

EU team wants more help for Kandhamal riot victims

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Bhubaneswar, Feb 5 : An 11-member European Union (EU) delegation that visited Kandhamal Friday expressed satisfaction over the Orissa government's rehabilitation of the victims of 2008 communal violence that hit the town, but stressed that more needs to be done for the riot-hit.

"We had a very good visit in Kandhamal district. We are meeting all people concerned, stake holders and state authorities. We also saw the rehabilitation work undertaken by the state authorities. That is very good but more needs to be done," a member of the team told reporters after meeting with the district administration. The team wrapped up its visit later Friday.

"Many people are still suffering. We are concerned about that," he added.

The team was scheduled to meet judges of the fast track court hearing the riot cases Friday to discuss security of victims. But the meeting was cancelled following opposition from district lawyers' association, which said that such a meeting would be unconstitutional.

"We are prepared to provide security to all concerned. We will provide security to those who want to return. If anyone feels that he is not able to return due to fear, we will ensure all security and provide all arrangement," Kandhamal District Collector Krishna Kumar said.

"The team did not point out any lapse on our part. We are providing security at all sensitive locations. We have already deployed 37 platoons at different places of the district," said Superintendent of Police Pravin Kumar.

The team comprised members from Spain, Hungary, Poland, Ireland, Finland, Sweden and Britain, and is led by EU's counsellor (head of political affairs) Christopher Manet.

Kandhamal, about 200 km from here, witnessed widespread communal violence after the murder of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati and four of his aides at his ashram Aug 23, 2008.

More than 25,000 Christians were forced to flee their homes after their houses were attacked by rampaging mobs, which held Christians responsible for Saraswati's killing, although police blamed the Maoists.