



Current Affairs of the Day

'Inaccuracies, procedural violations' in Great Nicobar EIA report

- Public hearing scheduled amid concerns over the independence and expertise of the consultant appointed to prepare the study document
- Ecologists have been raising concerns about the Great Nicobar Island project for over a year.

Highlights:

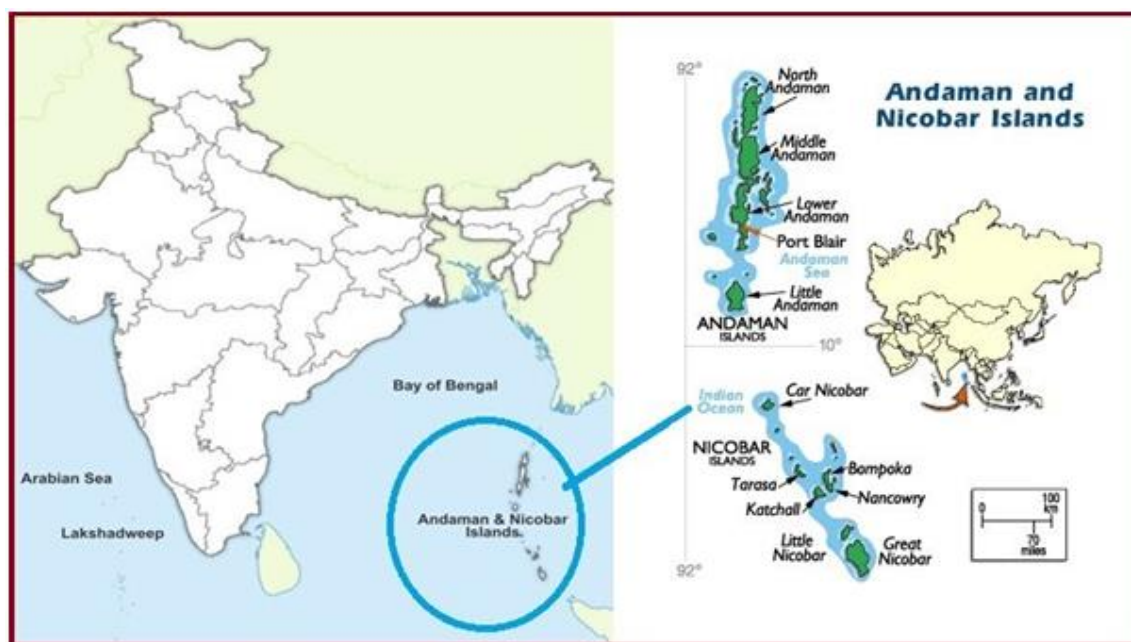
1. The details of the recently released draft environment impact assessment (EIA) report for the mega-development project in the Great Nicobar Island have raised serious questions related to submission of incorrect or incomplete information, scientific inaccuracy and failure to follow the appropriate procedure.
2. A public hearing to discuss the report has been scheduled at Campbell Bay, the administrative headquarters.
3. The matter is related to the NITI Aayog-piloted ₹72,000-crore integrated project in Great Nicobar that includes the construction of a mega port, an airport complex, a township spread over 130 sq. km of pristine forest and a solar and gas-based power plant. Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Ltd. (ANIIDCO) is the project proponent.

Concerns raised

1. Ecologists and researchers have been raising concerns about this project for over a year and the recent draft EIA has not been able to allay those fears. Concerns begin with the role of the Hyderabad-based Vimta Labs Ltd. hired for conducting the EIA.
2. The consultants appointed to carry out the draft EIA have only one empanelled expert on ecology and biodiversity in its team — and it is not clear what his area of expertise is.
3. It is also clear that several of the ToRs have not been complied with, as admitted in the draft EIA Report itself.



- The rapid assessment study carried out by the Wildlife Institute of India and the baseline survey by the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), both appended as annexures too were commissioned before the issue of the ToR.



'Incomplete data'

- There are also serious issues of scientific accuracy and integrity where the data presented is concerned. Large parts of Section 3.9, which is on ecology and biodiversity, have in-text citations but no references.
- Tables with lists of plants and animals found on the island are incomplete and with no sources provided. The information in other places is internally inconsistent and/or incorrect.
- The area of the island is mentioned in one place as 1,045 sq. km, while it is 910 sq. km (the current official figure) in another.
- The executive summary mentions that the Galathea port area does not record any coral reefs, whereas the ZSI study appended to the EIA, reports a coral reef spread over 116 hectares in Galathea Bay.
- Chapter 3 similarly says 330 species of fauna are recorded on the island, while the same ZSI study puts the number at more than double at 695.



6. The EIA says in another place no migratory birds have been reported from Great Nicobar, whereas it is well known that these islands are located along two globally significant bird flyways and more than 40 species of migratory birds have been recorded from Great Nicobar.

Institutional callousness

1. The callousness continues in the approach of the statutory authorities. The EIA report was expected to have details of the project proponent's environment policy such as its standard operating process, procedures for highlighting the violation of environmental and forest norms and for ensuring compliance with environmental clearance conditions.
2. All that the project proponent, ANIIDCO, has said in response is that no such policy exists and that they undertake to comply with all laws of the country related to the environment, forests and coastal regulation zone.
3. A statutorily mandated set of requirements is being given the go-by, raising further questions on the validity of the EIA. Equally illustrative is the undertaking issued by the Directorate of Tribal Welfare, the agency tasked with the primary job of securing the rights of the indigenous people on the islands.
4. It first assures that "the right of the tribal shall be well protected and taken care of" and then goes on to conclude that "whenever any exemption from the existing regulations/policies/law of the land is required to be provided for the execution of the project, this Directorate will seek required exemptions(s) from the competent authority to that effect".

Slash fuel tax, raise MGNREGS outlay to spur flailing consumption, suggests Crisil

It moots income support for low-income households hit by COVID-19 shock.

Highlights: Boost Private Consumption

1. The upcoming Union Budget for 2022-23 should include higher allocations for the rural employment guarantee programme, a new plan to generate urban jobs and fresh cuts in fuel taxes, to revive flailing consumption demand in the economy, credit rating agency Crisil said.



2. With the pandemic affecting low-income segments the most, near-term measures to support incomes and private consumption are crucial to strengthening the bridge to the medium-term growth path, the agency said, mooting a shift from the Centre's preference in the last Budget to push growth through reforms and capital spending.

'Worst hit'

1. Private consumption accounts for 55% of India's GDP and is 'the worst performer among the expenditure-side components of GDP', lagging 2019-20 numbers by 3% as per the official national income estimates for 2021-22, Crisil observed.
2. A rise in income inequality and lower allocations for the MGNREGS in 2021-22 had further dented households' spending power that was already hit by lower income growth, job losses, high inflation in essential goods and services and an uptick in medical expenditure owing to the pandemic.
3. While the reduction in petrol and diesel excise duties in November 2021 was helpful, consumers could do with more relief now as easing the fuel tax burden 'will augment disposable income while simultaneously trimming the input cost burden for producers', it said.
4. The case for a national urban employment guarantee scheme has repeatedly been put forth by experts as well as the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour in its August 2021 report. The time is ripe for its realisation.

MAINS DAWP	Q1. Account for low private consumption in India in recent years. Discuss ways to improve the situation for higher levels of economic growth.
MCQs	Q1. Galathea Bay National Park is situated in the a. Andaman and Nicobar Islands b. Lakshadweep Islands c. West Bengal d. TamilNadu