



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**GREAT NICOBAR PROJECTS:
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES**

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Context

- The **Great Nicobar Island** has emerged as a focal point for India's strategic and developmental ambitions, as the government pushes forward with a massive infrastructure overhaul.

About the Great Nicobar Project

- It was **piloted by NITI Aayog**, has an estimated cost of ₹72,000 crore, aims **to balance development with environmental preservation**.
- It encompasses various components, including a transshipment port, an international airport, a power plant, and township development.

Project Components	
Transshipment Port A ₹35,000 crore transshipment port at Galathea Bay aims to facilitate cargo handling and boost economic activity	International Airport The greenfield airport, with a capacity of 4,000 peak-hour passengers, will support both maritime and tourism sectors
Power Plant A 450 MVA gas and solar-based power plant is part of the project	Township Development The plan includes a township built over 30 years on more than 160 sq. km of land

- The goal is to tap into the largely unexplored potential of the island while preserving its natural ecosystem and rich biodiversity.

Strategic Significance of Great Nicobar Island

- Geopolitical Location:** It is a part of the **Andaman and Nicobar archipelago**, located at the southernmost tip of India in the Bay of Bengal.
 - It is near the **Malacca Strait, a key maritime route** that enhances India's maritime security and trade capabilities, and commanding position in the **Indo-Pacific**.
 - Sabang in Indonesia** is 90 nautical miles southeast of **Indira Point (on Great Nicobar island)**, and **Coco Island in Myanmar** is 18 nautical miles from the northernmost tip of the Andamans.
- Military and Civil Infrastructure:** The ₹72,000 crore development plan includes an International Container Transshipment Terminal, a dual-use airport, military logistics bases, and surveillance infrastructure.
- Regional Influence:** The project aligns with **India's Act East Policy** and **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) doctrine**, countering China's growing naval presence in the Bay of Bengal.
- Infrastructure Overhaul and Military Preparedness:** It includes revamped airfields and jetties; modern logistics and storage hubs; and establishment of a military base and surveillance network.
 - A particular focus is on **Great Nicobar Island**, where the project entails an **International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT)**; a **greenfield international airport**; a new **township**; and **solar-based power plants**.

Key Concerns

- Ecological Sensitivity and Indigenous Concerns:** Potential harm to **indigenous communities**, especially the **Shompen (a PVTG)**, a largely uncontacted tribe;
 - The island hosts endangered species like the **Nicobar megapode** and **leatherback turtles**. Coral reefs and tropical rainforests are at risk due to deforestation and coastal development;
 - Risk to **endangered species**, including the **Nicobar megapode** and **leatherback turtles**;
- Transparency Deficit:** The government has invoked national security to withhold environmental reports and deny RTI requests.

- ♦ Questions raised in the Rajya Sabha were deflected under the pretext of sub judice status, undermining legislative accountability.
- ♦ Activists and experts argue that strategic development must not override democratic norms and ecological safeguards.
- **Legal Red Flags:** The National Green Tribunal ordered a review of environmental clearances, but the High-Powered Committee's findings remain classified.

Way Forward

- **Disclose Key Reports:** Make the High Powered Committee (HPC) findings public, with redactions only where national security is genuinely at stake.
- **Engage Stakeholders:** Institutionalize consultations with tribal councils, environmental experts, and civil society.
- **Strengthen Oversight:** Empower parliamentary committees and independent bodies to monitor compliance and ecological impact.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands

- **Location:** The islands are located 1,300 km southeast of the Indian mainland in the Bay of Bengal.
 - ♦ It extends from 6° 45' N to 13° 41' N and from 92° 12' E to 93° 57' E.
- This archipelago is composed of more than 500 big and small islands, which are divided into two distinct groups of islands – The Andaman Islands and the Nicobar Islands.
 - ♦ **'Ten Degree Channel'** separates the Andaman Islands in the north from the Nicobar Islands in the south.

Andaman Islands

- These are divided into **three major sub-groups – North Andaman, Middle Andaman, and South Andaman.**
- Port Blair, the capital city of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands is located in South Andaman.



Nicobar Islands

- These islands are divided into three major sub-groups – Northern Group, Central Group, and Southern Group.
 - ♦ The Great Nicobar is the largest and the southernmost island in the group located in the Southern Group.
 - ♦ India's southernmost point '**Indira Point**' is located at the southern tip of the Great Nicobar.

Other Features

- Most of these islands have a volcanic base and are made of tertiary sandstone, limestone, and shale.
 - ♦ The **Barren and Narcondam islands**, north of Port Blair, are volcanic islands.
 - ♦ Some of the islands are fringed with **coral reefs**.
- **Saddle Peak (737 m)** in North Andaman is the **highest peak** in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- The names of the following three islands were changed in 2018:
 - ♦ **Ross Island** – renamed as Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Dweep
 - ♦ **Neil Island** – renamed as Shaheed Dweep
 - ♦ **Havelock Island** – renamed as Swaraj Dweep

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

- Great Andamanese of Strait Island;
- Onges of Little Andaman;
- Jarawas of South and Middle Andaman;
- Sentinelese of Sentinel Islands;
- Shompens of Great Nicobar;

Source: IE

Mains Practice Question

[Q] To what extent do the strategic benefits of infrastructure development in Great Nicobar Island justify the concerns over environmental degradation and lack of governmental transparency?

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