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We do believe that carefully considered and monitored ecotourism can help the Andaman's economy. The archipelago constitutes an exceedingly fragile ecosystem, as Sri Rajiv Gandhi himself noted. The Andaman Islands have dangerously limited supplies of water; on this count alone, they cannot afford luxury resorts with swimming pools, hot tubs and golf courses. (In Phuket, the government routinely appeals to rice farmers to forego a second crop to release water for golf courses.) Before inviting tourists on anything like the scale proposed—Phuket gets four million a year—the administration should first solve the acute problems that local residents have to face in this respect, and demonstrate the efficacy of various water management and harvesting techniques.

Nor can the Andamans currently deal with an explosion in AIDS, which will undoubtedly ensue if Phuket's particular brand of international tourists have easy access to the Andamans. Perhaps no other destination in the world offers, as does Phuket, such attractions as "Uncle Charlie's Boys for Men," specifically designed for pedophiles. Concerns emanate not only from the free flow of tourists from Thailand, but also from the movement of its pleasure boats and imports. Yachts and other watercraft from Phuket are involved in many illegal activities in the Andaman waters. And imports of foods and other materials are of concern if they harm the income of local farmers, already reeling from the tsunami.

The Andamans need ecosensitive tourists, who are prepared to pay simply for the privilege of visiting a pristine and unique environment. The tourism model needs to be such that the Andamans' primary tourism asset—the sheer beauty of the place—is maintained, and tourists keep coming back. Furthermore, the model of tourism applied in the islands will need to demonstrate long-term gains for local inhabitants rather than to foreign investors. A pilot project now underway in the Sunderbans has been cited as a possible model that yields returns to locals without harming the environment. The problem needs careful investigation and trials of pilot schemes with a view to determining the suitable models that meet the specific needs of the Andaman Islands.

In sum, the Government of India needs to be acutely aware of the many dangers posed by twinning with Phuket. We recommend the following actions:

- Ensuring that all existing environmental regulations are stringently enforced. Many lapses currently exist in enforcement with considerable illegal tourism-related construction becoming evident in recent years.
- Reviewing the Phuket agreement from the point of view of long-term dangers to the Andaman environment and people.
- Identifying and encouraging tourism schemes, that do not damage essential assets such as beaches, forests and corals, but yield long-term and sustainable gains to locals.
- Discouraging the free flow of tourists from Phuket. A high entry fee or AIDS screening could possibly be imposed.
- Keeping a stringent watch on yachts, pleasure boats and other vessels emanating from Thailand. These measures should include mandatory filing of sailing plans and surprise checks by the Navy, Police, Coast Guard and Customs.