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Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC)

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Government of India has commissioned a full-fledged naval base INS Kohassa in the north Andaman Island. According to media reports, the government has also made a 10-year-long “roll on” plan to create facilities for additional troops, warships, aircraft and drones on Andaman and Nicobar Islands, thus strengthening the existing military facilities.

Strategic Importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

- **Importance due to its location in Indian Ocean Region (IOR):**
 - One-Fourth of total world population and one-third of littoral states of the world are located around IOR.
 - Large volume of the World’s trade, particularly oil and gas passes through this ocean.

- Islands provide for 30% of India's total Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- Due to presence of islands in Indian Ocean, India is part of many maritime regional groupings.
- **Part of Trade Route:** The ten degree channel (that separates the Andaman Islands and Nicobar Islands from each other in the Bay of Bengal) through which majority of trade passes from South China Sea and Pacific to Indian Ocean is between North and South Nicobar Islands.
- **Buffer Zone:** Andaman and Nicobar Islands act as a buffer zone between India and rest of the nations present in Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- **Strategic Outpost:** Through these islands, India is able to defend its vital stakes in IOR. ANC has been set up for this reason only.

Drishti Input

Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC)

- It is the first and only Tri-Service theatre command of the Indian Armed Forces, based at Port Blair in Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India.
- It was created in 2001 to safeguard India's strategic interests in Southeast Asia and the Strait of Malacca by increasing rapid deployment of military assets in the islands.
- It is commanded by a three star officer from Navy, under whom officers and men from all three services (Navy, Air Force, Army) work.
- It conducts bi-annual coordinated patrols (CORPATs) with the navies of Thailand and Indonesia, the annual SIMBEX maritime exercise with Singapore, and the biennial Milan multilateral naval exercise.
- It also patrols India's exclusive economic zone to suppress gun running, narcotics smuggling, piracy, and poaching, and conducts maritime surveillance, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).
- Vice Admiral Bimal Verma is its current Commander-in-Chief.

Concerns

- **Islands are far from Indian mainland** but are comparatively closer to places in Thailand, Indonesia and Myanmar. Indira Point, the southernmost tip of the great Nicobar Island is just 215 Km away from Banda Aceh on Sumatra Island.
- **Sensitive ecology** that surrounds islands.
- Any sort of disturbance in IOR will directly affect India as the region falls in its backyard.
- Many countries in neighbourhood consider India as a benign and benevolent power. Power Projection at islands will change this perception of India.
- **Presence of Chinese submarines** in Indian Ocean.

Way Forward

- India continuously needs to collect lot of information on maritime domain to keep tab on activities that are going on in Indian Ocean.
- Presence of all the three forces at the islands is required to avoid any possible war in future.
- To defend islands from outside forces, four full-fledged air fields for surveillance are needed at Islands. India has only two, one at Port Blair and other at Car Nicobar.
- Besides air fields, other things like Anti Access Area Denial Complex, sea bed sensors, land based missiles etc. are needed to physically defend against any attack.
- ANC needs to be developed not only as Armed Forces strategic outpost but also as a business model. Once islands turn into commercial hub, countries in neighbourhood will perceive military deployment at islands as a protection force for economic assets established on the islands.
- There is tremendous potential for fisheries, seabed mining, and tourism at the islands. India needs to exploit that to generate funds and provide employment opportunities to people.
- While developing islands, India needs to ensure that ecology of the place remains preserved.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands are not only strategically located but also strategically significant for India. Therefore, civil as well as military infrastructure development is required at the islands.