

Development of an Island on the Bay of Bengal Coast

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The River Ganges in India rises from the Himalayan glacier Gongotri and flows through eastern India and partly through Bangladesh. She assumes the name river Hooghly in the downstream up to Sagar Island where the river opens into the Bay of Bengal. The banks of entire river Ganges are densely populated dotted with industries, towns and fertile agricultural land in between. The lower delta receives sediments from upstream. Sagar island dates back to 3000 BC. There are many historical references. It has faced many natural disasters with loss of life. The lower coastal deltaic region is known as the Sunderbans biosphere with mangrove forests, flora and fauna with unique biodiversity. Sagar Island is a large island with an area of around 300 sq km spread over 43 villages and a population of over 160,000, situated 110 km south of Kolkata. A regular ferry service links the Island with the mainland, which is 6 km. away across Muriganga River. Farming and fishing are the main occupation of the Island people. It attracts lakhs of devotees from all over India each year, especially during the Gangasagar Mela. A temporary city is built. They come for a holy dip on Makar Sankranti (last day of the Bengali Month) on the 14 January and offer their obligations at the Kapilmuni Temple, overseeing the Bay of Bengal. Gangasagar Mela, the largest fair in West Bengal. This is an occasion of Great National Integration. This activity involves almost all the Government departments, local bodies, scores of non-government voluntary organizations for a period over a fortnight. It is observed that the visit to Sagar Island with a view to spending week ends getting popularity day by day. The State Government is also very much keen to utilize this opportunity to identify and develop this Island as an attractive tourist area in the future.

Environmental Plan: Several environmental programmes have been taken up like embankment, prevention of soil erosion, conservation of historic areas, afforestation, waste disposal scheme etc. However, it was found that both transit/temporary plan and a long-range development plan are to be prepared. While the temporary plan focuses on transit camps, sanitation and facilities for pilgrims, the long range plan covers land use, deer and marine parks, plantations, helipad, plan for agriculture, fishing, tourism etc. Solar energy and wind power have been introduced. Under the coastal regulations of Govt. of India guidelines have been provided. There are now proposals for development of other islands with improved water transportation system. New islands are coming up and dredging at the mouth of rivers in the bay is difficult and expensive. It requires study of the ecosystem.