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Orissa priest, survived Hindu attack, dies of dengue

Anto Akkara Catholic News Service | Oct. 29, 2008

BANGALORE, India
Father Bernard Digal, the Bhubaneswar archdiocesan procurator who survived an attack by Hindu extremists and had been hospitalized for a month, died of dengue fever Oct. 28.

"We are saddened by Father Bernard's untimely demise," Archbishop Raphael Cheenath of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar told Catholic News Service.

"He was a dedicated priest at the service of the people," Archbishop Cheenath said of the 46-year-old priest from the Kandhamal district in Orissa state.

Father Digal was beaten by Hindu extremists and left to die in the jungle Aug. 26 before he was moved to a local government hospital. On Aug. 28 he was airlifted to Holy Spirit Hospital in Mumbai.

Father Digal fell into the hands of the extremists when he walked more than 10 miles into the jungle to fetch a motorbike to rescue an elderly priest. The elderly priest had been stranded in the violence after his own van was set on fire by the Hindu fundamentalists.

Archbishop Cheenath said the funeral arrangements for the priest had to be finalized, but he confirmed the funeral would be held in Kandhamal.

The violence in Orissa began Aug. 24, the day after a Hindu leader and four associates were killed in the Kandhamal district. The leader, Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati, had for decades opposed Christian missionary activities and Hindus converting to Christianity. A Maoist group claimed responsibility for the murders, but the Hindu extremists blamed Christians for the murders and began attacking them.

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