defeat, the CPI-M has emerged as the single largest party in the new House with 45 seats. The CPI has won 13 seats, Janata Dal (Secular) four, and the RSP, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), and the LDF-backed Independents two each. In the outgoing House, the LDF had 98 seats as against the UDF's 42.

Poll 2011 - Frontwise Seat-sharing

UDF	LDF
Congress 82	CPI-M 93
Muslim League 24	(Including 9 independents)
Kerala Congress (M) 15	CPI 27
Socialist Janatha(D) 6	Janatha Dal (S) 5
JSS 4	RSP 4
Kerala Congress (J) 3	NCP 4
CMP 3	Kerala Congress (PCT) 3
Kerala Congress (B) 2	INL 3
RSP (B) 1	Congress (S) 1

Poll 2006 at a Glance

LDF				
Party	No. of seats contested	Seats won	Votes	Percent
CPI-M	91	65	5051706	32.53
CPI	24	17	1257181	8.10
JC(S)	8	5	379029	2.45
KC(J)	6	4	271560	1.75

RSP	4	3	224129	1.44
NCP	2	1	99189	0.64
Cong(S)	1	1	72579	0.47
KC(S)	1	1	48795	0.31
WL	3	1	140194	0.90
Total	140	98	7544362	45.58

UDF

<i>Party</i>	<i>Seats contested</i>	<i>Seats won</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Congress	77	24	3737843	24.07
Muslim League	22	8	1195125	7.70
DICK	18	1	692128	4.46
Kerala Congress(M)	11	7	507349	3.27
JSS	5	1	235361	1.52
Kerala Congress(B)	2	1	95710	0.62
RSP(S)	1	0	52240	0.34
RSP(M)	1	0	33223	0.23
CMP	3	0	126046	0.81
Total	140	42	6675025	43.02

The last time the State had faced such a situation was in 1965 when no government was possible as no party could secure majority in the House. By giving the UDF a marginal victory this time, the State has stuck to its three-and-a-half-decade-old tradition of changing governments every five years, though barely.

Difference of Votes—1.68 Lakh

Kerala may not have kicked its much discussed habit of electing a new State Government every five years, but it has certainly bucked the decadal trend of giving massive victories and humiliating defeats to the two rival formations. Thus it is that the Congress-led United Democratic Front has ascended power in the State with a slender margin of four seats on a vote-share of 46.03 per cent.

With the UDF's 72 seats as against the CPI-M-led Left Democratic Front's 68, this is the closest election the State has witnessed in three decades. The vote-shares show that the UDF has secured only a marginally higher number of votes as compared to its rival. The two alliances are separated by just 1,68,520 votes: the UDF secured 80,02,854 votes and the LDF 78,34,334 votes. At 45.06 per cent, the LDF's vote-share is short of the UDF's by less than one per cent.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, which put up a strong showing in select constituencies but could not open its account in the Assembly, secured only 10,53,681 votes. Its vote-share is 6.06 per cent. The other candidates in the fray were able to secure 4,96,782 votes (2.85 per cent). The outcome has shocked the Congress and its allies more than their rivals because, after their impressive performances in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections and the local body elections held seven months ago, they were expecting to win big. The UDF won 16 of the 20 Lok Sabha seats, and over 55 per cent of the local self-government institutions.

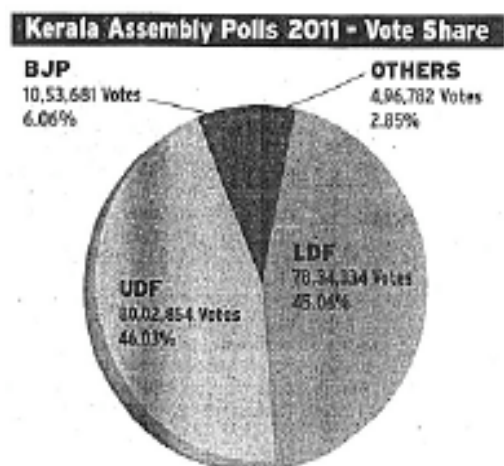
V.S. Factor

The one person who made a difference for the LDF was V.S. Achuthanandan, who took the battle to the UDF's terrain. Achuthanandan, who took the burden of the campaign on his shoulders with the track record of the LDF backing him, triggered a surge in favour of the LDF towards the final phase of the campaign. The outcome shows he was able not only to rouse the LDF cadres and supporters, but also win over a large number of unattached voters. The LDF's strong showing in the southern districts of Kollam, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta, central districts of Idukki and Thrissur, and the northern district of Kozhikode and to some extent Kasargod, could be attributed to the way he attracted and enthused the voters.

Kerala Party Position

UDF	72	LDF	68
Congress	38	CPI-M	45
IUML	20	CPI	13
KC(M)	09	JD(S)	04

SJ(D)	02	RSP	02
KC(B)	01	NCP	02
RSP(Bolshevik)	01	IND	02
KC(Jacob)	01	Congress(S)	00
JSS	00	KC (Thomas)	00
CMP	00		



IV Detailed Poll Results

THE Communist Party of India-Marxist was far ahead of the Congress in its vote-share in the State despite the defeat of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in the Assembly elections, an analysis of election data shows. The CPI-M secured 28.2 per cent of the valid votes polled in the elections, though its vote-share dipped by 2.3 percentage points from the figure in the 2006 Assembly elections. However, party-backed independents secured 2.4 per cent of the votes. The Congress secured 26.7 per cent of the votes as against 24.1 per cent in 2006.

The CPI-M contested for 84 seats in 2011, while the Congress had candidates in 82 constituencies. However, even a projection of the Congress party's vote-share for 84 seats would not bring it on a par with the CPI-M. The Congress had fielded candidates only in 77 constituencies last time, while the Democratic Indira Congress (Karunakaran) [DIC(K)] contested 18 seats. The DIC(K) has since merged with the Congress, and their combined vote-share in 2006 was 28.5 per cent.

Besides the Congress, the real gainers in these elections in terms of vote-share are the Bharatiya Janata Party and Kerala Congress(M). The BJP's vote-share went up by about 1.3 percentage points (from 4.75 per cent in 2006 to 6.03 per cent in 2011). The party's vote-share, however, is lower than what it got in the Lok Sabha elections in 2009 (6.3 per cent) and 2004 (10.4 per cent).

The Kerala Congress (M) made it to 4.9 per cent, con-testing 15 seats. This is more than what it could have expected from the merger of the Kerala Congress (J) with it. Contesting 11 and six seats, respectively, from the opposite camps in 2006, the Kerala Congress (M) and the Kerala Congress (J) had secured a vote-share of only 3.26 per cent and 1.75 per cent, respectively. Thus, it is a gain of almost one per centage point this time over the combined vote-share of 2006 despite a reduction in the number of the seats contested by one.

The Muslim League has also increased its vote-share by one percentage point—from 7.3 per cent to 8.3 per cent. However, this is only in proportion to the increase in the number of seats it contested: from 21 seats in 2006 to 24 seats this time. The Communist Party of India has increased its vote-share from 8.1 per cent in 2006 to 8.7 per cent. However, the increase is not in proportion to the increase in the number of seats it contested. While it contested 24 seats in 2006, this time the party had candidates in 27 constituencies.

Region and District-wise Details

The trend in voting in the 2011 Assembly elections shows that the fight between the CPI-M-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) was almost evenly close across the State. In all the three regions of the State, the two alliances moved neck and neck before they reached the photo-finish. However, the UDF was ahead of the LDF in both the northern and central districts in terms of vote-share, and the LDF could somewhat make up the

difference in their relative vote-shares only by securing a higher number of votes in the southern districts.

In the six northern districts of Kasargod, Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram, and Palakkad, the UDF secured 1,66,534 votes more than the LDF. It did the same in the central districts of Thrissur, Ernakulam, Idukki and Kottayam, securing 1,86,957 votes more than the LDF. However, the LDF forged ahead of its rival in the southern districts of Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram securing 1,99,940 votes more than the UDF.

The gap between the two alliances was most marked in Malappuram, where the UDF forged ahead of its rival with 3,79,046 more votes. The UDF was able to secure 1,66,534 votes more than the LDF in the northern districts of Kasargod, Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram and Palakkad only because of the higher tally in Malappuram. Of the 75,10,875 votes polled in the northern districts, 34,41,525 votes were won by the UDF, 32,74,991 by the LDF, 5,05,406 by the BJP, and 2,87,188 by the others. This is where the 10,27,529 votes secured by the UDF in Malappuram become significant. The LDF was way behind the UDF in the district with a tally of 6,58,483 votes. The BJP came a distant third in the district with 87,546 votes, much less than the 1,29,412 votes polled by the others.

Performance of Political Parties in Kerala Assembly Elections, 2011

<i>Political party</i>	<i>Number of candidates</i>	<i>Seats won</i>	<i>Votes in lakhs</i>	<i>%</i>
Bharatiya Janata Party	138	0	10.54	6.03
Bahujan Samaj Party	122	0	1.05	0.6
Communist Marxist Party	3	0	1.62	0.93
Communist Party of India	27	13	15.22	8.72
Communist Party of India-Marxist	84	45	49.21	28.18
Congress(S)	1	0	0.49	0.28
Congress	82	38	46.68	26.73
Indian National League	3	0	0.95	0.55
Janata Dal (Secular)	5	4	2.65	1.52
Janata Dal (United)	1	0	0.03	0.02
Janadhipatya Samrakshana Samithy	4	0	2.28	1.31
Kerala Congress (Jacob)	3	1	1.59	0.91
Kerala Congress (B)	2	1	1.25	0.72
Kerala Congress (M)	15	9	8.62	4.94
Kerala Congress (Thomas)	3	0	1.30	0.75
LDF-supported Independents	9	2	4.19	2.4
Muslim League	24	20	14.47	8.28
Nationalist Congress Party	4	2	2.17	1.24
People's Democratic Party	5	0	0.13	0.07
Revolutionary Socialist Party	4	2	2.28	1.31
Revolutionary Socialist Party (BJ)	1	1	0.65	0.37
Social Democratic Party of India	69	0	1.39	0.8
Socialist Janata Democratic	6	2	2.88	1.65
Shiv Sena	8	0	0.03	0.03
Socialist Unity Centre of India	23	0	0.09	0.05
Others/Independents	32	5	2.86	1.62

Data Source: CEO, Kerala

Bridging the Gap

The LDF had to depend heavily on the votes it secured in Kannur, Kozhikode and Palakkad to bridge the gap to a certain extent. Although the LDF conceded five seats to the UDF in Kannur, the alliance secured 1,36,678 votes more than the UDF in the district. The LDF's tally here stood at 7,13,624 against the UDF's 5,76,946 votes. The BJP could secure only 37,657 votes in the district.

Surprisingly, though the Kozhikode district gave the LDF its best seat tally anywhere in the State, there was no marked distance between the two alliances in terms of vote-share in the district. In spite of winning 10 out of the 13 seats, the LDF could get only 54,131 votes more than the UDF here, the LDF tally being 7,91,875 votes as against 7,37,744 votes of the UDF.

In the central districts of Thrissur, Ernakulam, Idukki, and Kottayam, the UDF was ahead by 1,86,957 votes. Taken together, the UDF tally in these districts came to 24,18,205 votes against the LDF's 22,31,248 votes. The BJP's share in these districts came to only 2,66,205 votes. The most noteworthy aspect of the polling figures in these districts is that in three out of four of them, the UDF was ahead of the LDF, the only exception being Thrissur.

In the south, the LDF was able to secure 23,42,984 votes against 21,43,044 votes polled by the UDF, the difference between the two being 1,99,940 votes. Going by this, the difference between the UDF and LDF is 1,53,551 votes in favour of the UDF.

**Kerala Assembly Polls, 2011
District-wise Vote-share**

<i>District</i>	<i>Total votes polled</i>		<i>UDF</i>	<i>LDF</i>	<i>BJP</i>	<i>Others</i>	
Kasaragod	6,54,459	26,6719	24,7691	1,21,385	18,664		
Kannur	13,97,426	5,76,946	7,13,624	67,717.	37,657		
Wayanad	3,93,899	2,01,523	1,63,037	21,141	10,447		Kozhikode
	16,88,914	7,37,744	7,91,875	1,11,726	44,648		
Malappuram	19,02,546	10,27,529	6,58,483	87,546	1,29,412		
Palakkad	14,73,631	6,31,064	7,00,281	95,891	46,363		
Thrissur	16,84,511	7,49,136	7,91,496	1,15,195	36,984		
Ernakulam	17,18,790	8,60,941	7,30,985	76,098	50,766		
Idukki	5,80,337	2,78,891	2,58,905	23,860	18,681		
Kottayam	10,57,310	5,29,237	4,48,860	51,052	28,161		
Alappuzha	12,19,335	5,45,785	6,11,009	41,296	21,245		
Pathanamthitta	6,79,084	2,97,762	3,01,465	37,525	12,332		
Kollam	13,95,856	5,99,194	7,05,496	49,680	41,486		
Thiruvananthapuram	16,37,238	7,00,303	7,25,014	1,52,066	59,885		

Concluding Observations

- THE manner in which the Congress went about its candidate selection worked against it. The pro-minority tilt in the candidate selection and the import of certain candidates at the behest of the party High Command have not helped the party. The overplaying of the minority card appears to have triggered off a Hindu backlash, which was quite evident in the districts that the Congress hoped to do well.
- There was a strong communal undercurrent too if one reads between the lines of the election results. A sizeable chunk of the majority community had lent its whole-hearted support to the LDF as a consolidation against the so-called projection of minorities as leaders of the UDF. The dilution of the 'equidistance' principle of the Nair Service Society whose leaders tried to be closer to the UDF also resulted in unification of the Ezhava votes, which tilted the results in a massive way helping the LDF in Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha and Kozhikode districts.
- The erosion of support suffered by the CPI-M-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) in some its traditional strongholds in north Kerala and the upsurge in support for the Indian Union Muslim League had weakened the LDF's chances of winning the Assembly poll.
- The Bharatiya Janata Party, which put up a strong showing in select constituencies but could not open its account in the Assembly, secured only 10,53,681 votes. Its vote-share is 6.06 per cent. The other candidates in the fray were able to secure 4,96,782 votes (2.85 per cent).
- The outcome has shocked the Congress and its allies more than their rivals because, after their impressive performances in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections and the local body elections held seven months ago, they were expecting to win big. The UDF won 16 of the 20 Lok Sabha seats, and over 55 per cent of the local self government institutions.
- The one person who made a difference for the LDF was V.S. Achuthanandan, who took the battle to the UDF's terrain. Achuthanandan, who took the burden of the campaign on his shoulders with the track record of the LDF backing him, triggered a surge in favour of the LDF towards the final phase of the campaign. The outcome shows he was able not only to rouse the LDF cadres and supporters, but also win over a large number of unattached voters. The LDF's strong showing in the southern districts of Kollam, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta central districts of Idukki and Thrissur, and the northern district of Kozhikode and to some extent Kasargod, could be attributed to the way he attracted and enthused voters.
- Before concluding it has to be stated that, a coalition of the past that won just two more seats than the winning combination did this time was not only stable but became the second Ministry in Kerala to complete its full term. And that too in spite of several crises created by not the Opposition, but its own constituents. Its predecessor that came to power with a brute majority had to quit within 21 months of assuming power owing to internal problems. The governments in question are those that came to power after the 1980 and 1982 elections respectively. The LDF

had won 93 of the 140 seats in the 1980 elections. There was a lone Independent. The remaining 46 seats went to the UDF. E.K. Nayanar was elected the leader of the ruling combination and the government headed by him was sworn in on January 25, 1980. But, soon problems developed and these led to the withdrawal of support by the Congress to the Ministry. That reduced the majority of the LDF to just one, excluding the Speaker. Soon, the eight-member Kerala Congress (M) also withdrew its support to the Ministry. That left it with no alternative but to quit. The Chief Minister resigned on October 20, 1981. President's Rule was imposed but the Assembly was kept in suspended animation. That enabled an eight-member UDF Ministry under K. Karunakaran to take over in December 1981. That too had to quit in March 1982 owing to dissensions and desertion. The number of political parties had risen to 25 from five in 1957 by the time the next elections were held in May 1982. The winning combination had nearly a dozen parties in it and the Opposition just one or two less than that. The multiplicity of parties in a coalition almost always leads to problems and it was no different in this case either. The two factions of the Kerala Congress merged but yet another split took place in the party later. Splits took place in the other constituents of the coalition too such as the SUP, the NDP and the PSP. But the Ministry headed by K. Karunakaran which had assumed office on May 24, 1982 was able to complete its term and win the credit of becoming the second Ministry in the history of the State to complete its full term. A thin majority need not always lead to problems galore, instability and short life if history and past experience are pointers.

In conclusion it can be stated that though the UDF has been able to form a government, the minority backed Kerala Congress and Muslim League are likely to exert extreme pressure on the Congress party at every turn for achieving their political ends. Moreover, if the Marxists in India are feeling that not all is lost for them even after the electoral devastation in West Bengal, they should thank 87-year-old V.S. Achutha-nandan, who managed to protect their 'fort' by limiting the victory of the UDF to a margin of two seats. ■

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