

The Last Of The Jarawas: Living On Handouts

Port Blair: (IANS) As we drove from this capital of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands towards the Mayabandar forest reserve, four Jarawa children blocked the road with bamboo poles and demanded “paan” (betel leaf) and “biscuit” (biscuits) in broken Hindi. The tribe with its population now down to 260 is getting dangerously dependent on handouts.

Aged 12-15, the boys with paan-stained teeth let us move only when we promised to bring them paan and biscuits the next time. They refused to be photographed. One said: “The flash will harm us.”

Inhabitants of a dense rainforest in the Andaman islands, the Jarawas have been living for thousands of years as isolated hunter-gatherers. Anthropologists everywhere were excited when they first made contact with the outside world in October 1997.

Still, very little is known about the Jarawas — one of the four Negrito tribes of the Andamans archipelago — apart from the fact that they use

rafts, live in oval huts and are excellent swimmers. The blockade by the Jarawa children may be harmless by itself but is one of the many prob-

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lems triggered by the contact of Jarawas with the outside world. They have become dependent on food handouts and have also picked up truck-drivers' abuses in Hindi.

In the history of the isle for the first time on Oct 21, 1997, eight Jarawas, four of them women, emerged from the jungle close to the Lukra Lungta village near Kadamtala in Middle Andaman.

Signalling for food, they pointed to their bellies. They were fed bananas and coconuts and sent back by villagers who were petrified lest the Jarawas let loose their arrows. This, however, triggered a regular arrival of Jarawas to nearby villages.

“They do come to the villages but we give

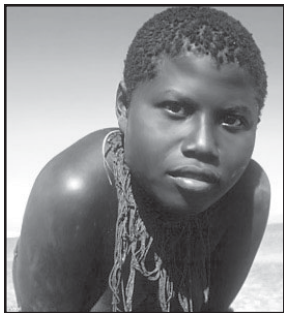
them food and paan so they do not hurt us,” said a villager who runs a tea stall outside the reserve forest where the Jarawas live.

One of the drivers, requesting anonymity, told IANS: “Of course people like us and the security guards posted in the reserved forest area are responsible for their degeneration. Some of them have actually been taught to hurl abuses and other vices.” Anthropologists and environmentalists have been pointing out that the problem exacerbated after the Andaman Trunk Road was built through the reserve forest.

Their white teeth gleaming in their ebony faces, Jarawa women can now be seen on the roadside, wearing leafy neck and arm sashes, shell and fruit necklaces, while the men sport tree-bark waist girdles, and usually carry their swords and bow and arrows.

As their population has dwindled, loggers, settlers and poachers have pillaged the forests, the environmentalists hold.

The word Jarawa is a term neighbouring tribes use for them. It means “the other people”. The other three Negrito tribes — Great Andamanese,



Onges and Sentinelese — have merged with the settlers to a far greater extent.

While anthropologists have so far been unable to decipher the language of the Jarawas or its origin, the tribesmen have now picked up Hindi and other languages through their contact with people outside their forest home.

The Cycle Rickshaw In London - It's A 'Pedicab' Mate!

London: (IANS) For an outsider, it's a strange and pleasant sight to see the pedicab - akin to the cycle rickshaw in India - weave its way across the London streetscape.

Since 1995, pedicabs have been a regular at West End, the entertainment area around Covent Garden, Leicester Square and the more crowded Soho, Regent Street and Piccadilly Circus.

Today there are more than 400 of them going up and down the busy London streets. And come 2012, the pedicabs will play an important role in giving the London Olympics a green image.

“The Olympic Village is trying to have 100-400 pedicabs so as to have an eco-friendly environment,” said Friedel Schroder, managing director of BugBugs, the market leader in creating pedicabs since 1998.

Life is not so easy for pedicab drivers who often have to struggle to earn a meagre income.

Gokhann, 20, a Turkish national, clad in blue jeans and a black turtleneck sweater, stands in front of the Leicester Square tube station. He has been waiting for two hours for a customer to hitch a ride on his pedicab.

“Sometimes I enjoy my job. But at times, I am tired, especially when I have to pedal with four people on the

pedicab,” Gokhann told IANS. He said on some days he earns a mere 20 pounds.

An Egyptian national who did not wish to be

named took up a job as a pedicab driver the day after he came to London almost three months ago. “Money is very difficult to come by in this job. It is difficult to go on like this,” he said.

With the Olympics Village giving the nod to pedicabs, there is now some hope for Gokhann and others, as they feel the humble rickshaw could get a lot of publicity during the mega sporting event.

The pedicabs are popular among tourists who take short rides in the eco-friendly vehicle for a few pounds.

“I loved chatting with the pedicabbie when I took it from Oxford Street to Edgware Road. It's a lovely way of seeing London,” said Rama Arya, a communications expert for the South African government.

A short trip from Leicester Square to Covent Garden varies from five to 10 pounds and this irks the ‘big brother’ - the London black cabbies.

“There's no regulation on the pedicab fares. They fleece the tourists for a five-10 minute journey. Our main problem is the congestion the pedicabs creates on the streets,” said Bob Oddy, general secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association (LTDA).

But pedicab driver Carl, a Polish national, refutes the allegation. He says he accepts whatever the riders give as a tip, while the fare of the journey is conveyed to the riders in advance.

“Since I am a part-time student, I work when I want and it's quite flexible,” said

Carl before being driven away by a policeman to Henrietta Street from Covent Garden.

Pedicabs are not licensed and this keeps them on the move, looking for prospective riders. “This is a big problem we are facing. We can't stay anywhere and when the police

Pedicabs can also be seen in Cambridge, Oxford, Manchester, Cardiff and Edinburgh. But it's the London pedicabs which are popular with the tourists and locals. In other cities, they are hired for weddings and corporate events.

see us, they ask us to move. We are also human beings and how can we keep on pedalling for six to eight hours?” asks Carl angrily.

According to Schroder, who is also secretary of the London Pedicabs Owners Association (LPOA), the Westminster City Council is coming up with a voluntary registration scheme soon.

“This scheme would ensure that the pedicabs are of high standard and also to have proper pedicab parking bays,” Schroder said.

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