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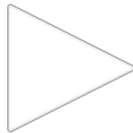
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Kerala Polls 2026: Wayanad Adivasi land protest enters 4th year, emerges as key issue

Video Desk

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In the dense coffee plantations of South Wayanad's Sulthan Bathery taluk, over 400 makeshift huts covered with plastic sheets mark an ongoing struggle for land and dignity. At the Pambra Mariyanad Estate in the Chethalath range, an Adivasi-led land protest has entered its fourth year, steadily gaining political significance as Kerala heads toward the 2026 Assembly elections.

The roots of the agitation lie in the devastating floods of 2018 and 2019 that ravaged Wayanad, destroying several Adivasi settlements. Landslides and severe soil erosion made many homes in forest and riverbank areas uninhabitable. The situation worsened with outbreaks of infectious diseases in the aftermath, leaving tribal communities in deep distress.

In 2022, nearly 400 families belonging to the Paniya, Adiya, Kattunaikka, Kuruma and Kurichya communities moved into 235 acres of land under the Kerala Forest Development Corporation (KFDC) at Mariyanad Estate. What began as a survival response has since transformed into a sustained protest

for land rights, unified under the slogan: "Land to those who till it."

The protesters maintain that the land historically belonged to Adivasi communities and was later converted into coffee plantations. They argue that their claims are backed by Supreme Court rulings and various government rehabilitation policies recognising tribal land rights. Their demand is clear: redistribute unused KFDC land for housing and cultivation.

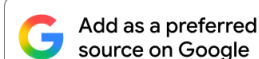
"We have been deceived for years. This land rightfully belongs to Adivasis," said protest committee chairman N. Chandunni. "Our decision in the 2026 elections will depend on how the government responds to this issue."

Despite the prolonged protest, living conditions remain dire. Families continue to reside in temporary shelters vulnerable to extreme weather and wildlife threats. Basic facilities such as drinking water, electricity and sanitation are largely unavailable.

"Officials keep promising land titles, but nothing changes," said Mini, a resident. "We have no drinking water and live without proper shelter. If we die, we will die on this land."

Elderly resident Kungiyamma highlighted the hardships faced by older members of the community. "At this age, living under plastic sheets is unbearable. Politicians come asking for votes, but never return after winning," she said.

Voices of discontent are also directed at the state government's inaction. "The LDF has been in power for two consecutive terms, yet our demands remain ignored," alleged Biju. "Children from Classes 1 to 10 study under sheds, often by candlelight. Even basic facilities are denied."



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