



Protect indigenous people

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Protect indigenous people-Implementation of the various provisions to protect the tribals of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has been poor

- The debates following the recent alleged killing of an American national, John Allen Chau, by the Sentinelese have put the spotlight on the vulnerability of an indigenous community that has lived for thousands of years with little contact with outsiders.
- The Sentinelese have been more fortunate than the Jarawas, though.
- The Andaman Trunk Road, among other projects, has cut into the heart of the Jarawa reserve, which has not only disturbed their ecological environment but also changed their lifestyle and dietary habits and endangered them.
- There are four ancient Negrito tribal communities in the Andaman Islands (the Great Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa and Sentinelese) and two Mongoloid tribal communities in the Nicobar Islands (the Shompen and Nicobarese).
- Except the Nicobarese, the populations of the other tribes have reduced drastically over the decades.

From Nehru to now

- Jawaharlal Nehru's Tribal Panchsheel were the guiding principles after Independence to formulate policies for the indigenous communities of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- Based on them, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation (ANPATR), 1956 was promulgated by the President.
- Despite this, there continued to be constant interactions between the tribals and settlers/ outsiders.
- A policy of non-intervention was also proposed by an expert committee on the directions of the Supreme Court.
- Similarly, a policy for protecting the Shompen tribes was released only

in 2015.

- Despite all these amendments and provisions, there continue to be numerous reports of civilian intrusion into the Jarawa tribal reserve.

International conventions

- While the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957, of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) insisted on an integrationist approach towards tribal communities, the 1989 convention insisted on a policy of non-intervention, “recognising the aspirations of these peoples to exercise control over their own institutions, ways of life and economic development.”
- India ratified the 1957 convention but has not ratified the 1989 convention.
- However, despite not signing it, India tried to tread the path of non-interference.
- Therefore it is puzzling that in August the government relaxed the restricted area permit (RAP) for 29 islands in the Andaman and Nicobar, including North Sentinel Island.
- If the government has decided to ease the restrictions in a phased manner, this could adversely affect the indigenous population in the long run.
- Considering the significance of the indigenous tribes of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the government needs to reorient its priorities towards protecting them from outside influence.

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