Great Nicobar Development Project

Why in news?

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change gave environmental clearance for the ambitious Rs.72000-crore development project on the Great Nicobar Island.

What is the proposal?

- A "greenfield city" has been proposed, including
    1. An International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT),
    2. A greenfield international airport,
    3. A power plant, and
    4. A township for the personnel who will implement the project.
- A total 166.1 sq km along the island's southeastern and southern coasts 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.
- The port will be controlled by the Indian Navy, while the airport will have dual military-civilian functions and will cater to tourism as well.
- Roads, public transport, water supply and waste management facilities, and several hotels have been planned to cater to tourists.

> *The NITI Aayog has said in a report that the proposed port will allow Great Nicobar to participate in the regional and global maritime economy by becoming a major player in cargo transshipment.*

When will the project implementation begin?

- Development activities are proposed to commence in the financial year 2022-23, and the port is expected to be commissioned by 2027-28.
- The project is to be implemented in 3 phases over the next 30 years.
- More than 1 lakh new direct jobs and 1.5 lakh indirect jobs are likely to be created on the island over the period of development.

What is the purpose?

- The government's goal is to leverage the locational advantage of the island for economic and strategic reasons.
- Great Nicobar is equidistant from Colombo to the southwest and Port Klang and Singapore to the southeast.
- It is positioned close to the East-West international shipping corridor, through which a

very large part of the world's shipping trade passes.
- The proposed ICTT can potentially become a hub for cargo ships travelling on this route.
- **Significance** - The proposal to develop Great Nicobar Island was first floated in the 1970s.
- 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.

What are the concerns?

- The proposed massive infrastructure development in an ecologically important and fragile region has alarmed many environmentalists.
- As almost a million trees will be felt, the loss of tree cover will lead to increased runoff and sediment deposits in the ocean, impacting the coral reefs in the area.
- The loss of mangroves on the island will be a result of the project.

What is the government's plan to address these concerns?

- India has successfully translocated a coral reef from the Gulf of Mannar to the Gulf of Kutch earlier.
- The Zoological Survey of India is currently in the process of assessing how much of the reef will have to be relocated for the project.
- The government has said that a conservation plan for the leatherback turtle is also being put in place.
- According to the government, expediting the project is of paramount national security and strategic importance.
- 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% of the development area itself will be green cover and open spaces.

Reference

1. The Indian Express | Development of Great Nicobar: strategic imperative and ecological concerns
2. Mongabay | Environmental path cleared for Great Nicobar mega project
3. Go2andaman | Great Nicobar

Quick Facts

Great Nicobar Island

- Great Nicobar Island is the southernmost of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- It is the largest of the Nicobar group of islands, spanning 921 km.
- Indira Point on the southern tip of this Island is India's southernmost point.
- 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.



- Great Nicobar is home to
    1. Two national parks,
    2. A biosphere reserve, and
    3. The Shompen and Nicobarese tribal peoples, and
    4. Ex-servicemen from Punjab, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh who were settled on the island in the 1970s.
- The approximately 8,000 settlers who live on the island are engaged in agriculture, horticulture, and fishing.

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.

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