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Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority — What the FNTA Agreement Means for Eastern Nagaland's Autonomy Demand

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SUBJECTS COVERED**POLITY****SOCIAL ISSUES****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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WHY IN NEWS

A tripartite agreement signed in New Delhi between the Union Government, Nagaland Government, and the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) established the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA), granting 46 state subjects and financial autonomy to six eastern Nagaland districts — the most significant step in addressing ENPO's decades-long demand for a separate state or territorial arrangement.

THE EASTERN NAGALAND PROBLEM — HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The demand for a separate administrative arrangement for eastern Nagaland is not new. The six districts — **Tuensang, Mon, Kiphire, Longleng, Noklak, and Shamator** — have historically felt marginalised within the Nagaland state structure, which has been dominated by political and economic interests centred on Kohima and Dimapur.

The **Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO)**, umbrella body of **8 recognised Naga tribes** (Chang, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Phom, Sangtam, Tikhir, Yimchunger, and Zeliang), has been demanding either a **separate state of "Frontier Nagaland"** or a meaningful autonomous arrangement since the 1970s. The demand intensified in the 2010s; ENPO boycotted Nagaland assembly elections in 2023, weakening democratic representation from the region.

The core grievance: despite housing the most ecologically rich and resource-rich areas of Nagaland, the six eastern districts remain the most underdeveloped. Road connectivity, healthcare, and educational institutions lag far behind western Nagaland. The ENPO attributed this to revenue allocation inequities and the absence of direct representation in key governance decisions.

THE FNTA AGREEMENT — KEY PROVISIONS

The tripartite agreement signed on February 7, 2026 creates the **Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA)** with the following architecture:

Legislative and executive powers: The FNTA receives jurisdiction over **46 state subjects** — covering education, health, agriculture, minor forests, fisheries, water supply, roads and infrastructure within the six districts, and similar local matters. It functions as a sub-state authority with its own legislative body and

executive council.

Financial autonomy: A dedicated financial allocation mechanism ensures FNTA gets a share of central and state funds proportionate to the region's development needs, bypassing the prior arrangement where funds flowed through the state government to the districts.

Article 371(A) protection: The constitutional protections under **Article 371(A)** — which safeguard Naga customary law and land rights — remain fully intact and are not overridden by the FNTA arrangement.

Composition: The FNTA will be composed of elected representatives from the six districts, with separate chambers for legislative functions. The exact electoral mechanism is to be notified separately.

What FNTA is NOT: It is not a full separate state. India's federal structure does not allow a new state to be created without amending Article 3 of the Constitution (which requires Parliamentary approval). The FNTA is a sub-state territorial authority — analogous (though not identical) to the Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam or the Sixth Schedule Autonomous District Councils in northeast India.

ARTICLE 371(A) — THE CONSTITUTIONAL BACKDROP

Article 371(A) of the Constitution (inserted by the 13th Amendment, 1962) provides special protections to Nagaland:

No Act of Parliament in respect of **religious or social practices of the Nagas, Naga customary law and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, and ownership and transfer of land and its resources** shall apply to Nagaland unless the Nagaland Legislative Assembly so decides.

The Governor of Nagaland has special responsibility for law and order in Nagaland.

This provision is the constitutional bedrock of Naga identity protection. Any arrangement for eastern Nagaland must work within this framework, which is why the FNTA agreement explicitly preserves these protections.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER NORTHEAST AUTONOMY MODELS

The FNTA sits in a continuum of northeast autonomy arrangements:

Arrangement	Constitutional Basis	Examples
Sixth Schedule ADCs	Articles 244(2), 275(1)	Bodoland Territorial Council (Assam), Karbi Anglong ADC, Dima Hasao ADC; Hill District Councils (Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura)
Article 371 Special Provisions	Part XXI (371-371(J))	Nagaland (371A), Manipur (371C), Sikkim (371F), Arunachal (371H), Mizoram (371G)
Territorial Council (sub-ADC)	Negotiated (within state)	Tiwi Autonomous Council, Deori Autonomous Council (Assam)
FNTA	Negotiated (sub-state authority)	Eastern Nagaland (new, 2026)

The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) — established under the Assam government following the 2003 Bodo peace accord — is the closest analogue: a sub-state body with executive and legislative powers over designated subjects within a defined territory, but without the full status of a separate state.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR NAGALAND — AND THE BROADER NAGA PEACE PROCESS

The FNTA agreement comes at a critical moment in the broader **Naga peace process**, which has centred on the **NSCN(IM)** framework agreement signed in **August 2015** with the Union Government. That agreement — over a decade old — remains unimplemented because of NSCN(IM)'s insistence on a separate Naga flag and constitution, which India has not accepted.

The FNTA creates an alternative track: rather than waiting for a comprehensive settlement involving all Naga factions, it addresses the specific economic and governance grievances of eastern Nagaland communities directly. This has two implications:

First, it reduces ENPO's incentive to align with armed groups demanding full independence, addressing a security concern in a sensitive border region (Mon district borders Myanmar; Tuensang borders Arunachal Pradesh).

Second, it demonstrates to other Naga factions that sub-state autonomy with meaningful powers is achievable — potentially softening maximalist demands that have stalled the broader peace process for a decade.

NORTHEAST AGREEMENTS — A PATTERN UNDER CURRENT GOVERNMENT

The current government has signed 12 northeast-related peace/autonomy agreements since 2019, including:

Bodo Accord (January 2020): Resolved the Bodoland Territorial Area District conflict; upgraded BTC powers; Bodo militants surrendered arms

NLFT-Tripura Accord (August 2019): National Liberation Front of Tripura signed peace

Karbi Anglong Agreement (September 2021): Resolved Karbi armed group conflicts in Assam; Greater Autonomy for Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council

FNTA Agreement (February 2026): Addresses eastern Nagaland autonomy demand

The pattern shows preference for negotiated sub-state autonomy arrangements over full statehood demands.

UPSC RELEVANCE

FNTA (6 districts, 46 subjects, Article 371(A)); ENPO (Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation, 8 tribes); 13th Constitutional Amendment (Article 371A); Bodoland Territorial Council (2003 accord); Sixth Schedule (Articles 244(2) and 275(1)); Article 3 of Constitution (creation of new states procedure); NSCN(IM) Framework Agreement (August 2015); ITR Nagaland capital (Kohima); NDDB seat (Anand, Gujarat) — not to be confused; Mon district (borders Myanmar).

Northeast governance; tribal autonomy models; Sixth Schedule vs negotiated arrangements; Article 371 special provisions; peace process and security implications in Northeast; federal asymmetry in India.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

FNTA — CORE DATA:

Authority: Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority

Tripartite parties: Union Government + Nagaland Government + ENPO

Districts covered: **Tuensang, Mon, Kiphire, Longleng, Noklak, Shamator** (6 eastern Nagaland)

Subjects transferred: **46 state subjects** (education, health, agriculture, roads, water, etc.)

Tribes represented: **8** (Chang, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Phom, Sangtam, Tikhir, Yimchunger, Zeliang)

Agreement signatories: Home Minister Amit Shah; CM Neiphiu Rio; ENPO leadership

Northeast agreements count: **12th since 2019**

Article 371(A) status: **Fully preserved**

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK:

Article 371(A): Special provision for Nagaland (13th Amendment, 1962) — protects Naga customary law, land, religious/social practices from Parliamentary legislation without state assembly consent

Article 3: Parliament can create new states, alter boundaries — requires Presidential recommendation + consultation with affected state legislature

Sixth Schedule: Autonomous District Councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura (tribal areas)

Seventh Schedule: Division of legislative powers (Union/State/Concurrent Lists)

NORTHEAST AUTONOMY MODELS:

Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC): Est. 2003 accord; 4 districts in Assam; 46 subjects; closest FNTA analogue

Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council: Upgraded September 2021 accord; Assam

Sixth Schedule ADCs: Constitutional (Hill District Councils in Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura; BTC/Dima Hasao in Assam)

NAGA PEACE PROCESS:

NSCN(IM) Framework Agreement: Signed **August 3, 2015** (PM Modi + NSCN(IM) Gen. Muivah)

Core dispute: Separate Naga flag and constitution — not accepted by India

Status: Unimplemented; Framework agreement only; final settlement pending

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

ENPO founded: 1970s; headquarters: Tuensang

2023 Nagaland Assembly elections boycotted by ENPO — reduced democratic representation from 6 districts

Mon district: Borders Myanmar; strategic location for India-Myanmar relations

Northeast Peace Agreements (2019–2026): 12 signed, including Bodo (2020), NLFT-Tripura (2019), Karbi Anglong (2021), FNTA (2026)

Sources: AffairsCloud, Drishti IAS

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