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# Indira Point Development Proposal Highlights India's Effort to Protect Its Southernmost Maritime Landmark While Balancing Ecological Conservation

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## Recent Developments:

- The Union Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has proposed **protection, structural restoration, and tourism-oriented development** at **Indira Point Lighthouse** on **Great Nicobar Island**.
- The Directorate General of Lighthouses and Lightships (DGLL), Sri Vijaya Puram, has sought **Island Coastal Regulation Zone (ICRZ) clearance** from the competent authorities because the project falls within ecologically sensitive coastal zones.

## Indira Point: Strategic and Geographical Significance:

### *Location:*

- **Indira Point** is the **southernmost point of India** and is situated on **Great Nicobar Island** in the **Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands**.
- **Indira Point** lies immediately **south of Galathea Bay**, where **India's proposed International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT)** is planned under the **Great Nicobar Mega Infrastructure Project**.
- **Indira Point** is located close to the **Malacca Strait**, one of the world's busiest maritime trade corridors, thereby enhancing India's **Indo-Pacific strategic importance**.

### *Maritime Importance:*

- The **Indira Point Lighthouse** serves as an important **navigational aid** on the **Singapore–Colombo international shipping route**.
- The **lighthouse** is expected to gain greater operational significance after the commissioning of the proposed **Galathea Bay transshipment port**.
- The **location** strengthens India's **maritime domain awareness, shipping safety, and strategic presence** in the eastern Indian Ocean.

### *Historical Background:*

- **Indira Point** was formerly known as **Pygmalion Point**.
- The site was renamed in **1985** in memory of former **Prime Minister Indira Gandhi**.
- The **lighthouse** was commissioned in **April 1972** and is a **35-metre-high cast iron structure** painted in **red and white horizontal bands**.

## Protection and Development Proposal:

### *Objective:*

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- **The project** aims to preserve the **functional, historical, cultural, and navigational significance** of the lighthouse while improving visitor facilities.
- **The proposal** seeks to protect the structure against **coastal erosion, wave action, and geological instability**, while promoting **sustainable tourism**.

#### *Structural Development Components:*

- **Repair and strengthening** of the lighthouse foundation.
- **Construction** of an **all-weather access road**.
- **Shore protection measures**, including **breakwaters** around the lighthouse.
- **Development** of a **powerhouse, inspection facility, and staff quarters**, along with a **compound wall and internal pathways**.

#### *Tourism Infrastructure Components:*

- **Eco-tourism facilities, convention centre, cafeteria, viewing tower, cycle tracks, international-standard museum, and memorial structure** have been proposed.
- **The tourism component** is intended to improve visitor experience without compromising navigational functions.

#### Environmental and Regulatory Aspects:

##### *Island Coastal Regulation Zone (ICRZ) Framework:*

- **The project** requires approval under the **Island Coastal Regulation Zone (ICRZ) Notification, 2019**.
- **Clearance** is mandatory from both the **Andaman and Nicobar Coastal Zone Management Authority** and the **Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**.
- **The notification** provides a legal framework for conserving **coastal ecosystems, marine biodiversity, and traditional livelihoods** in the island territories.

##### *Sensitive Coastal Zones Involved:*

- **ICRZ-IA** includes **mangroves, coral reefs, sand dunes, mudflats, national parks, marine parks, notified forests, salt marshes, and turtle nesting grounds**, representing the most environmentally sensitive category.
- **ICRZ-IVA** covers **the seabed and marine waters extending from the Low Tide Line up to 12 nautical miles seaward**.

##### *Environmental Concerns:*

- **Construction activities** may temporarily affect **marine sediments, coastal water quality, and air quality**.
- **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)** has included **coral reef surveys**, although the precise ecological impact on nearby coral ecosystems requires continued monitoring.

#### Need for Structural Protection:

##### *Impact of the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami:*

- **The 2004 earthquake and tsunami** caused extensive **tectonic land subsidence** across parts of the **Nicobar Islands**.
- **Indira Point** experienced permanent **land sinking**, allowing seawater to inundate the lighthouse surroundings.

- **The lighthouse foundation**, originally located about **3.5 metres above mean sea level**, became partially submerged after the disaster.
- **Residential quarters** and associated infrastructure around the lighthouse were destroyed.

#### *Present Structural Condition:*

- **Continuous shoreline retreat, coastal erosion, and high-energy wave action** have exposed the lighthouse foundation to severe marine conditions.
- **The lighthouse** presently exhibits an approximate **3.86° tilt**, although engineering assessments have concluded that its **structural stability remains intact**.
- **Strengthening measures** are therefore intended to ensure long-term operational safety.

#### Linkage with the Great Nicobar Mega Infrastructure Project:

##### *Major Components of the Mega Project:*

- **International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT)** at Galathea Bay.
- **Greenfield International Airport**.
- **Integrated township**.
- **Gas- and solar-based power generation facilities**.

##### *Strategic Importance:*

- **The project** aims to transform **Great Nicobar** into a major **maritime logistics and transshipment hub**.
- **Its location** near the **Malacca Strait** enhances India's **trade competitiveness, Blue Economy objectives, and Indo-Pacific maritime strategy**.

##### *Associated Concerns:*

- **The island** contains **tropical rainforests, biosphere reserve areas, coral reefs, and habitats of endemic wildlife**.
- **The region** is also home to the **Shompen and Nicobarese** tribal communities.
- **The project** has generated debate regarding the balance between **strategic infrastructure, tribal rights, and ecological conservation**.

#### Challenges:

##### *Environmental Challenges:*

- **Protection** of fragile **coastal ecosystems** and **marine biodiversity**.
- **Conservation** of **coral reefs, mangroves, and turtle nesting habitats**.
- **Management** of cumulative impacts arising from multiple infrastructure projects.

##### *Administrative Challenges:*

- **Obtaining statutory environmental clearances** within sensitive ecological zones.
- **Ensuring compliance** with **ICRZ norms** and environmental safeguards.
- **Coordinating** among multiple central and Union Territory agencies.

##### *Developmental Challenges:*

- **Balancing national strategic interests** with **long-term ecological sustainability**.
- **Promoting responsible eco-tourism** without causing irreversible environmental degradation.

## Way Forward:

### *Integrated Coastal Management:*

- **Adopt nature-based coastal protection measures** wherever technically feasible.
- **Strengthen shoreline monitoring** through **remote sensing** and **GIS-based coastal mapping**.

### *Sustainable Development:*

- **Ensure strict compliance** with environmental clearance conditions.
- **Develop low-impact eco-tourism infrastructure** based on carrying-capacity assessments.
- **Implement continuous ecological monitoring** of coral reefs, shoreline dynamics, and marine biodiversity.

### *Strategic Governance:*

- **Integrate infrastructure development** with **Blue Economy**, **disaster resilience**, and **maritime security** objectives.
- **Ensure participation** of local communities and scientific institutions in long-term environmental management.

### *Important Facts to Remember:*

- **Southernmost point of India:** Indira Point.
- **Island:** Great Nicobar Island.
- **Nearby strategic location:** Galathea Bay.
- **Nearby global sea lane:** Malacca Strait.
- **Lighthouse commissioned:** 1972.
- **Renamed from:** Pygmalion Point in 1985.
- **Relevant regulation:** Island Coastal Regulation Zone (ICRZ) Notification, 2019.
- **Ecologically sensitive categories:** ICRZ-IA and ICRZ-IVA.
- **Major associated project:** Great Nicobar Mega Infrastructure Project.
- **Important indigenous communities:** Shompen and Nicobarese.