

them. The road also effectively cut off their free access to the east coast resulting in further loss of habitat and shrinkage of their area of resource gathering.

The road was actively opposed and its construction obstructed by the Jarawas from the very beginning. The Jarawas regularly raided the labour camps, drove wedges in the water pipes to obstruct the flow of water and made log barriers. On the other hand, the construction crews were protected by armed policemen and many lives on both sides were lost in skirmishes. According to a report in the local press, the construction agency used to surround the camp with live naked electric wire, a sort of improvised electric fence, which claimed many Jarawa lives.

The road led to many encroachments *en route*. Initially the workers had put up small huts near their work site. They also started growing some vegetables, keeping a few chickens, a goat or a cow and so on to feed themselves in the absence of a market nearby. Frequently, they continued to stay in these camps even after the construction was over. The Bush Police, whose duty was to prevent the non-Jarawas from entering the Reserve and the Jarawas from coming out of the Reserve turned a blind eye. The Bush Police also had more empathy towards their civilised brethren than for the Jarawas, which emboldened these encroachers. Consequently more encroachments followed. Goats, cows and buffaloes were normally freed during the day for grazing in the forest. If the cattle failed to return in the evening, the owners entered the forest in search of their animals and some times confrontations resulted.

The present day cost of laying the road (assuming it to be a single lane one) from Port Blair to Mayabunder (approximately 250 km) will work out to Rs. 675 million @ Rs. 270 thousand/km. The annual cost of routine maintenance alone exceeds Rs. 150 million and at least Rs. 200 million when special works are involved. This annual cost of maintenance is actually for only 20% of the total length of the road, as every year 20% of the length is taken up for repairs. Such repair works consume 38 metric tons of bitumen for every kilometre of the road. To heat 38 tons of bitumen, 88 cords of firewood (approximately 249.04 cubic metre) is used. The consumption of firewood for the 50 kilometre of stretch that is repaired every year, therefore, works out to 12,452 cubic metre. Firewood is very much in short supply in the Andamans, the quantum of legal extraction of commercial timber in the whole of Andamans being 80,000 cubic metre only. The road appears to be posing a severe threat to the forest.

Since the road passes through virgin forests adjoining the tribal reserve without any foresters/guards, where the firewood comes from is anyone's guess. Besides firewood, the road also consumes substantial quantities of stone/metal chips and sand/quarry dust. Moreover, frequent landslides and caving in of the road surface at curves on the road require large quantities of boulders and rocks to stabilize the road surface. The road passes along the eastern part of the Cholunga Range and further north in South Andaman Island beyond Mount Cadell, the undulating ranges of hills continue, passing across streams and creeks until it reaches the Middle Strait. The entire stretch of the road beyond the check post at Jirkatang number 6 is mountainous, steep and prone to landslides, given the slope, nature of the soil and the large amount of rainfall. Given the fact that quarry products are in short supply and quarrying is recognized to be hazardous for the island ecosystem, the road appears to be extracting a high environmental cost.

In 1996, a total of 3,695 buses and 5,802 other vehicles crossed the Jirkatang check post either way. By applying the IRC norms for calculation of volume of traffic, we find that the road was used by only 515 persons daily or a total of 1,87,895 in the entire year. Even if we assume a 50% increase in traffic, the number of users per day now would be only 773 per day or 2,82,145 in one year. If the cost of repairing the road is divided by the number of users, we get a sum of Rs. 708.85 per user. In other words Rs. 708.85 of taxpayers' money goes to enable a passenger to travel from Port Blair to Rangat for a price of Rs. 45.00, as charged by the government buses.

The Andaman Trunk Road was constructed in phases. Beginning in the early 1970s the work was complete and the road became fully operational in 1989. The construction work continued so long due to:

1. High cost of construction
2. Difficulty posed by the thick virgin rain forest and undulating terrain.
3. The hostile resistance offered to the construction of the road by the Jarawas.
4. Periodic reviews by committees to examine the repercussions of constructing the road through the Jarawa territory.

Though it is common knowledge that the road passes through the Jarawa territory, some facts will help illustrate why the Jarawas tried very hard to protect