



UPSC &amp; STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · UJIYARI.COM

**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# Opacity at Great Nicobar: On Environmental Clearance and the Precautionary Principle

 **DOWN TO EARTH**20 June 2026 · **ENVIRONMENT** · **GS3**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator


 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)**ALSO FROM THE CREATOR****BharatNotes**Free UPSC notes, MCQs, PYQ analysis. **100% Free.**[bharatnotes.com](http://bharatnotes.com) → **ADVERTISE****Advertise with Ujiyari**

Reach thousands of UPSC aspirants daily.

 [epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)



# Opacity at Great Nicobar: On Environmental Clearance and the Precautionary Principle

 **Down to Earth**    20 June 2026    **GS3**

Source: [ujjyari.com](http://ujjyari.com) — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped



## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"When monitoring reports for a mega project remain unpublished, who bears the burden of proof: the developer to show safety, or critics to show harm?"*

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [Down to Earth](#)

 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujjyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

The Great Nicobar Island development, a roughly Rs 72,000-crore plan (revised estimates run higher) for a trans-shipment port, airport, power plant, and township, is moving forward on one of India's most ecologically sensitive coasts. It threatens the felling of close to a million trees on a coast where the giant leatherback turtle nests, and it affects vulnerable tribal communities. Yet the compliance and monitoring reports that should let the public verify the project's environmental conditions remain unpublished. The project has become a test of environmental-clearance transparency and the precautionary principle.

## THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

A mega project on Great Nicobar promises strategic and economic gains but risks felling nearly a million trees on a leatherback-turtle nesting coast and disrupting the Shompen and Nicobarese tribes. The deeper problem is **opacity** (<https://ujjyari.com/vocab/opacity/>): the monitoring and compliance reports stay unpublished, blocking independent scrutiny. The case tests whether India honours transparency in clearances and the precautionary principle.

## THE ISSUE, DECODED

Ujjayanti Current Affairs - [ujjayanti.com](http://ujjayanti.com) - Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
Great Nicobar project	Rs 81,000-crore port and township	Massive, largely irreversible footprint
Galathea Bay	Leatherback-turtle nesting beach	Endangered species habitat at risk
Tree felling	Close to a million trees	Loss of primary rainforest biodiversity
Shompen and Nicobarese	Vulnerable tribal communities	Forest rights and consent concerns
Unpublished reports	Compliance and monitoring data withheld	Prevents independent scrutiny

## THE ANALYSIS: DEVELOPMENT BEHIND A VEIL

- 1 The ecological stakes are extreme.** Galathea Bay hosts nesting leatherbacks, the world's largest sea turtle, and the island holds primary rainforest. Felling close to a million trees is the kind of irreversible harm the precautionary principle is meant to restrain.
- 2 The human cost is acute.** The Shompen, a particularly vulnerable tribal group in voluntary isolation, and the Nicobarese face displacement and disruption, raising obligations under the Forest Rights Act and the duty of informed consent.
- 3 Opacity is the governance failure.** Environmental clearance is granted on conditions. Verifying compliance depends on published monitoring reports. When those reports are withheld, the public cannot check whether conditions are met, and the clearance loses credibility.
- 4 The legal framework demands transparency.** The EIA notification of 2006 and the Coastal Regulation Zone rules are built on public scrutiny and evidence-based review, which unpublished reports defeat.

## DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

Ujjyari Current Affairs - [ujjyari.com](https://ujjyari.com) - Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

*Framework requiring environmental impact assessment (<https://ujjyari.com/terms/environmental-impact-assessment/>) and public consultation for major projects.*

*World's largest sea turtle; Galathea Bay is a key nesting site.*

*Rules regulating development along the coast.*

*Recognises rights of forest-dwelling and tribal communities, requiring their consent.*

*Indigenous communities of Great Nicobar; the Shompen are a particularly vulnerable tribal group.*

*Where serious or irreversible harm is possible, lack of full scientific certainty must not delay protective measures.*

## THE DEBATE

**The argument for** the project is that it advances strategic goals, including a trans-shipment hub and a stronger Indo-Pacific presence, along with economic development of a remote region, which proponents say justifies the environmental and social trade-offs.

**The argument against** is that the scale of irreversible ecological damage, the threat to endangered species, the impact on vulnerable tribes, and the refusal to publish compliance reports together make the project a violation of both precaution and transparency.

**The balanced verdict:** strategic interests are legitimate, but they do not exempt a project from transparency and precaution. The minimum demand, publishing all compliance and monitoring reports, is reasonable and non-negotiable for a project of this magnitude.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

*Apply the precautionary principle as a burden-shifting rule. Where harm may be serious and irreversible, the developer must prove safety, rather than critics being asked to prove harm. Opacity reverses this logic by hiding the evidence on which the burden turns. So when monitoring data is withheld, treat the precautionary presumption as unmet. Transparency is not a procedural nicety; it is what makes the principle operable.*

## DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Ujjiyari Current Affairs - [ujjiyari.com](https://ujjiyari.com) - Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

Mega project cleared with conditions -> Monitoring reports withheld -> No public scrutiny -> Irreversible ecological risk -> Precautionary principle invoked -> Demand transparency and consent

## THE WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Publish all compliance and monitoring reports** so the public can verify clearance conditions.
- ❷ **Apply the precautionary principle** strictly where harm is irreversible, with the burden on the developer.
- ❸ **Ensure genuine, informed tribal consent** under the Forest Rights Act before further work.
- ❹ **Conduct independent ecological monitoring** of leatherback nesting and forest loss.
- ❺ **Reassess the project's scale** against verified environmental and social impact data.

## THE TAKEAWAY BOX

*A flagship case on environmental-clearance transparency, the precautionary principle, and the development-versus-conservation balance.*

*“Transparency in compliance reporting and fidelity to the precautionary principle are not obstacles to development but the conditions of legitimate development.”*

*EIA 2006, leatherback turtle, Galathea Bay, CRZ, Forest Rights Act, Shompen and Nicobarese, precautionary principle.*

*Weighing strategic and economic gains against irreversible harm to nature and vulnerable tribes tests intergenerational (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/intergenerational/>) and environmental ethics.*

*Connects to past questions on environmental impact assessment and the rights of tribal communities.*

*Biodiversity conservation, tribal rights, coastal regulation, and the development-environment trade-off.*

**Sources:** *Down to Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/>), *PIB* (<https://pib.gov.in/>)

Source: Opacity at Great Nicobar: On Environmental Clearance and the Precautionary Principle — Ujjiyari.com |  
Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

**KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

 Ujjayanti Current Affairs · [ujjayanti.com](http://ujjayanti.com) · Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

**The Great Nicobar port-and-township project risks felling close to a million trees on a leatherback-turtle nesting coast while compliance and monitoring reports remain unpublished, undermining clearance transparency and the precautionary principle.**


**SUPPORTING**

- The project threatens leatherback nesting beaches at Galathea Bay and primary rainforest of high biodiversity value.
- It affects the Shompen and Nicobarese tribes, including particularly vulnerable groups, raising forest-rights and consent concerns.
- Unpublished monitoring reports prevent independent scrutiny of compliance with clearance conditions.


**COUNTER**

The project advances strategic and economic goals, including a trans-shipment hub and Indo-Pacific presence, which proponents argue justify the trade-offs.


**WAY FORWARD**

Publish all compliance and monitoring reports, apply the precautionary principle, and ensure genuine tribal consent before further work.


**MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

 Ujjyari Current Affairs - [ujjyari.com](http://ujjyari.com) · Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

**QUESTION**

*'The Great Nicobar project pits development imperatives against ecological and tribal protection. Examine it as a test of environmental-clearance transparency and the precautionary principle. (250 words)'*

**INTRODUCTION**

The Great Nicobar project, with an outlay originally cleared at around Rs 72,000 crore (revised estimates run higher, towards Rs 81,000 crore), promises a trans-shipment port, an airport, a power plant, and a township on a remote, biodiverse island. Its central controversy is not only what it will build but what it refuses to show: the compliance and monitoring reports remain unpublished.

**BODY**

The project sits on a coast of exceptional ecological value. Galathea Bay is a nesting site for the giant leatherback turtle, the world's largest sea turtle, and the island holds primary rainforest of high biodiversity. Estimates suggest felling close to a million trees, a scale that the precautionary principle, a cornerstone of Indian environmental law, demands be treated with extreme caution where irreversible harm is possible. The project also affects the Shompen, a particularly vulnerable tribal group living in voluntary isolation, and the Nicobarese, raising serious questions under the Forest Rights Act and the requirement of informed consent.

The deeper governance failure is opacity. Environmental clearance is conditional, and the public's ability to verify whether conditions are met depends on access to monitoring reports.

When those reports are not published, scrutiny is impossible and the clearance process loses legitimacy. The Coastal Regulation Zone rules and the EIA framework of 2006 exist precisely to subject such projects to transparent, evidence-based review.

**CONCLUSION**

A project of this scale and irreversibility cannot proceed behind a veil. Transparency in compliance reporting and fidelity to the precautionary principle are not obstacles to development but the conditions of legitimate development.


**RELATED DAILY ARTICLES**

20 Jun [India's Green Hydrogen Certification Portal \(GHCI\) and...](#)

17 Jun [Desertification Day 2026 and the UNICEF Children's...](#)

16 Jun [Current Affairs Today — June 16, 2026](#)

16 Jun **Great Indian Bustard Captive Breeding Count Reaches 94**

Ujjyari Current Affairs · [ujjyari.com](http://ujjyari.com) · Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

Ujiyari Current Affairs · [ujiyari.com](http://ujiyari.com) · **Free Daily** Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

## Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/06/opacity-at-great-nicobar-clearance-precautionary-principle/>

### ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

## BharatNotes

Free UPSC study platform — subject-wise notes across all 4 GS papers, Prelims MCQs, Mains answer frameworks, PYQ analysis & progress tracking. **100% Free • No Login Required.**

[Start Preparing → \[bharatnotes.com\]\(http://bharatnotes.com\)](#)

### 📌 OPPORTUNITY

## Advertise with Ujiyari

Reach **thousands of serious UPSC & State PCS aspirants** daily through our PDFs, website, and social channels.

**Ideal for:** Coaching institutes • EdTech platforms • Book publishers • Exam prep apps

[✉ epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)

Write to us for rates & media kit

Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs · [ujiyari.com](http://ujiyari.com) · [bharatnotes.com](http://bharatnotes.com)