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Andaman and Nicobar Islands Seek Nod to Cull Saltwater Crocodiles

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The local administration of the Andaman and Nicobar islands has submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change which sought the temporary removal of saltwater crocodiles from Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act. The proposal was issued in the wake of growing number of crocodile attacks at the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

- The removal could potentially lead to culling of adult saltwater crocodiles.
- Under the Wildlife Protection Act, the Schedule I status is given to the most endangered species of plants and animals and carry the highest penalty for poachers.
- However, permission may be given for selective culling if any species is declared vermin by local authorities or is perceived to be a severe threat to human lives.
- In response to the rising attacks the local administrator has restricted access to many popular beaches across the islands and has put warning signs urging visitors to not venture into the sea.
- The fear has impacted both the tourism and fisheries industries, which are the main source of revenue for the islanders.
- Local conservationists however argue that the decision to cull adult crocodiles will not be easy and is bound to raise an outcry.
- Geotagging of the animals has been suggested as an alternative. It can allow better monitoring of their movements and provide adequate warning.

Saltwater Crocodile

- The saltwater crocodile is the largest of all living reptiles and can reach 7 metres.
- It can be found across South-east Asia, Australia and the Sunderbans, besides the Andaman and Nicobar.
- They are known to swim long distances, which often makes their relocation difficult.

- Once poached extensively for their skin and meat, the saltwater crocodile population in the islands have grown from double digits in the mid 60s to about 1,700 under the government's Project Crocodile programme, which was launched in 1975.