News



by Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Bhopal, India — September 13, 2019
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

A priest and a nurse working at a Catholic school in India's eastern state of Jharkhand have been held in custody after being charged with sexually abusing a 9-year-old girl.

Church officials in the state, where the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party runs the government, say the case was fabricated amid a hostile atmosphere generated toward the state's Christians, mostly tribal people, reported ucanews.com.

Fr. Julian Ekka, vice principal of the Jesuit-run De Nobili School in Koradih, and the nurse, Emerencia Lomga, were arrested following a complaint from the father of the alleged victim, said district Police Chief Aman Kumar.

Ucanews.com reported the two appeared in court Sept. 10 and were remanded into custody pending further inquiries. They have been charged with violating several clauses of a stringent law relating to sexual offenses against children. Such offenses do not allow for bail.

According to police, in mid-August the fourth-grade girl was taken to the sick room after she complained of abdominal pain.

The priest and the nurse were present in the room, and police say a medical examination proved the child had been sexually assaulted. Based on " circumstantial evidence," both were arrested after officers interviewed some staff members several

weeks later, Kumar said.

Fr. Jerome Sequeira, assistant provincial of Jesuits in Jamshedpur province, told ucanews.com that Jesuits had studied the case and found the "priest and the nurse innocent" and "in no way connected to the child abuse case."

He said the child complained of abdominal pain Aug. 8 and the nurse took her to the sick room, where she treated her before calling her parents and sending her home with them.

"It is her father who named the priest, nurse and the class teacher in the complaint," said Sequeira.

Police first went to the school Sept. 6 and detained Lomga the following day. She was interrogated for 48 hours, and her arrest was not officially recorded until Sept. 9.

Ekka, a local tribal priest, was arrested Sept.10.

Jharkhand has a history of targeting Catholic priests and their institutions.

Another Jesuit, Fr. Alphonse Aind, was jailed for life in connection with a gang-rape case in June 2018. He is still in jail; his appeal against conviction is pending in the state court.

Missionaries of Charity Sister Concelia Baxla was arrested and jailed on charges of child trafficking in July 2018. The courts have repeatedly refused her bail, keeping her behind bars.

Fr. V.J. Binoy and catechist Munna Hansda were arrested and jailed from Godda district in early September following allegations that they violated the state's anti-conversion law and grabbed the lands belonging to a tribal man.

"They have all been framed for political gains," said Fr. Anand David Xalxo, the spokesman for Ranchi Archdiocese, in the state capital.

On Sept. 3, a mob vandalized a Jesuit mission, but police still have not made any arrests, even after mission officials named more than 25 of people in a complaint.

The church's mission to educate tribal people has resulted in hundreds of them accepting the Catholic faith, resulting in a stronger Christian community in the state.

Jharkhand has about 1.5 million Christians – or 4.3 percent of the population – almost double the 2.3 percent figure for India as a whole. Tribal people constitute 16 percent of the state's 32 million people.

Advertisement