



"Most of the children are sick and all of them will die," she reported.

"These words hit me hard and roused me from my sense of helplessness before a massive problem," the soft spoken archbishop recalls.

Over 500 people died, hundreds of houses were torched, and people rotted in 42 camps.

"I began by bringing into the field persons with little competence for offering relief, but a lot of good will: seminarians, candidates, novices. I kept informing the public what we were trying to do. Learning of our work, people came: nurses, doctors, university students and volunteers from all over India. We joined hands with the other Churches and sought help from non-governmental agencies".

Over 400 volunteers worked in turn for half a year bringing relief to people in the camps.

Even the Chief Minister of Assam visited the camps and praised the work. That is how JPT came into existence bringing together sober, moderate, far-sighted local people. When they make an appeal for peace, everyone listens.

The 75 year old archbishop is not discouraged by heartbreaking moments in peace-making despite much fatigue and enormous effort, sometimes ending in total failure.

He recalls a flicker of hope when a Muslim group said, "we came only because Archbishop Thomas invited us to this peace meeting," or when some Presbyterian or Baptist friends quote his writings on peace saying, "as 'our' Archbishop suggests".

In recent years, JPT ventured beyond peace initiatives making a drive for a 'corruption-free society'. Archbishop Menamparampil's 78-page booklet entitled *Probity in Public Life* was used as a reference when ecumenical Church leaders in Mizoram passed norms for

a corruption-free election recently.

The dramatic change of guard in that northeastern state owes much to this call for probity in public life. The archbishop adds, "youth groups like the Bodo Students' Union ask me to give talks on peace and 'Ethical Awakening'. They read my articles and booklets. Possibly the Assam Students' Union will be next".

Besides being a special invitee to the Synod of Bishops for Asia and on the Word of God, archbishop Menamparampil is currently president of the Northeast India Bishops' Conference; National Chairman of the Bishops Commission for Education & Culture; and Chairman of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference Commission for Evangelization.

A member of several Vatican Commissions, archbishop Menamparampil is a recipient of the prestigious Mumbai based Maschio Humanitarian Award 1998.

