Partial Suspension of Democracy in Tamil Nadu

What is the issue?

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- Recently, Tamil Nadu government extended the term of special officers managing local bodies by six more months, the fourth such extension.
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- In addition to this, the prolonging of judicial proceedings in the 18 MLAs case are clear indications of suspension of democracy.
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What is the progress in the 18 MLA's case?

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- **MLA vacancies -** 18 MLAs of the ruling AIADMK were disqualified by the speaker of the TN assembly in Sep 2017, under the anti-defection law.
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- The ground for disqualification was that they had written to the Governor, seeking the removal of CM Palaniswami (and replace with someone else).
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- Notably, without the support of these 18 MLAs, the government would fall short of the half way mark of 118 in the Assembly.
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- **Case -** The MLAs filed cases in the Madras High Court quash their disqualification, arguing that they didn't involve in any anti-party activities.
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- But despite the importance of the matter, the case was inordinately delayed by the High Court, and finally a 2 judge bench produced a split verdict.
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- While the case has now been referred to a 3-judge bench, it has in effect, helped in prolonging the case and thereby securing the CM for now.
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- **Revolt -** Thangatamilselvan (one of the 18 MLAs), has decided to

withdraw his case in the High Court in protest against the further delay in judgement.
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- He has stated that he intends to resign and contest again instead of facing the long legal battle, which is affecting his constituency and its people.
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- Incidentally, Thangatamilselvan recently made critical remarks against the judiciary, and has been issued a “show cause notice” for the same.
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Why are the local body and Assembly seats vacant?

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- Local body elections in Tamil Nadu were initially scheduled in October 2016, and were announced with a very short notice period.
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- But it was stalled by the Madras High Court after the opposition challenged the way in which the poll process was being carried out.
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- Also, DMK had demanded in its case before the High Court that reservations should be based on the 2011 census instead of the 1991 census.
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- Subsequently, the court dismissed the demand for basing the seats on 2011 census and ordered that polls be conducted after following proper procedure.
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- But at this point, the government sought more time citing “pending delimitation procedures”, and has been stating the same for months now.
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- Notably, Pondicherry too hasn’t held local body polls for over 7 years now and government is continuously delaying the delimitation process.
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- Such repeated delays in conducting elections are a serious cause of worry as it is akin to suspending democracy.
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Have there been problems in governance?

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- The TN government has stated that officials heading local bodies are doing their job well and denied any reports of delays in execution of projects.
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- But on the contrast, media has been reporting multiple deals in civic work.
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- Officials have also been facing the wrath of the public due to some of their decisions, like the" new garbage collection fee" proposed for Chennai.
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- Coimbatore Corporation's move to privatise the city's 24x7 water supply scheme to French Company has attracted protests.
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- Also, property tax rationalisation hasn't happed for residents in Chennai's suburbs (who are paying more), even after merger with Chennai Corporation.
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Source: Indian Express

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