

His task: a pan-Indian party

Ahamed has to broaden the League's base in other States

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KOZHIKODE: The elevation of E. Ahamed to the august office of all-India president of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) brings upon the senior leader the onus of nurturing the growth of the League as a national party.

This is in line with the League's declared intention to play a bigger role in political empowerment of Muslims in other States just as it has done in Kerala. It is a difficult mission, say party managers though they agree he is eminently qualified for the post by virtue of his seniority in the party and the wealth of experience he has gained from the public offices he held as party nominee during his long political career.

They hope the strong network of political connections that Mr. Ahamed is believed to have established in national politics since becoming an MP would help him to achieve his goal.

Filling a void

With the demise of G.M. Banatwala, the League was left without many senior leaders outside Kerala. Many believe Mr. Ahamed was the League's only option for the void created by the passing away of Banatwala.

Another likely candidate



- Ahamed's connections in national politics could help the party

- He will have to balance party policy and ministerial duties

was K.M. Kader Mohideen from Tamil Nadu who has been made the all-India general secretary.

Mr. Mohideen could not be made the chief as he had got elected as MP from Tamil Nadu as a candidate of the DMK, and not the IUML, and for that reason he would have to abide by the DMK leadership's whip on important national issues even if it may be antithetical to the League's policy.

Though a decisive political force in Kerala, the League is yet to make its presence felt in most other States. It has, at best, only has a token presence in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Karnataka.

Overcoming barriers

Party veterans point out that Mr. Ahamed would have to overcome linguistic as well as cultural barriers to win over Muslims in the northern States. Even the Urdu-speaking Banatwala and Ibrahim

Sulaiman Sait could not extend the IUML base in north India significantly. The presence of religious fundamentalist outfits and terror groups would be another hurdle.

Mr. Ahamed's job as party chief is at present made more difficult by his ministerial responsibilities. Ministerial responsibilities and party responsibilities sometimes are in conflict.

This is very much in evidence even now as Mr. Ahamed, in his role as the Union Minister of State for External Affairs, has to be diplomatic in his response on many issues in which the government's policy does not tally with the sentiments of the Muslim community.

Proactive role

Banatwala and Sait did not have much say in the party matters when they were the party president.

Those who know Mr. Ahamed's ways, however, are

certain he would play a more proactive role.

This would be critical at a time when party general secretary P.K. Kunhalikutty and others in the State would be trying to counter the campaign from Left parties and other Muslim organisations on issues like the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal which is being used to exacerbate the U.S. phobia that prevails among the Muslim community with a view to damaging the League's electoral chances.

Voice of moderation

It will be Mr. Ahamed's task to safeguard the League's image as a voice of moderation in times when communal passions run high.

Quite a few party men see his rise to the top of IUML organisational hierarchy from the position of a student leader as a personal victory also.

He is also widely tipped to be a candidate in the coming parliamentary polls from a safe seat in Malappuram.

Though he is now the party boss, Mr. Ahamed, going by his political past, would like to give the impression that it is the revered Panakkad Syed Mohammedali Shihab Thangal who is calling the shots though technically he is the man at the helm of the League.