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'Jana gana' in Nagaland House 1st time in 60yrs

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Almost 60 years after Nagaland attained statehood, the national anthem was played in the assembly for the first time this February.

The move is historic for a state that has been ravaged by decades of secessionist violence and frustrated by protracted peace talks that continue to hang fire.

In Tripura, another northeastern state, the national anthem was first played in the assembly only in 2018 — after BJP wrested power from the Left Front.

The budget session of the Nagaland assembly started on February 12 with an address by governor RN Ravi. "The national anthem was played before and after the

NOT MANDATORY

► Nagaland became 16th state on Dec 1, 1963. National anthem was played before and after governor R N Ravi's address on Feb 12 this year

► Anthem isn't mandatory, mostly treated as convention, say constitutional experts

► Ravi is also interlocutor for peace talks with militant outfits, including NSCN(IM)

► In Tripura, anthem was first played in assembly in 2018

governor's address on the first day of the session. This is how it happens in most states, but playing of the anthem wasn't part of the convention in Nagaland," PJ Antony, commissioner and secretary of the legislative assembly, told TOI.

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Playing national anthem was the Speaker's initiative: Antony

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Whether it was the first time that the anthem had been played in the assembly since Nagaland became the 16th state of the Union on December 1, 1963, Antony said, "It is at least the first instance since the assembly occupied the new building in 2007."

The initiative was taken by Speaker Sharingain Longkumer, he added.

"It is fitting that the anthem be played when the governor graces the House. That is what happens in every other assembly. I suggested this and the government endorsed my views," said Longkumer, who was elected Speaker in February 2020. Longkumer declined to comment on why the anthem wasn't played earlier despite this being the protocol.

While playing the nation-

al anthem isn't mandatory in the assembly, it is mostly treated as a convention, say constitutional experts.

"There is nothing in the Constitution that makes playing the national anthem compulsory. The Fundamental Duties talk about respecting it," said Subhash Kashyap, former secretary general of the Lok Sabha and expert in Indian Constitution. "The anthem was first played on January 24, 1950, when the Constitution was adopted and the Constituent Assembly was adjourned sine die," he added. Former Lok Sabha secretary general PDT Achary says each assembly follows its own convention and there is no uniformity in their practises. In Parliament, the anthem is played when the President addresses the opening session, Kashyap said.

In Nagaland's case, it isn't just a coincidence that governor Ravi is also the inter-

locutor for the peace talks with the state's militant outfits, including the NSCN (IM) and the other Naga national political groups (NNPGs) that espouse a separate Naga nation, and has taken a tough stand on the "taxes" levied by these outfits. Last June, Ravi had written to CM Neiphiu Rio and threatened to take over the reins of the government if "armed gangs" were allowed to run riot in the state. On Republic Day, Ravi delivered a strong speech and slammed the "gun politics" of the NSCN (IM) without naming the outfit. He has indicated that there is going to be no concession to the NSCN (IM) on its demand for a separate flag and constitution.

Antony said the playing of the anthem was the Speaker's initiative and "there is nothing more to be read between the lines".