



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)

