State Governor-Regime Disagreement – West Bengal Case

What is the issue?

- West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar made a visit to areas hit by post-poll violence in Cooch Behar.
- In this context, it is imperative to understand if this would constitute a transgression of the bounds of constitutional propriety.

What are the recent disagreements?

- Governor Dhankhar has been a habitual critic of the Mamata Banerjee (Chief Minister) regime in West Bengal.
- He has been seen ignoring the principle that constitutional heads should not air their differences with the elected regimes in public.
- As recently as December 2020, Ms. Banerjee had appealed to the President to recall the Governor.
- This was for political statements that she believed were being made by him at the behest of the BJP-led Union government.

What is the larger concern in this regard?

- The norms of representative government ought to be a natural restraint on the Governor's gubernatorial tendency to breach limitis.
- A former West Bengal Governor, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, came in for some criticism for setting aside the restraints of constitutional office.
- He was criticised for expressing "cold horror" at the police firing that left 14 protesters dead at Nandigram in 2007.
- So, the gubernatorial office ought not to be an impediment to the Governor yielding to the moral urge to condemn incidents of rare enormity.
- But, the larger principle that the Governor should not offer public comment on situations best handled by the representative regime has to be upheld.

- In the case of Mr. Dhankhar, what worsens his persistent criticism of the TMC regime is the congruency between his words and the interests of the BJP.

What is the right way forward?

- Post-poll celebrations in West Bengal degenerated into triumphalism and attacks on the losing side.
- Post-election violence is something that should not be witnessed at all in an electoral democracy.
- The onus is on Ms. Banerjee to restore order and end the violence.
- This should be the case even if she believed that the extent of the violence was being exaggerated by the Opposition.
- On the other hand, regardless of one's view of a regime's inaction, there should be no departure from constitutional prescriptions of governor's powers.
- Any advice or warning the Governor wants to give to the elected government ought to be in private and in confidence, and not in public.

Source: The Hindu

