News



Police lead Bishop Franco Mulakkal of Jalandhar, India, away for questioning on the outskirts of Cochin on Sept. 21, 2018. (CNS/Reuters/Sivaram V)

by Matters India

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The Kerala High Court July 7 rejected deposed Jalandhar Bishop Franco Mulakkal's plea to quash the charge against him of sexually assaulting a nun. Mulakkal is directed to face trial July 13 in the trial court in Kottayam.

The prosecution had argued in the high court that there's ample evidence against the bishop in the case and that the prelate was simply trying to delay the proceedings. Both the initial police report and the confidential statement provided by the victim offer foundation for the case, it said.

The 56-year-old prelate, in his plea to dismiss the charges, claimed that the allegations against him were fabricated based on personal grudges and differences the victim had with him. He claimed he was being implicated because he had questioned her financial dealings.

Mulakkal had appealed to the high court after the district court in Kottayam had dismissed his discharge plea in March.

Related: Indian court rejects Bishop Mulakkal's plea to dismiss rape case

Bishop Mulakkal of Jalandhar, a diocese in the northern Indian state of Punjab, is accused of raping a Missionaries of Jesus sister numerous times between 2014 and 2016 at a convent in Kuravilangad near Kottayam, the town where the trial court is situated.

The prelate had spent three weeks in prison in 2018 after being arrested by a special investigation team of the police and has been free on bail since then.

His counsel said Mulakkal would soon file an appeal to the Supreme Court in New Delhi.

In June, the trial court had asked him to appear before it on July 1, but he did not, citing that his house in Jalandhar is located in a coronavirus containment zone.

Sr. Anupama Kelamangalathuveli, one of the five nuns, who had staged a sit-in in Kochi in September 2018 seeking the bishop's arrest, said she is happy with high court decision and stated that she has full faith in the judicial system of India.

Mulakkal's case has highlighted the role of the Save our Sister Forum, which is spearheading the campaign against the bishop and also is fighting for reforms in the Syro-Malabar Church, the second-largest Eastern Catholic Church in the world.

[This story is part of a collaboration between GSR and Matters India, a New Delhi-based news portal that focuses on social and religious news.]

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