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Rally in Kochi Highlights Concerns Over Religious Minority Persecution in Northern India

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Thousands gathered in Kochi, Kerala, on Saturday in a rally organized by the Varapuzha Archdiocese to protest what church leaders described as increasing incidents of discrimination against Christians and Muslims in parts of northern India. The protest was

sparked by the recent arrest of two Catholic nuns from Kerala, Sister Preethi Mary and Sister Vandana Francis, in the state of Chhattisgarh.

The march commenced at Ernakulam High Court Junction and was led by Varapuzha Archbishop Mar Joseph Kalathiparambil. While welcoming the bail granted to the two nuns, he criticized what he termed a pattern of legal action targeting religious minorities in certain states. “India has a priceless Constitution respected across the world. It guarantees religious freedom and minority rights. Who can justify a situation where those expected to uphold these rights instead contribute to their erosion?” Kalathiparambil said in his address.

As part of the rally, Archbishop Kalathiparambil lit ceremonial torches carried by nuns, including Catholic Teachers Congregation (CTC) Mother General Sister Shahila. The procession moved to Gandhi Square at Rajendra Maidan, where a concluding meeting was held. Auxiliary Bishop Antony Valumkal inaugurated the event, with Kerala Latin Catholic Association Archdiocesan President C.J. Paul presiding. Sister Neelima, Provincial Superior of the Catholic Sisters of St. Joseph (CSS), read the preamble of the Indian Constitution aloud to the crowd.

The participants called on authorities to withdraw what they described as false charges against the two nuns and to act against those allegedly involved in their detention. Church leaders demanded steps to prevent future incidents targeting minority communities.

In Kannur, Thalassery Archbishop Joseph Pamplany expressed appreciation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, stating that the central government intervened despite pushback from the Chhattisgarh state administration. “Such incidents should not recur, and the charges against the nuns should be reviewed,” he said.

Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, head of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, welcomed the court’s decision to grant bail but said further action was needed. He urged the Chhattisgarh government to investigate those responsible for detaining the nuns and called for the case to be dropped to ensure justice is served.