Understanding the Tribes of Andaman

Why in news?

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An American National was allegedly killed recently by Sentinelese tribes of A&N Islands, when he tresspassed into their restricted island.

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What is the demographics of A&N islands?

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- The Andaman Island has dived into four different regions namely North, Middle, South and Little Andaman.
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- The four major tribes of Andaman are as follows
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1. **Great Andamanese -**Strait Island is the part of North and Middle Andaman district which is the home to Great Andamanese tribe, Fewer than 50 Great Andamanese are alive today.
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2. **Jarawa -** South Andaman and Middle Andaman Islands is inhabited by the Jarawa tribes, there are only 300-400 people of this community alive today.
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3. **Sentinelese -**North Sentinel Island is part of North Andaman region which is home to the Sentinelese tribe, only 50-100 tribes are alive today.
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4. **Onge -** The Little Andaman Island is home to Ongetribes, these tribes are fewer than 100.
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- Apart from there are nine Nicobar Islands that are home to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
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What are the characteristic features of A&N tribes?

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- **Race -** The Andaman tribes including the Sentinelese are Negrito, where the Nicobar tribes are Mongoloid.
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- The A&N tribes are short statureposibly due to the “island effect” that causes genetic limitation over time.
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- **Habitat -**The Sentinelese are a pre-Neolithic people who have inhabited North Sentinel Island for an estimated 55,000 years without contact with the outside world.
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- The reclusive Sentinelese still hold their tiny fort and all remain animistic in faith.
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- What makes these tribes special is that they are protected by coral reefs that make landing on their island dangerous, and by the tribe’s unwavering hostility towards outsiders.
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- **Occupation -** Seafaring, Hunting, Forest dwelling are the predominant occupation of these tribes.
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- In recent times most tribes have abandoned hunting-gathering and depend entirely on government help.
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What are the problems faced by A&N tribes so far?

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- **Intrusion -** Missionaries had greater success on the Nicobar Islands to the south, which lie on the ancient marine trade route between Europe and the Far East.
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- But missionaries have been historically unwelcome in the Andamans, and the

tribes of the Islands have resisted every occupation force with bows and arrows.
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- Even recently an American missionary was killed by Sentinelese tribes in north sentinel Island when he violated the law and tried to contact the tribes.
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- **Diseases -** Due to their isolation it is unlikely the Sentinelese have immunity against even common diseases.
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- A large chunk of the population of the 10 Great Andamanese tribes was wiped out after the indigenous peoples caught syphilis, measles, and influenza on an epidemic scale following contact with the early settlers.
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- **Natural Disasters -** The habitats of the A&N tribes are prone to natural disasters like tsunami and earth quakes.
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- Global warming has a high toll on this poor tribes, who are less resilient to recent climatic changes.
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- **Developmental Projects -** When NH 223 was being built in the 1980s, the Jarawa repeatedly attacked workers, the state power-fenced the construction site, and several tribal were electrocuted.
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- In recent times local touts and policemen conducting human safaris on NH 223 that cuts through the Jarawa reserve.
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- The highway continues to bring the world and sexual exploitation, substance abuse and disease into their shrinking sanctuary.
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What are the measures taken by government in this regard?

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- The Sentinelese and other aboriginal tribes of the archipelago are protected under The Andaman and Nicobar (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956.

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- According to the regulations,
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1. Traditional areas occupied by the tribes are declared as Reserves.
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2. It prohibited entry of all persons to reserves except those with authorization.
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3. Photographing or filming the tribe members is also an offence.
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- Under the Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands are a “Restricted Area” in which foreigners with a restricted area permit (RAP) can stay on 13 islands, and make day visits to another 11.
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- The government gave up in the mid-1990s, and in order to safeguard their health and sovereignty, decided that no one could enter a 5-km buffer zone around their island, which was already out of bounds.
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- Between 1998 and 2004, when the Jarawa started to respond to the state, all government hospitals bordering their reserve opened special wards to treat them for infections.
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- In 2014, the A&N administration announced a change of policy from “hands off” to “hands off but eyes on” to protect the Sentinelese.
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What are the issues with government’s measure?

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- In recent years, the Andaman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Andaman Association of Tour Operators have pressed to have the RAP restrictions relaxed.
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- In 2018, the Home Ministry dropped the RAP requirement for visiting 29

inhabited islands until 2022.
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- Even though “separate approvals continue to be required for visiting Reserve Forests, Wildlife Sanctuaries and Tribal Reserves.
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- But this move compromised the safety of the tribes and ecology of the islands.
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- Following this the UT Administration clarified that Indian nationals would continue to require a pass issued by the Deputy Commissioner for entering a tribal reserve.
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- Apart from this foreigners would need prior approval from the Principal Secretary (Tribal Welfare), from various instances it is found that these rules are being compromised.
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What actions are needed in this regard?

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- Recent tragic death of American missionary underlines the need to re-examine security and tighten vigil around North Sentinel Island.
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- While the “island effect” may eventually wipe out the tiny tribal populations in the archipelago, allowing their sanctuaries to be invaded by outsiders will only hasten that process.
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- Thus it is the duty of the Indian state “to protect them in their own environment and in their own circumstances”.
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Source: The Indian Express

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