

Bishop Franco Mulakkal and Kerala nun rape case

Why in news?

A nun's rape and victimisation charges against Jalandhar Bishop Franco Mulakkal of the Syro-Malabar Church has landed the numerically strong church into the vortex of its worst crisis in recent history.

What is the complaint of the nun?

- The nun had complained that she was raped and sexually exploited 14 times by the bishop since May 2014.
- She was allegedly raped by Bishop Franco Mulakkal, the head of the Latin diocese of Jalandhar.
- Diocese is a district under the pastoral care of a bishop in the Christian Church.
- The nun is a member of the Punjab-based Missionaries of Jesus congregation.
- But the attacks happened at one of the order's convents in the southern state of Kerala.
- She was allegedly sexually exploited at the Church's guest house facility at Kuravilangad, Kerala.
- So, the nun had filed a case with the Kuravilangad police, Kerala.
- However, her complaint came a few days after the bishop himself had filed a case of blackmail by relatives of the nun.

What are the recent developments?

- In July 2018, members of various Christian organisations have called upon Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Giambattista Diquattro to take steps to relieve Bishop Franco Mulakkal of his pastoral responsibilities.
- Justice Sunil Thomas of the Kerala High Court recused himself from hearing a petition filed by the Kerala Catholic Church Reformation Movement (KCRM), Pala, seeking a directive to arrest Franco Mulakkal.
- However in August, the Kerala High Court on Monday turned down a plea for a directive to arrest Franco Mulakkal.
- Following which high court also said the State government to report the progress in the case.
- In September, 2018, the nun who accused Bishop Franco Mulakkal of the Jalandhar diocese of raping her had petitioned the Vatican representative in

India.

- In the petition, she alleged that the clergyman was using political and money power to bury the case, and sought his removal from the post.
- In the meanwhile, nuns protested at Kerala High Court Junction and were on a sit-in under the Save Our Sisters (SOS) Action Council.
- The protest started to garner heavy public support.
- After the protest the Jalandhar-based Missionaries of Jesus (MJ) congregation has come out with its preliminary inquiry commission report in the case.
- It effectively absolved the bishop of the charge while casting aspersions on the integrity of the victim and the nuns supporting her.
- In the end of September, Bishop Franco moved the Kerala High court for anticipatory bail.
- However, the court postponed the hearing.
- Eventually, Bishop Franco Mulakkal was interrogated by Kerala police.
- So, Jalandhar bishop Franco Mulakkal requested the Pope Francis and it was accepted to relieve him temporarily of pastoral duties.
- Police arrest Bishop Franco Mulakkal on rape charge on September 2018.
- Then the Bishop's bail was turned down by the Kerala high court.
- Now, the High Court has given conditional bail to him.
- Still the high tension exits around the case as the witness Father Kuriakose Kattuthara against the Bishop Franco was found dead mysteriously in his room.

What can be the better way to prevent such incidents?

- Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) has framed the guidelines to deal with Sexual Harassment in Workplace, 2017.
- However the structures have to be established and procedures need to be described to implement them.
- Also it is the need of the hour to create awareness regarding these guidelines.
- Further CBCI also needs to ensure that every diocese respects and complies with the State laws with regard to addressing abuse cases of minors and sexual harassment of women in Church.
- It should also ensure that required structures are established at the diocesan level to address such cases.
- The authorities should pay more attention to the formation of the candidates to priesthood.

Source: The Hindu



SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering