

India Priest Pleads for Aid in Pakistan Crisis

Tells of Misery of Millions of Refugees Caught Up in Horror of War, Starvation

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The disaster, said the quiet, 43-year-old priest, "is unprecedented in human history — and human misery."

"I don't know how the whole civilized world can look on with indifference! Future generations will scarcely believe the historians who will summarize it.

"One of the 8 million refugees moaned to me that 'God alone can help us,' and it is largely up to God's people to do this."

The Rev. Joseph Puthenkalam, S.D.B., Roman Catholic episcopal vicar for the Garo Hills of East India, was telling in an interview of the mounting flood of destitute people fleeing from chaotic horror in East Pakistan.

Usually possessing only the tattered clothing on their backs, sometimes carrying a child or aged relative, they turn up at the rate of 50,000 a month at India border settlements and refugee centers.

Forsees 10 million

Their number soon will total 10 million or more, Father Puthenkalam predicted.

Help—still insufficient—has come from many sources.

The World Council of Churches has given \$775,000, the Lutheran World Federation \$71,000; Catholic Caritas International is \$35,000, the North American Mennonites \$100,000, U.S. volunteer organizations about \$1.1 million.

The U.S. government has given \$73 million and the U.S.S.R. 11 million, but the refugees cost India about \$1 million a day in food alone and the cost of medical aid, housing, clothing, as well as food for the next six months is

expected to run \$400 million.

Inside East Pakistan, said Father Joseph, complete chaos reigns, according to reports seeping out. Estimates of those killed in military action range from 200,000 to 1 million. In addition uncounted numbers have died from cholera and malnutrition, a euphemism for starvation.

Roots of Trouble

The East Pakistan trouble, he believes, had its roots in the division of India which came with the subcontinent's liberation from centuries of British rule.

East and West Pakistan were set up, their populations 90% Muslim, as well as India, its population 85% Hindu.

Jealousy between East and West Pakistan developed because East Pakistan, with most of the population, felt that West Pakistan, with the national capital, got most of the wealth and power. A recent election added fuel.

West Pakistan feared a separationist tendency generated by the Hindu minority in East Pakistan, and, when the election trend became evident, rushed troops in to nullify its results. The East Pakistani political leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, became a fugitive. Fight-

ing erupted in many places.

Refugees, who always had crossed the border into India in small numbers, began to flow in torrents. Many had tales of atrocities committed by West Pakistani soldiers.

Men were stripped and those uncircumcised — hence not Muslim — were shot.

Disease and starvation added to the horrors inflicted upon a people who a few months ago had suffered perhaps history's cruelest disaster, a tidal wave caused by a sudden storm that drowned an estimated million persons. No one knows the figure with any exactness.

"Now there are these astronomical numbers of refugees," said Father Joseph, helplessly. "How can India take care of 10 million more people when it already was struggling to care for its own population?"

'50,000 in District'

Born in Kerala, a state in southwest India, Father Joseph studied in a Salesian seminary at Turin, Italy, and was ordained there in 1960. Because India frowns on foreign missionaries, he was sent 14 months ago to the Garo district to succeed a bishop.

His district has 50,000 Catholics in four churches and hundreds of small groups scattered about the area. Under him are 11 priests, including one German, one Italian and the rest Indian, and fifteen sis-

ters, two of them Spanish, the rest Indian.

Father Joseph said that Communist influence is minimal in the region and in East Pakistan as well. Most Communist strength in India is in the southern territories.

"All my priests and the sisters are engaged in relief and social work among the refugees, among whom cholera has also appeared," he said. "I have 100,000 refugees in my area. The schools in border areas are closed, and refugees are housed in them, to their capacity."

Father Joseph said that he was in the United States seeking to raise funds for refugee relief. He added that such funds could be sent to him at Tura P.O., Garo Hills-Meghalaya, India, or in care of Mrs. Ivor Grant, 850 Glenhaven Drive, La Habra.

"The only thing to correct the situation," he added, "is for governmental pressure to be exerted on West Pakistan to stabilize the situation. I doubt that the Hindus would return, although some of the Muslims might.

"The Hindus will be a burden on India for many years to come. Her progress has been retarded by 20 years, at least."