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75-member Legislative Council has just 2 women

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Women constitute barely 2.6% of the total members in the Legislative Council.

On Thursday, the ruling BJP, the opposition Congress and JD(S) announced seven candidates for the June 29 MLC elections: All men. With this, the number of women in the 75-member Upper House will soon reduce to two.

Until this month, there were four women MLCs, including three Congress MLCs Jayamala (Governor-nominated), Jayamma and Veena Achaiah (both elected by MLAs) apart from BJP's Tejaswini Gowda (also elected by MLAs). The terms of both Jayamma and Jayamala will end this month, leaving the Council with only two women.

Soon, there will be five vacancies under the Governor-nominated category. Even if all these five will be

women, their number in the Council will still not cross the single-digit mark.

This skewed gender representation has come as a dampener for several aspirants.

"The party has given an opportunity to B K Hariprasad who was already an MP for four times. When will the leaders ever make way for women," one Congress leader asked.

Senior Congress leader Motamma also said this was a huge disappointment. "When it comes to women, somehow party loyalty does not seem to count. This is highly unfortunate and is discouraging for women in political parties," she said.

Veena Devi, professor, political science at Bangalore University, opined this was the "unfortunate outcome" of political parties being preoccupied with caste and religious parameters. "They have to consciously keep aside

a section of seats for women. Across the globe, we're talking about how women-led countries have fared better in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic. It's unfortunate that our leaders do not have the political will to ensure equitable representation," she said.

Activist Cynthia Stephen also added that unless there was institutional reservation, political establishment would not be motivated for ensuring gender parity. "The government should reserve for women either all of the 25 MLC seats elected from Local Authorities or at least 50% of them," she said.

"Usually women leaders are not allowed to grow beyond zilla panchayat and their political experience tends to get wasted," added Stephen, who was part of the KR Ramesh Kumar committee that redrafted the Panchayat Raj Act and is also a member of the Shakti group to promote political empowerment of women.