
[India: Road brings death for isolated tribe](#)

The Jarawa are one of four surviving tribes living in the Andamans, a cluster of islands in the Bay of Bengal, India. Two of these tribes were settled by the colonial British and Indian authorities with catastrophic consequences: one, the Great Andamanese, of whom there were 5000 in 1948, now number only 41 individuals.

Survival International has launched a campaign to ensure the survival of this recently-contacted Jarawa tribe and now circumstances appear favourable. Firstly, the High Court has temporarily halted local government plans to settle the Jarawa by force, which if enacted would prove fatal. This creates a chance to pressure the government to abandon these plans for good and instead ensure the Jarawa's right to live as they choose. Secondly, the Andaman authorities have been considering a plan to close the road which cuts through Jarawa territory for improvements. If they can be persuaded to close it permanently, it will remove one of the biggest threats to Jarawa survival.

During almost 150 years of colonisation, the Jarawa, who number 250-300, remained hostile to all outsiders, especially those entering their forests in search of timber or wild game. Since the 1970s, when the 'Andaman trunk road' was bulldozed through the heart of their territory, they have also had to contend with lorries, cars and buses travelling through their land. In 1998, some Jarawa started to come out of their forests into the Indian settlements, without their bows and arrows. From what is understood of their language it appears that pressure from poachers on the coast drove them onto the road and into the settlements.

The Andaman trunk road represents a deadly threat to the Jarawa's survival, and has brought violence and death to the Jarawa ever since it was illegally built right through their protected area. The Jarawa resisted the invasion, attacking the road-building crews and cutting down trees to block the bulldozers' paths. In retaliation, the road crews reportedly laid high-voltage cables which electrocuted an unknown number of Jarawa. A village elder said, "Nobody raised a cry about it, fearing for their lives. Since there is no official record the administration got away clean. But we know it happened."

Even now it is built, the road needs a large number of maintenance workers, who live inside the Jarawa reserve, cut down their trees for timber to heat bitumen, and hunt their game for food. And of course, the steady stream of outsiders travelling on the road carries the constant threat of introducing epidemics of deadly diseases. Already it is feared that whole families have died in the forest of unknown diseases, and a dangerous measles epidemic broke out in 1999.

For the Jarawa to have a realistic chance of survival the road must be closed. The local administration was considering closing it for two to three years anyway to build bridges and make improvements; during this time the traffic would have been routed via ferries. The fact that they could contemplate this strongly suggests that the road is not necessary at all, and in fact the use of ferries has been shown to be a far cheaper option for transport within the main islands. If the road is closed permanently, the Jarawa could live in peace on their own land.

This action (see action alert details at: <http://www.survival-international.org/jarawauab0202.htm>) must be taken soon if the Jarawa are not to meet the same fate as the other Andaman tribes, who have been wiped out by a combination of colonisation and disease. The Indian and Andamanese authorities have it in their power to prevent the same thing happening to the Jarawa – if they fail to do so it will be tantamount to genocide.