

SC has said nothing. The road remains open, albeit the traffic is regulated and vehicles allowed to move in convoys during certain prescribed times.² The dereserved area was reduced in 2004; 200 metres on either side of the ATR to 30 metres.

A plethora of arguments are given in favour of the ATR. Let us look at a few. It is strategically important for moving military; necessary for moving people to Port Blair in case of a medical emergency; used for transporting goods for 1.5 lakh settlers; alternative sea route needs to be highly subsidized; in any case sea route unusable during seven months of monsoon. These arguments are further strengthened by the assertion that closing the ATR is not going to stop this skewed contact; the Jarawa have multiple contact points. Administration also claims that it has been able to persuade the Jarawa to move away from ATR into the deep jungles.

Each one of these arguments can be countered by facts or statistics. For example, the number of vehicles that ply daily (see footnote 1) or how much does the Ministry of Defence use the ATR, or establishing small health centres close to Jarawa Reserve or getting mobile health units.

There are political costs of closing the ATR because of the overwhelming public opinion and the political clout of the settlers compared with the political invisibility of the Jarawa. Though administration is aware that Supreme Court may rule in favour of its earlier judgement, and ATR may have to be closed, so far there is no alternative plan in place. It maintains that ATR should be kept open and suggests a realignment of the road if necessary. This however will not solve the problem because in South Andamans, Jarawa Reserve extends across the entire breadth of the island and upto 5 kms of coastal waters from the high tide line. So, there is no scope for any realignment.

² Traffic data for the last few years shows that traffic on the ATR increased between 2001 and 2004. However, contrary to the administration's argument, maximum usage of the ATR was not during the monsoons but during the winter months November, December, and January. 2005 saw a substantial decrease in vehicular traffic on the ATR. Whether this was a result of tsunami or of the convoy system needs to be studied. (34083 vehicles used the ATR in 2004; 24938 in 2005)