

RELAXATION OF RULES TO AID RED-FLAGGED ANDAMANS TOURISM PROJECT

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Factors responsible for location of Tertiary sector Industries incl. Tourism in world & India and related issues

The Environment Ministry has amended laws that now allow a proposed tourism project in the Aves island, of the Andaman and Nicobar island (A&N) territory, to come up.

The project was the only one of three high-profile proposed tourism projects that did not get a clearance from an expert committee on coastal clearance in February. This was because the proposed Aves island project was located 20 m away from the High Tide line (HTL) and existing rules required such projects to be at least 50 m away.

An official said that while the new rules did ease the way for the Aves island project, it was also done to broadly align the changes in coastal zone regulations in the country's mainland States with the island regions. "What is important is that there is no other industrial development in the A&N and tourism is a major thrust area that we have to consider. However, there continue to be stringent provisions on how infrastructure and development projects can be executed," an official, who did not want to be identified, told *The Hindu*. These were "high end" eco tourism projects and had to strictly adhere to the island management plan, the official added.

In December, the government had issued a coastal regulation zone notification that largely allows tourism and development projects located near coasts in mainland States to come up closer to the sea. It also issued an Island Zone Protection Notification in January 2019 to allow similar relaxations in the A&N Islands.

In January, an expert committee of the Union Environment Ministry "deferred" clearance to a 100 crore proposal by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Limited to develop an island resort, as well as put up "premium tents" and "tree houses," on the grounds that it did not account for the biodiversity of the islands' coast.

After site visits, the committee in February recommended two of them— at Lalaji Bay on Long Island and at Smith Island — for island protection zone clearance, with caveats. However, the Aves Island project was still red-flagged primarily because of the 50 m clause. In light of the March 8th notification, the committee is likely to re-look the project.

The Centre has been working on a long-term plan to make several of the A&N islands more conducive to tourism. Last year, the Home Ministry revived an Island Development Agency that would coordinate infrastructure projects to aid tourism in the A&N islands as well as Lakshadweep.

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