

500 Houses Burn Down, 40 Killed in India Fire

A massive fire devastated a community in Tripura, India, taking 40 lives and destroying approximately 500 houses. The dead were mostly children and the elderly.

"Five hundred houses were burned down accidentally when a flame of fire from the nearby Jhum cultivation fell on them during midday," reported a woman from a Gospel for Asia-supported congregation.

The fire occurred at a refugee camp for tribal people. Most of the approximately 3,000 families who live there make their livelihood through agriculture, practicing a form of cultivation that involves cutting down forested areas so they can dry the leaves of the plants and trees. Usually during the second week of March, they burn the deforested areas and fertilize them in preparation for planting. Most of the tribes people rely on this practice to earn their livelihoods because they have no other means to meet their basic needs.

The month of March brings a lot of wind to Tripura. While people were burning a deforested area, sparks got on a house and, due to the high wind, the flames spread rapidly from house to house. The homes in the camp are made of bamboo and straw, so they were no match for the fire.

The flames devoured possessions, including furniture and electronics, and killed many domestic animals such as pigs, ducks, chickens and goats.

"One could hear in the entire area sounds of howling, screaming, shouts of cries. Babies burned to death in the fire. Grandparents were burned alive on their sleeping cots. Some were half-burnt and ran away to the jungles," wrote a GFA correspondent in Tripura.

People are mourning the loss of their loved ones and property. The anguish caused by this devastation even drove some people to commit suicide.

Six Gospel for Asia-supported churches, situated at various points of the relief camp, serve more than 150 families there. Ninety-two of these families lost their homes and possessions, escaping with only the clothes on their back. They are currently living at two nearby schools.

Gospel for Asia staff in Tripura request prayers on behalf of the community. Please pray for the following:

â€¢ God's provision of the people's basic needs—in particular, food and clothing.

â€¢ God to use the government, churches and other organizations to help in a timely manner.

â€¢ Divine comfort for those mourning the deaths of family or friends.

â€¢ Many to put their trust in the Lord.