

Hindu-Muslim clashes injure scores in India

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Authorities fired tear gas and warning shots and swung batons Monday to disperse crowds of angry Hindus and Muslims who attacked each other with stones and clubs in southern India, where more than 75 people have been injured.

Communal rioting broke out Saturday in Hyderabad, capital of southern Andhra Pradesh state, and about 1,600 paramilitary soldiers and police have been deployed to calm the situation, A.K. Khan, city police commissioner, told reporters.

Hyderabad has a population of 8 million, nearly 40 percent Muslims. The last major Hindu-Muslim rioting in Hyderabad took place in 1990, killing 200 people. The city had been mostly peaceful since then.

Trouble started after Muslims hoisted green flags as part of celebrations of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday a month ago but never removed them.

Clashes erupted Saturday between the two communities after Hindus attempted to replace the green flags with saffron ones to celebrate a Hindu festival.

Violence continued Sunday with dozens of vehicles torched and half a dozen mosques and temples damaged, Khan said. More than 75 people have been injured since Saturday, he said.

Hostilities persisted Monday despite police banning the assembly of more than five people in one place and closing markets and schools for the day, he said.

Police fired warning shots into the air to control crowds and imposed an indefinite curfew in parts of India's key information technology hub — a base for Google, Microsoft, and IBM. Eighty-six people from both communities have been arrested.

Hindus make up more than 80 percent of India's population, and Muslims comprise nearly 14 percent.

Tensions remain between Hindus and Muslims since the bloody partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan after gaining independence from Britain in 1947.

In India's Gujarat state, Hindu mobs rampaged through Muslim neighborhoods, towns and villages between February-April 2002, leaving about 1,000 people dead.

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