



## ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS - GS III MAINS

Q. The strategic and economic importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands is increasing in the power corridors of India. Why? Discuss the challenges faced by the strategic islands at present. (15 marks, 250 words)

**News: An Expert Explains: The strategic importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands**

### What's in the news?

- The strategic and economic importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands is increasing in the power corridors of New Delhi.

### Key takeaways:

- The enhanced focus of New Delhi on the strategic importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands is reflected by the renewed emphasis on the creation of major military infrastructure (revamping of airfields, jetties, habitat for troops) in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

### Enhanced Governance Structure:

- The Government of India had earlier constituted the **Islands Development Agency (IDA)** and a **NITI Aayog Committee** for holistic socio-economic development of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

### Andaman and Nicobar Islands:

- The Andaman and Nicobar Islands consists of two groups of islands, the Andaman Islands and the Nicobar Islands. It covers an area of 8,249 sq km.
- The entire island chain consists of **836 islands** including islets and rocky outcrops, of which some 38 are permanently inhabited.

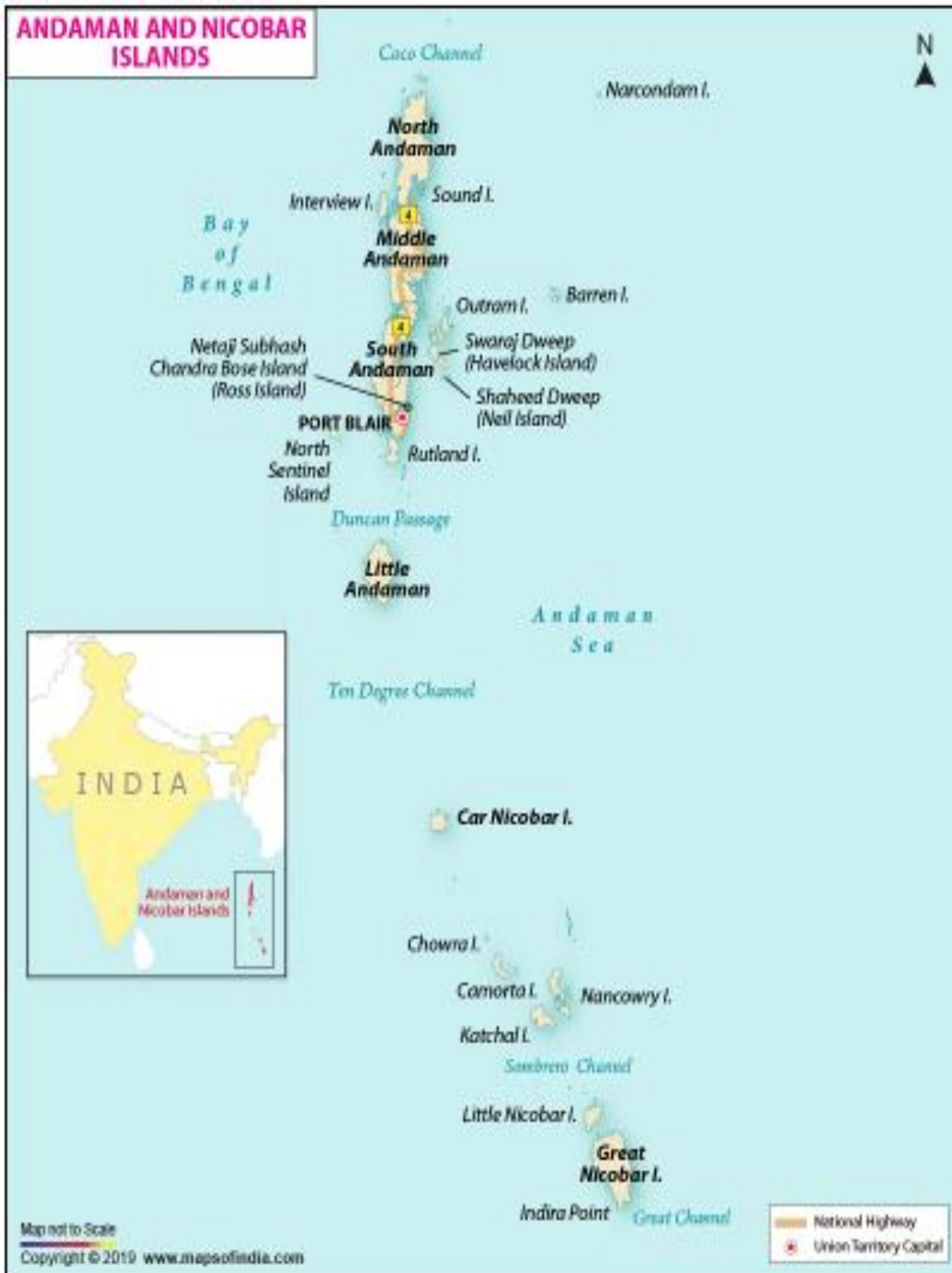
### Governance:

- The islands are governed as a single Union Territory by the Central Government of India, through the Andaman Nicobar Administration.



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## Significance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands to India:

### Geo-strategic and Geo-Political Significance:

#### 1. Crucial Node for Peace and Security in the Indo-Pacific:

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- India can leverage the strategic position of the Andaman and Nicobar islands to emerge as the 'net security provider' in the Indo-Pacific region.

## 2. Enhances the Scope of Maritime Partnership:

- Andaman and Nicobar's geo-strategic location enhances the scope for India's maritime partnership with the US, Japan, Australia and France.
- For example - Enhances their scope for participation in Exercise KAVACH.

## 3. Countering the Growing Chinese Influence:

- Andaman and Nicobar Islands is like a 'Metal chain' strung right down the Bay of Bengal to the mouth of the Malacca, with the potential to block China's access to the Indian Ocean.
- Beefing up of military infrastructure creates a 'Malacca Dilemma' for China due to the proximity of Andaman and Nicobar Island to the Malacca Strait.

## 4. Protection of Maritime Choke Points:

- Its geo-strategic location gives India advantage of securing the Malacca Strait from where more than 90,000 merchant ships carrying about 30 percent of the world's traded goods pass every year.

## Geo-Economic Significance:

### 1. Mineral Deposits:

- The island provides India with 300,000 sq km of exclusive economic zone with the potential of undersea hydrocarbon and mineral deposits.

### 2. Tourism Potential:

- The pristine beaches of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands have a large tourism potential which can attract FDI in the hospitality sector in India.

### 3. Maritime and Startup Hub:

- NITI Aayog has identified the potential for development of Andaman and Nicobar Island as a maritime and startup Hub.
- For example - NITI Aayog's proposed project for Great Nicobar which includes an international container trans-shipment terminal, a greenfield international airport, a power plant and a township complex.

## Social Importance:

### 1. Treasure of Tribes:

- The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are home to 5 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups - Great Andamanese, Jarawas, Onges, Shompens and North Sentinelese.
- These tribal groups are a treasure for enrichment of our anthropological understanding.

### 2. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR):



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- The Andaman and Nicobar Island provides an opportunity for India to undertake disaster-relief, medical aid, countering piracy and human smuggling, aircraft/submarine search and rescue operations for the social welfare in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Government Initiatives:

### 1. Japan's Overseas Development Assistance:

- Japan approved a USD 265 crore grant aid for Andaman and Nicobar Development projects in 2021.

### 2. NITI Aayog's Project for Great Nicobar:

- It entails development of an international container transshipment terminal, an airport, a power plant, and a township.

### 3. 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.

### 4. Modernisation of Defence Infrastructure:

- Modern Hangar and Dispersal system at INS Utkrosh in Port Blair.
- Naval Communication Network (NCN) Centres at INS Kohassa, INS Baaz and INS Kardi, designed to further augment the communication and operational capability of the Andaman and Nicobar Command.

### 5. Submarine Cable Connectivity to Andaman & Nicobar Islands (CANI):

- The 2300 Kms submarine Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) will connect Andaman & Nicobar Islands to the mainland.

## Challenges Lies Ahead:

### 1. Environmental Concerns:

- There are environmental concerns around the large scale development projects being undertaken in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- These developmental projects can endanger the flora and fauna of the island state.
- For example - Proposed Great Nicobar project will endanger the Giant Leatherback in the Galathea Bay area & threat to coral reefs and mangroves in the area.

### 2. Geo Political Insecurity:

- The geopolitical influence of Chinese military facilities at Myanmar's Coco Islands lying 55 km north of A&N Islands poses a threat to India's blue economy and maritime security.

### 3. Maritime Challenges:

- There are maritime threats and challenges arising from illegal migration, human trafficking, poaching, and subversive threats from the seas.



#### 4. Geological Vulnerability:

- The Andaman and Nicobar island group's location in the highly active geological zone makes it prone to a number of natural disasters.
- For example - 2004 earthquake and tsunami wiping one-fifth of the population and 90% of mangroves in Nicobar and Car Nicobar island.

#### 5. Lack of Coordination:

- The development of islands and strategic infrastructure is a multidimensional project involving several ministries, departments, and agencies, that presents significant coordination challenges

#### 6. Encroachment in Tribal Space:

- There has been intrusion in the tribal space due to encroachment into their areas in the name of development, and lack of effective rehabilitation program.

#### 7. Socio-economic Challenges:

- The influx of settlers, job-seekers, labourers, and migrants that has created socio-economic problems on the island.
- The high cost of living, lack of employment opportunities, and distance from the mainland have led to a sense of negativity among the islanders.

#### Way Forward:

##### 1. Development in Accordance with Sustainable Island Development Framework:

- Environmental and Social Impact Assessment should be made mandatory for any development activity in the Andaman and Nicobar Region.
- Planned habitation of uninhabited islands should be considered by providing incentives such as free or subsidised land, where eco-friendly entrepreneurial efforts could be encouraged.

##### 2. Developing Island Security Model:

- A long-term Capability Development Plan must be prepared for the Andaman and Nicobar Command, the Coast Guard, and the Andaman Police for developing and implementing an Island Security Model.
- There must be robust maritime security to keep the vast area around the islands under surveillance.

##### 3. Increasing the pace of Development Works:

- The pace of Socio-economic and Infrastructural Development works must be increased for the holistic development of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- It's crucial to develop infrastructure on the southern group of islands, strategically positioned along the main shipping route from the Indian Ocean to Southeast Asia, to support India's maritime economy.



#### 4. Making the Andaman - a Formidable Maritime Bastion:

- This will extend India's defensive perimeter and also bestow the ability to project power or extend a hand of friendship to maritime neighbours.

Go back to basics:

Important Straits in Andaman and Nicobar Islands:

