Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA)

Mains: *GS II – Governance*

Why in News?

Recently, the Union Government signed a tripartite agreement with the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) and the Government of Nagaland to establish the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA).

What is FNTA?

- **FNTA** – This arrangement seeks to grant enhanced administrative and financial autonomy to six eastern districts of Nagaland—Kiphire, Longleng, Mon, Noklak, Shamator, and Tuensang—addressing long-standing political and developmental grievances.
- The FNTA represents a "middle path" between full statehood and conventional district administration, reflecting a calibrated approach to regional aspirations within the constitutional framework.
- **Colonial Legacy and Developmental Differential –** The origins of eastern Nagaland's autonomy demand lie in colonial administrative policies.
- The British treated the Naga Hills as a frontier tract, largely leaving it unadministered.
- This policy created a governance vacuum and deep developmental disparities that persisted after Independence.
- When Nagaland was carved out of Assam and granted statehood in 1963, the eastern Naga tribes felt politically and economically marginalized.
- The eight tribes inhabiting the eastern districts perceived dominance by western Naga tribes centered around Kohima, leading to growing resentment.
- **ENPO's Core Demand of Separate Statehood –** In 2010, the ENPO formally submitted a memorandum to the Centre demanding the creation of a separate state—"Frontier Nagaland."
- The demand was rooted in:
    - Perceived neglect in development funding and infrastructure
    - Limited political representation
    - Administrative centralization in Kohima
- Over time, the movement gained momentum, evolving from demands for equitable development to calls for full statehood.

Why did the centre intervene?

- The Union Government's decision to engage meaningfully with the ENPO was driven

by both political and strategic considerations.

- **Political Compulsion –** Earlier attempts to placate the region—including Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and a ₹500-crore development package—failed to satisfy deeper political aspirations.
- In 2024, the ENPO called for a total boycott of the Lok Sabha elections, demonstrating significant collective leverage and signaling escalating discontent.
- **Strategic Imperative –** Eastern Nagaland shares a sensitive international border with Myanmar.
- The region functions as a strategic buffer zone where armed insurgent groups operate across porous borders.
- Sustained alienation in such a geopolitically sensitive area posed serious national security risks.
- Thus, the FNTA emerged as a pacifying mechanism to stabilize a critical frontier region while aligning local aspirations with national interests.

What are the key features of the frontier nagaland territorial authority (FNTA)?

- **Administrative Autonomy –** Establishment of a mini-Secretariat within eastern Nagaland.
- Headed by a high-ranking officer to decentralize governance.
- Reduced administrative dependence on Kohima.
- **Financial Devolution –** Development funds to be allocated proportionally based on population and area.
- Initial establishment expenditure to be borne by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Greater control over planning and implementation of development projects.
- **Legislative and Executive Powers –** The FNTA will exercise authority over 46 specified subjects, including:
    - Land use
    - Agriculture
    - Rural development
    - Infrastructure
    - Local governance
- This ensures policy decisions are tailored to tribal and regional needs.
- **Constitutional Safeguards –** Importantly, the arrangement does not alter Article 371(A) of the Constitution, which protects Naga customary laws, religious practices, and land ownership rights.
- Thus, the FNTA strengthens autonomy without undermining constitutional protections central to Naga identity.
- **FNTA as a Model of Devolutionary Autonomy –** The FNTA reflects a broader constitutional innovation—territorial authorities as an intermediate solution between:
    - Full statehood
    - Union Territory status
    - Ordinary district administration
- It signals the Centre’s willingness to accommodate regional aspirations without redrawing state boundaries.
- **Applicability to the Kuki-Zo Demand in Manipur –** The FNTA model has sparked debate about whether similar mechanisms could address the Kuki-Zo community’s

demand for a separate administration in Manipur.

- **Structural Similarities –** The arrangement resembles the Hill Areas Committee under Article 371(C), designed to protect tribal interests in Manipur.
- The FNTA demonstrates constitutional flexibility in designing sub-state autonomy frameworks.

What are the key differences?

- **Political Consensus** – In Nagaland, Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio was a willing partner in negotiations.
- In Manipur, the Imphal Valley-based government strongly opposes administrative separation.
- **Conflict Context** – Nagaland did not witness active inter-group violent conflict during negotiations.
- Manipur, however, has experienced severe ethnic violence, eroding trust.
- **Competing Territorial Claims** – The presence of groups such as the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN), which lays claim to parts of hill districts, complicates any clean administrative reorganization.
- Thus, while the FNTA provides a conceptual template, replication would require substantial political reconciliation and consensus-building.

What lies ahead?

- The Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority represents a pragmatic experiment in asymmetric federalism and devolutionary autonomy.
- It addresses regional grievances while preserving state integrity and constitutional safeguards.
- The FNTA illustrates:
    - The evolving nature of Indian federalism
    - Strategic dimensions of regional autonomy
    - Constitutional innovation under Articles 371(A) and 371(C)
    - The intersection of development, identity, and national security
- Its success will depend on effective implementation, genuine fiscal devolution, and sustained political engagement.
- If successful, it may redefine how India manages sub-state regional aspirations in sensitive border regions.

Reference

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