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Political Significance Of The Local Body Polls (2020) In Kerala | M R Biju and M R B Anantha Padmanabha

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Prelude

Article 243 E and 243 U of the Constitution of India deals with the question of duration of Panchayats and Municipalities and periodicity of elections to the rural and urban local bodies. It says "Every Panchayat/Municipality unless sooner dissolved under any law for the time being in force shall continue for five years from the date appointed its first meeting and no longer". This constitutional provision also prohibits any dissolution of a Panchayat/Municipality during its life by amendment of law. It also provided that an election to constitute a Panchayat/Municipality shall be completed before the expiry of its duration of five years and in case it is dissolved, the election shall be completed before the expiration of six months from such dissolution. If, however, a dissolved Panchayat/municipality had a tenure of less than six months left, there is no need for election for such a short period. Thus conduct of election to the rural and urban local bodies at a five-year interval is mandatory. Elections to the civic bodies assumed greater significance because local level democracy is the basic foundation on which the entire democratic edifice rests. The legitimacy of these elections as crucial instruments of a democratic political process at the local level is increasing day by day.

The 2020 Local body elections were the 10th poll after the attainment of independence. The first poll was held in 1953 under the provisions of the then Travancore - Cochin Panchayat Act, 1950. The second election was held in 1963 after the formation of the state in 1956 and after the passing of Kerala Panchayat/ Municipality Acts of 1960. It was followed by elections in 1979, 1988, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015. With regard to the political

significance of the local body polls 2020 is concerned it has to be noted that coalitions winning a majority of the local bodies have go on to register victories in the subsequent assembly polls or Lok Sabha polls. Having clear representation at the grass-root level is also key for political parties to effectively implement the development agenda once they come to power. With a slew of welfare schemes, navigating the state through back — to — back floods and controlling the Pandemic in initial months, the LDF had a clear edge but the political ramifications of the gold smuggling case, the arrest of CPIM state secretary's son in a money laundering case and the pandemic going out of control has certainly troubled the LDF. On the other hand, UDF made a slight edge over the LDF by making use of all the available avenues. For the BJP and NDA an improvement on its past performance is a must to satisfy its central leadership.

The Local body polls (2020) in Kerala were originally scheduled to take place in October as the tenure of elected representatives to the local bodies is set to end on November 12. The new elected bodies were expected to take oath before that date. However, an alarming rise in Covid-19 pandemic in the state through August and September forced a rethink among the officials and political parties. An all-party meeting was convened by the state government where almost all political parties agreed on requesting the state election commission to defer the polls by a couple of months but not indefinitely. After due consultations with leaders of political parties, health department officials, the state election commission agreed to postpone the polls till December when the situation is expected to normalise.