

# EU Delegation meets Kandhamal victims

## Residents of rehabilitation camp seek work and livelihood support

Prafulla Das

**KANDHAMAL:** A European Union team was given a rousing welcome here on Thursday by those affected by anti-Christian violence in August 2008.

The victims showered petals on the visiting delegates at the rehabilitation camp at Nandagiri in the G. Udaigiri area. Many in the camp danced to drumbeats and several shook hands with the 11-member team.

The camp has 55 families living in tents. They did not want to return to their native village, Betikala, a few km away, for fear of attacks by the majority community.

The administration, in association with the Believers' Church, is building homes for them.

Money provided by the Centre, the State government and the church as compensation was being used for the purpose.

Interacting with the team members, the camp residents said they were happy with whatever the administration had done to rehabilitate them.

They, however, sought the intervention of the team to ensure work for them and livelihood support. Many of them demanded opening of a school and a prayer hall near the colony.

"We suffered for our religion. We should be provided a prayer house," Sabita Nayak told the team in the presence of local people and journalists.

The church and houses in their village were damaged and burnt down in the violence that followed the killing of Vishwa Hinda Parishad leader Swami Lakshmanananda on August 23, 2008.

There was no opposition to the EU team's visit to the district by activists of any organisation.



**EXPRESSING THEIR ANGUISH:** Members of the European Union delegation listen to residents of the Nandagiri rehabilitation camp in Kandhamal district on Thursday. - PHOTO: PTI

## Rehabilitation is nowhere near completion

Prafulla Das

**KANDHAMAL:** The administration, the Sal trees in the hills, vast stretches of barren fields and nondescript hamlets of this Orissa district give an impression that everything is alright with the people living here. But the reality on the ground is different.

A visit to some villages where Christian families were attacked in the aftermath of the killing of

VHP leader Lakshmanananda Saraswati showed that rehabilitation of the riot-hit population was nowhere near completion.

"I am still not able to return to my village. I have filed a case against those who burnt down our house. Those from the Hindu community have put up an impossible condition for my return. They demand that I bring along with me the two youths who had been sentenced to five years'

imprisonment for their involvement in my case," says Subas Digal.

Digal (32), who belongs to Padhanpada village, is now living in a rented house at Tengedapathar village near Tikabali, and maintains his family by working on daily wages.

"Of the eight Christian families in our village, only one family has returned so far. The others are living in different places or distant towns outside the district,"

Digal says.

Although there has been no communal clash in the district in the recent past, except for a small conflict between the members of the two communities on the eve of the EU team's visit, many affected families are still living in relief camps away from their villages.

### Compensation

The process of payment of compensation is still incomplete. Many at

Tengedapathar said they had not received any compensation as they were away in relief camps when their damaged houses were surveyed by the authorities.

"What Kandhamal needs now is not relief but are measures that would provide livelihood support to a majority of the people who are suffering from poverty, illiteracy and ill-health," said a villager belonging to the Hindu community at G. Udaigiri.