

Communal Violence Threatens South Asian Ministry

Gospel for Asia-supported ministries in the mountainous border region between two South Asian states are being threatened amid communal violence that has left at least eight people dead and thousands homeless.

At least two villages where GFA-supported missionaries serve as pastors have been attacked. And while more than 6,000 people in the two villages lost their homes to the invading arsonists, Pastor Gyan Tekin reports that all the believers are safe.

One Christian layman, Indra Jumarkar, has opened his home to feed and give shelter to some of the victims of the violence. Others sought protection in a nearby elementary school, including some 200 women and children who were later moved to a refugee camp by the army.

The latest attacks in a long-festering conflict between two tribal groups began when several hundred Rabha villagers in Assam burned down two Garo villages and set a third one on fire.

Garo villagers retaliated, and a hand-to-hand battle ensued. Later, large groups of Garo youth in neighboring Meghalaya threatened to cross the state border and seek revenge.

The Garo, literally "hill people," are the second-largest tribal group in Meghalaya and are nominal Christians.

The Rabha, a much smaller group, live in the mountains and follow an animist religion. Because they live in a border area, their culture is a blend of two distinct groups.

When the Garo youth threatened to invade the state, Army

troops rushed to quell the escalating violence.

"This is a difficult time for our missionaries and believers in this strife-torn area," said GFA president K.P. Yohannan. "Losing homes and belongings is an emotional as well as physical loss. And it is especially disturbing that a people group considered 'Christian' is involved in retaliation and fighting.

"But whether they are believers, nominal Christians or followers of traditional religions, our prayers go out to all of those who are victims of this violence.

"I ask all of our friends in the West to pray for our missionaries in both of these states as they continue to proclaim the love of Jesus Christ amid this violence. Pray for the believers as they bear witness to the true peace found in Him. Pray for those who have lost their homes, and for those who are ministering to them.

"And pray that all of those, on both sides of the conflict, will come to know the One who died so they can live together as true brothers and sisters, both in this life and for eternity."