

LEGITIMATE CONCERN: ON LAW AND ORDER IN NAGALAND

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Dispute Redressal Mechanisms, and the Centre-State Relations

By [writing a strong letter to Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio](#), alleging that “law and order has collapsed” in the State and that armed gangs “who question the sovereignty and integrity of the nation” had challenged its authority by engaging in blatant “extortion” and siphoning off funds meant for development work, Governor R.N. Ravi has thrown down the gauntlet to the ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party-led government, in which the BJP is a coalition partner. The Governor went on to write that functions such as “transfer and posting of officials” who are in charge of law and order above the district level will be done with his approval, as proposed under Article 371A(1)(b) of the Constitution. In a way, he was only voicing the concerns of sections of civil society over the slide in law and order; illegal collections by armed groups have been an issue for several years. In its response to the letter, the insurgent National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM), which has been observing a ceasefire with the government for the last 23 years, has said the group was only engaged in collecting “taxes”, suggesting that the Governor was not inaccurate in his description. But his letter has put the State government in a difficult situation.

Also read: [No extortion, only legitimate taxes levied: NSCN \(IM\)](#)

The much touted peace accord with the insurgent groups involved in the long-standing Naga conflict is yet to be achieved, despite the Centre’s push to conclude it last year. Mr. Ravi has remained the Centre’s interlocutor, a position he took up in 2015, even after becoming the State Governor in August 2019. Despite the Centre’s heady statements heralding a Naga peace accord since 2015, it is nowhere close to finalising it with the groups. In some ways, this is due to the NSCN-IM’s obstinacy such as its insistence on retaining a separate flag and a Constitution for the State of Nagaland and its unwillingness to dismantle its parallel administrative and paramilitary structure. The distrust it invokes among other Naga organisations besides other north-eastern governments because of its core ideology of a “greater Nagalim”, and the inherent difficulties in getting other insurgent actors on board have made this a conflict that persists despite the ceasefire and a problem that does not lend itself to a quick solution. Yet, without an agreement to rein in all the insurgent groups, the State government will have little leeway in imposing its will and prevent the blatant extortion that is hampering development and law and order. The ball is therefore in the Centre’s court, and by extension its interlocutor, Mr. Ravi’s, in finding a way to address this knotty issue. This the Governor must do, not by usurping the authority of the State government in governance matters, but by patiently refocusing on the peace process.

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