

Policy to protect rare tribe on cards

By **Meenal Dubey** in New Delhi

THE UNION ministry of tribal affairs is making a draft policy which will discourage tourists from interacting with the Shompen tribe of Great Nicobar.

The draft policy was discussed in a meeting at Port Blair that was attended by the tribal affairs secretary G.B. Mukherji, Andamans chief secretary Vivek Rai, expert committee on policy for Primitive Tribes of Andaman and Nicobar member Dr H. Sudarshan and joint secretary (Union Territory) ministry of home affairs B. Bhamathi.

Shompen is one of six primitive tribes in the UT

"The Shompens are a shy tribe of Mongoloid origin and they share this trait with the Great Nicobarese tribe. They are also one of the six primitive tribes in Andaman and Nicobar and it is estimated that there are at least 390 Shompen tribals. During the tsunami, nine Shompen tribals were killed.

The other primitive tribes are the Nicobarese, Onges, Sentinalese, Jarawas and the Great Andamanese," said Surendra Nath, professor in the anthropology department of the Delhi University.

"They are divided into two groups — hostile Shompens and Mawa Shompens. The former tend to avoid human contact and remain confined

to dense forests while Mawa Shompens reside near the Alexandra and Galathia rivers," he added. "They build their huts on steep hilltops and camouflage the path leading to their hut with leaves and branches in order to confuse anyone who wants to intrude upon their settlement. This is done in such a way that a person who is not



Andaman & Nicobar has about 390 Shompen tribals.

familiar with the terrain can easily lose his foothold and suffer a fall of up to three metres," said Nath.

"The Mawa Shompens are known to come to the coast and engage in trade through the barter system. They usually exchange meat and forest fruits for tobacco and other items," he added. "Shompens are hunters and gatherers

and use spears, bows and arrows to hunt animals. They are usually scantily clothed," he said.

Nath said, "Their health is an area of concern because the areas they reside in are marshy and they are exposed to insects and other dangers, making them vulnerable to a variety of ailments."

"The Shompens are not known to consume liquor and we want to ensure that they do not acquire this habit in the future. We are also concerned about their health. Though health facility is available, we don't want the

Their health is a cause of concern

tribe to have too much exposure to allopathic drugs, rather we want to retain their traditional medicine system," said Dr Sudarshan.

"Our biggest concern is that road construction should be discouraged in the areas inhabited by the Shompens. This kind of interference from the outside world could expose them to all types of risks," said Dr Sudarshan.

Meanwhile, an official source from the Andaman administration said, "This is just the preliminary stage of the draft and it will be finalised at a later stage."

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