

Great Nicobar development project

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In news– Recently, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change gave environmental clearance for the ambitious Rs 72,000 crore development project on the strategically important Great Nicobar Island.

What is Great Nicobar development project?

- A total 166.1 sq km along the southeastern and southern coasts of the island have been identified for project along a coastal strip of width between 2 km and 4 km. Some 130 sq km of forests have been sanctioned for diversion, and 9.64 lakh trees are likely to be felled.
- Development activities are proposed to commence in the current financial year, and the port is expected to be commissioned by 2027–28.
- The project is to be implemented in three phases over the next 30 years.
- A “greenfield city” has been proposed, including an International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT), a greenfield international airport, a power plant, and a township for the personnel who will implement the project.
- Under the project, the proposed port will be controlled by the Indian Navy, while the airport will have dual military-civilian functions and will cater to tourism as well.
- The island has a lot of tourism potential, but the government’s greater goal is to leverage the locational advantage of the island for economic and strategic reasons.
- The proposal to develop Great Nicobar was first floated in the 1970s, and its importance for national security

and consolidation of the Indian Ocean Region has been repeatedly underlined.

- Increasing Chinese assertion in the Bay of Bengal and the Indo-Pacific has added great urgency to this imperative in recent years.

The concerns-

- The proposed massive infrastructure development in an ecologically important and fragile region, including the felling of almost a million trees, has alarmed many environmentalists.
- As per the union government, the project site is outside the eco-sensitive zones of Campbell Bay and Galathea National Park.
- The Centre has said that the development area is only a small percentage of the area of the island and its forest cover, and that 15 per cent of the development area itself will be green cover and open spaces.

The Great Nicobar Island-

- **Great Nicobar, the southernmost of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, has an area of 910 sq km.**
- The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a cluster of about 836 islands in the eastern Bay of Bengal, the two groups of which are separated by the 150-km wide Ten Degree Channel.
- The Andaman Islands lie to the north of the channel, and the Nicobar Islands to the south.
- **Indira Point on the southern tip of Great Nicobar Island is India's southernmost point,** less than 150 km from the northernmost island of the Indonesian archipelago.
- **Great Nicobar is home to two national parks, a biosphere reserve, and the Shompen and Nicobarese tribal peoples,** along with ex-servicemen from Punjab, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh who were

settled on the island in the 1970s.

- **The Shompen are hunter-gatherers** who depend on forest and marine resources for sustenance.
 - **The Nicobarese**, who lived along the west coast of the island were mostly relocated after the 2004 tsunami.
 - An estimated 237 Shompen and 1,094 Nicobarese individuals now live in a 751 sq km tribal reserve, some 84 sq km of which is proposed to be denotified.
 - **The Great Nicobar Island has tropical wet evergreen forests, mountain ranges reaching almost 650 m above sea level**, and coastal plains.
 - Fourteen species of mammals, 71 species of birds, 26 species of reptiles, 10 species of amphibians, and 113 species of fish are found on the island, some of which are endangered.
- **The leatherback sea turtle is the island's flagship species.**

