



Leave them alone

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Leave them alone-Calls to take action against the Sentinelese for a tragic death are dangerously misguided

- The death of a young American man at the hands of the inhabitants of North Sentinel Island in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has led to dangerous lines of debate.
- Some have called for the Sentinelese to be convicted and punished and others have urged that they be integrated into modern society.
- Both these demands are misguided, and can only result in the extinction of a people.
- John Chau's killing was a tragedy but his attempt to make contact with the Sentinelese, who he seemed to know something about, was foolhardy and dangerous, not only to himself but to them.
- There is a reason why no one — whether missionary, scholar, adventurer, U.S. citizen or Indian — is allowed to venture near North Sentinel Island without permission, which is given only in the rarest of circumstances and with meticulous precautions in place to ensure that the Sentinelese are not disturbed.
- Having lived in isolation in an island in the Bay of Bengal for thousands of years, the Sentinelese have no immunity or resistance to even the commonest of infections.
- Various degrees of protection are in place for the indigenous people of A&N Islands, but it is complete in the case of the Sentinelese.
- The administration enforces "an 'eyes-on and hands-off' policy to ensure that no poachers enter the island".
- A protocol of circumnavigation of the island is in place, and the buffer maintained around the island is enforced under various laws.
- The Sentinelese are perhaps the most reclusive community in the world today.
- Chau's death is a cautionary incident — for the danger of adventurism, and for the administration to step up oversight.
- But it is also an occasion for the country to embrace its human heritage

in all its diversity, and to empathetically try to see the world from the eyes of its most vulnerable inhabitants.

