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INDIA: CATHOLIC PRIESTS HONORED AT 56TH NATIONAL FILMAWARDS

Salesian priests Joseph Kizhakechennadu and Joseph Pulinthanath of Tripura made history when they were awarded by the President of India, Pratibha Devisingh Patil, at the 56th National Film Awards in New Delhi March 19. The award was for "Yarwng" (Roots), the priests' feature film dubbed in Tripura's Kokborok language. Kizhakechennadu (producer) and Pulinthanath (director) were among 52 film award winners, including high-profile Bollywood actor Priyanka Chopra and the doyen of Indian cinematography V. K. Murthy, who was awarded the country's highest honor in cinema - the Dada Saheb Phalke Award. "Priests and priesthood have always had a niche carved out for themselves in the vast repertoire of fiction and film stories. One seldom sees men in garb take the driver's seat and make a mark at the highest level," said Fr. Thomas Vattathara, director of Don Bosco Institute of Guwahati. (SAR NEWS)

HONG KONG: CARDINAL ZEN ADVERTISES JUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY IN THE PRESS

Cardinal Joseph Zen, bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, has appeared in a full page advertisement in some newspapers, urging Hong Kong people to vote on May 16 as an act of "social justice" and for universal suffrage. This is a way to show support for democracy, Lina Chan, executive secretary of the diocese's Justice and Peace Commission, said. The ad, with the cardinal's signature and his full page photo in Roman collar, aims to underline the importance of voting, at a time when five of the 60 seats of the territory's parliament will be elected. Only half of the 60 seats are elected directly, the others are elected by corporations or are chosen by the government. (ASIANEWS)

SINGAPORE: YOUTHS LEARN TO EVANGELIZE THROUGH INTERNET

A "webinar" (online seminar) held on March 20 at St. Mary of the Angels parish taught six youth communicators how to use new media to fulfill their mission. Father Stephen Cuyos, a Missionary of the Sacred Heart, conducted the seminar teaching the youth about Web 2.0 and social networking as a tool to proclaim God's Word. Fr Cuyos works full-time with the Manila-based "Communication Foundation for Asia," a center dedicated to educating people on social issues through print and audio-visual publications. The webinar is part of a series of media awareness workshops the parish organizes for young people. (CN)

"you are called to take the role of animators of the community on the Internet... to prepare the ways that lead to the Word of God, and to express a particular sensitivity to the disheartened..."

- Pope Benedict XVI, Italian national conference on "Digital Witnesses: Faces and Languages in the Cross-Media Age, April 24, 2010

INDIA: COMMUNICATION RESOURCES FOR FORMATION LAUNCHED

Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli has released three books and DVD resources for teachers at the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) Centre, New Delhi on February 12. The president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications also launched a national formation program in social communication for seminarians, religious and lay leaders. The event took place after a three-day meeting of bishops and secretaries in the 13 regional bishops' councils in the country. Archbishop Celli said the project is a profitable tool for the Church. He complimented the CBCI Commission for Social Communications and Don Bosco Communications in India for spearheading the project, which includes three volumes of a formation manual titled "Communication for Pastoral Leadership," DVD resources and an interactive website at <www.communicationformation.com> (CBCI)

INDIA: FILMMAKER TO HELP KANDHAMAL VICTIMS

A delegation of Christian lay persons, nuns and priests has called on Bollywood director and social activist Mahesh Bhat, March 21, to help victims of the Kandhamal violence in Orissa state. Bhat assured the team that he would ask prominent members of civil society to help as well. The filmmaker said he would meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Orissa state Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik in a bid to get justice for the impoverished victims, now living in sub-human conditions in makeshift camps. (SAR NEWS)

INDIA: MUMBAI CATHOLIC PRIESTS GO ONLINE

To engage youth, Fathers Nigel Barrett and Warner D'Souza in Mumbai scrap on "Orkut," run "Facebook" groups, write blogs and send parish updates through e-posters as well as text messages. "The best way to reach today's youth is to meet them where they are -- on social networking sites," said D'Souza, 38. The priest has more than 400 fans on each of his Bandra parish-related Facebook communities. "Young people hesitate to approach priests in the institution of the church. They are more comfortable opening up within the anonymity of the net," said Barrett, 42. From Malad's Orlem Church, he reaches out to parishioners over Google chat, attracting more youngsters to join community activities. (HINDUSTAN TIMES)

TAIWAN: FR. RAYMOND PARENT, S.J. PASSED AWAY

Father Raymond Parent passed away on February 3 at the National Taiwan University Hospital in Taipei. He was 78. The Jesuit missionary from Montreal, Canada was a pioneer of Catholic communications in Asia. He was the second director of Kuangchi Program Service (KPS) in Taipei, after the term of its founder and first director, Fr. Philip Bourret, sj. Fr. Parent was head of the Kuangchi Press in Taipei, and board member of the Mandarin Program Service of Radio Veritas Asia. The funeral was on February 11 at Holy Family Parish in Taipei.

INDIA: TRIBALS ACCESS SERVICES THROUGH INFORMATION LAW

A Church-run social service center is using a government freedom law to help illiterate tribal people get assistance due to them. The Right to Information (RTI) Act, passed in 2005, forces government officials to give information on pay and other entitlements within a fixed time frame. The Church group is publicizing the law among the poorest Baiga and Gond tribes whose members lack basic amenities. Tribal leaders are also being trained to in turn train people in some 60 villages. (CNUA)

INDIA: ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE BARES PLAN TO BUILD MEDIA RESEARCH CENTER

Upon completion of 150 years' celebration of St. Xavier's College, Father Felix Raj, principal and president of the school's alumni association, bared plans to build an Education Mass Media Research Center. "We want to expand the student community. Three new post graduate courses are (also) in the offing in the fields of economics, English and microbiology," said Fr. Raj in a function organized to celebrate the end of his first year as college principal. (CNUA)

INDIA: TROUBLE OVER TARNISHED IMAGE OF JESUS

The display of a morphed image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on a hoarding in Jalandhar unleashed violent protests in Punjab. The same image published in a textbook by a Delhi-based publisher led to accusations of blasphemy in Meghalaya, northeastern India. In June 2008, the picture was published by the Catholic magazine, "Vachana Jyoti," owned by the Diocese of Neyyattinkara in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala forcing Bishop Vincent Samuel to take action on the magazine's editorial staff. In July 2009, the Telugu daily, "Sakshi," published the distorted image of Jesus. This led to widespread protests by Christians. The result was an unconditional apology from the daily's management. The image in question used to appear on the first page of "Google Images" uploaded from a web blog run by a student from Australia. After several Christians wrote to the student, the image was removed from the Internet. (SAR NEWS)

MALAYSIA: MUSLIM MAGAZINE APOLOGIZES FOR OFFENDING CATHOLICS

"Al-Islam" magazine apologized to Catholics for publishing a report in which two of its journalists profaned a consecrated host, reported Eglises d'Asie, agency of the Foreign Missions of Paris. Archbishop Murphy Pakiam of Kuala Lumpur had asked for the apology in early March after affirming that the archdiocese would not pursue legal action. The directors of the monthly publication issued a public apology for the actions of two Muslim journalists who attended Mass and, posing as Christians, took Communion. They spat out the hosts and one took a photograph. They later criticized and ridiculed Christian beliefs in an article published in the magazine. The incident was reported to the police, who accused the two of having "caused disharmony, feelings of enmity and hatred, and undermining religious harmony in the country." (ZENIT)



BANGLADESH: SEMINAR EXPOSES DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS CHASM

A lecture on digital communications organized by the Episcopal Commission for Social Communications (ECSC) in Dhaka in February has exposed just how big the challenges are for the local Church. "Most priests, nuns and brothers have little knowledge to use digital media and communication tools. It's costly and we're not asked to use them for our ministries," said Fr. Theotonius Rebeiro, chancellor of Dhaka archdiocese. "But I realized that the Church needs to be present in the digital world," he added. Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, was keynote speaker of the event. He stressed the use of social networking sites, blogging and podcasting in Church ministries. While the some 300 bishops, priests, religious and media persons who attended the event were eager to learn, some found the prelate's speech hard to grasp. "I actually didn't understand much of what Archbishop Celli spoke about," said Holy Cross Brother Placid Peter Rebeiro. "But I realize it's high time the Church takes major initiatives to go digital," he added. (CNUA)

CHINA: BIBLE DEMAND OUTSTRIPS SUPPLY

The British-based Bible Society has reported that demand for copies of Bibles in China now exceeds supply as an estimated 500,000 people convert to Christianity every year. The official number of Christians stands at 28.6 million, but it is believed that the true figure could be as high as 90 million if the estimated number of worshippers in unofficial churches is included. Some four million Bibles were printed and distributed across China last year. The Bibles were printed by Amity Printing Company, the only government-approved Bible printing press in China. It has printed around 70 million copies since it started operations in 1987. Distribution, however, has been limited to government-sanctioned bookstores and distribution points, making it difficult for Christians in rural areas to access them. Cost is also an issue as most church-goers in China live in poverty. (CATHNEWS ASIA)

CHINA: CATHOLICS APPRECIATED AND RECOGNIZED BY SOCIETY AND THE MEDIA

The recognition given to two Catholics in China proves that Chinese Catholics today are valued by Chinese society and the media in general. Wang Ping An, 71 and a farmer of modest means, was chosen by major national media and online voting to be among the "Top 10 People of 2009." He spent 23 years taking care of the elderly, abandoned children, the sick and disabled in his own home. Catholic university student, John Huang Chuan Ding, 21, was hailed as "Best Student" at his funeral. He died on January 7 saving a 5-year old boy who had fallen into an icy river. The over 3,000 people who attended the funeral including fellow students and government officials labeled him "heroic," "courageous," "of great moral height," and "an example for all citizens." (FIDES)

INDONESIA: INTERNET USED FOR CHASTITY CAMPAIGN

The Catholic youth group, "Domus Cordis," has launched a nine-month long awareness campaign on the importance of chastity for young people in Jakarta on March 6. The campaign dubbed "True Love Celebration" will use media and social networking websites to get the message across. Talks will also be organized based on Pope John Paul II's "Theology of the Body." The group also plans to recruit "chastity ambassadors" to help spread the message beyond the use of media. The National Commission for Child Protection reported in 2008 that over 95 percent of high school students had sex and watch pornographic movies. (CNUA)