



# **LOK SABHA**

PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY OF INDIA

## **AGENDA**

*Deliberation upon “The Great Nicobar Island project”:  
A path towards development or ecological risk, with  
special emphasis on the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006  
and the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.*

# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Respected Members, We, as the executive board for the Lok Sabha simulation at **Chirec J MUN 2025** whole-heartedly welcome each and every single one of you, to this unconventional, yet, the most important Committee.

With the help of this Background Guide, towards the Agenda, we as the Executive Board, aim to give you a starting point, a base, for your research and most importantly, a base for the Lok Sabha, to forbade clarifications.

Delegates, although the Committee might be unconventional, it is still one of the most relevant and the most important committee in the Modern Era.

This is where, your research comes in and we would like to reiterate here, that this Background Guide is **only to be used for reference.**

Please don't limit or consider your research done after going through the Background Guides contents. *The executive board has tried their level best to inculcate everything here, if something left or any questions unanswered it is the delegates' responsibility to research and understand it.*

This is – simply a starting point. Looking forward to hosting the best committee at **CHIREC J MUN**, The one, the only, The Lok Sabha.

## Regards

Giriyam Charan Krishna Tejh (Speaker)  
Aashi Poogalia (Deputy Speaker)  
Hayagreev (Scribe)

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) The Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) Islands, one of the seven union territories of India, are a group of islands at the juncture of the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. The territory is about 150 km north of Aceh in Indonesia and separated from Thailand and Myanmar by the Andaman Sea. It comprises two island groups, the Andaman Islands and the Nicobar Islands, separated by the 150 km wide with the Andamans to the north, and the Nicobars to the south. The Andaman Sea lies to the east and the Bay of Bengal to the west. The territory's capital is the city of Port Blair. The total land area of (A &N) islands is approximately 8,249 km.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are one of the most remote place of the world located at 1400 km from mainland India and 1000 km from Thailand. The original inhabitants are various aboriginal tribes, who exist more-or-less out of the mainstream. There are some tribes who have had no contact with the rest of the world. Of nearly 600 islands, only 9 islands of Andamans are open to foreign tourists.

Presently, tourism has the potential to be an efficient driver of high economic growth in the Islands. Development potential also exists in other sectors such as maritime trade, shipping, fisheries, under-sea mining, oil and gas. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands have a long coastal length of about 1,912 km. The Exclusive Economic Zone around these Islands is about 6 lakh sq km constituting 28 per cent of the total EEZ in our country . The Great Nicobar Island is only about 90 km away from the western tip of the Malacca Strait, an important shipping route between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Being at close aerial/shipping distance to a number of countries (Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand) and the Malacca Strait, the Islands have the potential of enhanced maritime trade, particularly for export of the products made in the Islands.

Existing situation calls for formulation of suitable strategies for holistic development of identified Islands.

Effective implementation of well planned strategies in tourism and other key economic sectors would lead to creation of more jobs and generation of additional income for the Islanders. However, while planning development interventions, both the ecological concerns and the tribal-related issues need to be fully addressed so as to ensure a sustainable development process.

The project is located on Great Nicobar Island, the southernmost land mass of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Great Nicobar Island has a total area of 910.074 sq.km. The island includes two national parks, a biosphere, and is home to the Shompen and Nicobarese tribes. With a view to preserving the valuable ecological and anthropological assets on Great Nicobar Island, the development area has been limited to a 166.1 sq.km area along the south eastern and southern coastlines.

It extends from the north of Campbell Bay to Indira Point and further up to the Pemayya Bay area in the south. While the east and South of the site are edged by the Indian Ocean, the west and north are flanked by mountainous terrain and forests of the Galathea National Park. The development area does not include any area within the national parks, though a small portion falls within the Biosphere reserve. The project area has been carefully delineated after considering the parameters of topography, drainage pattern, preservation of rich ecological central core of the island, national parks and its eco-sensitive buffers, mangroves and other ecological assets, presence of existing habitation on the western coast and considering all the natural features.

Great Nicobar is an integrated urban development project planned on a pristine tropical island with exceptional natural and cultural assets and distinct economic advantages.

The project will (1) strengthen India's presence in the Andaman Sea and the Southeast Asian region and (2) create an economic hub in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands that functions simultaneously as a major cargo transshipment centre and a global tourism destination.

This project is in fact four 'interlinked' projects that together constitute the new Greenfield city at Great Nicobar. The four projects are the port, airport, power plant, and township. Each of these four projects is considered separately and together, as an integrated whole in each section of this pre-feasibility report. From an environmental assessment perspective, the port is considered the primary project.

For several reasons, successful development of Great Nicobar Island requires a sensitive, holistic approach. First, the island is home to a dwindling number of indigenous people whose traditional culture is considered an international resource.

Development plans must not only consider the impact of growth on these people, but also be formulated in order to generate benefits for them as well as for future immigrants and investors. Second, the world-class ecological resources must be conserved and enhanced during the proposed integrated development at Great Nicobar Island.

While it is clear that development on Great Nicobar will have environmental impacts, the holistic master plan must enable environmentally and socio-culturally sustainable development and identify effective mitigating measures for any anticipated negative impacts. A systematic and thorough method for evaluating the socio-cultural and environmental impacts of different planning infrastructure project proposals has been employed. Trade-offs are identified and quantified, and alternatives that perform better from a socio-cultural and environmental perspective are prioritised. The preferred alternatives will be those that strike the appropriate balance between the environmental, social, and economic goals of the project.

## Need for the Project and Its Importance

Great Nicobar Island is a jewel of an island, the development of which can address several pressing concerns related to maritime security, economic growth, and quality of life for the local population.

The development of Great Nicobar Island is significant from the point of view of national security. This is in light of the ongoing consolidation of the Indian Ocean region and the military and economic impact of this consideration. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in general and the Indian Ocean in particular has turned into a strategic hotspot in recent years. In response to the increasing strategic value of this IOR, a critical mass of development in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands is necessary for strengthening India's regional presence.

In addition, Great Nicobar Island represents a significant economic development opportunity. The main east-west shipping route that links East Asian exports with the Indian Ocean, Suez Canal and Europe runs just to the south of Great Nicobar Island, the southernmost landmass in India. By building a container port in this location, India can participate more fully in the global shipping trade, creating employment opportunities for its citizens and improving quality of life for current and future residents of Great Nicobar Island.

### *International Container Transshipment Terminal*

The development of a new cargo Transshipment terminal and associated industrial facilities will allow India to leverage its excellent access to major shipping routes between East Asia and South Asia in order to capture a significant share of the regional maritime economy.

Due to geographical and logistic constraints, deep water berths in the ports along the East & West Coasts of India have not been developed for berthing large inter-continental vessels of drafts over 15 m. The present major Transshipment hubs in South Asia at Colombo and Singapore provide deep water ports for main line vessels carrying cargoes for smaller ports in the region. Feeder vessels presently call Singapore and Colombo for loading cargoes bound for smaller ports in the Bay of Bengal, Andaman and the Arabian Sea.

The result is that India is losing substantial revenue in terms of facilities and higher rate of landings. It has also been observed that other countries like Myanmar, China and Sri Lanka are gearing up to develop deep water facilities for taking major share of trade by developing suitable harbour facilities.

From the foregoing, it is quite evident that India should move towards setting up dedicated deep-water berths for primarily Transshipment activities in its waters thereby generating revenue. Great Nicobar Island is strategically located equidistant from Colombo, Port Klang and Singapore and is also very close to the East-West international shipping corridor.

### Greenfield International Airport

The island and the archipelago feature world class ecological resources that, with the right level of infrastructure development, can attract international and Indian tourists. An international airport is necessary to improve connectivity to Great Nicobar and open up the island to tourism. Given its geographical context, an airport at Great Nicobar can serve not only the island but also adjoining areas.

Locational advantage of the islands is their close proximity to international tourist island destinations like the upcoming Senang City, the Phuket Island and Langkawi Island. Thus, the islands present a great opportunity for a tourism-oriented island development that would put Andaman and Nicobar on the global tourist destinations map. Econometric modelling using various parameters individually and in combination (as input independent variables) are in the process of being undertaken to find the most correlated factor(s). The projections will also be informed by inputs from key stakeholders. In the absence of any concrete data and very minimal economic & tourist activity, it has been assessed that the projections would be akin to what prevails at Port Blair. Currently, Port Blair Airport handles approx. 2000-2500 passengers per day bringing to an annual figure of approx. 1.8 million passengers in 2019.

It can be reasonably assumed that by the time the airport opens, this international airport will also have an identical influx of passengers. Hence, it is being assumed that the airport should be capable of handling at least 1 million passengers at the instance of opening and thereafter be adequate to sustain a figure of approx. 10MPPA wherein after it would require further enhancement.

### *Existing Population and Occupation*

The population of Great Nicobar Island combines aboriginal tribes that have inhabited this island for thousands of years with ex-servicemen that were settled here by the Government of India during the 1970s. The new residents came from Punjab, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Thus, a 'Mini-India' exists in Great Nicobar Island, with Indians from all parts of the country harmoniously residing here. Great Nicobar Island is inhabited by aboriginal mongoloid Shompen. The Shompens are hunter-gatherers and depend on the forest and marine resources for sustenance.

They live where natural water source is available and use the surface water for drinking. Another Mongoloid Tribe, the Nicobarese, used to live in settlements along the west coast. After the tsunami in 2004, which devastated their settlement on the western coast, they were relocated to Afra Bay on the north coast and to Campbell Bay. They survive on fish caught from the sea. There are about 237 Shompen and 1,094 Nicobarese individuals. The areas where the tribal dwell have been declared as Tribal Reserve.

The Shompens move between the Core and Buffer Zones, while the settlers and Nicobarese live in settlements spread along the coast in the Transition zone. The area of the tribal reserve is 751.070 sq.km. Of this 84.10 sq.km falling under tribal reserve, is proposed to be denotified. Andaman & Nicobar Administration proposes to renotify 45.23 sq.km of land in Campbell Bay and Galathea National Parks and 31.73 sq.km land outside the National parks. Therefore effectively 7.11 sq.km will be required for de-notification for the project.

## Environmental Conditions

Great Nicobar Island harbours a range of ecosystems, including tropical wet evergreen forests, mountain ranges reaching a height of nearly 650 m (Mt. Thullier) above sea level, and coastal plains. The island is noted for its rich biodiversity. It houses 650 species of angiosperms, ferns, gymnosperms, bryophytes and lichens among others. The tract is rich in plant diversity and fosters a number of rare and endemic species, including Cyathea albosetacea (tree fern) and Phalaenopsis speciosa (orchid). A total of 14 species of mammals, 71 species of birds, 26 species of reptiles, 10 species of amphibians, and 113 species of fish have been reported. The region also harbours a large number of endemic and endangered species of fauna. To date, 11 species of mammals, 32 species of birds, 7 species of reptiles and 4 species of amphibians have been found to be endemic. (Of these, the well-known Crab-eating Macaque, Nicobar Tree Shrew, Dugong, Nicobar Megapode, Serpent Eagle, salt water crocodile, marine turtles and Reticulated Python are endemic and/or endangered.

The area harbours coral reefs. These reefs are present around the island with varied thickness and diversity.

The corals were severely affected due to 2004 tsunami. In 2008, due to rise in sea water temperature, significant number of corals were bleached all over the world; the corals of Nicobar Island also experienced bleaching. However, the exact quantity of coral bleaching has not been estimated. The corals generally exist along the rocky coastal stretches with varied thicknesses. The island has plates of dead and live corals. In few areas, new coral recruits were also observed. As a part of the EIA study for this development, Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has surveyed the area.

The data collection is underway, and the report is awaited. Along the coastal beaches of the Nicobar Island, Leatherback and Olive Ridley turtles are known to nest.

The tsunami of 2004 modified the coastal morphology significantly and the turtles stopped visiting the beaches for nesting. However, with the passage of time, some turtles have returned for nesting.

Each Leatherback turtle lays about 100 eggs, and the survival rate of the hatchlings is around 2-5%. Various reports suggest that one out of one thousand turtles reach adulthood. Megapode nesting sites can be seen in various places around the island. Megapodes are mainly solitary birds that do not incubate their eggs with their body heat as other birds do, but bury them in mound consisting of decaying vegetation. ZSI is studying the megapode nesting sites as a part of the EIA. The report is awaited.

The island is known for salt water crocodiles. There has been an increase of man-crocodile conflict and the attacks on human have increased significantly over the years. There have been petitions by locals for culling of crocodiles.

The GNI suffered severely during the 2004 tsunami. The Sumatra earthquake (Mw 9.3) of 26 December 2004 was one of the most important earthquakes from the point of view of plate tectonics. This event occurred along the plate boundary marked by the subduction zone between the Indian Plate and the Burmese Plate (a part of the Eurasian Plate).

The southern portion of the Great Nicobar Island seems to have subsided by about 3 m, as supported by changes in the natural water levels. The entire Megapode Wildlife Sanctuary was submerged due to the submergence and does not exist anymore. On the eastern coast also, the sea has advanced to the coast by about 200–500 m, depending on the topography. This sudden 'land drowning' (due to tectonic subsidence), coupled with the tsunami, altered the structure of mangrove forests.

As per the study by WII, the mangrove cover in the Nicobar Islands declined by around 97 percent, which is higher than the earlier estimation. The researchers from Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) documented 20 mangrove species from 34 sites across the Nicobar Islands, of which eight species were recorded for the first time from the island group. There could be two major reasons for the new reports of eight mangrove species. These islands are often underexplored, so the species could have been there but not reported.

The second factor could be that the tsunami may have carried the seed material of the unreported species from nearby sources (such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore) along with the huge pile of debris that it dumped on the Nicobar coasts.

These are concerns that many independent analysts, NGOs, tribal rights groups and environmental commentators have flagged, some key issues being :

1. Threats to endemic flora & fauna: The island is biodiversity-rich, with tropical rainforests, mangroves, coral reefs. Species like the leatherback sea turtle, Nicobar long-tailed macaque etc may face risk due to the project.
2. Tribal / human rights & social ecology: Indigenous groups (e.g., the Shompen tribe, Nicobarese) are particularly vulnerable. The project may impact their lands, livelihoods, culture, health (due to incoming migration, diseases) and rights.
3. Marine/coastal ecosystem disturbance: The port and associated infrastructure sit in or near the CRZ (Coastal Regulation Zone) areas, which raises concerns like seabed dredging, reef damage, and sedimentation.

This project is important ecologically because the initiation of this project may lead to cultural disruption, erosion and potential extinction of species as a consequence of introducing heavy large-scale infrastructure.

### Tribal Consent and FRA Mechanism

The Forest Rights Act establishes that tribal communities must provide consent prior to any diversion of forest land, with clear recognition of their existing rights. However, in the case of the Great Nicobar Project, Gram Sabha consent was reportedly either absent or improperly obtained. Section 4(5) explicitly prohibits eviction before recognition of rights, yet the 2022 environmental clearance raised concerns about potential displacement of the Shompen and Nicobarese without completed rights settlement. Procedural compliance alone (e.g., convening meetings) may not constitute substantive consent if participation is insufficient or coerced, raising legal and ethical questions for development planning.

## Environmental Clearance and CRZ Challenges

The project received environmental clearance in November 2022, subject to 42 conditions addressing terrestrial and marine biodiversity, as well as tribal welfare. This included the establishment of three independent monitoring committees. Critics argue that clearance processes were based on incomplete or inaccurate ecological data, including underestimates of tree density and biodiversity impact. Galathea Bay, classified under CRZ-1A for nesting and mangrove protection, was reclassified as CRZ-1B in a confidential report to facilitate port construction, raising legal and procedural concerns. Removal of wildlife sanctuary status and proposed compensatory afforestation in distant states like Haryana has sparked debate over environmental accountability.

Source: 'Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island at Andaman & Nicobar Islands':  
Pre-feasibility report  
(March 2021)

