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NCST launches probe into allegations of 'adverse' impact on local tribals

The NCST said it would issue a summons for the personal appearance of representatives of the Andaman and Nicobar Island administration if it failed to respond to the notice within the stipulated time

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Representative Image

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The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has launched a probe into allegations that a mega infrastructure project being undertaken by the Centre in the Great Nicobar Island would be "violative" of the constitutional mandate and would "adversely impact" the lives of local tribals.

The commission issued a notice to the Andaman and Nicobar administration on April 20, asking the archipelago administration to submit facts and an action-taken report in the matter within 15 days of the receipt of the communication.

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) formed a high-powered committee earlier this month to re-examine the environmental clearance granted to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO) for the multi-component mega project involving an area of 16,610 hectares.

Along with the development of an international container transshipment terminal, the project involves the development of a military-civil, dual-use airport, a gas, diesel and solar-based power plant and a township.

The commission also said the project is being undertaken without "prior consultation with the NCST".

It said it had received a representation on January 1 from a resident of Andhra Pradesh, who alleged that the mega infrastructure project in the Great Nicobar Island would be "violative of the constitutional mandate and would adversely impact the lives of the local tribals".

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Govt invites Island

"The commission has decided to investigate/inquire into the matter in pursuance of the powers conferred upon it under Article 338A of the Constitution of India. You are hereby requested to submit the facts and information on the action taken on the allegations/matters within 15 days of the receipt of this notice," the notice read.

The NCST said it would issue a summons for the personal appearance of representatives of the Andaman and Nicobar Island administration if it failed to respond to the notice within the stipulated time.

The NGT had, on April 7, said there was a need for adequate studies on the project's adverse impact on coral reefs, mangroves, turtle-nesting sites, bird-nesting sites, other wildlife, and erosion, disaster management and other conservation and mitigation measures.

Besides, an Island Coastal Regulation Zone (ICRZ) notification of 2019 had to be complied with and tribal rights and rehabilitation had to be ensured, it had said.

"The respondents (ANIIDCO and the environment ministry) are committed to complying with the ICRZ, 2019 and tribal rights. They have also planned compensatory afforestation and mangrove plantations and thus, by and large, the project is compliant and the EC (environmental clearance) does not call for interference," the NGT had said.

It had, however, underlined some "unanswered deficiencies" such as a threat to 4,518 coral colonies, impact assessment being of only one season as against the mandated three seasons and a part of the project being in the area where a port was prohibited.

"These aspects may call for revisiting the EC by a high-powered committee," the tribunal had said.

Headed by the chief secretary of the environment ministry, the committee is required to finalise its proceedings within two months.

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