



Great Nicobar Project: FAQs

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The Great Nicobar Project is a strategic initiative to strengthen India's presence in the Andaman Sea. It seeks to balance port-led growth with calibrated environmental safeguards. Protection of indigenous communities remains central to its planning. The project combines strategic, economic, and ecological priorities. This ensures that development is sustainable, inclusive, and aligned with national interests.

The following FAQs provide an understanding of the key aspects of the project:

Does the Great Nicobar Island Project serve a clear strategic and national purpose?

The Great Nicobar Island Project is a project of strategic, defence, and national importance, undertaken after due diligence and careful consideration. It is of critical national security and strategic significance. The project will substantially strengthen India's presence in the Andaman Sea and Southeast Asia, enhance maritime and defence capabilities, and integrate the island with global trade and logistics networks. It will also establish a major international transshipment terminal with distinct locational advantages over competing ports in the Bay of Bengal region, positioning India as a key economic and strategic hub.

It is because of the rigor of environmental scrutiny and after incorporating the consequent safeguards that the Environment and Forest Clearances were granted. The Environmental and Forest Clearances so granted has withstood the judicial scrutiny.

With reference to the Hon'ble NGTs order dated 3rd April, 2023 wherein Hon'ble NGT, recognises that the " project has great significance not only for economic development of the island and surrounding areas of strategic location but also for defense and national security. Even the appellants have not joined issue on these aspects. While the Tribunal's consideration is confined to material on record, we have also noted (without any comment) media reports that the area is located in China's 'string of pearls' strategy which is sought to be countered by Indian Authorities under India's 'Act East' policy. Indian Ocean has emerged as a key intersection zone of Indian and Chinese strategic interests. There are further media reports of huge poaching of environmental marine resources of Andaman by poachers from Myanmar for which number of people have been arrested. Poaching activities include destruction of corals, killing of sharks, taking away of valuable fishes. The project will help bridge infrastructural gap in island and promote international trade saving huge amount on transshipment cargo".

The availability of a strong and permanent defence presence in Great Nicobar, enable India to effectively monitor and secure maritime routes and counter the growing presence of foreign powers in the Indian Ocean.

In view of the above, the Great Nicobar Project is of paramount national importance. It combines the objectives of economic growth, infrastructure development, and employment generation with critical national security imperatives. This contributes to India's long-term strategic and developmental interests in the Indian Ocean Region.

Does the project incorporate robust environmental safeguards alongside development objectives?

The potential ecological impacts of the project have been comprehensively identified, assessed, and are being effectively managed through a robust Environmental Impact Assessment process and a detailed Environmental Management Plan (EMP). The assessment was carried out in accordance with the EIA Notification, 2006 and ICRZ Notification, 2019. It involved reputed national institutions including the Zoological Survey of India, Wildlife Institute of India, and Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, along with premier technical bodies such as IITs, NIOT, NCCR, and NIO. This ensured a scientifically rigorous and multi-disciplinary appraisal.

Based on their findings, stringent mitigation and conservation measures have been incorporated into the Environmental Clearance. These include biodiversity conservation plans, coral protection and translocation, wildlife management strategies, and long-term ecological monitoring. The EMP is supported by substantial financial allocation and institutional oversight. It provides for continuous implementation of mitigation measures during both construction and operation phases, ensuring that ecological impacts are minimised, monitored, and effectively managed in a sustained and accountable manner.

Will the island's forests and tree cover be adequately preserved and compensated for?

Only 166.1 sq. km of area is proposed for development, which is approximately 2% of the total area of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Further, 130.75 sq. km of forest area is proposed to be diverted for the project which is only approximately 1.82% of the total forest area of A & N Islands.

The total estimated tree count in the 130.75 sq. km of forest land to be diverted is 18.65 lakh. Of these, a maximum of 7.11 lakh trees are estimated to be felled in the 49.86 sq. km forest area. Tree felling will be undertaken in a phased manner: 2.79 lakh trees in Phase I (2025–2035), 3.41 lakh trees in Phase II (2036–2041), and 0.91 lakh trees in Phase III (2042–2047). Further, as per the EC & FC condition, an area of 65.99 sq. km shall be retained as a green area with no tree felling.

As per MoEF&CC Guidelines dated 22.05.2019 under The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, States/UTs with over 75% forest cover are exempt from providing non-forest land for Compensatory Afforestation (CA) and such CA may instead be taken up in other States/UTs with available land banks.

Since A & N Islands have more than 75% forest cover, CA is proposed outside the UT. The diversion of 130.75 sq. km of forest land has been offset through a comprehensive Compensatory Afforestation (CA) plan under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. A total of 24,750.93 ha has been identified for CA: 1,414.95 ha of non-forest land (equivalent to the diverted area) and over double that extent in degraded forest land. Of this, about 17,000 ha is in Haryana and 6,320.10 ha is in Madhya Pradesh, ensuring adequate ecological compensation.

A significant portion of the Compensatory Afforestation land identified in Haryana comprises degraded forest areas, including PLPA lands, which are largely situated within the Aravalli landscape. These areas are earmarked for ecological restoration in accordance with prevailing guidelines.

Will tribal communities be safeguarded, ensuring the continuity of their culture and rights?

All statutory procedures and policy safeguards for the protection of tribal communities have been duly complied with in the Great Nicobar Island Project. Necessary consultations were undertaken with competent authorities and domain experts, including the Anthropological Survey of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, and other stakeholders, in line with the Jarawa Policy, 2004 and Shompen Policy, 2015. The Empowered Committee, comprising senior officials and eminent anthropologists, has categorically ensured that the interests of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), especially the Shompen community, will not be adversely affected. No displacement of tribal populations shall be permitted. The project has also secured a No Objection Certificate from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, with due adherence to the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

Currently, Great Nicobar Island has 751.070 sq. km of land officially marked as Tribal Reserve. Of the 166.10 sq. km proposed for development, 84.10 sq. km overlaps with the Tribal Reserve. Within this portion, 11.032 sq. km has already been settled and used as revenue land since 1972. The effectively remaining area of 73.07 sq. km is being de-notified for project purposes. To compensate, 76.98 sq. km is being re-notified as tribal reserve, resulting in a net addition of 3.912 sq. km. In Phase I, only 40.01 sq. km of tribal area is involved, of which 11.032 sq. km has been under revenue use since 1972.

Does the project strike a balanced approach between protecting natural heritage and advancing national development?

The project has undergone comprehensive scientific and regulatory appraisal, taking into account the uniqueness of the island's biodiversity. The environmental impact of the project has been assessed in a detailed and multi-tiered manner in accordance with the Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006 and Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 2019, wherein due consideration has been given to the ecological sensitivity and biodiversity value of the island. Based on such assessment, a robust Environmental Management Plan, along with stringent and enforceable conditions, has been prescribed to avoid, minimise and mitigate any potential impacts.

The project has been conceived with a balanced approach, integrating environmental safeguards with strategic and national development objectives. Extensive mitigation measures, continuous monitoring mechanisms, and institutional oversight have been put in place to ensure the protection of biodiversity and ecological integrity over the long term. The project is therefore a carefully planned initiative with in-built safeguards that address environmental concerns while advancing national interests.

Is the project well-planned, feasible, and designed with long-term impact in mind?

The environmental impact of the project has been assessed in a detailed and multi-tiered manner in accordance with the Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006 and Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 2019, wherein due consideration has been given to the ecological sensitivity and biodiversity value of the island. Based on such assessment, a robust Environmental Management Plan, along with stringent and enforceable conditions, has been prescribed to avoid, minimise and mitigate any potential impacts.

Has the Environmental Clearance process been thorough and subject to independent judicial scrutiny?

The project has undergone a comprehensive appraisal in accordance with the Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006 and Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 2019. All relevant environmental aspects were rigorously examined by expert bodies. The Environmental Clearance incorporates detailed and enforceable conditions, supported by a robust Environmental Management Plan and a continuous monitoring framework, ensuring that all identified environmental concerns are adequately addressed.

It is further submitted that the project has withstood judicial scrutiny before the National Green Tribunal, a specialised statutory body entrusted with adjudication of environmental matters. The Hon'ble Tribunal considered the pleadings, materials on record, and expert inputs before upholding the decision-making process. This affirmed that environmental concerns were duly examined and addressed in accordance with law.

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