

Surprise victory for LDF's Kappan, big jolt for UDF

K M Mani had been winning in Kerala's Pala constituency since its formation in 1965

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Jubilant LDF workers celebrate with Mani C Kappan after his victory in Pala bypolls, on Friday | VISHNUPRATHA P

M ARUN @ Pala

PALA, which had stood with K M Mani for more than five decades, sprang a surprise in the bypoll held after his demise and gave NCP's Mani C Kappan a narrow victory, triggering tremors in an already disjointed Kerala Congress (M) and spreading cheer in the LDF camp ahead of the next set of byelections on October 21.

Kappan defeated KC(M)'s Jose Tom by 2,943 votes, three-and-a-half years after he had lost for a third time to K M Mani in the same assembly constituency. K M Mani had been winning in the constituency since its formation in 1965.

Kappan's unexpected victory should boost the morale of the ruling LDF, which had lost 19 of the 20 Lok Sabha seats in the state in the general elections five months ago. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan himself had campaigned for three days in Pala and oversaw electioneering.

For the UDF, it came as a shocker as the front had expected a cakewalk for Jose Tom, despite him contesting as an independent after KC(M) acting chairman P J

Joseph denied him the party symbol.

Kappan polled more votes than his rival in 10 of the 13 panchayats, indicating a big swing towards the Left. While Ramapuram, Kadanad, Melukavu, Moonnilavu, Thalannadu, Thalappalam,

Kappan secured a 10-vote lead in the booth where K M Mani's residence is located.

Considering that Chazhikadan, as Kottayam Lok Sabha candidate, had got a lead of

33,472 in the Pala assembly segment, the loss is demoralising for the UDF.

Halfway through the counting, Kappan had a lead of 4,440 votes. But the UDF lead in three panchayats saw margin being cut to 2,943 votes.

Reacting to the defeat, Jose K Mani said the UDF contested the election as one single unit and the front will analyse the defeat in detail. The differences between Joseph and Jose K Mani, son of K M Mani, had marred the UDF campaign in Pala, with Jose Tom contesting with the 'Pineapple' symbol. And Joseph put the blame squarely on Jose K Mani, saying his faction voted for Kappan.



I thank all LDF leaders including the Chief Minister (Pinarayi Vijayan), who camped in Pala to ensure my victory

Mani C Kappan,
NCP leader