



For Indigenous peoples,  
for nature,  
for all humanity

# **CRUSHED**

How India plans to sacrifice one of the world's most isolated tribes to create "the new Hong Kong"



**“Don’t come into our forests and cut them down. This is where we collect food for our children and ourselves. We don’t want outsiders in our forests.”**

**Shompen woman**, when asked about her feelings of outsiders coming to chop down trees, in the context of the Great Nicobar project.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For security reasons we have anonymized this quote and its source.

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Cover image: Shompen band traversing a river on Great Nicobar Island  
© Anthropological Survey of India

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## **THIS REPORT:**

This report, compiled by Survival International for the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), relevant United Nations Special Rapporteurs and other relevant UN officials, documents the situation facing the Indigenous Shompen people of Great Nicobar Island, India, whose existence is threatened by a huge industrial project planned by the Indian government, which aims to transform the Shompen's small island into the "Hong Kong of India." Survival is extremely concerned about the fate of the Shompen. This report details how the project risks causing the genocide of the Shompen, and outlines the urgent need for the cancellation of the project to ensure their survival.

Established in 1969, Survival International is a global movement for the rights of Indigenous and Tribal peoples. Survival has Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at the United Nations.



Elderly Shompen woman collecting chillies from her forest garden in a coconut shell. © Survival International

## WHO ARE THE SHOMPEN?:

Numbering only around 300 people, and recognized by the Indian government as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), the Shompen are an Indigenous tribe living only on Great Nicobar Island, the southernmost of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. According to some estimates, their ancestors arrived on Great Nicobar over 10,000 years ago.<sup>2</sup> Under the guardianship of the Shompen, and their Indigenous Nicobarese neighbours, Great Nicobar is a mega-biodiverse island, home to over 50 endemic species. Around 95% of Great Nicobar is covered in tropical rainforest.<sup>3</sup>

As hunter gatherers, the Shompen live in small family bands and, while they are nomadic, they have some semi-permanent communities, four of which are inside or extremely close to the proposed project area. (See the example of Kirasis below). Most Shompen rely entirely on what nature directly provides for them and their staple food is the pandanus fruit which grows predominantly in the lowlands. The Shompen identify their clans with the various rivers (known as *ruhi* in the Shompen language) which criss-cross the rainforest. Their migrations, marriages and subsistence all depend on these *ruhi*, and the integrity of the island's river system is essential to their survival.<sup>4</sup>

### Lack of contact and vulnerability to disease

Around two thirds of the Shompen reject contact with outsiders, something they have in common with their distant neighbours the Sentinelese.<sup>5</sup> Some Shompen groups have a degree of contact with outsiders, but generally only very minimally. This does not mean the Shompen are unaware of other ways of life but, for the most part, they choose to be left alone. The Shompen have never been asked for their Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), and because most are uncontacted, an FPIC process would be impossible<sup>6</sup>. However, one Shompen woman, when asked about her feelings of outsiders coming to chop down trees (in the context of the Great Nicobar project) stated, "Don't come into our forests and cut them down. This is where we collect food for our children and ourselves. We don't want outsiders in our forests."<sup>7</sup> Another Shompen man stated, "Do not come near our hills."<sup>8</sup> As with other uncontacted peoples (also known as "Indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation") around the world, the Shompen are extremely vulnerable to diseases to which they have no immunity. Uncontacted peoples typically experience devastating population declines after experiencing contact, including those in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.<sup>9</sup>

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2 See [McNaughtan, 2013](#).

3 See [Scientific American, 2024](#).

4 See [Andaman and Nicobar Collective, 2020](#).

5 See [Survival International, Sentinelese](#).

6 See [United Nations Human Rights Council, 2009](#).

7 For security reasons we have anonymized this quote and its source.

8 See [Andaman and Nicobar Collective, 2020](#).

9 See [Stock and Migliano, 2006](#).

## HOW ARE THE SHOMPEN THREATENED BY THE GREAT NICOBAR PROJECT?:

### Environmental destruction

The Great Nicobar project is set to utterly transform the Shompen's small island and the effects will be catastrophic. The authorities plan to create a mega-port; an international airport; a liquefied natural gas plant; a defense base; an industrial park and tourism zones, spread over more than 244 square km of land, including 130 square km of rainforest.<sup>10</sup> The project will take up around a third of the island, half of it within the Shompen and Nicobarese's official Tribal Reserve,<sup>11</sup> key parts of which have already been stripped of their protection in violation of India's own laws. For the Nicobarese, this means they are unable to return to their ancestral villages, destroyed during the 2004 tsunami.<sup>12</sup>

Millions of trees are set to be cut down and a permanent city, with a population of up to the size of Las Vegas, is to be built in their place, increasing the current population of the island by an incredible 8,000%. This influx of settlers will inevitably lead to significant further encroachment into the Shompen's rainforest, beyond the initial project area. The project's planned "blasting, earth movement and excavation,"<sup>13</sup> along with associated emissions and pollution, will cause further upheaval to the ecosystem and the Shompen's hunting and foraging grounds will be devastated. Similarly, through restricting the mouth of the Galathea River by 90%, the mega-port will have serious effects on the ecosystem upstream, likely leading to a huge backlog of silt in the floodplains to the north and destroying the Shompen's staple pandanus trees. Such effects will also cause the Shompen nearest to the project to move into other territories, likely resulting in the collapse of the *ruhi* system. To quote genocide scholar Dr. Mark Levene's testimony on the Shompen, "The result will be psychic collapse, leading to lingering death."<sup>14</sup>

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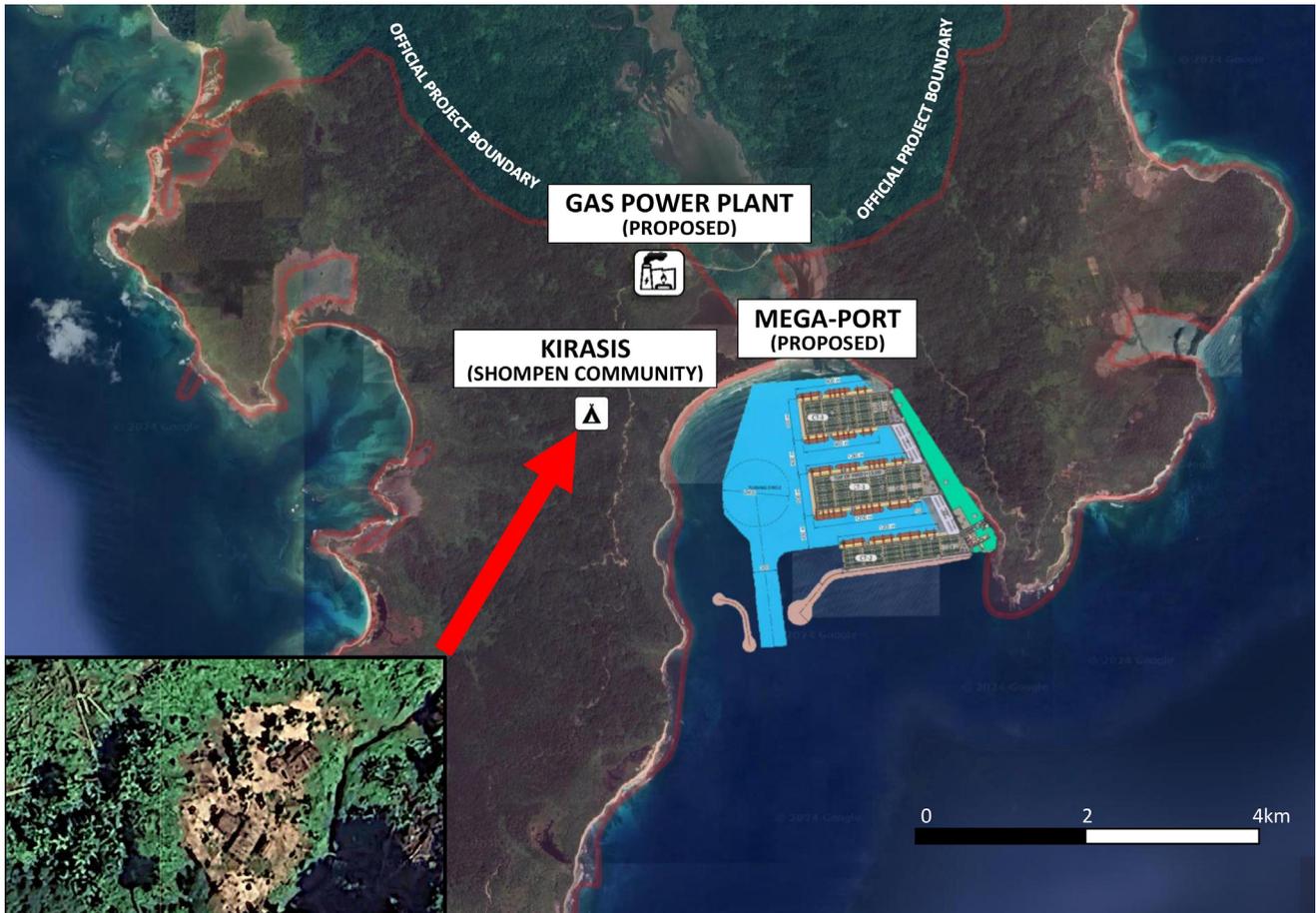
10 See [Environmental Impact Assessment for the Great Nicobar project, 2022](#).

11 In addition to this, note that a significant part of the island near the project area, is in fact Shompen territory which has yet to be added to the official Tribal Reserve, despite experts' testimony. See [Countercurrents, 2024](#).

12 See [The Diplomat, 2024](#).

13 See [Environmental Impact Assessment for the Great Nicobar project, 2022](#).

14 See [Mark Levene, expert witness testimony on the threat of genocide towards the Shompen, posed by the Great Nicobar project, 2024](#).



Satellite map showing Kirasis, a Shompen community within the southernmost part of the project area; and its proximity to the proposed mega-port and gas power plant. © Survival International

Similarly, in their public statement objecting to the project, a coalition of expert Indian anthropologists describe how “Such catastrophic transmutation of the existing landscape will render the natural resources of the entire island unusable and tip them beyond recovery...If no intervention is made, the Shompens will be gradually pushed towards the same fate as that of the Andamanese and the Onges in Andaman.”<sup>15</sup> (These neighbouring Indigenous peoples lost 99% and 85% of their populations respectively from disease, environmental destruction and conflict, following contact with British colonial officials and Indian settlers).<sup>16</sup> The Indian government’s own Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) from 2022 notes: “Any disturbance or alteration in the natural environment ... where they [the Shompen] live, may cause serious threat to their existence”.<sup>17</sup> Despite this, the government continues to push ahead with the project.

15 See [Public Hearing for Environmental Clearance for “Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island in Andaman and Nicobar Islands” 2022. \[Now deleted from government website\].](#)

16 See Survival International, [Onges](#) and [Great Andamanese](#).

17 See [Environmental Impact Assessment for the Great Nicobar project, 2022](#).

**“The loss will be especially huge and traumatic for them...Whatever we call development in the outside world is not of interest to them. They have a traditional life of their own... The Shompen people do not have the knowledge or the means to survive in an industrial world.”**

**Anstice Justin**, Indigenous Nicobarese Anthropologist and Former Deputy Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, in an interview about the Shompen.<sup>18</sup>



Indian government visualisation of the Great Nicobar mega-port, just one element of the massive industrial project planned for Great Nicobar Island. © Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

## Disease

Among uncontacted peoples, even a chance meeting with an outsider runs the risk of introducing deadly diseases to which they have little to no immunity and, as Dr. Levene states, the survival of Shompen society is “predicated on its isolation from outsiders.”<sup>19</sup> As well as causing unprecedented social and environmental devastation for the Shompen, the massive population explosion that the Indian government is planning for Great Nicobar will drastically increase exposure to outside diseases, by bringing in up to 650,000 permanent settlers.<sup>20</sup>

Even now, the Shompen are already at risk of contracting deadly diseases. There are reports that up to 100 Shompen died during an epidemic in the 1980s, following the effects of contact with outsiders.<sup>21</sup> One 1990 Indian government report describes how, “The Shompen bands which have had frequent contact with outsiders...have either been totally annihilated or the population of the band has dwindled.” Even the project’s EIA states “Once infections spread amongst the tribal [Shompen], the whole community may face extinction.” As such, the Great Nicobar project will dramatically increase the already high threat of a deadly disease outbreak among the Shompen, and risk causing the entire population to be wiped out.

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19 See [Mark Levene, expert witness testimony on the threat of genocide towards the Shompen, posed by the Great Nicobar project, 2024.](#)

20 See [Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island at Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Pre - Feasibility Report, March 2021.](#)

21 See S. N. H. Rizvi, *The Shompen: A Vanishing Tribe of the Great Nicobar Island*, 1990.

**“In my opinion, such major infrastructure projects aren’t correct [in Great Nicobar Island]...The Shompen may be few in number but their knowledge of the forests in their islands is supreme. They are happy, joyous. They have their own understanding of the universe. Let them remain the way they are. If we enter into their abode, their end will be much faster, such as from disease.”**

**Triloknath Pandit**, Former Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, in an interview about the Shompen.<sup>22</sup>



A group of young Shompen men next to their house on Great Nicobar Island. © Survival International

### Human safaris and exploitation

Moving hundreds of thousands of permanent settlers to Great Nicobar greatly increases the likelihood of the Shompen being exploited by outsiders, even more so with the government planning to expressly market the area for tourism; with preparations being made for around a million tourists and other visitors annually.<sup>23</sup> Already the Shompen are subjected to exploitation and face severe racism, being regularly labelled as “primitive” by the media and even the government.<sup>24</sup>

Through encouraging hundreds of thousands of tourists onto the island and building more roads and associated tourist infrastructure, there is also a considerable risk of “human safaris” taking place among the Shompen as has happened for years to the Ang (formerly known as Jarawa) people of the neighbouring Andaman Islands. Such exploitation is likely to increase the likelihood of epidemics, accidents, dependency of the Shompen on outsiders, and their exposure to alcoholism, sexual harassment and other traumatic experiences. All of these threats have been seen among other Indigenous peoples of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands who have had more sustained contact with outsiders.<sup>25</sup>

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23 See [Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island at Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Pre - Feasibility Report, March 2021.](#)

24 See [Environmental Impact Assessment for the Great Nicobar project, 2022.](#)

25 See [Survival International’s report to CERD on the rights of the Ang \(Jarawa\), 2006.](#)

## The threat of genocide

The above information provides evidence and details of how and why the Great Nicobar project will likely lead to the annihilation of the Shompen. In his testimony on the threats to the Shompen, genocide expert Dr. Mark Levene states that even though the Indian government, which has ratified the Genocide Convention, has not openly expressed an intention to exterminate the Shompen, “there can be no mitigating plea of innocence when the protagonists know in advance what the outcome will be.”<sup>26</sup> As has been noted above, the government’s own EIA expressly describes this threat of extermination.

There is increasing international concern over the impending genocide of the Shompen. In February 2024, 39 international genocide experts from 13 countries wrote to the Indian President describing the mega-project as a “death sentence for the Shompen, tantamount to the international crime of genocide.”<sup>27</sup> They called for the scheme to be immediately abandoned. Similarly, in April 2024, 12 leading Indian anthropologists and other experts wrote an open letter calling for the project to be scrapped. They described how the government’s mitigation plans of “Geo fencing cum surveillance towers” are wholly unsuitable and wrote, “If this project is not scrapped, the A&N Administration and the Government of India will be knowingly subjecting the indigenous communities of the Great Nicobar Island to irreversible damage, which will in due course lead to their extinction.”<sup>28</sup>

**“The consequence of the development of Great Nicobar Island will lead to the inevitable destruction of these people [the Shompen]... One must remember that genocide doesn’t necessarily mean just the physical destruction person by person, it can be a case of creating conditions for the breakdown by which a group’s existence becomes impossible to continue.”**

**Dr. Mark Levene**, genocide expert and Emeritus Fellow at the University of Southampton, in an interview about the Shompen.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See [Mark Levene, expert witness testimony on the threat of genocide towards the Shompen, posed by the Great Nicobar project, 2024.](#)

<sup>27</sup> See [Genocide experts call on India’s government to scrap the Great Nicobar mega-project.](#)

<sup>28</sup> See [Counter Currents, 2024.](#)

<sup>29</sup> See [Channel 4 News, 2024.](#)



Shompen man in the Great Nicobar rainforest. © Andaman and Nicobar Collective.

## HOW THIS VIOLATES INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL LAWS:

Neither the Shompen, nor the Nicobarese have given their Free, Prior and Informed Consent for the project, and therefore this project is in violation of ILO Convention 169, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.<sup>30</sup> Such an inherently dangerous project is also in clear violation of the Shompen's right to life,<sup>31</sup> their right to health<sup>32</sup> and their right to self-determination,<sup>33</sup> and risks wiping them out.

Because of the failure to seek prior consultation with the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, the project is also in violation of Article 338A(9) of the Constitution of India. Without the consent and rights of the Shompen and Nicobarese being recognized, it also violates the 2006 Forest Rights Act. Finally, it violates the 2015 Shompen Policy, which states that the welfare and integrity of the Shompen must be prioritized in any large-scale development on the island.<sup>34</sup>

30 See [ILO, 1989](#), [UNDRIP, 2007](#) and [ICERD, 1969](#). In General Recommendation XXIII the CERD states that “no decisions directly relating to their [Indigenous peoples’] rights and interests are taken without their informed consent.”

31 See [Article 6 of the ICCPR, 1966](#). Forced contact (which this project will inevitably lead to) has been recognised by the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights \(‘IACHR’\)](#) and the [UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) as a grave risk for uncontacted peoples’ lives.

32 See [Article 12 of the ICESCR, 1966](#).

33 See [Article 1 of the ICESCR, 1966](#) and [Article 1 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#).

34 See [Constitution of India](#), [Forest Rights Act, 2006](#) and [Policy on Shompen Tribe of Great Nicobar Island, 2015](#).

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SOLUTIONS NEEDED:**

As an Indigenous tribe living only on Great Nicobar Island, the majority of whom are uncontacted, the Shompen are among the most vulnerable people in the world. The Indian government's plans for the enormous and unprecedented transformation of the island, through the Great Nicobar project, will be nothing short of catastrophic for the Shompen, not only due to the environmental upheaval, but through mass exposure to deadly diseases and wider exploitation. Indian authorities were right to arrest the American tourist who illegally landed on North Sentinel Island, home to the uncontacted Sentinelese tribe.<sup>35</sup> But they must act just as swiftly to stop the overwhelming threat they themselves pose to the Shompen by imposing this devastating project on their island.

The evidence and testimonies provided by national and international experts are very clear. No amount of planned mitigation will be able to prevent a cataclysmic situation for the Shompen. The only way for them to survive is for the Great Nicobar mega-project to be urgently cancelled. Survival is therefore submitting this report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the relevant UN Special Rapporteurs and other UN experts, to call for their urgent attention and immediate action.

### **The Government of India must:**

- Abandon all current and future plans for the Great Nicobar project.
- Renotify the territory belonging to the Shompen and Nicobarese in the designated Tribal Reserve, which has been wrongly denotified for the project.
- Expand the current Tribal Reserve so that it accurately reflects the Shompen's territory.
- Enable the Nicobarese to return to their pre-tsunami villages.

### **The relevant authorities at the United Nations<sup>36</sup> should:**

- Call on the government of India to immediately abandon all current and future plans for the Great Nicobar project, in line with international law.
- Raise the highest concern about this project at all relevant levels of the UN.

### **Companies and financial bodies interested in the Great Nicobar project must:**

- Withdraw all expressions of interest and tenders to develop, run or otherwise participate in this project.
- Refuse to provide finance or insurance for, or invest in any way, in this plan.

Survival urges all relevant parties to take immediate action to stop the Great Nicobar project, as the only means to ensure the survival of the Shompen people.

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<sup>35</sup> See [Survival International, 2025](#).

<sup>36</sup> Including but not limited to: the High Commissioner for Human Rights, CERD, the Special Rapporteurs on the rights of Indigenous peoples, on the human right to a healthy environment, on the right to food, on the right to health, on the freedom of religion or belief and in the field of cultural rights and the Special Advisor on the prevention of genocide.

**“They [the Shompen] and other tribes are the true heirs of this land. They have lived here for millennia. Their rights must be respected.”**

**Anstice Justin**, Indigenous Nicobarese Anthropologist and Former Deputy Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, in an interview about the Shompen.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See [Hindustan Times, 2025](#).