

Further argument for control of Tourism and Jarawa on ATR
June 15th 2013

Introduction

In spirit the use of the ATR by the islanders to move along the Northern and Southern limits of the Islands, has practical and legitimate grounds given the present conditions that have evolved over a period of time. In fact the 'settlers' are no more the real problem factor as their interaction with the Jarawas is somewhat manageable. However the propensity of tourists to sneak an opportunity to gawk at the Jarawas in the name of seeing the 'mud caves' is the most deplorable and pressing issue at hand. No government committed to protecting these people can endorse this phenomenon. It must be also made clear that nowhere in the report or in the research work undertaken recently with the Jarawas, the expert committee and the AAJVS has the idea of tourist intrusion been supported or legitimized. My view on the matter is that we need to gradually think of other tourist options in the area in place of the mud volcanoes of Baratang. To be honest, it is not such a spectacularly interesting natural phenomenon that the average tourist is dying to see. But if indeed the government wants to organize tours of mud volcanoes, I am told there are better ones in North Andamans that could be explored. Tour operators and other interests have been citing economic reasons, it maybe useful to prepare a research note to assess real impacts. The economic costs of tour operators have to be assessed in relation to the social and cultural costs on the lives of the Jarawas.

The social and cultural costs tourism has had on the Jarawas is a fact that is hard to refute. If we begin from this premise we need to figure out ways in which the administration can address some of the dangers of the reopening of the ATR to tourist traffic. The administration in its wisdom has assured us that various systems will be put in place to monitor tourist traffic so that Jarawas do not become victims of unethical tourist interest.

Let us be clear at this stage that the measures taken to ensure the regulation of the Buffer Zone and of settler interaction with the Jarawas cannot serve the purposes of the regulation of the ATR too. Further more tourists can be subjected to regulation but it is impractical and philosophical wrong to expect the Jarawas to not move at the times' when tourists use the road 'going' through their area. This would be a fundamental breach of the very spirit of Tribal Welfare policy.

At the ATR we need to condition the flow of tourists so that the integrity of Jarawa Policy is not compromised. This can be done only with the commitment of various departments (Tribal Welfare and Tourism in particular) and agreement on methods aimed at modifying tourist assumptions, expectations and behavior.

It has to be kept in mind that measures taken in relation to the Buffer Zone is a two-fold approach that will impact on the ATR in the long run, but notions such as of HOT SPOTS has no direct and immediate co-relation to TOURISTS on ATR. I say this because media interpretation of the administration's order tend to suggest that measures taken in relation to the Buffer Zone are all adequate 'protective' measures in relation to tourism. This is a misreading of the Buffer Zone regulations that could lead