## GREAT NICOBAR

- Great Nicobar is the **southernmost island of the Nicobar Islands Archipelago**. It covers 103 870 hectares of unique and threatened tropical evergreen forest ecosystems. It is home to a very rich ecosystem, including species of angiosperms, ferns, gymnosperms, bryophytes, among others. In terms of fauna, there are over 1800 species, some of which are endemic to this area.
- The Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve harbours a wide spectrum of ecosystems comprising **tropical wet evergreen forests**, mountain ranges reaching a height of 642 m (Mt. Thullier) above sea level, and coastal plains. The region is noted for its rich biodiversity. It houses 650 species of angiosperms, ferns, gymnosperms, bryophytes and lichens among others. The tract is rich in plant diversity and fosters a number of rare and endemic species, including Cyathea albosetacea (tree fern) and Phalaenopsis speciosa (orchid).
- A total of 14 species of mammals, 71 species of birds, 26 species of reptiles, 10 species of amphibians and 113 species of fish have been reported. The region also harbours a large number of endemic and endangered species of fauna. Of these, the well-known **Crab-eating Macaque, Nicobar Tree Shrew, Dugong, Nicobar Megapode, Serpent Eagle, salt water crocodile, marine turtles** and **Reticulated Python** are endemic and/or endangered.
- The **Mongoloid Shompen Tribe**, about 200 in number, live in the forests of the biosphere reserve particularly along the rivers and streams. They are hunters and food gatherers, dependent on forest and marine resources for sustenance. Another Mongoloid Tribe, **Nicobarese,** about 300 in number, used to live in settlements along the west coast. After the tsunami in 2004, which devastated their settlement on the western coast, they were relocated to Afra Bay in the North Coast and Campbell Bay. They survive on fish caught from the sea. The settlers and mainlanders, which number over 8 000, live along the southeast coast of the island, practising agriculture, horticulture and fishing.
- The Shompens move between the Core and Buffer Zones, while the settlers and Nicobarese live in settlements spread along the coast in the Transition zone.

## HIMALAYAN CATCHMENT

- The Himalayas are drained by 19 major rivers, of which the Indus and the Brahmaputra are the largest, each having catchment basins in the mountains of about 100,000 square miles (260,000 square km) in extent.
- Five of the 19 rivers, with a total catchment area of about 51,000 square miles (132,000 square km), belong to the **Indus system—the Jhelum, the Chenab, the Ravi, the Beas, and the Sutlej**—and collectively define the vast region divided between Punjab state in India and Punjab province in Pakistan. Of the remaining rivers**, nine belong to the Ganges system**—the Ganges, Yamuna, Ramganga, Kali (Kali Gandak), Karnali, Rapti, Gandak, Baghmati, and Kosi rivers—draining roughly 84,000 square miles (218,000 square km) in the mountains, and **three belong** to the Brahmaputra system—the Tista, the Raidak, and the Manas—draining another 71,000 square miles (184,000 square km) in the Himalayas.
- The major Himalayan rivers rise north of the mountain ranges and flow through deep gorges that generally reflect some geologic structural control, such as a **fault line**.
- The rivers of the **Indus system** as a rule follow **northwesterly courses**, whereas those of the **Ganges-Brahmaputra systems generally take easterly courses** while flowing through the mountain region.
- To the north of India, the **Karakoram Range, with the Hindu Kush** range on the west and the **Ladakh Range on the east, forms the great water divide**, shutting off the Indus system from the rivers of Central Asia. The counterpart of that divide on the east is formed by the Kailas Range and its eastward continuation, the **Nyainqêntanglha (Nyenchen Tangla) Mountains**, which prevent the Brahmaputra from draining the area to the north. South of that divide, the Brahmaputra flows to the east for about 900 miles (1,450 km) before cutting across the Great Himalaya Range in a deep transverse gorge, although many of its Tibetan tributaries flow in an opposite direction, as the Brahmaputra may once have done.
- The Great Himalayas, which normally would form the main water divide throughout their entire length, function as such only in limited areas. That situation exists because the major Himalayan rivers, such as the Indus, the Brahmaputra, the Sutlej, and at least two headwaters of the Ganges—the Alaknanda and the Bhagirathi—are probably older than the mountains they traverse.