



## Developmental Needs of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

This article is based upon [“Development of Great Nicobar: strategic imperative and ecological concerns”](#) which was published in the Indian Express on 22/11/2022. It talks about the strategic and ecological significance of Andaman and Nicobar and challenges related to it.

**For Prelims:** Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI), Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, Greenfield coastal city, Coral reefs, Mangroves, Japan’s Overseas Development Assistance, Car Nicobar, Handicraft Industries.

**For Mains:** Significance of ANI for India, Challenges Related to Andaman and Nicobar Islands, NITI Aayog’s Project for Great Nicobar.

The [Andaman and Nicobar Islands \(ANI\)](#), located in the Indian Ocean, are a group of **572 islands** in the **south eastern part of the Bay of Bengal**. These islands are situated close to Indonesia and Thailand.

**ANI's strategic importance has not been fully appreciated** by India from a **security and economic standpoint**, and environmental degradation is a major concern in ANI at present, so a greater focus on sustainable development is needed to flourish the **economy of the island**, as well as **strengthen India's maritime capabilities**.

### What is the Significance of ANI for India?

- **Treasure of Tribes:** The **Andaman and Nicobar Islands** are home to 5 [Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups](#): **Great Andamanese, Jarwas, Onges, Shompens and North Sentinelese**.
- **Space for Maritime Partners:** India's key maritime partners such as the **US, Japan, Australia and France** acknowledge and **recognise the strategic location of the Andaman and Nicobar**.
  - These islands not only provide India with a key maritime space but also **carry significant potential in shaping the strategic and military dynamics** of the Indian Ocean region.
- **Recent Developmental Plans for ANI:**
  - **Japan’s Overseas Development Assistance:** Japan approved a **USD 265 crore grant** aid for Andaman and Nicobar Islands development projects in 2021.
  - **NITI Aayog’s Project for Great Nicobar:** It includes an **international container transshipment terminal**, an airport, a power plant, and a township.
  - **NITI Aayog’s Proposal for Little Andaman:** The plan calls for the development of a new [greenfield coastal city](#) to **compete with Singapore and Hong Kong**.

### What are the Challenges Related to Andaman and Nicobar Islands?

- **Illegal Migration and Smuggling:** Andaman and Nicobar Islands face greater challenges to their [internal security](#) through non-conventional threats such as illegal migration from **littoral states of the Bay of Bengal**, poaching of marine and forest resources, **arms and narcotics smuggling through uninhabited islands and natural disasters**.
- **Unsustainable Development:** Andaman and Nicobar have become a **major tourist** attraction, and this has resulted in **many development projects** being initiated in this region. While at one side **it will transform the islands substantially**, it would also cause loss of ecological stability.
  - Developmental activities are also impacting the [coral reefs in the area](#), which are **already under threat from warming oceans**, and are of enormous ecological importance.
  - **Environmentalists** have also flagged the **loss of [mangroves](#) on the island as a result of the development project**.
- **Geological Volatility:** The Andaman and Nicobar island's groups lie in a **seismically highly active zone**. Due to this, the **region is prone to a number of natural disasters**.
  - For instance, in **2004 an [earthquake](#) and accompanying [tsunami](#) devastated large parts of the island chain**.
    - **Nicobar and Car Nicobar (northernmost Nicobar Island) lost almost one-fifth of its population and close to 90% of its mangroves**.
- **Geo-Political Instability:** Andaman and Nicobar islands are part of the [Indo-Pacific geopolitical theatre](#), where **China is actively trying to expand its influence**, potentially posing a **threat to [India's blue economy](#) and maritime security**.
  - The **aspirations of China to register its presence in this region** can be seen in [Hambantota, Sri Lanka](#) where China is in possession of Sri Lankan real estate.
- **Encroachment in Tribal Space:** While **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)** are accorded the highest level of protection by local administration, they still face numerous challenges due to **encroachment into their areas in the name of development**, and lack of effective **rehabilitation program**.

## What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Sustainable Island Development Framework:** Infrastructure and developmental projects in Andaman and Nicobar will **no doubt aid India's strategic and maritime capabilities**, but such development **should not come at the cost of the exploitation of the ecosystem** that the Andaman and Nicobar offers.
  - Prior to any development activity in this region, an [Environmental and Social Impact Assessment](#) should be made mandatory.
  - A **Sustainable Island Development framework** is not only important for the Andaman and Nicobar but should also be **applicable to other Indian islands as well**.
- **Master Plan for Community Development:** The laws must be strengthened to **protect indigenous communities**, and a proper rehabilitation plan should be formulated to protect them during times of calamity.
  - Due to the high demand from visiting tourists, the **Islands provide opportunities for the handicrafts industry**. In line, **India can set a template for other islands across the world** by preparing a master plan for the **formalising [Handicraft Industries](#) in island regions and promoting Make in India initiative**.
- **Developing Island Security Model:** There is a need for India to **invest in capacity building in maritime security and incentivize research**, to develop an **Island Security Model**, and to equip its [Navy](#) with the latest technology to track any infiltration attempt.
- **Revitalising Linking Projects:** There is a need to revitalise the plan of linking the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the mainland** through [Submarine Optical Fibre Cable \(OFC\)](#).
  - **Submarine Cable** will also assist A&N in **providing cheaper and better connectivity and all of [Digital India's](#) advantages**, especially in **improving online education, telemedicine, banking and online trading**.
- **Thrust to Shipbuilding and Repair Industry:** The **lifeline of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands** is shipping operations, as most construction activities are related to it. The **ship repair facilities need to be established in order to keep the shipping operations alive without any disruption**.
  - The [shipbuilding and repair industries](#) will also enable India to become a **junction in the Indian Ocean** and **developing trans-shipment ports** will also facilitate trade with

## Southeast Asia.

### ***Drishti Mains Question***

What is the strategic and economic significance of Andaman and Nicobar for India? Also discuss major environmental and geopolitical challenges related to this region.

### **UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)**

**Q1. Which one of the following regions of India has a combination of mangrove forest, evergreen forest and deciduous forest? (2015)**

- (a) North Coastal Andhra Pradesh
- (b) South-West Bengal
- (c) Southern Saurashtra
- (d) Andaman and Nicobar Islands

**Ans: (d)**

**Q2. Which one of the following pairs of islands is separated from each other by the 'Ten Degree Channel'? (2014)**

- (a) Andaman and Nicobar
- (b) Nicobar and Sumatra
- (c) Maldives and Lakshadweep
- (d) Sumatra and Java

**Ans: (a)**

**Q3. Which of the following have coral reefs? (2014)**

1. Andaman and Nicobar Islands
2. Gulf of Kachchh
3. Gulf of Mannar
4. Sunderbans

**Select the correct answer using the code given below:**

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 4 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Ans: (a)**

**Q4. In which one of the following places is the Shompen tribe found? (2009)**

- (a) Nilgiri Hills
- (b) Nicobar Islands
- (c) Spiti Valley
- (d) Lakshadweep Islands

**Ans: (b)**

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