

GREAT NICOBAR PROJECT – ECONOMY

The ₹72,000-crore Great Nicobar Project faces controversy as the Tribal Council alleges false certification of settled forest rights under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, enabling illegal forest diversion.

Great Nicobar Project (Launched 2021)

A mega development initiative proposed at the southern tip of Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) with both economic and strategic objectives.

Key Components

1. **International Container Trans-shipment Terminal (ICTT)** – A deep-draft port to serve as a major maritime hub.
2. **Greenfield International Airport** – A dual-use airport for both civilian and military purposes.
3. **Township Development** – To accommodate workers, military personnel, and local communities.
4. **450 MVA Gas & Solar-based Power Plant** – To ensure uninterrupted power supply for industries, port operations, and township.

Implementing Agency – Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO).

Origin of Idea – Based on a NITI Aayog report emphasizing the island's strategic maritime location – equidistant from Colombo, Port Klang, and Singapore.

Jurisdiction – The port will be under Indian Navy's control, enhancing maritime security. The airport will be dual-use, supporting both defense operations and civilian air traffic.

Reasons for Development

Strategic Maritime Hub – Located near the Malacca Strait, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes linking the Indian Ocean with the Pacific Ocean. ICTT will strengthen India's role in regional and global maritime trade.

Enhancing Military Capabilities – Ability to station large warships, aircraft, missile batteries, and troops. Strengthens surveillance over the Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea, and eastern Indian Ocean.



Countering China – China's PLA Navy expanding presence in the Indo-Pacific. Concerns about Chinese presence in Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok Straits. Suspected Chinese surveillance facility in Coco Islands (Myanmar), just 55 km from ANI. The project provides India a strategic counterbalance in the region.

Regional Security Challenges – Will help India counter piracy, smuggling, sea line vulnerabilities, and illegal fishing.

Boosting Blue Economy - Proposed SEZ (Special Economic Zone) will act as a commercial hub. Aims to reduce dependence on foreign trans-shipment hubs (e.g., Colombo, Singapore). Supports marine resources-based growth, trade, and logistics efficiency.

About Great Nicobar Island

Location - The southernmost island of ANI. Stretches from Ranganatha Bay (north) to Galathea Bay (south-east), further extending to Indira Point (India's southernmost tip).

Geography - ANI has **836 islands**, divided into two groups:

1. Andaman Islands (north)
2. Nicobar Islands (south)

They are separated by the 10° Channel (150 km wide).

Strategic Significance - Situated close to the East-West International Shipping Corridor. Equidistant from Colombo (Sri Lanka), Port Klang (Malaysia), and Singapore, making it ideal for trade and defense logistics. Inhabitants

Indigenous Tribes

1. **Shompen** - ~250 people, live in interior forests, hunter-gatherers, recognized as PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group).
2. **Nicobarese** - Engage in farming and fishing; two groups -
 - i. **Great Nicobarese** - Lived along coasts until 2004 tsunami; now resettled in Campbell Bay (~450 people).
 - ii. **Little Nicobarese** - Live in Afra Bay, Pulumilo, and Little Nicobar islands (~850 people).

Settlers - Between 1968-1975, retired servicemen and their families from Punjab, UP, Bihar, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu were relocated here.

Biodiversity of Great Nicobar - Covered with tropical wet evergreen forests.

Rich wildlife diversity

1. 14 species of mammals
2. 71 species of birds
3. 26 species of reptiles
4. 10 species of amphibians
5. 113 species of fish

Leatherback Sea Turtle is considered the **flagship species** of the island.

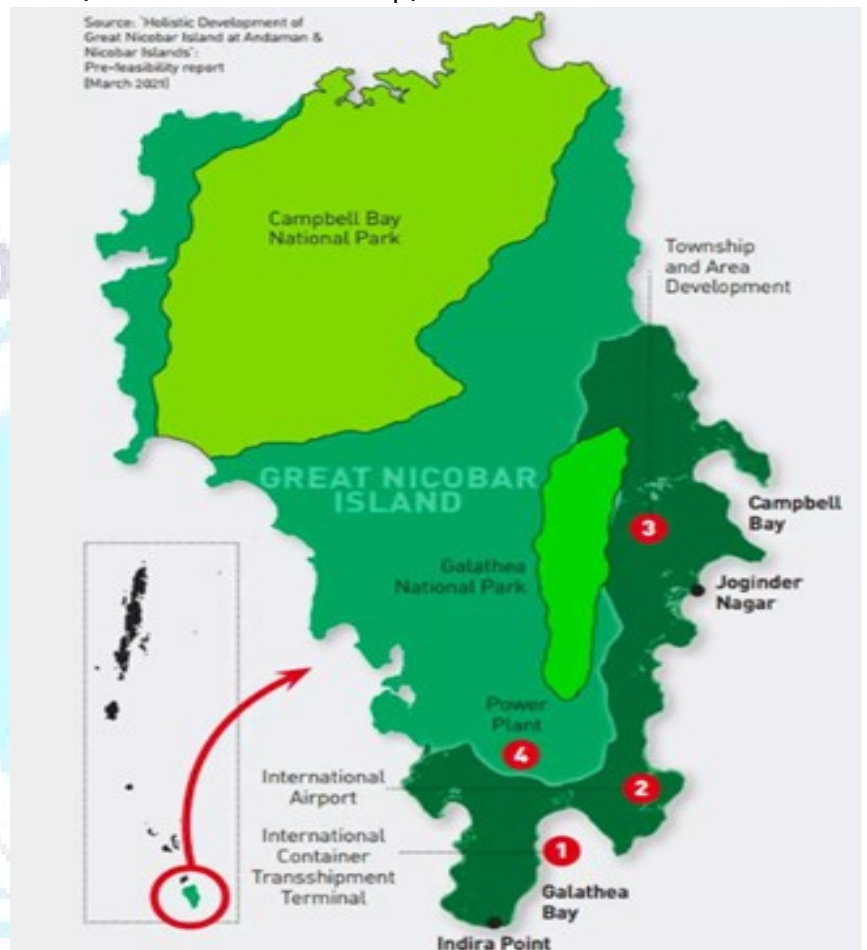
About PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups)

Represent the most marginalized sections among Scheduled Tribes.

Characteristics - pre-agricultural level of technology, declining/stagnant population, and low literacy.
History - Based on Dhebar Commission (1975) recommendations, 52 groups were initially identified as PVTGs.

Current status - Out of 705 Scheduled Tribes, 75 groups are recognized as PVTGs in India.

Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006



Objective - To recognize rights of Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs) over forest land and resources.

Key Provisions -

1. **Individual Rights** - Up to 4 hectares for habitation/self-cultivation.
2. **Community Rights** - Rights over minor forest produce, grazing, water, fishing, traditional practices.
3. **Development Rights** - Access to schools, hospitals, and roads in forest areas.
4. **Gram Sabha's Role** - Gram Sabha is the **primary authority** for verification and approval of rights claims.

Safeguards - No eviction of forest dwellers until rights are recognized and verified.

Significance -

1. Empowers tribal communities.
2. Promotes participatory conservation.
3. Balances livelihood security with forest sustainability.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andaman-and-nicobar-islands/forest-rights-of-tribal-people-were-not-settled-for-nicobar-project-council/article69964782.ece>

