

GREAT NICOBAR PROJECT: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

The Great Nicobar Project is an ambitious initiative by the Central Government aimed at the strategic development of the southern part of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

1. CORE COMPONENTS

With an estimated investment of **₹72,000 crore**, the project focuses on four major infrastructure pillars:

- **International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT):** To be developed at **Galathea Bay** with a capacity of 14.2 million TEU.
- **Greenfield International Airport:** Targeted to handle 10 million passengers annually.
- **Gas and Solar Power Plant:** A hybrid power plant with a **450 MVA** capacity.
- **Green City (Township):** A new township planned over **16,610 hectares**.

2. STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

- **Strategic Location:** It is located just **40 nautical miles** from the international East-West shipping route.
- **Strait of Malacca:** Its proximity to this vital chokepoint (connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans) makes it defense-critical for India.
- **Economic Gain:** Currently, India depends on foreign ports like Colombo and Singapore for cargo transshipment. This project will reduce that dependency and boost national revenue.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS & CHALLENGES

Given the ecologically sensitive nature of the region, several safeguards have been implemented:

- **Forest Cover:** Only **1.82%** of the islands' total forest cover will be utilized for the project.
- **Compensatory Afforestation:** Since 75% of the islands are already forested, afforestation will be carried out in **Haryana** over an area of **97.30 sq. km**.
- **Monitoring Committees:** Three independent committees have been set up to oversee pollution, biodiversity, and tribal welfare.

4. TRIBAL WELFARE

- Measures are in place to ensure no displacement or disruption to the **Shompen** and **Nicobarese** tribes.
- **Tribal Reserve:** While some tribal reserve land was de-notified for the project, a larger area was re-notified as reserve land, resulting in a **net addition of 3.912 sq. km**.

5. IMPLEMENTATION PHASES

The project is scheduled to be completed in three phases by 2047:

- **Phase I:** 2025–35
- **Phase II:** 2036–41

- **Phase III: 2042-47**

KEY TERMS FOR COMPETITIVE EXAMS:

1. **Galathea Bay:** The specific site for the ICTT.
2. **Shompen & Nicobarese:** Key indigenous tribes (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups - PVTGs) residing here.
3. **Transshipment Hub:** A central point for moving cargo between ships, reducing reliance on foreign ports.
4. **EIA 2006 & ICRZ 2019:** The legal frameworks and notifications under which the project received environmental clearance.

INDIA'S FEMALE WORKFORCE: A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

On the occasion of International Labour Day (May 1st), here is a special analysis of women's participation in the Indian economy and their empowerment.

1. SHIFTS IN DATA & TRENDS

- **Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR):** Female workforce participation has risen significantly from **23.3% in 2017-18 to 40% by 2025** (based on the Periodic Labour Force Survey).
- **Rural India:** Women's workforce participation is growing faster in rural areas compared to urban regions, indicating a structural shift in the rural economy.

2. ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND LIVELIHOOD

- **DAY-NRLM:** Under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission, approximately **10 crore women** have been mobilized into **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**.
- **Lakshpati Didi:** This scheme aims to increase the income of women in SHGs to create crores of women entrepreneurs earning at least **₹1 lakh annually**.
- **Startup India:** Out of 2.2 lakh recognized startups in India, over **1 lakh startups have at least one woman director**. India is currently the 3rd largest startup hub in the world.

3. SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

- **Skill India Mission:** Equipping women with industry-relevant skills to enhance their employability.
- **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam:** A legislative process for women's reservation in legislatures to strengthen their role in **decision-making**.

4. LABOUR REFORMS AND SAFETY

- **4 Labour Codes:** Consolidating 29 Central labour laws into 4 codes ensures minimum wages, social security, and occupational safety for women in the unorganized sector.
- **e-Shram Portal:** A national database for unorganized workers with over **31 crore registrations**. It enables women in sectors like agriculture and construction to easily access welfare schemes.
- **Social Security:** Social protection coverage expanded from 19% in 2015 to **64% by 2025** (including PF, insurance, and healthcare).

KEY POINTS FOR EXAMS:

1. **LFPR:** The rise in the Female Labour Force Participation Rate is a major economic indicator.
2. **SHG Model:** Improvement of women's socio-economic status through micro-enterprises.
3. **Formalization:** Recognition of women workers in the informal sector through the e-Shram portal.
4. **Social Security:** Expansion of the ESI scheme and healthcare services (e.g., the new ESIC hospital in Budgam, Jammu & Kashmir).

MULTI-LANE FREE FLOW (MLFF) TOLLING SYSTEM: KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Shri Nitin Gadkari, inaugurated India's first **barrier-less** tolling system in Gujarat.

1. PROJECT DETAILS

- **Location:** Launched at the **Chorayasi Toll Plaza** on the **Surat-Bharuch** section of **NH-48** in Gujarat.
- **Significance:** This is India's first **Multi-Lane Free Flow (MLFF)** system. It allows for toll collection without requiring vehicles to stop or slow down at toll booths.

2. TECHNOLOGY USED

The system primarily operates on two state-of-the-art technologies:

1. **Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR):** High-speed cameras automatically identify and record the vehicle's license plate.
2. **FASTag:** Utilizes Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology for seamless electronic fund transfer.

3. KEY BENEFITS

- **Time Savings:** Elimination of physical barriers reduces travel time significantly as vehicles no longer need to queue.
- **Fuel Efficiency & Environment:** By removing traffic congestion at toll plazas, fuel consumption is reduced, leading to lower vehicular emissions.
- **Ease of Doing Business:** Faster movement of goods and logistics helps in reducing overall supply chain costs.
- **Transparency:** A fully digital process minimizes human intervention, ensuring higher transparency in toll operations.

EXAM POINTS (KEY FACTS FOR ASPIRANTS):

1. **What is MLFF?** A method of toll collection where fees are deducted while vehicles move at highway speeds without stopping.
2. **Where is the first MLFF plaza located?** Chorayasi Toll Plaza, Gujarat.
3. **Which National Highway is it on?** NH-48 (Surat-Bharuch section).
4. **What does ANPR stand for?** Automatic Number Plate Recognition.

ANALYSIS

This system marks a significant milestone in upgrading India's road infrastructure to global standards. It is a critical component of the '**Digital India**' initiative and the ongoing modernization of the National Highway network.

57TH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL OF INDIA (IFFI) - KEY HIGHLIGHTS

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has made a significant appointment regarding the 57th IFFI celebrations.

1. APPOINTMENT OF FESTIVAL DIRECTOR

- **Who:** Renowned filmmaker **Shri Ashutosh Gowariker**.
- **Position:** Festival Director for the 57th International Film Festival of India (IFFI).
- **Background:** He previously served as the Jury President for International Cinema in 2024.

2. ABOUT IFFI

- **Establishment:** Started in **1952**.
- **Venue:** **Goa** (Permanent venue).
- **Significance:** It is one of the oldest and most prestigious film festivals in Asia.
- **Management:** Jointly organized by the **National Film Development Corporation (NFDC)** under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the **Entertainment Society of Goa (ESG)**, Government of Goa.

3. KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 57TH EDITION

- **Schedule:** To be held in **November 2026**.
- **Major Programs:** International competitions, masterclasses, tributes, and the **WAVES Film Bazaar** (a platform for creative collaborations and partnerships in cinema).

KEY POINTS FOR COMPETITIVE EXAMS:

1. **Who is the Director of the 57th IFFI?** Ashutosh Gowariker.
2. **When was IFFI established?** 1952.
3. **Where is the permanent venue of IFFI?** Goa.
4. **Which organizations conduct it?** NFDC and ESG.
5. **When and where was it held for the first time?** 1952 (In Mumbai; later moved permanently to Goa in 2004).

OPERATION WHITE STRIKE - KEY HIGHLIGHTS

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), under the supervision of the Ministry of Home Affairs, has dismantled a massive drug network in the Mumbai region.

1. OPERATION DETAILS

- **Operation Name:** Operation WHITE STRIKE.
- **Executing Agency:** Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB).
- **Contraband Seized:** Approximately **349 kg** of high-grade Cocaine.
- **Estimated Value:** Nearly **₹1,745 crore** in the international illicit market.
- **Location:** Navi Mumbai (Kalamboli) and Thane (Bhiwandi) corridor.

2. STRATEGIC APPROACH (BOTTOM-TO-TOP)

- This operation serves as a textbook example of the '**Bottom-to-Top**' approach.
- The agency successfully traced back a smaller drug consignment to uncover and net an entire massive international narcotics network.

3. KEY TECHNICAL ASPECTS

- **Concealment Method:** The cocaine was concealed within a machine cavity imported into India. Each packet was meticulously packed in nine layers of polythene and black grease to evade detection.
- **Significance:** On average, India seizes about 200–300 kg of cocaine annually. Seizing 349 kg in a single operation is considered a monumental success.
- **Government Policy:** This action reflects the Central Government's '**Zero Tolerance Policy**' against narcotics trafficking under the leadership of the Union Home Minister.

QUICK BITS FOR COMPETITIVE EXAMS:

1. **What is Operation WHITE STRIKE related to?** Dismantling a major transnational cocaine trafficking syndicate.
2. **Full form of NCB:** Narcotics Control Bureau.
3. **Where was the ₹1,745 crore cocaine consignment seized?** Mumbai Region (specifically Kalamboli and Bhiwandi).
4. **Which strategic method was used by the agency?** Bottom-to-Top approach.

5TH INDIA-TANZANIA JOINT TRADE COMMITTEE (JTC) MEETING

The meeting was organized to strengthen bilateral economic ties between India and Tanzania.

1. MEETING DETAILS

- **When:** April 29–30, 2026.
- **Venue:** Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- **Co-Chairs:** Shri Rajesh Agrawal (Commerce Secretary, India) and Amb. Dr. Samwel William Shelukindo (Permanent Secretary, Tanzania).

2. BILATERAL TRADE STATISTICS

- **Trade Value:** Bilateral trade reached **USD 9.02 billion** in the 2025–26 financial year (up from USD 8.64 billion the previous year).

- **Growth:** India-Tanzania trade has shown consistent growth, successfully crossing the **USD 9 billion** milestone.

3. KEY DISCUSSION POINTS (EXAM FOCUS)

- **Local Currency Settlement:** Discussions were held on promoting trade settlements in **local currencies** to facilitate easier transactions.
- **IIT Madras Zanzibar:** Highlighted the importance of this campus as a growing regional hub for Science and Technology education in Africa.
- **Digital Infrastructure:** Collaboration on '**India Stack**', DigiLocker, and real-time payment systems (similar to UPI).
- **Water Projects:** India has extended a **Line of Credit (LoC) of USD 1.1 billion** for water infrastructure projects in Tanzania.
- **Health & AYUSH:** Joint research on diseases like Malaria, TB, and HIV/AIDS, alongside cooperation in Oncology (cancer treatment) and Telemedicine.

4. OTHER AREAS OF COOPERATION

- **Shipbuilding:** Utilizing Indian expertise for shipyard development and port infrastructure in Tanzania.
- **Agriculture:** Focus on trade in pulses (especially **Pigeon Peas**) and the transfer of agricultural technology.
- **Energy Sector:** Emphasized the need for a comprehensive MoU covering natural gas, biofuels, and renewable energy.
- **Railways:** Indian support for the supply of locomotives, rolling stock, and modernization of railway infrastructure.

QUICK BITS FOR COMPETITIVE EXAMS:

1. **Where was the recent 5th JTC meeting held?** Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
2. **What milestone did India-Tanzania bilateral trade cross?** USD 9 Billion.
3. **Where is the first-ever IIT campus in Africa located?** Zanzibar, Tanzania (IIT Madras campus).
4. **How much Line of Credit (LoC) did India provide for Tanzanian water projects?** USD 1.1 Billion.
5. **Where is the next (6th) JTC session scheduled to be held?** New Delhi, India.