

## Indian youth return home after world youth festivities

As the nearly 500 Indian youth, who participated in the week-long Catholic Church's World Youth Day festivities here, return home Monday, there was shock and embarrassment because some of their members were still absconding in New Zealand.

At least 40 Indian men disappeared in New Zealand en route to attending the Catholic Church's WYD.

'It is sad for the entire country that an incident like this happened. We were part of the group of 220, who spent eight days in Auckland Diocese billeted with families, before coming to Sydney,' Father Olavo Caiado, director of the Diocesan Youth Centre in Panaji, Goa, told IANS.

Two of the 40 Indian men, who disappeared in New Zealand, have returned home Monday.

The department of labour's immigration service has spoken to approximately 20 others at various locations in New Zealand's upper North Island over the weekend, asking them about the circumstances of their visit to New Zealand and reminding them of the conditions of their visitor visas, which expire Aug 5 or 6.

Father Caiado has been in Sydney for the past week, leading a group of 20 youth aged between 19 and 29.

'They are all returning to India Monday night after a week of enriching and joyful experiences. We have all learnt a lot from meeting youth from across the globe and the volunteers - their patience, dedication, organisational skills,' Caiado told IANS.

Caiado along with Father Xavier Pinto of the Porvorim Diocese in Goa, will be in Sydney until the weekend to celebrate World Goa Day - a celebration of Goan heritage, culture and cuisine, with the 1,000-odd members of the Goan diaspora here.

As a young boy, Caiado had met Pope John Paul II in 1986 when the pontiff visited Goa, but this was the first time he saw Pope Benedict XVI up close. 'It was an experience I'll always treasure,' he said.

Similarly, Tushar Tribhovan and Patricia Martin, both a part of a group of 10 from the Pune Diocese, were thrilled to see the Pope. This event has been incredible, they said.

Meeting or just being able to wave to the Pope, during one of his many public appearances in Sydney, has been a memorable experience for many Indian Catholics, who made this journey to Australia for the World Youth Day festivities (July 15 to 20).

Beryl and Stanley D'cruz, who migrated to Australia from Mangalore in 1995, were among the 8,000 volunteers who braved the winter chill and arrived at 6 a.m. at The Domain in the heart of Sydney, eagerly anticipating Pope Benedict XVI's arrival, where he thanked the volunteers.

'I happened to be just behind the barricade from where the Pope's mobile passed, barely two metres away from me and I managed to get a photo, which I shall treasure forever,' said Beryl, who had

been volunteering during the festivities with distribution of lunch and dinner packages.

'To see 400,000 youth come together in the spirit of faith and solidarity has been an exhilarating experience,' said Stanley, who is president of the Mangalorean Catholic Association of Sydney.

Said Tony Colaco, president of the Goan Overseas Association, New South Wales: 'The Indian Christian community from all over New South Wales opened their hearts and homes to accommodate the visiting youth from all over the world, including India.

"I was overjoyed to meet youth from Goa, Jalandhar and Kerala hoisting the Indian flag high at the Randwick racecourse where thousands had assembled for the Papal mass on Sunday."

'For many youth," Colaco said, "it is their first trip abroad. Joining in prayer and friendship with youth from 170 countries is an experience that will stay with them for the rest of their lives." Colaco is also general secretary of the World Alliance of Goan Overseas Associations.

The 81-year-old spiritual leader of the world's 1.1 billion Catholics, the Pope also met Australian leaders of many faiths, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism, during his first visit to Australia.

Recent surveys have found Australia to be one of the least devout countries in the world. Christianity is the dominant faith with more than 12.7 million followers; there are 420,000 Buddhists, over 340,000 Muslims, nearly 150,000 Hindus and more than 88,000 Jews, according to the 2006 Census.

The next 2011 World Youth Day will be held in Madrid.

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