



NITI Aayog's Project for Great Nicobar Island

Why in News

Recently, the Environment Appraisal Committee which flagged concerns over the project has now 'recommended' it **'for grant of terms of reference'** for [Environmental Impact Assessment \(EIA\)](#) studies.

- In August, 2020 the Prime Minister had declared that the Andaman and Nicobar islands will be developed as a **"maritime and startup hub"**.

Key Points

▪ About the Project:

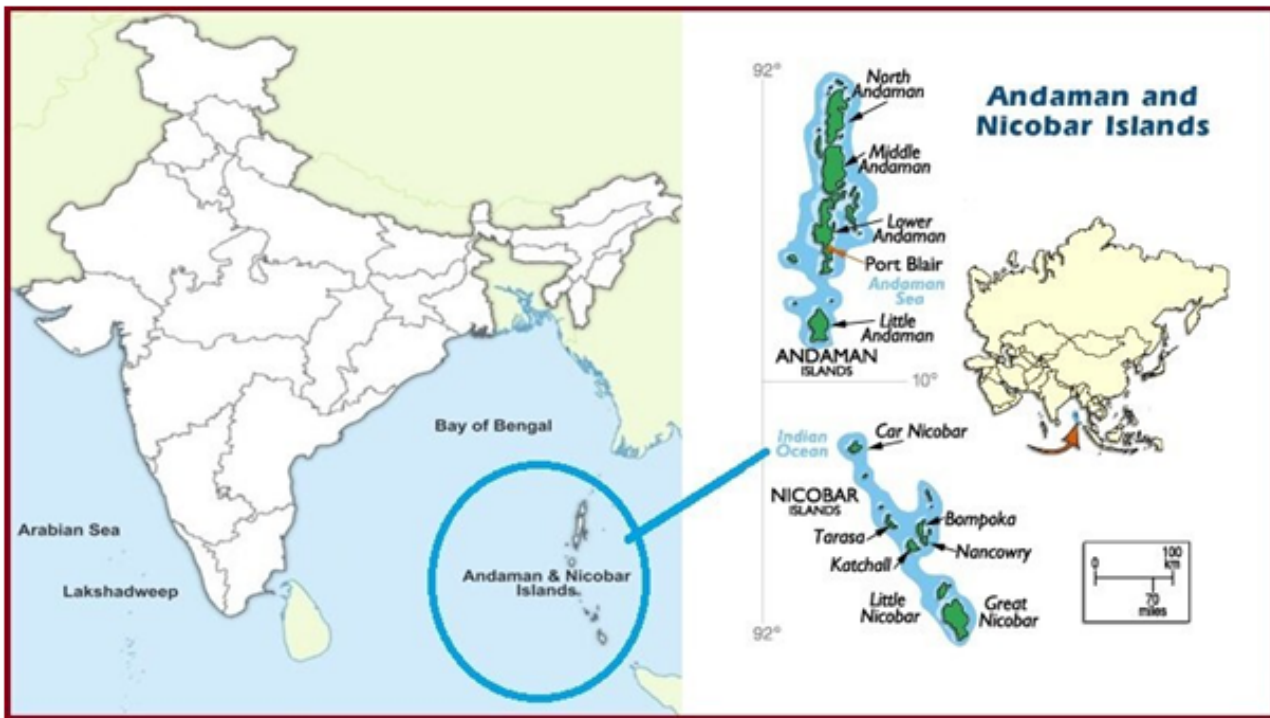
- The proposal includes an **international container trans-shipment terminal, a greenfield international airport, a power plant and a township complex spread over 166 sq. km. (mainly pristine coastal systems and tropical forests)**.
- It is estimated to cost Rs. 75,000 crore.

▪ Issues with Project:

- Lack of details on **seismic and tsunami hazards, freshwater requirement** details, and details of the **impact on the [Giant Leatherback turtle](#)**.
- **No details of the trees to be felled**—a number that could run into millions since 130 sq. km. of the project area has some of the finest tropical forests in India.
- A number of additional issues include about **Galathea Bay**, the site of the port and the centrepiece of the NITI Aayog proposal.
 - **Galathea Bay** is an iconic nesting site in India of the **enigmatic Giant Leatherback, the world's largest marine turtle**—borne out by surveys done over three decades.
 - Ecological surveys in the last few years have reported **a number of new species**, many restricted to just the Galathea region.
 - **These include** the critically endangered Nicobar shrew, the Great Nicobar crane, the Nicobar frog, the Nicobar cat snake, a new skink (*Lipinia* sp), a new lizard (*Dibamus* sp,) and a snake of the *Lycodon* sp that is yet to be described.
- The site selection for the port had been done **mainly on technical and financial criteria, ignoring the environmental aspects**.

▪ Action Points listed out by the Committee:

- There is a need for **an independent assessment of terrestrial and marine biodiversity**, a study on the impact of dredging, reclamation and port operations, including oil spills.
- The **need for studies of alternative sites for the port** with a focus on environmental and ecological impact, especially on turtles, analysis of risk-handling capabilities.
- A **seismic and tsunami hazard map, a disaster management plan, details of labour**, labour camps and their requirements, an assessment of the cumulative impact, and a **hydro-geological study** to assess impact on ground and surface water regimes.



Great Nicobar

▪ About:

- Great Nicobar is the **southernmost island** of the Nicobar Islands Archipelago.
- **It covers 1,03,870 hectares of unique and threatened tropical evergreen forest ecosystems.**
- It is home to a very rich ecosystem, including 650 species of angiosperms, ferns, gymnosperms, bryophytes, among others.
- In terms of fauna, there are over 1800 species, some of which are endemic to this area.

▪ Ecological Characteristics:

- The **Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve** harbours a wide spectrum of ecosystems comprising **tropical wet evergreen forests**, mountain ranges reaching a height of 642 m (**Mt. Thullier**) above sea level, and coastal plains.

▪ Tribe:

- The **Mongoloid Shompen Tribe**, about 200 in number, live in the forests of the biosphere reserve particularly along the rivers and streams.
 - They are hunters and food gatherers, dependent on forest and marine resources for sustenance.
- Another Mongoloid Tribe, **Nicobarese**, about 300 in number, 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 in the North Coast and Campbell Bay.**

[Source: TH](#)

