

Annexure I: Compilation of analysis of the responses to questions about the Great Nicobar project that were raised in the monsoon session of the parliament

1. Environmental impact of the Great Nicobar Project - Shri Mohammed Nadimul Haque

Question No. 375 - Rajya Sabha (25.07.2024)

Will the Minister of Environment, Forest And Climate Change be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that 9.64 lakh trees will be felled for the Great Nicobar Project;
- (b) whether this will impact the critical ecosystem and taxa of the region, if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether the trans-shipment port in Galathea Bay will affect the nesting of the giant leatherback turtle, if so, the details thereof,
- (d) whether Government proposes specific conservation plans for coral reefs, the Nicobar Megapode bird, and the leatherback turtles, if so, the details thereof; and
- (e) if not, the reasons therefore?

1.1 Rebuttal of responses

Sr. No.	Response from Environment Minister Shri Kirti Vardhan Singh	Rebuttal/clarification/counter question
i.	The Central Government vide letter dated 27.10.2022 has accorded the In principle/Stage-1 approval for diversion of 130.75 Sq km forest land for sustainable development in Great Nicobar Island.	The minutes of the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) meetings where the proposal for forest diversion was appraised, and all other forms submitted for the Forest Clearance have not been uploaded on PARIVESH and were refused when sought under the RTI act citing 8.1(a)11 ¹ . The proposed diversion of forest land is the largest in recent times: about a quarter of all the forest land diverted in the past three years across the country (554 sq km, as per the information revealed by the government in Lok Saba in July, 2022) ² and yet there is a total lack of transparency and accountability on the Ministry's part.
ii.	Compensatory Afforestation is carried out in lieu of diverted forest land.	There are reports of inadequate land ^{3,4} in Haryana and the land declared as protected area for Compensatory Afforestation being auctioned off for mining within 24 hours of getting notified ⁵ . Moreover, the Compensatory Afforestation for the million-year-old pristine rainforest which is a part of the Sundaland

		Biodiversity Hotspot has been proposed in a region which is a dry deciduous region. The carbon sequestration by such a vast, contiguous area of primary rainforest is unparalleled with any other forest type. No amount of human planted forest can compensate for the loss of forest in Great Nicobar Island.
iii.	Further, more than 50% i.e. 65.99 Sq km of the area proposed for diversion is reserved for green development where no tree felling is envisaged.	If there is no tree felling envisaged, why the forest is being diverted in the first place? Why is the number of trees to be felled for the project inconsistent every time it is mentioned? It was 8.5 lakhs as per the minutes of the 297th meeting of the EAC held on May 25, 2022 ⁶ , then it came to 9.64 lakhs as per response to Rajyasabha Qs 1648 ⁷ asked on August 3, 2023 and now it is said to be less than that. Notably, ecologists who have worked in the island have flagged ⁸ the projected figures of trees to be felled. Based on the estimated forest density of the tropical moist forest in Great Nicobar, as estimated by scientific research conducted in the island, the tree cover in the area of 130.75 could be as high as one crore ⁹ . It is pertinent to note that the details of the method used for tree enumeration used by the EIA consultant were left blank in the Form 2 ¹⁰ submitted for seeking the Environment and CRZ Clearance.
iv.	It is expected that about 15% of development area would continue to remain as green and open spaces and therefore the number of trees likely to be affected is going to be less than 9.64 lakhs	What is the meaning of “green and open spaces”? What is the exact number of trees going to be affected? How many trees less than the estimated number are to be cut and why isn’t the exact number of the trees to be cut and the method of tree enumeration being made available in public?
v.	As per the conditions stipulated in the approvals accorded by the Central Government, adequate mitigation measures to compensate the impact of development on flora and fauna are part of the EC/FC conditions. The special conditions stipulated under the Environmental Clearance (EC) has provisions for preparation of Biodiversity Conservation / Management Plan for the Great Nicobar Island ecosystem with inputs from WII, ZSI, BSI and ICFRE.	The mitigation plans that were submitted to the Expert Appraisal Committee before the project was recommended for clearance are unscientific, impractical and untested. Moreover, the revised plans mentioned in the conditions of the Environmental Clearance have not been made public and haven’t undergone scrutiny by independent experts.
vi.	The breeding grounds of leatherback turtles are in no way getting altered due to the project. The large nesting areas (Western flank) have been retained as such for nesting of leather backs.	Firstly, the breeding grounds of leatherback turtles and other species of sea turtles, are situated on the Eastern Flank of Galathea as well, as is evident by the turtle hatchery and the Forest Camp that has been maintained by the Nicobar Forest Division on the Eastern Flank of Galathea ¹¹ , for several years. Secondly, the construction planned on the Western flank of Galathea involves

		<p>building structures for the port logistics and a marina for tourism, which will be a disturbance on the nesting turtles during the breeding season. Thirdly, the approach way of the turtles to Galathea Bay will be reduced from 3 km to 300 metres, leaving a very narrow gap for the Giant Leatherback females to access the beach. Moreover, navigating through the ship traffic during the construction and operational phases will be a hazardous task for the gravid female turtles who swim thousands of miles to reach Galathea¹². The EIA report completely disregards the impact of ship traffic, impact of dredging and pilling and land reclamation on the coral reefs - an essential foraging grounds for young sea turtles.</p>
vii.	<p>Research unit set up by Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to undertake and monitor sea turtle related research in A&N islands is an important component of the special conditions of EC.</p>	<p>WII, by its own admission has never conducted any research on Leatherbacks or any other species of sea turtles in A&N Islands¹³. Their expertise in this matter is therefore questionable. Why have the other organizations who have worked on leatherback turtles in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and other parts of India, not been consulted and why an organization with no previous experience is being given this important task of long-term monitoring of a Vulnerable species, needs an explanation.</p>
viii.	<p>The Coral Conservation Plan prepared by Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) addresses both the conservation strategies for coral colonies around Great Nicobar Island (GNI) as well as translocation strategies for impacted corals.</p>	<p>As was pointed out in NGT's order of April 2023, a total of 20,668 colonies of corals (spread over 10 hectares) are going to be affected by the project. ZSI, in its ten-year Coral Conservation Plan has proposed the translocation of 16150 colonies without clarifying the fate of the remaining 4518 colonies¹⁴. Furthermore, the report has inconsistencies regarding the donor and recipient sites; for example, Gandhinagar, which is the site of the airport is mentioned as a recipient site for the corals that will be translocated from Galathea Bay, the site of the ICTT, and it is also mentioned as a donor site because the corals already present in the area are going to be damaged by the land reclamation needed to build the runway for the proposed airport¹⁵.</p> <p>It is important to note that corals are not the only agent in the coral reef system. Coral reefs are an exceptionally complex and diverse ecosystem constituting all the trophic levels analogous to a rainforest ecosystem, for instance where there are primary producers (plankton), several levels of consumers (primary [coral, sea turtle, fish], and secondary [anemone, starfish, sharks, eels, dolphins, etc.]), scavengers [few fishes] and decomposers/detrivores (microbes). Therefore, just</p>

		<p>translocating the corals, which form under a very narrow range of physical conditions does not move the entire ecosystem.</p> <p>Attempting to translocate over 10 hectares of corals is almost improbable on one hand and counterproductive and misguided on the other (especially when such fragile creatures can hardly survive outside their homeostatic survival conditions when removed for translocation over 5 nautical miles). Their survival on removal would be highly suspect. Contrary to reef translocation, current experiments worldwide are inclined towards attempting to build/restore coral reefs but such experiments at best populate the ocean floor with few robust and dominant species of corals analogous to growing teak/sal (or other fast-growing plant species) plantations, they can never replace old-growth natural forests and are hardly biologically/ecologically functional, which means they do not perform the functions of healthy/natural reefs.</p> <p>As per ZSI's 10-year monitoring plan¹⁶, “Extraction of coral colonies will be made from the substratum with help of coral cutting saw, hammer and chisel, and hydraulic underwater hammer drill, etc. Coral colonies will be translocated entirely as a whole object...”. However, there is no mention of how many of the sixteen thousand coral colonies are going to survive what translocation entails. It is noteworthy that as per the Environmental Clearance, a 30-year plan was to be prepared and submitted, which has not been uploaded on PARIVESH and therefore has not undergone scrutiny by independent coral biologists.</p>
ix.	<p>Comprehensive studies and conservation measures for endemic Nicobar Megapod as prescribed by Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) and WII is also one of the conditions of EC.</p>	<p>Before the Environmental Clearance was granted, two separate reports containing the 10-year conservation and monitoring plans for the Nicobar Megapode were submitted by WII and SACON.</p> <p>There is inconsistency in the number of active nests or breeding pairs present on the site of the port in the reports submitted by ZSI and WII but the EAC committee in its 306th meeting¹⁷ held on 8th, September 2022 in which the project was recommended for Environmental Clearance, clarified that there are about 51 active nests of Nicobar Megapode within the entire project area, out</p>

		<p>of which approximately 30 will be permanently destroyed. Both the reports include unscientific and untested mitigation measures: the report on conservation and long-term monitoring of Megapode by SACON, for instance, proposes to capture the birds that are nesting in the project site, fit transmitters on them and relocate them to a new location or hold them in closed enclosures with a chain-link mesh where an artificial mound will be created to provide an alternate facility for keeping eggs until they hatch.</p> <p>As per the Environmental Clearance¹⁸, the 30-year reports on the long-term monitoring and conservation plans that were to be prepared and submitted, have not been uploaded on PARIVESH and therefore have not undergone scrutiny by independent experts.</p>
x.	The A&N Forest Department has been entrusted with this responsibility of ensuring implementation of the conservation measures.	The A&N Forest Department has not even fulfilled the responsibility of complying with the condition number VI in the Environmental Clearance which mandates that the minutes of the meetings of the three monitoring committees formed to overlook biodiversity, pollution and tribal rights related issues should be uploaded on its website.

1.2 Comments on unaddressed questions

No.	Unaddressed question/s	Comments
1.	Whether this (felling of 9.64 lakh trees) will impact the critical ecosystem and taxa of the region, if so, the details thereof	The felling of trees on such a massive scale will alter the rainfall pattern, the ground water levels, the integrity of the soil, in turn leading to water scarcity, landslides and soil degradation. Several species that are directly and indirectly dependent on the forests will lose their habitat and food resources. The populations of endemic species like the Nicobar tree shrew (Endangered), the Nicobar spiny shrew (Critically Endangered), the Nicobar long-tailed macaque (Vulnerable), the Nicobar megapode (Vulnerable), the Nicobar Scops owl (Data Deficient), the Great Nicobar Serpent Eagle (Near Threatened), the Nicobar cat snake (Data Deficient), the Nicobar tree frog (Endangered) will undergo severe stress and are likely to reduce due to limited food, hampered movement because of forest fragmentation, increased exposure to heat and increased competition due to reduced resources. The reduced population of these species

		<p>including plants will in turn limit the dietary and material sources of the Shompen PVTG who are completely dependent on the forest for their sustenance. The depleted forest cover will also result in reduced population of the wild pig which is an integral component of the food culture and customary practices of the Nicobarese people. Further, destruction of forest will lead to increased chances of exposure to zoonotic diseases for the human and non-human residents of the island. Depleted forest cover would also affect the indigenous and settler communities dependent on agriculture due to reduced water table, alteration in local weather patterns and loss of soil fertility.</p>
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2. Great Nicobar Island Project - Shri Asaduddin Owaisi

Question No. 991 Lok Sabha (29.07.2024)

Will the Minister of Environment, Forest And Climate Change be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government is aware that about 10 million trees are cut and displace indigenous tribes living in Great Nicobar Island as part of a Government project to develop the island for tourism etc.;
- (b) whether such project is consistent with the country's domestic and international obligations to protect the environment; and
- (c) the details of the response of the Government in this regard?

2.1 Rebuttal of responses

Sr. No.	Response from Environment Minister Shri Kirti Vardhan Singh	Rebuttal/clarification/counter question
i.	The Central Government vide letter dated 27.10.2022 has accorded the In principle/Stage-1 approval for diversion of 130.75 Sq. km forest land for sustainable development in Great Nicobar Island.	<p>The application forms submitted for Forest Clearance, the number of trees to be cut, the method of enumeration of the trees, as well as the minutes of the meetings of the Forest Appraisal Committee which recommended the project for Forest Clearance have not been uploaded on the PARIVESH website¹.</p> <p>Moreover, the NOC for the diversion of forest that was procured from the representatives of the Shompen and Great Nicobarese people, was violative of the free, prior and informed consent from the bona fide owners of the forest to be diverted and hence the stage-1 approval thus obtained stands nullified².</p>

ii.	The project is of significant strategic and national importance.	<p>This is a blanket statement which is misleading to the local stakeholders as well as the citizens of this country. The draft master plan report submitted by AECOM in August, 2021 states this as the vision statement for Great Nicobar Island project: <i>'to capture the locational advantage of being on international sea route and develop Great Nicobar as a Sustainable, Green, Global Hotspot for Business, trade and leisure'</i>³.</p> <p>It needs to be stated clearly, exactly which component of the project and covering how much area is strategic in nature. Is it strategic from an economic angle or a defence angle? It is important to mention that the island where the project is proposed is certainly of great national pride and international importance by virtue of being a Biodiversity Hotspot, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and an Important Bird Area (IN451) that is categorised as A1 (holds significant numbers of globally threatened species) and A2 (holds a significant population of at least two range restricted species). The island also falls in the East Asian Australasian Flyway (EAAF) and the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) acts as a refuge to several migratory species of birds. Moreover, the leatherback nesting population in the Nicobar is one of the four colonies that exceeds 1000 individuals in the Indo-Pacific, and hence of global significance (Andrews and Shanker, 2002). Great Nicobar is also the only home of two indigenous tribes, the Shompen (a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, only 229 in number) and the Great Nicobarese (a Scheduled Tribe, only 450 in number) who have been living on the island for over thousands of years.</p>
iii.	The estimated number of trees to be affected is 9.64 lakhs. However, more than 50% i.e. 65.99 Sq. km of the area proposed for diversion is reserved for green development where no tree felling is envisaged.	<p>The method of tree enumeration, on the basis of which the figure of 8.5 lakhs (as per 297th Minutes of Meeting of EAC⁴) and later the figure of 9.64 lakhs (as per response received to Qs No. 1648⁵ on August 3, 2023) have been arrived at, has not been mentioned anywhere in the EIA report. It is pertinent to ask why this crucial information was not revealed anywhere while the public consultation was going on.</p> <p>Moreover, as per the Minister's response, if the trees spread across 65.99 sqkm of area proposed for the diversion of forest are not going to be felled,</p>

		then why is the area being diverted in the first place? Further, there is no clarity on what “green development” really entails.
iv.	It is expected that about 15% of development area would continue to remain as green and open spaces and therefore the number of trees likely to be affected is going to be less than 9.64 lakhs.	<p>It is unclear if the development area mentioned here is same as the project area or is it the “green development area” mentioned above. If it is the project area and 15% of that will continue to remain as “green and open spaces”, then considering the above statement (that 65.99 sqkm area will not be clear felled), the effective project area is much less, and again the question arises: why is 130.75 sqkm of forest area, double than the area where development has been proposed, has been diverted for non-forestry purposes.</p> <p>Moreover, there is no clarity on the composition of these “green and open spaces”. Are the green areas the original forest or decorative garden plants? If the green areas are forested, why would they be open? The information on how much of the 15% is green and how much is open, is also not given. And at what stage can we expect to get a clear figure of the trees to be felled? How many trees less than 9.64 lakhs are going to be affected? One lakh less, ten thousand less or a thousand less? Notably, ecologists who have worked in the island have flagged⁶ the projected figures of trees to be felled. Based on the forest density of the tropical moist forest in Great Nicobar, as estimated by scientific research conducted in the island, the tree cover in the area of 130.75 could be as high as one crore⁷.</p>
v.	Protection of the interests of tribals is inherent in conditions of approval accorded by the Central Government and the UT Administration has been entrusted with such responsibilities as elaborated in the approvals granted.	The impact of the proposed project on the two tribal communities – the Shompen (a PVTG) and the Great Nicobarese (an ST), and the misrepresentation of their current and ancestral land in the master plan of the project, have been pointed out by anthropologists at the Andaman and Nicobar Tribal Research Institute as well as at the Anthropological Survey of India ^{8,9} , human-ecologists, local tribal welfare officers ² , ex-bureaucrats ¹⁰ , national and international tribal rights organizations ^{8,11,12} , genocide scholars ¹³ , and most importantly the members of the tribes themselves ² , in various ways, to various authorities, including the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), and at all stages of the clearance, starting from the Public Hearing of the EIA of the project to the SDLC meeting for seeking free, prior

and informed consent for the forest diversion. However, none of these concerns and appeals seem to have registered with the MoEFCC.

The A&N Administration, who has been entrusted with ensuring the protection of the tribes, has not made any attempts to engage with the tribal communities and has in fact lied to them, hid the extent of the area to be acquired for the project, misled them into signing the NOC for the diversion of forest, dissuaded them from returning to their pre-tsunami settlements by offering them better opportunities and living conditions or by mentioning the risks of another tsunami. The committee that was mandated to oversee tribal related issues as per a “specific condition” in the Environmental Clearance, has not met with the Tribal Council even once till date, and there is no information as to who are the members of this committee.

In multiple project related documents there are several insensitive, unethical and unconstitutional statements made regarding the tribes that are alarming. For example, the Directorate of Tribal Welfare’s undertaking which mentions **“any exemption from the Tribal Reserve Area will be made”**; or the draft EIA report which says that **“the forest and tribal area should be guarded and even barricaded with barbwire, if necessary, to prevent the labours contacting the Shompen”** (Chapter 4D-11).

Later when the EAC pointed out that there are no studies of the impact of the project on the Shompen, the response given by the project proponent was that **a proposal regarding installation of Geo-fencing-cum-surveillance towers in the tribal settlements is under consideration**; but the A&N Administration knows fully well that there is very little information available on the extent and patterns of use of the island by the Shompen people since they are a semi-nomadic, hunter-gatherer tribe. It is noteworthy that on one hand the UT Administration has repeatedly assured that the displacement of tribals will not be allowed and on the other hand one of the reports prepared by AECOM in August 2021, blatantly states this: **“If required, the tribals can be relocated to other parts of island which is conserved and protected.”**

		These statements are reflective of the UT's complete lack of responsibility towards the most vulnerable of the islanders.
vi.	The approval granted by the Central Government is in consonance with the policies and programme of the Government which includes inter-alia mitigation measures to compensate the impact of development on flora and fauna.	The approval has been granted despite grave violations as were pointed out by the NGT Kolkata in its order of April, 2023 ¹⁴ .
vii.	The conditions stipulated under the Environmental Clearance (EC) has provisions for preparation of Biodiversity Conservation / Management Plan for the Great Nicobar Island ecosystem with inputs from WII, ZSI, BSI and ICFRE.	<p>Several methods and mitigation measures that were proposed in the 10-year plans submitted before the clearance by the same organizations, are found to be impractical, unscientific and untested.</p> <p>The 30-year plans were prepared after the clearance was granted and they have not been made public till date. As a result, scrutiny by independent scientists and experts of the proposed conservation, monitoring and management plans for the affected species has not taken place.</p> <p>The EAC has failed to do its duty by recommending the project for Environmental Clearance while many critical reports and information were yet to be submitted by the project proponent and in fact are still pending.</p> <p>Moreover, there is no mention of ICFRE anywhere in the Environmental Clearance.</p>

2.2 Comments on unaddressed questions

No.	Unaddressed question/s	Comments
1.	Whether such project is consistent with the country's domestic and international obligations to protect the environment;	<p>The project violates the following domestic and international obligations to protect the environment:</p> <p>Article 48, in the Indian Constitution is a provision that emphasizes the responsibility of the state to safeguard and enhance the environment.</p>

Article 21 guarantees the right to life as a right in India. The Supreme Court has interpreted this article as encompassing the right to a healthy environment.

Article 51A(g) outlines a duty for citizens of India to protect and enhance the environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, wildlife and to show compassion towards living creatures.

The Environmental Protection Act of 1986 is aimed at preserving the environment and tackling diverse environmental issues and grants the central government authority to enact measures for safeguarding and enhancing environmental quality.

The present project is a clear violation of the international commitments under the **Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD)** and the **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)** of which India was a signatory since its inception in 1992.

This project is also responsible for pushing back the results of work done under **Aichi Target 10** which states that “By 2015, the multiple anthropogenic pressures on coral reefs, and other vulnerable ecosystems impacted by climate change or ocean acidification are minimized, so as to maintain their integrity and functioning” and **Aichi Target 11** which states that “By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes.”

These Aichi targets have been adopted as the **National Biodiversity Target 6 for India** which states that “Ecologically representative areas on land and in inland waters, as well as coastal and marine zones, especially those of

		<p>particular importance for species, biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved effectively and equitably, on the basis of PA designation and management and other area-based conservation measures and are integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes, covering over 20% of the geographic area of the country, by 2020.”</p> <p>India has an obligation to abide by the UN General Assembly declaration passed in 2009, where Member States acknowledged that the Earth and its ecosystems are our common home, and expressed their conviction that it is necessary to promote Harmony with Nature in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations.</p>
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3. Status of forest and protected land in Great Nicobar - Shri Saket Gokhale

Question No.1173 Rajya Sabha (01.08.2024)

Will the Minister of Environment, Forest And Climate Change be pleased to state:

- a) whether any wildlife sanctuaries or forest land have been denotified as such or Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island at Andaman and Nicobar Islands' project proposed by NITI Aayog;
- b) and the measures proposed under this project to protect the nesting sites for the giant leatherback turtle at Galathea Bay and the uninhabited settlements of tribals belonging to the Shompen community?

Table 3.1 Rebuttal of responses

Sr. No.	Response from Environment Minister Shri Kirti Vardhan Singh	Rebuttal/clarification/counter question
i.	The proposal to de-notify the Galathea Sanctuary in the Andaman and Nicobar (A &N) Islands was recommended by the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wild Life (SCNBWL) in its 60th meeting held on 5.01.2021.	<p>As per an excerpt from the Minutes of the 60th SCNBWL meeting¹ where the decision to de-notify Galathea Wildlife Sanctuary was taken: <i>“Comments from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) were sought and the Director, WII has opined that the concerned authorities develop and implement a mitigation plan to facilitate leatherback and other turtles to continuously nest for which the connectivity between the Galathea River and the Bay should be ensured”.</i></p> <p>Interestingly, in its response to an RTI², WII had stated that it has not done any studies on Leatherback turtles or any other species of sea turtles in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands previously and yet the committee saw it fit to solicit comments from the Director of an institute with no relevant</p>

		<p>experience, instead of engaging an independent expert who was well versed with turtle nesting behaviour and the importance of Galathea Bay beach for the nesting sea turtles.</p> <p>In the same meeting it was also stated that the final notification of the wildlife sanctuary could not be completed because the rights were not settled. The same is also valid when the sanctuary is being de-notified – i.e. the rights have not been settled and hence the denotification is null and void.</p>
ii.	The Central Government vide letter dated 27.10.2022 has accorded the In principle/Stage-1 approval for diversion of 130.75 Sq km forest land for sustainable development in Great Nicobar Island.	The stage-I approval for the diversion of forest was granted without the free, prior and informed consent of the two indigenous communities who depend on the said forest. The Chairman of the Tribal Council, Little and Great Nicobar was made to sign the NOC for the diversion of forest in a rushed manner and under a false pretext. The statements given by the officer of the local Tribal Welfare body (AAJVS) regarding the impact of the project on the Kokeon band of Shompen who frequent Galathea, were not recorded in the proceedings of the SDLC committee ³ .
iii.	The Andaman and Nicobar Islands Administration was directed by the SCNBWL that a comprehensive management plan may be prepared in consultation with Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and other relevant stakeholders, and followed for conservation and protection of Leatherback Turtles in Great Nicobar Islands.	<p>WII has not done any studies on Leatherback turtles or any other species of sea turtles in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands previously and yet the committee saw it fit to solicit the comments from the Director of the institute with no relevant experience instead of engaging an independent expert who was well versed with turtle nesting behaviour and the importance of Galathea Bay beach for the nesting sea turtles¹. Organizations and individuals who have worked in the island and understand turtle nesting behaviour have sent multiple representations pointing out that the narrowing of the opening of Galathea Bay from 3 km to a mere 300 metre because of the breakwaters of the port will lead to crowding or worse, gravid female turtles who are biologically primed to lay eggs at Galathea Bay having to deviate from their path and travel miles to look for another appropriate nesting beach which might lead to complications. And hundreds of leatherback females come to Galathea every year^{4,5,6,7}.</p> <p>Moreover, the reports submitted by WII thus far do not address the impact of the loss of coral reefs on turtle population given that young turtles derive majority of their food from the rich and diverse coral reef ecosystem⁸.</p>

iv.	<p>The large nesting areas (Western flank) have been retained as such for nesting of turtles. Research unit set up by WII to undertake and monitor sea turtle related research in A&N islands is an important component of the special conditions of Environment Clearance.</p>	<p>The Eastern Flank of Galathea also hosts leatherback turtles in addition to Hawksbill, Green Sea turtle and Olive Ridley turtle, every year, as is evident by the existence of a Forest Camp and a turtle hatchery being maintained by the Nicobar Forest Division since several years⁹. Moreover, the Western Flank is also demarcated for logistics infrastructure which will invariably cause sound and light pollution. Furthermore, the EIA report is silent on the impact of the port and the airport for which land needs to be reclaimed resulting in destruction of the rich coral reefs along the eastern coastline of Galathea which forms the major food resource for young sea turtles.</p> <p>What is the purpose of the monitoring program after the construction work begins? Will the project be stopped if the reports prepared by WII reveal that turtle nesting is getting adversely affected due to project activities?</p>
v.	<p>The Central Government has also subsequently notified an area to an extent of zero to one kilometer around the boundary of the Galathea National Park as Ecosensitive Zone on 12th March, 2021 with the objective to ensure forest protection and biodiversity conservation in the area.</p>	<p>As per the Gazette Notification declaring the Eco-Sensitive Zone around the Galathea National Park¹⁰, <i>“The minimum extent is ‘zero’ as the major geographical area of the Great Nicobar Island where the Park is located, is covered under Protected Areas Network and Tribal Reserves; therefore, there is hardly any area left for holistic development. Further, to protect the development and inhabitants from unforeseen natural disaster like Tsunami, rising water level, a 750 meters buffer is proposed with guidelines all along the coastline for development. This requires the developable area to be located away from the coast and near the National Park boundary”.</i></p> <p>However, as per the revised master plan of the project there are multiple structures proposed right on the coast and even beyond for which sea will be filled in order to reclaim land¹¹. The proponents therefore have not adhered to maintaining the aforementioned 750 meters buffer, the importance of which was learnt after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and at the same time the ESZ for the Galathea National Park has been kept at 0 km thereby exposing the buffer area of the National Park to the impact of the massive construction activities.</p>
vi.	<p>The project activities envisage no disturbance to Shompen tribe and their habitations and for the protection and</p>	<p>Many anthropologists have sent written representations expressing their concerns and highlighting an array of impacts that the large-scale construction will have on the forest dwelling Shompen tribe¹². Even the</p>

<p>safety of the tribal settlements, there is provision for geo-fencing cum surveillance towers.</p>	<p>officer of the local Tribal Welfare body AAJVS had mentioned that the Kokeon group of Shompen frequent Galathea but his statement was not recorded in the proceedings of the SDLC where the NOC for the diversion of forest was signed by the Chairman of the Tribal Council¹³.</p> <p>Moreover, it is well known to the local administration as well as several advisors/subsidiaries to the ANI administration such as the AAJVS, ZSI, MES, GREF, and local contractors that a group of Shompen regularly visits the Galathea river mouth for fishing and hunting. The site of the designated power plant overlaps with the area frequented by the Shompen of the Kirasis band and Buja yae band in the forests of the Galathea river basin, as has been pointed out in the aforementioned letter withdrawing the NOC by Tribal Council. Additionally, the Shompen who have been living in New Chingeh along with the Great Nicobarese have time and again expressed their wish to go back to their pre-tsunami village.</p> <p>The proposal to use Geo fencing cum surveillance towers that has been stipulated for the protection of the tribal habitat is not in keeping with the dense canopy and extreme weather conditions of the island. More importantly, the effect of fencing the Shompen and their forest on their bona fide movement and needs, has not been assessed. How can this exercise be conducted when not a single resident of Campbell bay can converse logically with the Shompen in their own language? Besides, there has been no mention of how the labor force, who will be bought from all over the country will be sensitized about the tribes and their safety. Enough damage has been done by outsiders being the ones to introduce alcohol and tobacco to the Shompen, many also indulging in the hunting of the Nicobar Megapode, Wild Pig, Water monitor lizard, Saltwater Crocodiles, etc. all of which are on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Such a large influx of people will pose a serious challenge and result in a reduction in the already scant food resources available to the Shompen community who live off these resources from their forest. There are reports that construction workers who were brought in after the tsunami to build settlements have never left the island and have encroached upon forest lands. The UT Administration has</p>
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		been unsuccessful in tackling the already prevalent exploitation and violation of the rights of the Shompen PVTG.
vii.	Further, Department of Tribal Welfare is the agency that oversees the protection and safety of the community as per the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956.	In their letter dated August 12, 2021, the Directorate of Tribal Welfare, Andaman and Nicobar Administration, has stated this: <i>“Wherever any exemption from the existing provisions of regulations/policies/law of the land are required to be provided for execution of the project, this Directorate will seek required exemption(s) from the competent authority to that effect”</i> – this undertaking is reflective of the extent of commitment the agency has towards overseeing the protection and safety of the indigenous communities.
viii.	In addition, the project proponent is mandated to constitute a monitoring committee for ensuring the welfare and other issues related to Shompen and Nicobarese.	The project proponent refuses to divulge the details of the members appointed for the monitoring committee. Till date, not even a single member of this committee has met the Tribal Council. Furthermore, as per the specific condition VI of the Environmental Clearance¹⁴, the minutes of the meeting of these committees should be uploaded on the website of the Andaman and Nicobar Forest Department, which has not been fulfilled.

3.2 Comments on unaddressed questions

NIL

3.3 References

1. [NBWL 60 MoM 05.01.2021.pdf - Google Drive](#)
2. [WII RTI response - no study on leatherback turtles 07.06.2021.pdf - Google Drive](#)
3. [Tribal Council Letter withdrawing NOC for forest diversion 22.11.2022.pdf - Google Drive](#)
4. <https://www.sanctuarynaturefoundation.org/article/the-great-nicobar-misadventure>
5. <https://frontline.thehindu.com/environment/proposed-great-nicobar-project-makes-a-mockery-of-the-national-marine-turtle-action-plan/article66349653.ece>
6. <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/a-mega-port-in-india-threatens-the-survival-of-the-largest-turtles-on-earth/article66884132.ece>
7. [Turtle researchers Letter of concern for LA & GNI 14.06.2021.pdf - Google Drive](#)

8. [WII Survey on sea turtles in GNI 14-19.04.2021.pdf - Google Drive](#)
9. [GNI Timeline 2024 11.06.24 \(kalpavriksh.org\)](#) (Page 6: Photograph of Turtle camp on Eastern Flank of Galathea)
10. <https://moef.gov.in/uploads/2019/02/galateea.pdf>
11. [Map of draft master plan AECOM 09.03.23.pdf - Google Drive](#)
12. [Anthropologists Write Rebuttal To ANIIDCO Over The Disregard For The Rights Of The Indigenous Communities Of Great Nicobar Island | Countercurrents](#)
13. [Tribal Council Letter withdrawing NOC for forest diversion 22.11.2022.pdf - Google Drive](#)
14. https://aniidco.and.nic.in/announcement/ECL_AUTH_175W92_IA_AN_NCP_260108_2021.pdf

4. Environmental impact assessment of the Great Nicobar Island Project - Shri Sandosh Kumar P

Question No. 1963 Rajya Sabha (08.08.2024)

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE be pleased to state:

- a) Whether Government is aware of the potential environmental impacts of the Great Nicobar Island Project on the survival of coral reefs and marine species;
- b) if so, whether Government has done Environmental Impact Assessment studies before sanctioning the projects, if so, the detailed findings thereof; and the steps taken by Government to ensure environmental protection in the Nicobar Islands?

4.1 Rebuttal of responses

Sr. No.	Response from Environment Minister Shri Kirti Vardhan Singh	Rebuttal/clarification/counter question
i.	<p>The decision on the proposal involving development of Great Nicobar Island project has been taken after due consideration of potential environmental impacts on coral reefs and marine species, including the fact that the Project has significant strategic, defence and national importance.</p> <p>As per EIA notification, 2006, as amended from time to time, prior environmental clearance is required for all</p>	<p>The decision on the Environmental and CRZ Clearance granted to the proposal involving development of Great Nicobar Island project was ordered to be evaluated by NGT, Kolkata in April, 2023 by the High-Powered Committee (HPC)¹. The 6-member, special bench of judges had pointed out three deficiencies by way of examples:</p> <p>i) A part of the port has been proposed in the ICRZ 1A area – the most ecologically sensitive area as per the Island Coastal Zone Regulation – where constructing a port is strictly prohibited,</p>

	<p>new projects and/or activities or modernization of existing projects or activities as listed in the schedule to the Notification, 2006.</p>	<p>ii) The impact assessment data was collected only for a single season as opposed to the requirement of three seasons' data and</p> <p>iii) A total of 20668 colonies of corals will be affected due to the project. Of these, the Zoological Survey of India has proposed to translocate 16150 colonies. But there is no mention of the threats on the remaining 4518 coral colonies.</p>
<p>ii.</p>	<p>Several studies were conducted and their consequent mitigation measures were undertaken by the top statutory and non-statutory bodies like Zoological Survey of India ("ZSI"), Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History ("SACON"), the Wildlife Institute of India ("WII"), Indian Institute for Science ("IISc").</p>	<p>Many of these studies were still ongoing when the draft EIA was made public. The EAC found the EIA/EMP reports lacking and that is why many additional reports were submitted after the Public Hearing. The conservation and management reports on mangroves, corals, crocodiles, Megapode and Leatherback turtle were submitted as a response to Additional Details Sought and were therefore not scrutinized by independent subject matter experts².</p> <p>Moreover, the 10 month monitoring plans for all concerned species prepared by ZSI, WII and SACON had many unscientific and unverified mitigation measures: the report on conservation and long-term monitoring of Megapode by SACON, for instance, proposes to capture the birds that are nesting the project site, fit transmitters on them and relocate them to a new location or hold them in closed enclosures with chain-link mesh where an artificial mound will be created to provide an alternate facility for keeping eggs until they hatch.</p> <p>The report on the conservation and long-term monitoring of sea turtles prepared by WII is silent on the impact of the dredging, piling, land reclamation, and other construction activities for the port and the airport that will affect not only the nesting but feeding and foraging grounds of sea turtles. Moreover, according to WII's own admission, it has not conducted any studies on the Giant leatherback turtles or any other species of sea turtles in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.</p> <p>The conservation and management plan prepared by ZSI predominantly relies on translocation – which is only showed to be successful in hardy and generalist species and not on all species. Besides, corals are not the only</p>

		<p>agent in the coral reef system. Coral reefs are an exceptionally complex and diverse ecosystem constituting all the trophic levels analogous to a rainforest. It is absurd to even contemplate shifting ecosystems artificially; it is like moving the entire forest along with all its lifeforms from the tiniest of microbes to the largest of creatures, when some are migratory, some are resident, some are terrestrial, many are subterranean, some are arboreal, and others are aerial. Attempting to translocate about 16150 colonies of corals is almost improbable on one hand and counterproductive and misguided on the other.</p> <p>Moreover, the Environmental Clearance itself makes a mention of long-term conservation and monitoring reports that were going to be prepared for Robber crab, Reticulated python, Nicobar long-tailed macaque in addition to the aforementioned species. It is noteworthy that none of these reports have been made public.</p> <p>It is important to note that IISc has not been involved in preparation of any of the aforementioned reports. There needs to be further clarification sought into whether or not IISc was inducted for preparing any plans and if yes, why haven't the reports prepared by IISc not been uploaded on PARIVESH.</p>
iii.	Independent organization with specialized skill such as IIT, NIOT, NCCR, NIO, etc. were also involved during the appraisal process.	There are no public records of the involvement of these organizations at any point during the appraisal process. Neither the EIA report, nor the reports submitted later in response to the Additional details Sought by the Expert Appraisal Committee, mention any scientists affiliated to any of these organizations.
iv.	The evaluation conducted by ZSI has indicated that the project can be implemented with requisite environmental safeguards and appropriate conservation measures.	ZSI's mandate primarily concerns taxonomic identification and enumeration of the faunal diversity of the country. ZSI has played a crucial role in determining the bird diversity of Great Nicobar Island and its importance as a "resting spot" falling under the East Asian Australasian Bird flyway for migratory birds. ZSI has also conducted coral transplantation in the Gulf of Kutch and as per their assessment and claim, achieved success in transplanting coral species in degenerated regions. However, it is crucial to note that the coral species that bore success are

		<p>one of the most hardy and generic species of corals. It is akin to successfully propagating a generic grass species while attempting to translocate a rainforest.</p> <p>The ZSI has never conducted any extensive impact assessment studies, nor does it hold any expertise in the ecology and environment domains which is crucial to correctly assess whether or not a large-scale development project can be implemented in a given area. A project of such massive scale proposed in a highly fragile area needs a multi-organizational approach and the inclusion of several subject matter experts from independent organizations to carefully assess its impact</p>
v.	A detailed scrutiny of the EIA/EMP report took place during the appraisal of the project by an independent Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) having experts from the field of science and engineering.	The EAC pointed out several crucial reports lacking in the EIA/EMP that was initially submitted to them. Multiple reports concerning the affected species like the leatherback, the megapode, crocodiles, corals, mangroves, etc, had to be prepared and submitted by the project proponent in response to the “Additional Details Sought” by the EAC, after the public hearing. Furthermore, there are several examples where the EAC’s suggestions were not implemented; like in the “Additional Details Sought” documents dated May, 9, 2022 ³ and August, 19, 2022 ² , the EAC has pointed out that parts of the port, the airport, road infrastructure and others components of the township are falling under the ICRZ-1A area and asked the project proponent to send a revised plan. However, even in the revised recommendation submitted by ANZMA, 7.07 sqkm of total project area still falls under the ICRZ-1A zone, despite of which the EAC recommended the project for clearance.
vi.	The Environmental Clearance accorded contains as many as 42 specific conditions dealing with each component of the project, in addition to all standard conditions applicable to each component dealing with statutory compliances, air quality monitoring and preservation, water quality monitoring and preservation, noise monitoring and preservation, energy conservation measures, waste management, green belt, marine ecology, transport, human health	Stating the mere number of specific conditions listed on the Environmental Clearance is not enough when the management plans for conservation and monitoring of affected species and the names of the members of the monitoring committees and minutes of the committee meetings are being concealed. The Department of Forests and Environment, A&N, has been directed to upload the minutes of the committee meetings, as per point VI of the “other specific conditions”, which is yet to be fulfilled.

	environment and risk mitigation and disaster management.	
vii.	Further, three independent Monitoring Committees to oversee the implementation of Environmental Management Plan is also prescribed in the Environmental Clearance letter namely (i) Committee to oversee pollution related matters (ii) Committee to oversee biodiversity related matters (iii) Committee to oversee welfare and issues related to Shompen and Nicobarese.	<p>The project proponent refuses to divulge the details of the members appointed for the three monitoring committees⁴. It is not clear if there are any members on these committees who are affiliated to independent organizations. The area of expertise of these members is also not known.</p> <p>Till date, the committee to oversee tribal issues has not met the Tribal Council. Furthermore, as per the specific condition IV of the Environmental Clearance, the minutes of the meeting of these committees should be uploaded on the website of the Andaman and Nicobar Forest Department, which has not been fulfilled.</p>

4.2 Comments on unaddressed questions

NIL

4.3 References

1. https://greentribunal.gov.in/gen_pdf_test.php?filepath=L25ndF9kb2N1bWVudHMvbmd0L2Nhc2Vkb2MvanVkZ2VtZW50cy9LT0xLQVRBLzlwMjMtMDQtMDMvMTY4MDc4MTA3NzU4NTgyMDQ0MDY0MmVhZjE1ZWQxNDAucGRm
2. [ANIIDCO Response to ADS 19.08.2022.pdf - Google Drive](#)
3. [ANIIDCO Response to ADS 09.05.2022.pdf - Google Drive](#)
4. <https://yourti.in/document/myygyhbt/>

5. Consultations on the Great Nicobar project - Shri Mohammed Nadimul Haque

Question No. 1976 Rajya Sabha (08.08.2024)

- a) the details of the environmental and financial impact of the Great Nicobar project;
- b) whether it is a fact that the Tribal Council of Nicobar Island has withdrawn its 'no objection' given in 2022, if so, the details thereof;

- c) whether Government has held consultations with the original inhabitants of the region, the Shompens and Nicobarese, if not, the reasons therefor;
- d) whether Anthropological Survey of India was consulted on the project, and if so, the details thereof; and
- e) if not, the reasons therefore?

5.1 Rebuttal of responses

Sr. No.	Response from Environment Minister Shri Kirti Vardhan Singh	Rebuttal/clarification/counter question
i.	A detailed scrutiny of the EIA/EMP report took place during the appraisal of the project by an independent Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) having experts from the field of science and engineering.	<p>The EAC found the EIA/EMP reports lacking and that is why many additional reports^{1,2} after the Public Hearing were submitted. The conservation and management reports on mangroves, corals, crocodiles, Megapode and Leatherback turtle were submitted as a response to Additional Details Sought and were therefore not scrutinized by independent subject matter experts. The entire Environment Management Plan had to be updated.</p> <p>Moreover, the Environmental Clearance³ itself makes a mention of long-term conservation and monitoring reports that were going to be prepared for Robber crab, Reticulated python, Nicobar long-tailed macaque in addition to the aforementioned species. It is noteworthy that none of these reports have been made public.</p>
ii.	It is on the basis of a rigorous appraisal process that the project was granted Environmental and Forest Clearance with requisite environmental safeguards and conservation measures.	<p>The NGT, Kolkata in April, 2023, had formed a High-Powered Committee which was to revisit the Environmental Clearance and had pointed out the following deficiencies by way of example:</p> <p>i) A part of the port has been proposed in the ICRZ 1A area – the most ecologically sensitive area as per the Island Coastal Zone Regulation – where constructing a port is strictly prohibited, ii) The impact assessment data was collected only for a single season as opposed to the requirement of three seasons’ data and iii) A total of 20668 colonies of corals will be affected due to the project. Of these, the Zoological Survey of India has proposed to translocate 16150 colonies. But there is no mention of the threats on the remaining 4518 coral colonies⁴.</p>

		<p>With respect to the Forest Clearance, the application forms submitted, the number of trees to be cut, the method of enumeration of the trees, as well as the minutes of the meetings of the Forest Appraisal Committee where which recommended the project for Forest Clearance have not been uploaded on the PARIVESH website⁵.</p> <p>Moreover, the NOC for the diversion of forest that was procured from the representatives of the Shompen and Great Nicobarese people, was violative of the free, prior and informed consent from the bona fide owners of the forest to be diverted and hence the stage-1 approval thus obtained stands nullified⁶.</p>
iii.	<p>As per the information provided by the project proponent, the total estimated project cost for Port, Airport, Power Plant & trunk infrastructure for Township is Rs. 81834.22 crores which includes the estimated budget for wildlife conservation plan, Compensatory Afforestation, Tribal welfare plans, conservation and mitigation measures during construction and operation of port, airport, township and power plant and Monitoring program.</p>	<p>The tribal welfare plans, the conservation plans and the proposed mitigation measures have not been made public. The budget allocated to these plans is irrelevant if they have not been reviewed by independent experts and organizations.</p>
iv.	<p>The District Level Committee of Nicobar District has approved the record of forest rights prepared by the Sub-Division Level Committee (SLDC), headed by Assistant Commissioner in the meeting held on 18.08.2022.</p> <p>The Chairman of the Tribal Council, Campbell Bay, Little and Great Nicobar were duly consulted during the meeting held on 13.8.2022 and no objections were raised during the statutory period prescribed in the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.</p>	<p>The meeting held on 18.08.2022 and the NOC obtained from the representatives of the tribal communities, for the diversion stands nullified as the Chairman of the Tribal Council withdrew his signature in a letter dated 22.11.2022, where it was mentioned that he was rushed to sign the letter, not given the time to consult the members of the community, details about the project being situated on the pre-tsunami villages of the Great Nicobarese people were kept hidden and the statements of the AAJVS officer regarding the Kokeon Shompen visiting Galathea were not recorded on the minutes of the meeting⁶.</p> <p>The sequence of events that led up to the signing of the NOC by the Chairman of the Tribal Council and the AAJVS Officer as mentioned in Tribal Council's letter dated 22nd November, 2022, clearly indicates that</p>

		<p>the SDLC meeting and its purpose were not widely advertised to the Great Nicobarese community and only the Chairman of the Tribal Council was initially called to sign, which deprived him of the opportunity/right to internally consult within his community. Moreover, it is not clear to whom the RoFR certificate was issued. What category of RoFR was issued, for which land specifying location, and measuring what area? The DLC overlooked all these violations and granted an RoFR certificate.</p> <p>The letter withdrawing the NOC⁶ signed by the Chairman of the Tribal Council was sent to the Assistant Commissioner, Campbell Bay and the District Commissioner (Nicobar) who are the members of the SDLC and the DLC respectively. As per section 6(6) of the FRA, 2006 “no such petition shall be disposed of against the aggrieved person, unless he has been given a reasonable opportunity to present his case” which means that the DLC has failed to execute its duty in this regard when it issued the RoFR certificate without resolving the matter put forth by the Great Nicobarese community.</p>
v.	<p>The inhabitants of the region were duly represented at the public hearing through the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS) whose views were also considered.</p>	<p>Throughout the draft EIA and at the time of the public hearing, the project proponents and the EIA consultants maintained that the tribal areas will not be affected by the project and that is perhaps why the AAJVS officer present during the public hearing did not mention anything about the impact on the Shompen.</p> <p>It is noteworthy that the comments of the AAJVS member about the Shompen frequenting Galathea and likely to be displaced by the project, were not incorporated in the proceedings of the SDLC. These details came to light in the letter dated 22.11.2022 where the chairman of the tribal Council withdrew his signature from the NOC⁶.</p> <p>Secondly, how many members (regular employees of the AAJVS) are conversant with and can comprehend and converse with the Shompen in their own language for them to explain the nuances of the project, and</p>

		<p>understand their needs, and challenges? The Terms of Reference for conducting the EIA issued by the MoEFCC to ANIIDCO, the project proponent, dated 25th May, 2021, under Special Condition number (3) states the following: “It should be ensured that tribes such as Shompen and Nicobarese and anthropological organisations well versed in communication with and involved in welfare of Shompen and Nicobarese are adequately represented in the Public Hearing”. But this condition was not fulfilled.</p> <p>Further, the Indian Anthropological Association had written a detailed letter² explaining the impact on the two communities and this letter too, was completely ignored. Had the Expert Appraisal Committee executed its duty well, these massive shortcomings in the EIA report and withholding of information by the project proponent would have been flagged and the proposal for Environmental Clearance would have been rejected.</p> <p>The Chairman of the Tribal Council during the Public Hearing had mentioned very clearly that they wish to return to their ancestral villages. The point raised by him was entirely ignored and not addressed at any point in the process of the Environmental Clearance, even though a substantial part of the south eastern and western coast of Great Nicobar, where the Great Nicobarese villages are located, is going to be taken up by the project.</p>
vi.	It was also noted that the only habitation of Shompens or Nicobarese in the project area is at New Chingen, Rajiv Nagar and the Administration is not proposing displacement of any tribal habitations.	With regards to the displacement of tribals, as has been the case since the settlement of ex-servicemen families on the island in the 1960s, the Shompen in the Magar nallah area and those living in the present villages of Joginder Nagar and Laxmi Nagar deserted their huts and moved in the interiors of the forest, such displacements are not noticed until it's too late. They occur as a result of disturbances caused by the construction of roads and settlements. This project will result in the displacement of 2-3 Shompen settlements (Kirasis, Kurchinom, Buja yae and possibly Re-Pakao) located in the Galathea river basin forests. This fact has gone

		<p>unacknowledged by the project proponent and the committee that has granted clearances⁷.</p> <p>The Great Nicobarese have time and again requested both the A&N Administration and high-ranking Government officials who visit them from time to time, to enable their return to their traditional homeland, from where they were displaced to Campbell Bay and New Chingenh after the 2004 tsunami. That their ancestral lands are proposed to be used for tourism establishments, power plant and other infrastructure to cater to non-islanders who will be brought in to occupy their land, is of concern; all they are requesting is that they wish to return to their homeland. The A&N Administration has not done anything to facilitate their rehabilitation, while the ex-servicemen families of 5 out of 6 revenue villages were re-settled in their own villages after the tsunami, the Great Nicobarese have not been allowed to return to their natal villages.</p>
vii.	Further, due consultation with the tribal experts including Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) has also been conducted in order to ensure the safety, protection, welfare and wellbeing of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in the wake of Holistic Development of GNI project.	Are there any records of such consultations? Because many prominent AnSI ^{8,9} experts who have closely worked with the two communities have expressed their views regarding the impact of the project during the public hearing and more recently, as a rebuttal to ANIIDCO's response to the NCST regarding the violation of the constitutional mandate and adverse impacts of the project on the lives of local tribals vide a letter dated 30.03.2024 ⁸ .
viii.	Further, as per the condition of Environmental Clearance one of the Committee is exclusively prescribed to oversee the welfare and issues related to Shompens and Nicobarese.	The project proponent refuses to divulge the details of the members appointed for the monitoring committee ¹⁰ . Till date, not a single member of this committee has met the Tribal Council. Furthermore, as per the specific condition number IV of the Environmental Clearance, the minutes of the meeting of these committees should be uploaded on the website of the Andaman and Nicobar Forest Department, which has not been fulfilled ¹¹ .
ix.	The other two Committees have been incorporated in the Environmental Clearance to oversee the implementation of Environmental Management Plan namely (i) Committee to oversee pollution related	The same questions arise regarding the other two committees as well: i) Who are the members of these committees, ii) How many times have they met? iii) Why are the minutes of the meetings of these two committees not available on the website of the Andaman and Nicobar Forest

	matters (ii) Committee to oversee biodiversity related matters.	Department as was mandated in the conditions of the Environmental Clearance and iv) Why is the project proponent denying the details of these committees when sought through an RTI?
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5.2 Response to unaddressed questions

1	Unaddressed question/s	Comments
1.	The details of the environmental and financial impact of the Great Nicobar project	<p>The environmental impact of the Great Nicobar project has been raised time and again through representations^{12,13,14} sent by organizations, and individuals working in the field of environmental science and conservation, experts, bureaucrats, concerned citizens, etc before and after the clearances for the project were grated.</p> <p>Some of the statements mentioned in the reports prepared by consulting agency AECOM which was engaged by NITI Aayog to prepare the master plan for the project point towards the project being financially unviable.</p> <p>“The major disadvantage for Great Nicobar as a potential trans-shipment hub is the scale of domestic cargo. All the ports in A&N Islands combined had container traffic of only ~32,000 TEUs in 2013-14 (0.3% of the total EXIM container traffic in India). Clearly, the domestic cargo traffic is miniscule as compared to that in other contending locations like Vizhinjam and Enayam.”¹⁵</p> <p>Considering the nature of the Project “Holistic Development of Greater Nicobar Island” it will not be a financially viable project. However, it provides a unique opportunity to derive direct and indirect economic benefits to both the UT administration and the Government of India. Considering that high quality urban mixed-use development program that capitalizes on the location, its proximity to the international shipping lines, proposed infrastructure like a township infrastructure, ICTT, an International airport and the tourism infrastructure will have direct and substantial impacts on commercial land values in the island.¹⁶</p>

		<p>Moreover, recently, multiple disagreements among port authorities regarding the feasibility and funding of the port at Galathea have surfaced:</p> <p>The Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority has expressed its inability to commit to the Galathea Bay project, citing its existing focus on the Vadhavan Port project in Maharashtra.¹⁷</p> <p>As per the statement of the President of All India Chamber of Commerce & Industries (AICCI), "<i>The logistic cost for Indian products comes to about 14% of the total product cost, while the cost of those manufactured in developed countries is only around 8%. Transshipment containers at Great Nicobar may not reduce the logistic cost. Since VOC port has multiple advantages, it should be a transshipment hub for India.</i>"¹⁸</p>
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5.3 References

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