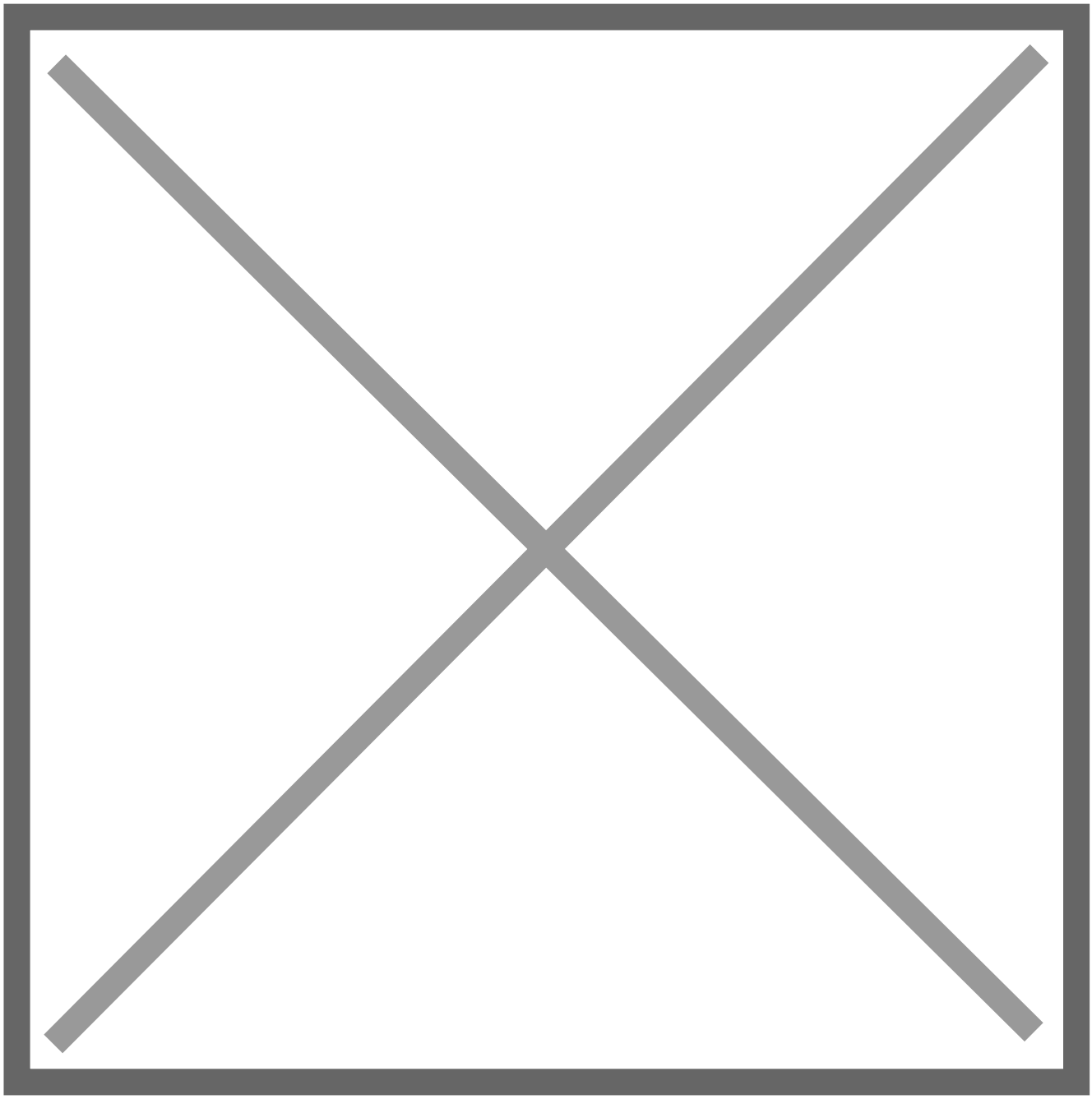
News
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Jesuit Fr. Stan Swamy, pictured in a screenshot from a video, has been incarcerated in an Indian jail since his Oct. 9, 2020, arrest. Relatives and Jesuit friends are concerned that the 84-year-old priest, who suffers from Parkinson's disease, has contracted COVID-19. (CNS screenshot/YouTube)



by Catholic News Service

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MUMBAI, INDIA — May 18, 2021

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A prominent Jesuit priest whose health was deteriorating was transferred from jail to a hospital May 18 after an outcry from relatives and fellow Jesuits.

Indian Jesuits petitioned the National Human Rights Commission to examine the health of Jesuit Fr. Stan Swamy, 84, following suspicions that he has contracted COVID-19.

Matters India reported May 18 that Swamy was transferred from Taloja Central Jail in Mumbai to a hospital, where he received his first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

The Jesuits' demand for treatment came after family members of the rights activist priest suspected that he could be suffering from COVID-19 as a second wave of the pandemic spread across India, particularly in western regions.

"Father Swamy had a severe cold, fever, body pain and diarrhea and could not even attend a call from his legal team. This indicates that he was suffering from COVID-19," his elder brother, Irudaya Swamy, 90, told a virtual news conference May 15. "We are not sure if he is getting proper medical attention. His health condition is getting worse."

Federal anti-terror police arrested Swami Oct. 8 from his residence in Ranchi, capital of Jharkhand state in eastern India. The priest, who works for the rights of tribal people in Jharkhand, was accused of conspiring with the outlawed Maoist rebels to overthrow the federal government and organize violence.

He is among 16 rights activists detained in the same jail on charges under the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act linked to a 2018 riot in Maharashtra's Bhima Koregaon village.

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Jesuits and rights activists say the police fabricated charges and evidence against the activists to silence them after they criticized the policies and programs of the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party that runs the federal government.

Fr. A. Santhanam, a Jesuit lawyer, said several others jailed with Swamy also are not well. They, too, need care after many in the prison, including staff and cooks, reportedly contracted COVID-19, he said.

"We are seriously worried about his health," Santhanam told ucanews.com May 17.

"Father Swamy is already suffering from Parkinson's disease and needs the help of inmates to take care of his daily chores. His situation will be serious if he is infected."

Jesuit Fr. Joseph Xavier, director of the Indian Social Institute based in Bengaluru, formerly Bangalore, said Swamy "never complained about his health in the past months but on May 14, for the first time, he spoke of his deteriorating health."

On April 26, the priest appealed for bail, challenging the order of a special court that denied him bail twice. The High Court has scheduled the bail hearing for May 19.