

Delhi Government's Street Protests

What is the issue?

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- Delhi government has come to the streets in protest against excessive interference by the Lt. Governor and the non-cooperation of officials.

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- This is rooted in the demand for “full statehood” versus “partial statehood” for Delhi and is more about political compulsions and less about constitutionality.

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Why is Delhi's apparatus a stress point?

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- Delhi is the seat of the Union Government and hence holds national and international political significance along with other logistical issues.

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- While the territory has been granted partial statehood and has a functional state government, tensions over jurisdictions has always existed.

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- This is the result of a fractured power arrangement in Delhi, with “law and order, land, services” (usually state subjects) residing with the union.

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- Such constitutional arrangements militate against the preferences of the “elected government”, which is accountable to the citizens.

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- Significantly, even when the same party was at power in both the centre and the state, there were tensions between the Delhi CM and the Lt. Governor.

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What is present political situation in Delhi?

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- The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) formed the government after winning 67 of the 70 seats in the 2015 Delhi assembly elections.
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- But subsequently, the LG's office imposed more constraints on the state government's powers by disabling its power to transfer employees.
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- In addition, the state government was also deprived of ordering vigilance probes on complaints or proceeding against corrupt officials.
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- While these moves were off questionable intent, the imprudent theatrics employed by the state government effectively resulted in the case losing steam.
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- The fact that AAP (which rules Delhi) has clearly poised itself as an anti-BJP party has only aggravated the political tensions.
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- On that count, the Centre successfully and, perhaps unfairly, checkmated the state government, thereby curtailing AAP's political clout.
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What is the current crisis about?

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- The Delhi government has alleged that bureaucrats are not showing up to work and have thereby brought the state machinery to a stand-still.
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- The IAS association has refuted the allegations (that the bureaucrats are hampering the work of the government) as "unwarranted and baseless".
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- The association points to the passing of the state budget and the accompanying budget session as proofs of a working machinery.
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- But the Delhi Cabinet has nevertheless started an agitation against the interventionism of the Lt. Governor and non-cooperation of bureaucrats.
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What is the way ahead?

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- Trust between the political class and bureaucracy is necessary for good governance, which in Delhi's case has clearly broken down.

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- While protests by the Delhi Government are tending to imply that the entire bureaucratic machinery is being non-cooperative, this is unlikely to be true.

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- Also, considering its salience, Delhi can't afford prolonged mudslinging and street activism, as it might take a toll on the nation's wellbeing.

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- As responsible administrators, Delhi ministers need to introspect on their conduct and choose better ways to express dissent.

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- Painting the entire system as corrupt and resorting to sensationalism has its limits and can lead to build up of a chaos culture, which is undesirable.

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- While the demands for greater autonomy are indeed legitimate to some extent, any such devolution needs to be considerate of Delhi's political importance.

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Source: Indian Express

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