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**LINKING GOD'S PEOPLE TO
REACH THE UNREACHED**

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From the Editor

As I joined millions of viewers who watched the magnitude of the tsunami disaster unfold, I kept asking the Lord what He would have us do. Any aid we might be able to send seemed insignificant compared to the relief efforts of the US Army and Navy, the UN and the large humanitarian agencies who flocked to the region with billions of US dollars.

Then I remembered what God specifically enables and anoints us to do: cross paths and network with individuals who are called to pioneer the work of the Gospel in unreached people groups and geographical regions, and come alongside to help equip and support those individuals.

By God's grace, I then learned about Varughese Mathew's ministry in the remote, inaccessible Andaman and Nicobar Islands where no international help had yet arrived. Aril Edvardsen's ministry in Norway has helped sponsor his work and highly recommends him.

This is an opportunity for you to bypass the red tape of the mega agencies and get your contributions directly into the hands of a spiritual marine who lives and works right where the need is, through the infrastructure already in place. The funds collected will go directly to Varughese's ministry to relieve the suffering of these desperate victims. Please memo your contribution: Tsunami Relief Aid.

...cont. In every camp, people ask us for rice, water containers, clothes, baby food, dry food, blankets, oil, mats to sit and sleep on, soaps, mosquito nets, etc.

"In one village near Port Blair where we live, 300 fishermen and their families lost everything, including their homes, their fishing boats and nets. We would like to help them re-establish their families and livelihood.

"On a permanent basis, we would like to buy 5—10 acres of land and build a village for 100 destitute victims and their families, providing each of them with a one room house with a kitchen.

"The Tribal Protection Regulations of the government of India forbids anyone to go to the Nicobar Islands or have contact with the six original tribes who live there. But now, due to the tsunami devastation, several thousand of them have been brought from different islands and placed in refugee camps in Port Blair. **The largest camp is located 3 miles from our office!** Every day I visit them and ask about their well-being. They have asked me for a TV.

"God has shown me that the best thing I can give to the people around me, is His love. I therefore desire to give them a TV and CD player, so that we can show them gospel CD programs. Every evening we go and pray for them and conduct children's classes. Since we could not go to the tribes, they have come to us! **Please pray that God will do miracles so that His glory will be manifest, that many Nicobars will come to know God the Father through Jesus Christ.**

Volume 22, Issue 1

January 2005



LINKING GOD'S PEOPLE TO REACH THE UNREACHED

The Bridge Report

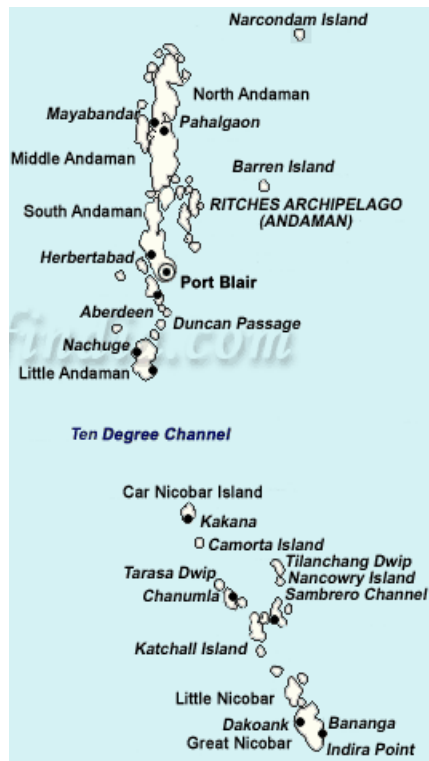
HELPING THE TSUNAMI VICTIMS



This picture represents some of the Christian believers who live in a predominantly Hindu environment on the Andaman Islands in the Indian Ocean. It was taken before disaster struck on December 26, when a massive Tsunami crashed onto land around the Indian Ocean rim and caused the largest natural disaster in recent history. There are over 150,000 confirmed dead, a number that will continue to rise as those who were swept away without a trace are daily being added to the list by remaining family members and friends. 1.5 million children are orphaned, and vast areas of countless towns and villages in 11 countries have been obliterated. Although it is impossible for any individual to begin to grasp the depth of grief and despair among such a huge number of people, the outpouring of compassion and generosity from people around the world has been unprecedented in history. More than 4 billion US dollars has been committed to relief aid and help in rebuilding the communities that were destroyed - so much so that some organizations have asked that people stop giving to them, as the funds received are beyond their capacity to utilize.

In the aftermath of the disaster, I prayerfully considered what the involvement of The Bridge should be, if any, since we are not directly involved in that region. The answer was affirmative when we were given a direct connection on the ground into the most remote and needy region: The Andaman and Nicobar Islands. **Cont. on p. 2**

THE ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS



FACTS

The Andaman & Nicobar Islands constitute the remotest part of the Indian Union. This archipelago spreads along 490 miles in the Indian Ocean - the southern tip of these islands located only 91 miles from Sumatra - consists of 572 islands with a population of app. 350,000 who live on 38 inhabited islands in 537 towns and villages. Most of the people are ethnic Indians, many of whom are descendants of freedom fighters and criminals who were sent to penal institutions built by the British during their rule of India. The Nicobar Islands are also home to six stone-age tribes, who, being isolated from and hostile to the outside world, have maintained their traditions unchanged for thousands of years. We know that Marco Polo encountered these tribes during his voyage through South-Asia. They are unreached by the Gospel. The islands inhabited by the six tribes are off-limit to the public, requiring special visitation visas by the Indian government.

THE EFFECTS OF THE TSUNAMI

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands at the epicenter of the massive underwater earthquake that shook the Indian Ocean rim, bore the full brunt of the tsunami. The quake altered the topology of the underground ocean floor in the region, causing several islands to disappear (one was cut in half), and floodwater is permanently rising above many of the villages along the coast-lines, making them a total loss to their inhabitants. 300,000 people have been directly affected by the tragedy; 6,000 are still missing. The Indian government was slow to respond, and initially turned down disaster relief help for the islands from the international community. Their official relief aid organization has now rescued 41,000 from their islands and moved them to refugee camps on safer ground. The region keeps experiencing aftermath tremors.

Incredibly, the six indigenous tribes appear to have survived much better than the Indians on the islands. The people obeyed a warning that had been passed down orally through their elders for generations: "When the earth shakes, you must leave the beach and immediately run into the forest, because a big wave will come to swallow you up." As a result, some of the tribes people are now appearing from inland hiding places. In a rare encounter, a Jarawa man told outsiders that all 250 members of their tribe survived on coconuts. A full survey needs to be done to assess how to help people who continue to live on these remote islands.

VARUGHESE AND SARAMA MATHEW

INDIAN MISSIONARIES TO THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

"I was born in Kerala, Southern India in 1963. My wife's name is Sarama. I have two daughters, Reshma (18) and Rose (14). I grew up in a nominally Christian home, but when I was a teenager, I got involved in many bad things and began drinking and smoking. One day a preacher came to town. He reached out to me, and through his care, I came to understand that Jesus Christ loved me and gave His life for me. I received Him and became a child of God.

"After I finished my education, I studied theology in Kerala. In 1988, the Lord spoke clearly to us students regarding our further service for Him, and He asked me, 'Are you willing to go to a place where no one, not even missionaries, will go?' I responded, 'Yes, Lord. I will go'.

"That year I moved with my young wife and baby girl to the Andaman Islands. We arrived with two empty hands, trusting that the Lord would provide for us. In the early years, we were sometimes so poor that we did not have enough to eat. The people around us are Hindus, so many times we experienced abuse, assaults and threats from Hindu fanatics. But we trusted the Lord and He always gave us the faith and mental strength to carry on the ministry without fear.

"We keep on reaching people with the Good News, and many have come to faith in Jesus Christ and have been baptized. Today our ministry, **Indian Christian Fellowship**, includes 13 churches, a Bibleschool and an orphanage with 68 children.



HELPING TSUNAMI VICTIMS

"By the grace of God, all of us at the ICF, the Bibleschool, the orphanage, and all the church members escaped from a direct hit, so we are all fine.

"The situation is desperate on Little Andaman, and the southern islands are still totally isolated. The government of Andaman is airlifting as many as possible to safety and placing them in schools in our capital. My wife and I, together with the believers from our fellowships, visit the camps regularly and counsel the victims while extending our love to them.

"There are still scores of people left destitute on so many of the islands. They have nothing to eat or drink. Transportation of relief aid is mainly done by small boats due to the destruction of bridges and roads, which is very dangerous because of crocodile attacks.

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