A NEW AGE KERALAM



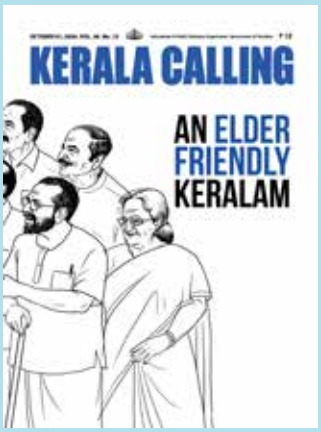


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KERALA CALLING



AN ELDER FRIENDLY KERALAM



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A NEW CHAPTER IN ELDERCARE

The true grace of a society lies not merely in the heights of its progress, but in the tenderness with which it honours those who paved the way. As Keralam continues to set national benchmarks in human development, the establishment of a dedicated Senior Citizens' Department marks a historic milestone in compassionate, forward-looking governance. This landmark initiative elevates elder welfare beyond traditional assistance to a rights-based framework centred on dignity, wellness and active social inclusion.

As demographic changes transform Keralam into an ageing society, the creation of this specialised department represents a proactive response to the evolving needs of our golden generation. The new department serves as a unified, streamlined platform for coordinating social security pensions, specialised healthcare services and grassroots community support networks. Beyond financial support, the State's vision encompasses comprehensive doorstep healthcare, age-friendly public infrastructure, dedicated wellness programmes and robust legal protections for senior citizens. The Government will ensure that no senior citizen is left unattended or unprotected. Even when individuals lack the family support they deserve, the Government assumes full responsibility for their protection and empowerment.

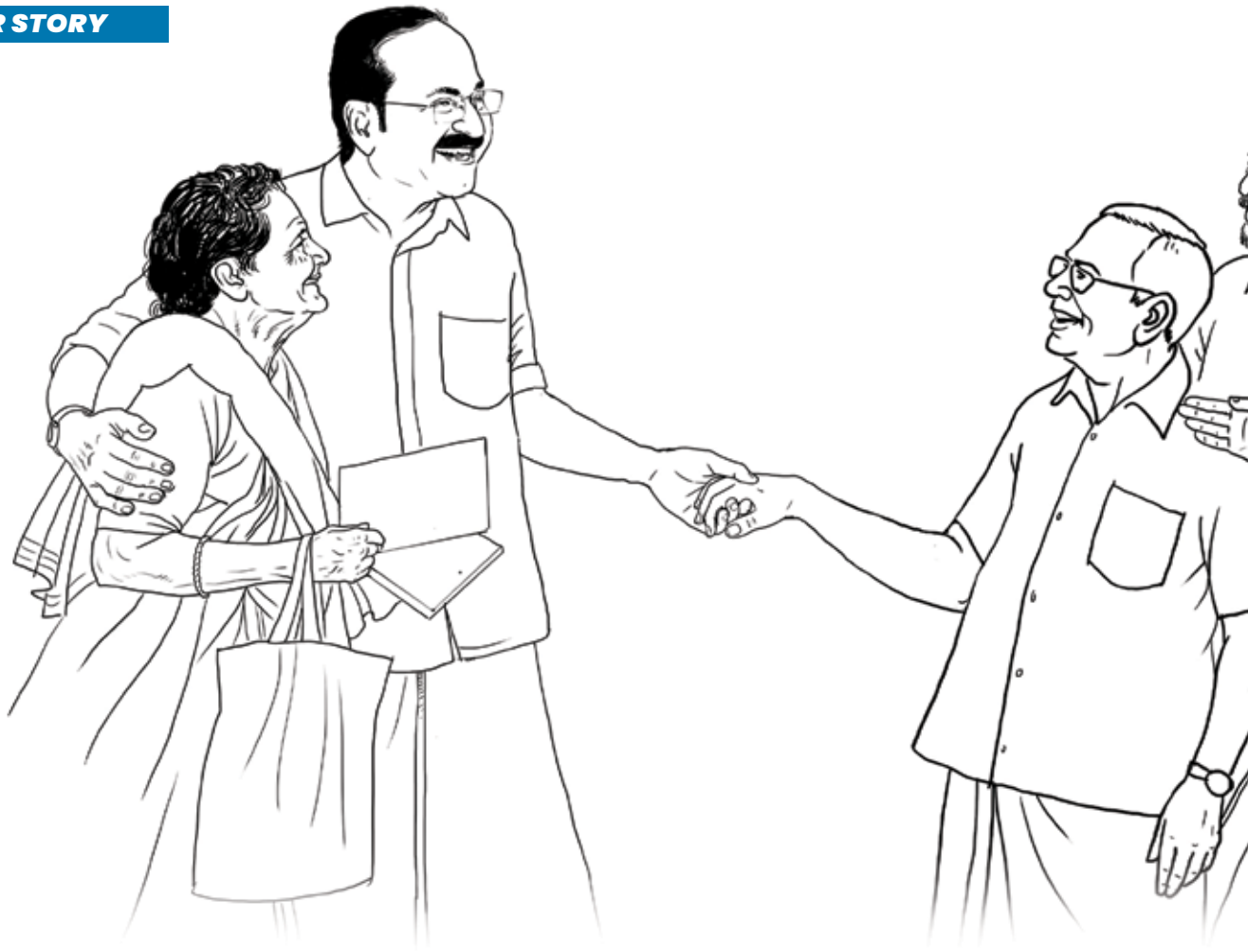
From safe public spaces to responsive healthcare systems, this dedicated department reinforces Keralam's enduring promise to its people: to ensure that every senior citizen can enjoy their golden years with security, dignity and joy. It is not merely an administrative milestone but also a testament to our collective gratitude towards those who laid the foundations of our State.

In this issue, Kerala Calling explores the State Government's policy on senior citizen welfare, highlighting the landmark initiatives launched so far, the strategic roadmap ahead and the evolving aspirations of our elders. Complementing this coverage are inspiring profiles of vibrant seniors who remind us to cherish every moment, along with an exclusive interview with renowned screenwriter Raghunath Paleri on embracing the 'golden period' of human life. Readers will also find insightful coverage of the c0c0n Cyber Security Conference, a feature on the newly launched GIGON hubs for platform workers and much more.

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TOWARDS AN ELDER-FRIENDLY KERALAM

AGEING WITH DIGNITY, PURPOSE AND BELONGING

Keralam's ageing population presents not merely a welfare challenge, but an opportunity to reimagine what it means to grow older-with dignity, independence, participation and purpose.

V.D. Satheesan
Chief Minister

Keralam is entering a new chapter in its development story. Longer life expectancy, smaller families, migration, changing lifestyles and shifting social structures are steadily transforming the State's demographic profile. As the number and proportion of older people increase, ageing will influence not only healthcare and social welfare, but also the way Keralam thinks about families, neighbourhoods, public spaces, economic participation and community life.

An ageing population is often discussed mainly in terms of healthcare costs, dependency and the need for welfare support. These concerns are real, but they represent only one part of the picture. Longer lives are also a remarkable social achievement, reflecting decades of progress in healthcare, education, nutrition and living standards. The challenge before Keralam, therefore, is not simply how to care for a growing elderly population, but how to create a society



in which people can grow older with confidence, dignity, independence and a continuing sense of belonging.

Beyond Welfare

For many years, public discussion around old age has often been framed through the language of dependency and assistance. An elder-friendly society must move beyond this limited understanding. Older people are not merely recipients of pensions, healthcare or welfare programmes. They are citizens with rights, aspirations, relationships, accumulated experience and the capacity to make choices about their own lives.

Respect for age should therefore mean more than sympathy or protection. It should include the right to live safely without unnecessary restrictions, to participate in family and community decisions, to access services with dignity and to remain socially connected. Care and support are essential when people need them, but receiving care should never require surrendering autonomy or identity. An elder-friendly Keralam must create systems that protect people when they are vulnerable while continuing to recognise them as independent individuals.

Ageing with Purpose

Retirement need not mark the end of meaningful participation. Senior citizens carry an extraordinary reservoir of knowledge and experience accumulated over decades. Teachers, farmers, health professionals, artisans, administrators, entrepreneurs, homemakers and workers from every sphere of life possess skills and perspectives that can continue to enrich society long after formal employment ends.

"Care in old age should not be seen as charity. Dignity, security and participation are rights that should remain with every person throughout life."

Many older people may wish to mentor younger generations, participate in community activities, volunteer, learn new skills, pursue creative interests or remain economically active. The objective should never be to impose productivity on people in later life. Rather, society should ensure that meaningful opportunities do not disappear simply because someone has crossed a particular age. Active ageing is ultimately about choice—the freedom to remain engaged where one wishes and the assurance of care and support when one needs it.

Health Is More Than Treatment

Growing older well requires much more than access to hospitals or medicines. Health in later life includes physical mobility, mental and emotional well-being, social relationships, good nutrition, rehabilitation and the ability to carry out everyday activities as independently as possible. An effective approach to ageing must therefore look beyond the treatment of individual diseases and focus on preserving overall functional ability and quality of life.

Preventive care, early identification of health concerns, rehabilitation and support close to home can help people remain independent for longer. Equally important are opportunities for exercise, social interaction and mental stimulation. The true objective of healthy ageing is not merely to extend lifespan, but to enable people to live those additional years with greater autonomy, comfort and purpose.

Communities That Care

Family has traditionally been one of the strongest sources of support for older people in Keralam. Yet family structures are changing rapidly. Migration, smaller households and changing patterns of employment mean that many senior citizens now live alone or at a considerable distance from their children. These changes make strong neighbourhood and community relationships more important than ever.

An elder-friendly Keralam must ensure that vulnerable older people do not become invisible simply because immediate family support is unavailable. Neighbours, local institutions, voluntary organisations and community networks can play an important role in reducing isolation, recognising early signs of difficulty and connecting people with appropriate assistance. Such networks are particularly valuable for people who live alone, are bedridden, have disabilities or are facing financial or emotional difficulties.

Community support cannot and should not replace professional health and social-care services. Its strength lies elsewhere: in ensuring that no older person disappears between institutions and that people continue to experience a sense of belonging within the places where they live.

A Dementia-Friendly Society

Dementia is one of the most sensitive challenges associated with population ageing. Its impact is felt not only by the individual but also by family members and caregivers, who may face significant emotional, physical and financial strain. Misunderstanding and stigma can make the experience even more difficult.

A dementia-friendly Keralam should therefore begin with awareness and empathy. Early identification and timely care are important, but so too is creating communities that understand the condition and support families rather than isolating them. Wherever possible, people living with dementia should be able to remain connected to familiar places, relationships and routines.

Most importantly, dementia must never erase personhood. An individual living with memory loss remains a person with identity, emotions, preferences and dignity. A truly compassionate society will ensure that this understanding guides both professional care and everyday community interactions.

Connecting Generations

An elder-friendly society cannot be created by separating generations. Young people and older people possess different forms of knowledge and experience, and both can benefit when opportunities for meaningful interaction are created.

Older generations can share life experience, cultural memory, professional knowledge and a long-term perspective shaped by social change. Younger people, in turn, bring familiarity with new technology, emerging ideas and new ways of communicating and engaging with the world. Intergenerational programmes can bring these strengths together in ways that reduce loneliness, challenge stereotypes and strengthen community relationships.

Such connections can also transform the way younger generations understand ageing. When children and young adults interact meaningfully with older people, old age becomes less associated with decline and more closely connected with continuity, learning and shared human experience. A society that nurtures strong relationships between generations ultimately becomes more compassionate for everyone.

> ***"The true measure of healthy ageing is not only how long people live, but how independently, meaningfully and securely they are able to live."***

The Promise of the Silver Economy

Population ageing will also reshape Keralam's economy. As people live longer, demand will expand for age-friendly healthcare, housing, assistive technology, financial services, tourism, mobility solutions, education, leisure and professional care. This emerging silver economy can become an important source of employment, entrepreneurship and innovation.

Its growth, however, should be guided by values as well as markets. Products and services intended for older people must be affordable, trustworthy, accessible and designed around genuine needs. Older consumers should never be treated simply as a commercial opportunity or as a vulnerable market segment.

The silver economy should also recognise older people as participants rather than merely consumers. Senior citizens can continue to contribute as mentors, entrepreneurs, advisers, cultural custodians, hosts and knowledge holders. In this sense, the silver economy can become both an economic opportunity and a framework for ensuring continued participation in later life.

Designing for Every Age

An elder-friendly Keralam should be visible in the design of everyday public life. Government offices, hospitals, transport systems, streets, parks and service centres should



Chief Minister of Keralam V. D. Satheesan announces the launch of the Department of Senior Citizens. Also present are Ministers K. Muraleedharan and C. P. John, Secretary Rathan U. Kelkar, and Director Arun S. Nair. *Photo: Sreelas Olari, IPRD*

be safe and easy for older people to use. Clear signage, comfortable seating, accessible toilets, ramps, lifts, safe walkways and respectful service can make the difference between dependence and independent participation.

These improvements are not useful only to senior citizens. A ramp also helps a wheelchair user, a person recovering from an injury or a parent with a stroller. Better signage benefits people with visual difficulties as well as anyone navigating an unfamiliar building. Age-friendly design is therefore not about creating separate spaces for older people; it is about creating inclusive environments that work better for people at every stage of life.

Technology Without Exclusion

Digital technology has the potential to make healthcare, communication, information and public services easier to access. Teleconsultation, digital records, online services and assistive technologies can all improve everyday life for older people when thoughtfully designed.

Yet digital transformation can also create new forms of exclusion. Essential services should never become inaccessible because a person cannot operate an application, remember a password or complete digital authentication independently. Technology should therefore be accompanied by accessible design, clear language and human assistance wherever required. Progress should bring public services closer to people, not create new barriers between citizens and the support they need.

A New Understanding of Ageing

Perhaps the deepest transformation Keralam needs is cultural. Ageing should no longer be understood mainly through the language of burden, helplessness or decline. Older age can also represent resilience, memory, accumulated knowledge, continuity and contribution. Families, institutions, workplaces, media and communities all have a role in changing the social imagination of ageing.

A society that celebrates youth while fearing old age ultimately creates insecurity for every generation. By contrast, a society that respects the entire life course reassures people that their dignity and value will not disappear as they grow older. Keralam's next major social achievement can therefore be to make longevity not only possible, but meaningful.

The aspiration is for a Keralam where senior citizens remain visible and valued, where care strengthens rather than diminishes independence, where generations remain connected and where accumulated experience continues to enrich development. It is a vision of a society in which people can grow older with health, security, dignity and self-respect.

That is the promise of an elder-friendly Keralam.



AGEING WITH DIGNITY:
KERALAM'S NEW VISION FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

FROM WELFARE TO RIGHTS, FROM CARE TO OPPORTUNITY-BUILDING AN AGE-READY KERALAM

"A society's progress must be measured not merely by how long its people live, but by how well they live as they grow older."



Dr. Rathan U. Kelkar IAS
Secretary, Dept. of Senior Citizens

Keralam stands at a defining moment in its demographic journey. Decades of investment in public health, education, social development and community welfare have contributed to longer life expectancy and improved quality of life. Today, as the proportion of senior citizens in the population continues to rise, the State faces a new responsibility: ensuring that longer lives are accompanied by dignity, security, independence and meaningful participation in society.

Population ageing is often discussed in terms of increasing healthcare expenditure, growing dependency and pressure on social security systems. While these challenges are real, they represent only one dimension of the demographic transition. An ageing society also presents opportunities for social innovation, new economic activities, specialised services, intergenerational cooperation and the creation of a more inclusive development model.

Recognising both the responsibilities and opportunities arising from this transition, the Government of Keralam

is taking important steps towards a comprehensive and forward-looking framework for senior citizens.

The Government's approach marks a fundamental shift — from fragmented welfare interventions to an integrated system of rights, care, protection, active ageing and economic opportunity.

A Dedicated Department: A Major Institutional Reform

One of the most significant steps taken by the Government is the establishment of a dedicated Department of Senior Citizens.

This is a landmark institutional initiative, reflecting the Government's recognition that the needs of senior citizens require focused policy attention, sustained administrative coordination and long-term planning.

Traditionally, issues affecting older persons have been addressed through multiple departments and agencies, including social justice, health, local self-government, housing, police and social security institutions. While each has contributed substantially, the absence of a unified institutional framework can result in fragmentation, overlapping responsibilities and difficulties in accessing services.

The creation of a dedicated department seeks to address this challenge by providing a clear institutional focus for policies concerning senior citizens.

The new department is envisaged as a nodal institution for coordinating programmes across sectors, promoting age-friendly infrastructure, strengthening care services, encouraging active ageing and facilitating partnerships with civil society, research institutions and the private sector.

Importantly, the objective is not merely to create another administrative structure. It is to bring coherence, accountability and measurable outcomes to an area of governance that will become increasingly important in the coming decades.

The creation of a dedicated department seeks to address this challenge by providing a clear institutional focus for policies concerning senior citizens.

Keralam already possesses considerable institutional strengths through its Family Health Centres, local self-governments, Kudumbashree, ASHA workers and extensive community-based palliative-care networks. The new department offers an opportunity to bring these strengths together within a coordinated framework.

A New Legislative Framework: Protecting Rights and Ensuring Dignity

Complementing this institutional reform, the Government is introducing The Keralam Senior Citizens (Care and Protection of Rights) Bill, 2026.

The proposed legislation represents an important step towards placing the dignity, care, safety and rights of senior citizens at the centre of public policy.

Ageing is not merely a question of welfare assistance. It is equally a question of rights, autonomy, protection against neglect and abuse, access to essential services and the ability to participate in society without discrimination.

The proposed legislation seeks to provide a stronger framework for addressing these concerns and establishing appropriate institutional responsibilities for the protection and welfare of older persons.

Its significance lies in recognising that senior citizens must not be viewed simply as passive recipients of assistance. They are individuals with rights, aspirations, experience and the capacity to contribute meaningfully to society.

The legislative initiative also provides an opportunity to strengthen coordination among public institutions, improve accountability in service delivery and develop more responsive mechanisms for addressing the concerns of elderly persons.

Together, the establishment of the new department and the introduction of the Bill signal a decisive policy direction: senior-citizen welfare is being elevated from a collection of programmes to a sustained responsibility of governance.

The Silver Economy: Turning Demographic Change into Opportunity

An equally important dimension of the Government's emerging approach is the development of the silver economy.

The silver economy encompasses the products, services, technologies, infrastructure and economic activities that respond to the needs and aspirations of an ageing population.

It extends far beyond conventional eldercare. It includes healthcare, rehabilitation, assistive technology, age-friendly housing, home-based services, wellness, tourism, financial services, digital solutions, mobility, lifelong learning and recreational activities.

As Keralam's senior-citizen population grows, demand for these services is expected to increase substantially. With its strong healthcare ecosystem, skilled workforce, educational institutions and established community networks, Keralam is well positioned to emerge as a leading centre for silver-economy innovation.

The Government's focus on this sector offers opportunities for entrepreneurship, employment generation, investment and the development of new service models.

Specialised home-care enterprises, rehabilitation services, assistive-device manufacturing, age-friendly tourism, senior living solutions and technology-enabled care platforms are among the areas that could benefit from a supportive policy ecosystem.

The silver economy also creates possibilities for young people, particularly those trained in nursing, allied health



sciences, social work, rehabilitation, technology and hospitality.

Rather than viewing population ageing solely as a growing fiscal burden, Keralam can use this transition to develop a new economic ecosystem that simultaneously improves the lives of senior citizens and generates productive employment.

However, the expansion of the silver economy must be guided by appropriate standards, affordability, accessibility and consumer protection. Economic opportunities should reinforce, rather than replace, the Government's responsibility to ensure essential care and social protection.

Professionalising Caregiving: A New Employment Frontier

A critical component of an age-ready society is the availability of trained, reliable and compassionate caregivers.

Families increasingly require assistance with home nursing, daily living, dementia care, rehabilitation, companionship and palliative support. At present, caregiving services are often fragmented, with considerable variation in training, quality and accountability.

Keralam has an opportunity to develop a professional caregiving ecosystem through structured training, certification, competency standards and appropriate regulatory safeguards.

A proposed caregiver certification framework can help establish professional standards while enabling families to identify trained personnel.

Different categories of caregiving require different competencies. Assistance with daily activities, dementia support, rehabilitation and skilled home nursing cannot be treated as interchangeable services. Role-specific training and certification would improve both service quality and professional recognition.

Equally important is the protection of caregivers themselves through fair employment conditions, transparent contracts, continuing education and appropriate remuneration.

A well-developed care workforce could become an important source of employment within Keralam and contribute to the State's broader skills economy.

Health, Wellness and Longevity: A Holistic Approach

Keralam's achievements in healthcare provide a strong foundation for a more comprehensive approach to ageing.

The Government has initiated an important policy exercise through the constitution of a task force to examine a holistic Kerala model for health, wellness and longevity.

The initiative seeks to move beyond a predominantly illness-centred approach towards a broader understanding of health that includes prevention, physical fitness, nutrition, mental well-being, traditional medicine, rehabilitation, healthy lifestyles and quality of life.

For senior citizens, this approach is especially relevant. The goal of public policy should not be limited to extending life expectancy. It must also seek to improve healthy life expectancy — the years during which individuals can remain active, independent and socially engaged.

Preventive healthcare, early detection of chronic conditions, rehabilitation, mental-health support and community-based wellness programmes will become

increasingly important.

Keralam's existing public-health infrastructure and its experience in community-based care provide a strong platform for developing innovative models that connect medical services with social and community support.

Such an approach can also create opportunities for research, specialised healthcare services, wellness enterprises and partnerships with academic and technical institutions.

Enabling Senior Citizens to Live Independently

For most older persons, the preferred environment for ageing is their own home and community.

Public policy must therefore seek to support independent living wherever it is safe and appropriate.

This requires coordinated attention to accessible housing, home-based healthcare, assistive devices, mobility, rehabilitation, community support and reliable caregiving services.

Local self-governments have a particularly important role in identifying vulnerable senior citizens and ensuring that essential services reach them.

An integrated approach can help identify persons living alone, those with severe mobility limitations, individuals requiring long-term care and those without dependable family support.

The development of appropriate vulnerability assessments and individual care plans could enable government institutions to respond more effectively to such needs.

Keralam's extensive local-government network, together with community health workers, Kudumbashree and voluntary organisations, provides a valuable foundation for these interventions.

A well-developed care workforce could become an important source of employment within Keralam and contribute to the State's broader skills economy.

The objective should be to create a continuum of care in which older persons receive timely assistance without being required to navigate multiple institutions independently.

Making Public Services Age-Friendly

An age-ready Keralam must extend beyond healthcare and welfare schemes.

Government offices, hospitals, public transport systems, parks, streets, banking facilities and digital platforms must progressively become more accessible to older persons.

Simple improvements such as adequate seating, accessible toilets, clear signage, ramps, priority assistance and user-friendly procedures can significantly improve everyday experiences.

Digital inclusion deserves particular attention. While technology can simplify public-service delivery, it can also create new barriers for senior citizens who may not be comfortable using smartphones, online applications or digital authentication systems.

Essential public services must therefore retain accessible, human-assisted alternatives.

The development of age-friendly standards for public institutions, supported by periodic assessment and feedback, can help ensure that accessibility becomes a normal feature of governance rather than an occasional intervention.

Social Security, Safety and Protection

Keralam has a long history of social-security interventions and community-based welfare programmes.

The next phase must focus increasingly on ensuring that eligible persons are able to access their entitlements without unnecessary administrative difficulty.

The existence of a welfare benefit does not automatically guarantee that every eligible senior citizen receives it.

Administrative processes must therefore become more responsive, particularly for persons with limited mobility, those living alone and those facing financial or social vulnerability.

Local-level facilitation, assisted applications, doorstep services and coordinated grievance-redressal systems can make a substantial difference.

The safety of senior citizens is another critical concern. Neglect, abuse, financial exploitation, cyber fraud and abandonment require coordinated responses involving the police, healthcare institutions, local governments and legal-support mechanisms.

A responsive system must ensure not only that complaints are received but also that they are followed through to resolution.

Active Ageing: Recognising Experience as an Asset

A forward-looking ageing policy must also challenge the assumption that advancing age necessarily means withdrawal from economic and social life.

Many senior citizens remain physically active, intellectually engaged and willing to contribute their experience to society.

Retired teachers, doctors, engineers, administrators, entrepreneurs, artisans and professionals represent an enormous reservoir of knowledge and expertise.

Structured opportunities for mentoring, volunteering, community participation, lifelong learning and appropriate economic engagement can help harness this potential.

Intergenerational initiatives can connect the experience of older persons with the energy and innovation of younger generations.

The concept of active ageing must therefore be understood not merely as physical fitness but as the ability to continue participating meaningfully in family, community, cultural and economic life.

The emerging silver economy can support this objective



by creating services and opportunities that promote independence, participation and social connection.

From Individual Schemes to an Integrated System

The success of Keralam's new approach will ultimately depend on implementation.

A dedicated department, a legislative framework and new economic opportunities provide important foundations. Their full value will be realised when they translate into better everyday experiences for senior citizens.

This requires clear institutional responsibilities, coordination among departments, measurable service standards and regular evaluation of outcomes.

Progress should be assessed not merely by the number of programmes conducted or beneficiaries registered, but by improvements in access to care, functional independence, safety, social protection and overall quality of life.

Universities, research institutions, professional organisations, civil society and private enterprises can play an important role in generating evidence, developing innovative solutions and supporting implementation.

The Government's role will be to provide leadership, establish appropriate safeguards and ensure that innovation remains aligned with public welfare.

Towards an Age-Ready Keralam: Vision 2031

Keralam's demographic transition is not a distant challenge. It is already reshaping the social and economic landscape of the State.

The steps now being taken by the Government-establishing a dedicated department, introducing a comprehensive Bill for the care and protection of senior citizens exploring the potential of the silver economy and developing a holistic approach to health, wellness and longevity-represent important elements of a long-term policy response.

Together, these initiatives reflect an understanding that ageing must be addressed not through isolated welfare measures but through an integrated approach encompassing rights, healthcare, social protection, economic opportunity and community participation.

By 2031, Keralam should aspire to become a State where every older person can live with dignity, security and independence; where families can access dependable support; where public institutions are responsive to the needs of an ageing population; and where longer lives are recognised as an achievement to be celebrated.

The true measure of an age-ready society is not simply how effectively it cares for older persons, but how successfully it enables them to remain healthy, independent, respected and connected to the world around them.

Keralam has an opportunity to demonstrate that population ageing need not be viewed merely as a challenge to be managed. With thoughtful public policy, institutional commitment and social participation, it can become an opportunity to create a more compassionate, inclusive and economically vibrant society.

That is the larger vision of an age-ready Keralam-a State where longevity is matched by dignity, care is supported by opportunity, and every generation has a meaningful place in the development journey.



AN ODE TO OLD AGE

Dr. Arun S. Nair IAS
Director, Department of Senior Citizens

As evening settles over Kottayam and the clock nears five, an eighty-two-year-old mother sits on the veranda of her home, phone in hand, waiting longingly for a video call from her son in Canada. Yet when the call finally comes, she hides her world from him. She does not tell him that her medicines have run out, that her knees burn with pain, or that the silence of the night fills her with a sudden, quiet terror.

"I'm perfectly fine, son," she whispers.

Reassured, her son closes the connection, and she turns back, walking alone into the heavy silence of the house.

She is not just one mother; she is the living portrait of

thousands of homes across Keralam today, a mirror image of a tomorrow that may well belong to you and to me. How, then, does a government reach that veranda? Keralam's newly formed Department of Senior Citizens is, at its heart, a simple answer to that cry. To understand why a separate department is called for now, we need not look far.

The World Is Turning Grey

Never before in human history have so many walked this earth for so long. According to the World Health Organization, by 2030, one in every six people on our planet will be sixty or older. The population aged sixty and above, numbering one billion in 2020, is climbing toward 2.1 billion by 2050, while those past eighty will triple, touching 426 million.

Two out of every three will not live in wealthy Western nations, but right here in middle-income lands like ours. What took a century to unfold in Europe is sweeping across Asia in a mere two or three decades. This is the great defining paradox of our century: societies are growing old before they have grown rich. Ageing, therefore, is not a detached social statistic, but a profound, sweeping wave that touches every corner of human existence.

Countries that faced this dawn earlier reshaped their worlds to meet it. Japan, one of the world's oldest societies, built a dedicated long-term care insurance system as far back as 2000. The Madrid World Assembly in 2002 recognized ageing as a core pulse of development, and the United Nations named 2021–2030 the Decade of Healthy Ageing. Across the globe, shaping cities, transport, and public spaces to welcome age has become a moral and political priority.

European nations began to look past cold hospital wards and old-age homes, choosing instead to bring care directly into the warmth of people's homes, training caregivers and wrapping their hands with dignity and legal recognition. Today, some nations even hold ministries and agencies dedicated solely to the elderly. The world has learned a simple truth through it all: old age is not a burden, but a sacred season of life that must be welcomed with foresight. The longer we delay that preparation, the heavier the shadows fall.

The Indian Picture

India still loves to cloak itself in the title of a young nation. Yet the United Nations Population Fund's India Ageing Report 2023 tells a different, sobering story. Senior citizens made up 10.5 percent of India's population in 2022; by 2050, that figure will leap to 20.8 percent, one out of every five souls, or nearly 347 million Indians. The population of those aged eighty and above will multiply nearly fourfold.

Even now, nearly one in five elders lives entirely alone or solely with a spouse. Women make up the vast majority of this elderly crowd, many of them widowed, many financially tethered to the mercy of others. Those who spent a lifetime breaking stones or toiling in unorganized sectors step into old age with no pension to cushion their fall. As medical bills mount and daily survival grows harsher, an old age without a steady income becomes an abyss of quiet anxiety.

There was a time when the joint family was our living safety net, where grandparents held a sacred space and a living role in the courtyard of the home. But nuclear walls, cityscapes, and migration have worn that circle thin. A government can never replace a family, but it can stand as a crutch when the family falters, and it must.

This wave is not breaking equally across India. In the southern states, where birth rates slowed earlier, the silver tide is rising far faster than in the north. A single blanket scheme cut out in Delhi cannot heal every wound across the land; every state must find its own path home.

Senior citizens made up 10.5 percent of India's population in 2022; by 2050, that figure will leap to 20.8 percent, one out of every five souls, or nearly 347 million Indians.

It is not that India lacks laws or paper policies, as we have the National Policy on Older Persons (1999), the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act (2007), and the Elderline helpline 14567. The tragedy lies elsewhere: the pension rests in one office, healthcare is locked in another, and grievances wander through a third, with still no guiding hand to train and standardize the touch of those who care for the elderly inside their homes. An older person may have a thousand needs, but they have only one life, and that life deserves a single address. That is the missing heartbeat in our journey toward ageing.

Why Keralam, and Why Now?

Keralam will reach the demographic future that the rest of India expects by 2050 much earlier than the rest. By 2036, seniors will form nearly 20 to 25 percent of our population. Our triumphs in health and literacy have bought us the gift of long life, a glorious victory that turns the page to a heavier chapter. Keralam is being forced to answer today the questions that other states will face only tomorrow, carrying the duty to lead this path as a state that once taught the country how to read and how to heal.

When children scatter across oceans for education and work, what stays behind in the echoing rooms of large houses is first an aging couple, and eventually, just one solitary soul. Dementia, bodies locked in bed, deafening loneliness, and the cruel traps of cyber fraud are the new ghosts haunting the autumn of our elders' lives. An old age with money in the bank but no one to hold your hand is, in many ways, a uniquely Keralam sorrow.

Yet we do not stand empty-handed, as Keralam carries deep roots: Vayomithram, day-care homes, a peerless

grassroots palliative care network, vibrant local panchayats, and Kudumbashree. Few lands on earth possess such soil. The malady has been our fragmentation, with these strengths staying scattered across various departments, blind to the whole picture because there was no shared cord.

Until today, the welfare of the elderly was merely one small file among a thousand on the desk of the Social Justice Department. But when a fifth of our society is turning silver, that is no longer enough. Out of this awakening, Keralam has birthed India's very first dedicated Department of Senior Citizens. The glory is not in the title, but in the promise that from this day forward, when an elder cries out, there is one department, one system, and one single door that must answer.

What the Department Seeks to Do

Five great pillars hold up this new journey:

- Healthy and Active Ageing: Healing the sick is not enough; we must shield people from illness and keep them vital for as long as breath remains.
- Community Care and Freedom: Giving elders the grace to live and breathe with dignity in their own soil, wrapped in local love.
- Universal Protection and Rights: Weaving a safety net so fine that not a single soul slips through, backed by the unyielding shield of law against abuse and neglect.
- Care and Silver Economies: Turning caregiving into a respected, honored profession, and treating the lifetime wisdom of our elders as a living economic treasure.
- Research and Innovation: Guiding our steps not by blind guesswork, but by the steady lamp of truth and data.

Even before two months had passed since its birth, the department set its hands to work to keep these promises from fading onto paper:

- Launching "Honor a Home" to bridge the generations.
- Conducting studies into the Time Bank model and neighborhood support circles.
- Establishing District Senior Citizen Cells breathing life into all fourteen collectorates.
- Opening facilitation desks waiting in every local body.
- Drafting blueprints for a Dementia-Friendly Keralam and Senior Citizen-Friendly Office Certifications.

Behind every stroke of ink lies a tender



Illustrations: Sudheer P.Y.

conviction: an elderly person should never have to wander in search of a government, because the government must find its way to them. In every panchayat office and collectorate, there must be a desk waiting just for them, and behind it, a welcoming smile. Surveys are taking shape to map their true realities, a single digital gateway is opening to bring all services to their fingertips, and laws are being forged to register care homes, build a state registry of trained hands, and hunt down cyber thieves who prey on the vulnerable.

The Promise of the Silver Economy

At the pulsing heart of the silver economy are our elders themselves. A person past sixty is not a deadweight on the state's shoulders, but a vast, unmined mountain of capital; thirty or forty years of sweat and mastery should not simply vanish with a polite farewell speech.

A retired engineer can pour decades of vision into a panchayat project, a teacher can sit with youth and sharpen their minds, a farmer or artisan can hand down the secrets of the earth to young hands, and a retired banker can guide a trembling young entrepreneur through the storm. Flexible work hours, loans to spark new enterprises after sixty, and a living skills bank cataloging a lifetime of expertise are the bridges we are building.

Until today, the welfare of the elderly was merely one small file among a thousand on the desk of the Social Justice Department. But when a fifth of our society is turning silver, that is no longer enough.

Elders are not merely givers of wisdom; they are the consumers and investors whose savings and quiet spending keep our local markets alive. This is the great rewriting of the old ledger that once marked human ageing down as a mere expense, which is why a comprehensive Silver Economy Policy has found its home in our state budget and why this department must now breathe life into it.

The Road Ahead

Over the coming ten winters, three truths will measure whether this department has truly triumphed:

- First: The home and the native village must remain the natural resting place for a grey head, as an institution must always be the final refuge, never the first. For this, care must walk right up to the doorstep, binding the panchayat, the neighbor, the clinic, and the community into one protecting embrace.
- Second: Caregiving must blossom into a proud, certified profession. When caregivers are trained, honored, and paid a living wage, it heals two wounds at once: bringing honorable work to our youth and unshakeable security to our elders.
- Third: We must shatter the lie that the old are a burden. Their scars, their stories, and their time are the purest wealth of our society, and they must sit at the head of the table where our future is drawn, stepping forward not as a liability in our story, but as our greatest promise.

We must also tame the digital storm so it becomes a safe harbor for them. As banks, hospitals, and governance retreat behind glowing screens, our elders must never be pushed out into the cold or left as prey to swindlers, and every year we must look our people in the eye and account for how many hands we held and how many tears we dried.

We must draw the generations closer. When a child sits in a day-care center listening to an old man's tales, or a college student gently teaches a grandmother how to swipe a smartphone screen, both worlds heal, proving that a society is truly age-friendly only when it learns to bow before the dignity of years.

No government can walk this road alone, but a government can clear the thorns from the path while the walking, and the shifting of our hearts, must be done by all of us. It lives in the neighbor who pauses by the garden gate to ask the grandfather next door, "How are you holding up today?" and in the start-up that knows a lifetime of experience is worth more than algorithms alone.

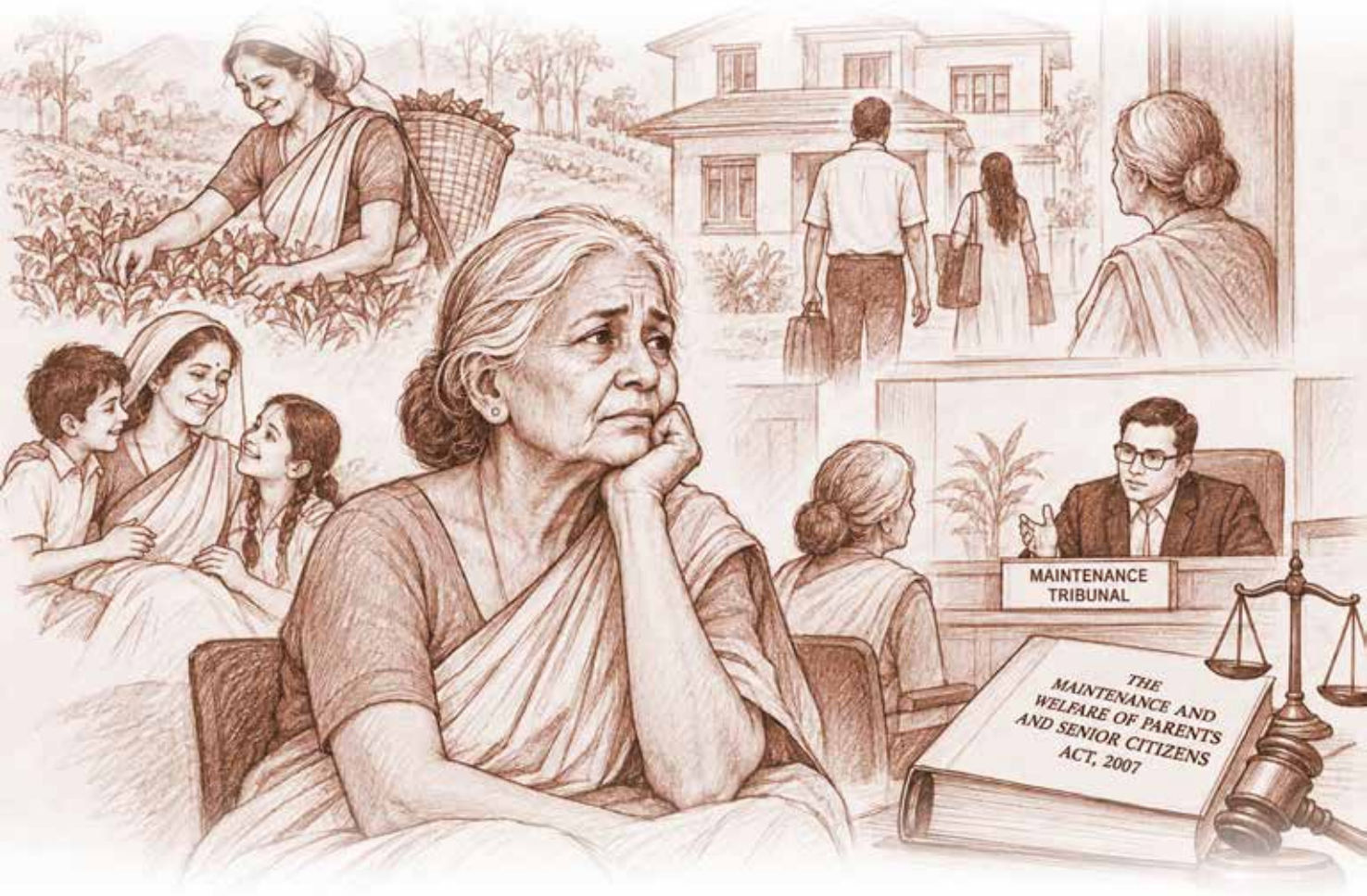
Years from now, the victory of this department will not be carved into a mountain of government orders. It will be measured by something far softer, far more fiercely human. One day, when that mother sitting out on her veranda looks into her son's eyes through a glowing screen and tells him,

"I'm perfectly fine,"

Those words will finally ring with absolute, unshakable truth. A confidence born from the quiet, beating knowledge that she is never truly alone, that a whole society stands beside her, that there is a system she can lean her tired bones against, and that she can walk to her grave with her head held high.

What we are weaving together today is not just someone else's old age. It is the tomorrow that waits, patiently, for you and for me.

WHEN AGE BECOMES A PLEA FOR DIGNITY



The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, is more than a mechanism for financial support. Through the lived realities of older people, this article explores how the law seeks to protect dignity, security, property, and the right to live without neglect, abandonment, or fear.

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Bhagyam had spent most of her life among tea bushes.

For decades, she had walked the steep plantation paths before sunrise, carrying the fatigue of yesterday into another day's work.

Her hands had known the roughness of plucking leaves; her feet had known the wet earth of the plantations. Whatever she earned went largely towards one purpose—raising her children.

She worked, saved, sacrificed, and brought them up.

Years passed. The children grew up. They found jobs, married, and built lives of their own.

Bhagyam, meanwhile, grew old.

One day, the house that she had helped build no longer seemed to have a place for her.

The details are fictional, but the predicament is painfully real. An elderly parent may discover, after spending an entire lifetime caring for a family, that the family has gradually stopped caring for her. Sometimes it is a dispute over property. Sometimes it is the burden of medical expenses. Sometimes it is a strained relationship between the parent and the children. And sometimes, quite simply, it is abandonment.

This is where the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, enters the picture.

As a Presiding Officer of a Maintenance Tribunal, I have come to understand that the cases that arrive before the Tribunal are rarely just about money. Behind an application for maintenance, there may be decades of family history, hurt, expectations, property transactions, sacrifices, and, often, a profound sense of betrayal.

A Law Born Out of a Changing Family

The traditional Indian family was built around an implicit social contract: parents cared for their children when they were young, and children cared for their parents when they became old.

But families have changed. Joint families have increasingly given way to nuclear households; children migrate for employment; economic pressures have increased; and longevity means that people may spend many years in old age requiring financial, medical, and emotional support.

The 2007 Act gave this moral responsibility a legal framework.

A senior citizen under the Act is a person who has attained the age of 60 years or above. The law places a legal obligation upon children and, in certain circumstances, relatives to maintain eligible senior citizens and parents who are unable to maintain themselves from their own earnings or property.

In appropriate cases, the Tribunal can become an instrument for restoring an elderly person's security in relation to his or her own property.

The word "maintenance" is important. It is not merely a monthly payment. Under the Act, it includes provision for food, clothing, and residence, as well as medical attendance and treatment.

What Can the Tribunal Do?

The Act provides for Maintenance Tribunals to decide applications for maintenance. In Keralam, Maintenance Tribunals have been constituted at the sub-divisional level, with Revenue Divisional Officers functioning as Presiding Officers. Appellate Tribunals function at the district level, with Collectors as Presiding Officers; District Social Justice Officers are designated as Maintenance Officers.

An application may be made by the senior citizen or parent himself or herself. It may also be made by another person or organization authorised on their behalf in circumstances contemplated by the Act.

The Tribunal can summon the parties, conduct an inquiry, and, where appropriate, attempt conciliation. The law envisages a summary procedure so that relief does not come after years of litigation.

This is significant because time has a different meaning when one is seventy-five or eighty.

Bhagyam's Case

Let us return to Bhagyam.

Suppose Bhagyam is unable to support herself, and her children, despite having the means, refuse to provide for her. She can approach the Maintenance Tribunal. The Tribunal can examine her financial condition, the circumstances of the children, and the nature of her needs and pass an appropriate maintenance order.

But there is another dimension.

Imagine that Bhagyam had transferred her house or property to her son on the understanding that he would provide her with basic amenities and physical needs. If, after obtaining the property, he refuses to care for her, Section 23 of the Act provides a powerful remedy: such a transfer can, subject to the statutory conditions, be declared void by the Tribunal.

This provision reflects an important principle: property given by an elderly parent in the expectation of care cannot become a ticket to abandonment. In appropriate cases, the Tribunal

can become an instrument for restoring an elderly person's security in relation to his or her own property.

Then There Is Sebastian

Consider another fictional case.

Sebastian is seventy-two. His son lives with him. What began as occasional arguments has become a pattern of physical violence. Sebastian is slapped, pushed, and threatened. He is afraid of his own son, but he is even more afraid of losing him.

A senior citizen may tolerate humiliation or violence because the person causing it is his or her own child. The victim may hesitate to complain because of shame, affection, social pressure, or the hope that the child will change.

When Sebastian finally appears before the Tribunal, his request may initially sound simple: "I want to live peacefully."

That sentence contains much more than a claim for money.

The 2007 Act contains provisions dealing with the protection of the life and property of senior citizens and provides for measures by the State to ensure their protection and welfare. The broader criminal law may also become relevant where conduct amounts to assault, criminal intimidation, or other offences. A Maintenance Tribunal should not be seen as a substitute for the criminal justice system or the police where immediate protection from violence is required.

The 2007 Act contains provisions dealing with the protection of the life and property of senior citizens and provides for measures by the State to ensure their protection and welfare.

The Tribunal's role, however, can be crucial in coordinating relief within the framework of the Act—particularly where maintenance, residence, property, and the senior citizen's protection are interconnected.

In such a situation, the objective cannot merely be to ask, "How much money should the son pay?"

The more important question is: How can Sebastian live the rest of his life without fear?

Abandonment Is Not Merely a Family Dispute

One of the strongest messages of the Act is that the abandonment of a senior citizen is not simply a private family matter.

Section 24 makes the abandonment of a senior citizen by a person having the care or protection of that senior citizen, with the intention of wholly abandoning him or her, an offence punishable with imprisonment of up to three months, a fine of up to ₹5,000 or both.

The Law Is About Dignity, Not Charity

There is sometimes a misconception that the Maintenance Tribunal exists to "force children to give money to parents."

That is an incomplete understanding.

The larger purpose of the legislation is to secure the maintenance and welfare of parents and senior citizens. It recognises that old age can bring vulnerability—loss of earning capacity, illness, dependence on others, and sometimes loss of bargaining power within one's own family.

Sometimes a maintenance order provides financial security. Sometimes mediation brings estranged family members back to a workable relationship. Sometimes a property dispute has to be addressed. Sometimes the matter requires coordination with the Social Justice Department, police, health services, or local authorities.

And sometimes, the most important thing that happens in a Tribunal room is that an elderly person discovers that somebody is willing to listen.

The Tribunal Is Not a Courtroom in the Conventional Sense

Perhaps the most striking feature of a Maintenance Tribunal is the nature of the people who appear before it.

Many are not accustomed to legal proceedings.

Some arrive carrying documents in plastic folders. Some come with neighbours or relatives. Some are hesitant even to describe what has happened to them. Others speak at length because the Tribunal may be the first place where they have felt heard.

And then there are the children.

They may say that the parent is unreasonable. They may speak about their own financial difficulties. They may produce medical bills, loan documents, or evidence of family disputes.

Families are complicated.

The task of the Tribunal is, therefore, not simply



to punish the child or mechanically award money. It is to apply the law fairly while keeping the central purpose of the legislation firmly in view: the welfare and dignity of the senior citizen.

A study commissioned by the Kerala State Planning Board examined the functioning of the Act across the State and interviewed hundreds of petitioners, defendants, and officials. It found that many petitioners came from economically vulnerable backgrounds and that the Tribunal often became a place where issues of property, family conflict, harassment, and living arrangements converged.

The Last Lesson

The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, is important precisely because it converts a social expectation into a legal responsibility. It tells a parent that dependence does not mean helplessness. It tells a senior citizen that age does not mean the loss of rights.

As a Presiding Officer, one gradually realises that the most valuable thing a Tribunal can restore is not always money or property.

Sometimes it is confidence.

The confidence to say, "I deserve to be treated with dignity."

The confidence to say, "I have a right to food, shelter, and medical care."

The confidence to say, "My property cannot simply be taken in exchange for a promise of care that is later forgotten."

And, for someone like Sebastian, the confidence to say, "I should not have to be afraid in my own home."

A society is often judged by how it treats those who have power.

But perhaps it is judged more truthfully by how it treats those who have lost power.

The elderly have given us their strongest years.

The least we can ensure is that their remaining years are lived with security, respect, and dignity. ●



CONNECT HOME-BASED CARE TO FORMAL HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

As Keralam's population ages rapidly, fragmented and specialist-driven care is becoming increasingly inadequate for older people with multimorbidity, frailty, and functional impairment. Prof. K. S. Shaji argues for an integrated system that connects home-based care with formal health and social care services, supported by trained community workers, nurses, health professionals, and district-level programmes.

Prof. K. S. Shaji, MD
Dean (Research) & Director, State Resource Centre for Older People, Kerala University of Health Sciences

Keralam has been experiencing accelerated demographic ageing for the last four decades. We lack accurate data on population characteristics since the last census in 2011. The census data indicate that demographic ageing is rapidly progressing in Keralam, and some districts already have a significant proportion of people aged 80 years or more. Some districts, such as Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, and Kottayam, have a larger share of older people than others. Older segments of the population, especially those in their eighties, are more frail and often grapple with multimorbidity and cognitive symptoms. Multimorbidity refers to the presence of two or more health conditions requiring long-term health care. Nearly two-thirds of people aged 65 years or more would meet the criteria for multimorbidity. We need more research from Keralam



to estimate the prevalence of multimorbidity and its implications for senior care. This is particularly important because Keralam has a large population aged 75 years or more.

Need for Integrated Care:

Keralam leads other states in many measures of progress in health and development. However, we must take stock of the progress we have made and plan to address the public health challenges that lie ahead. It is clear that the strategies we adopted helped in the past, but the emerging health and social care landscape demands new, evidence-informed policies and clearly spelt-out action plans. Research shall inform policies as well as service development.

Multimorbidity, frailty, functional impairment, and the need for long-term care are emerging public health issues driven by rapid demographic ageing in developing countries. These challenges coincide with significant social and economic shifts in the region. More women are entering the formal workforce, and many young adults are moving away from their families. Smaller family sizes and fewer household members are putting pressure on resources for home-based care for older adults, especially those with functional impairments. This situation heightens caregiver stress, which can adversely affect productivity, health, and well-being. Consequently, it is essential to build a robust knowledge base to create and deliver accessible, easy-to-use services for our ageing population.

Why Integrated Care?

Most older adults have multimorbidity, and many are frail and vulnerable to health problems, including infections, climate change-related environmental hazards, and disasters. The past few decades have seen remarkable achievements in health care worldwide. However, we still lack sufficient knowledge to care for older adults with multimorbidity and frailty. This is because demographic ageing is a relatively new phenomenon, even in developed countries.

Specialisation is driving costly private care provision in Keralam, leading to fragmented care, with too many specialists involved in caring for one individual. Without convergence or co-ordination, this often leads to delayed or inappropriate care and increases the burden of care. Older people and their care partners are often negatively affected by fragmented care. We need care that leads to better outcomes and a better quality of life. “Integrated care” is the rightful need of older people and those involved in their care. Senior care has to be “integrated”, affordable, and accessible to all, and made available at home or near home, as far as possible.

We have a robust network of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and Anganwadi Workers (AWs) across the state. These community outreach services can be equipped and empowered to serve as a live link between those in need of services and those who provide them. In a state like Keralam, with its high population density,

access to healthcare matters. We need user-friendly senior care services that meet current needs and can adapt to future demands. By linking home-based care to formal health and social care services, we can add more layers of care for older adults.

We can consider training and equipping three layers of health workers. "Home Care Workers (HCWs)" will form the first layer, and Palliative/Geriatric Care Nurses the second layer. They will be nurses trained in Palliative Care as well as Geriatric Care. They will support and guide "Home Care Workers (HCWs)" in the community and support the delivery of Geriatric Care in Primary Care settings. They will be trained nurses with additional training in Palliative Care and Geriatric Care. They can guide geriatric care in the Grama Panchayat. The third layer will consist of doctors and other health professionals, such as pharmacists, health inspectors, physiotherapists, social workers, or optometrists, who will undertake brief in-service courses to become better equipped and more skilled in providing care for older adults. There will be a particular emphasis on linking and strengthening home-based care rather than providing clinic-based services.

Once we have trained manpower across the three layers mentioned above, we can venture to develop and test the feasibility and usefulness of specialised services such as:

- Dementia Care Programme
- Fall Prevention Programme
- Incontinence Management Programme
- Self-care Programme for older people with Diabetes/Hypertension
- Caregiver Support Services & Online Assistance to Home-based Care

Running these services will provide us with valuable insights. Implementing them requires careful consideration of the setting and socio-cultural factors. We must identify barriers and enablers to service development, which vary by context. Afterwards, we should assess the usefulness and cost-effectiveness of new services. Let us now look at the Dementia Care Programme in a little more detail.

Development of Community Resources for Dementia Care in Keralam

Supporting functionally impaired individuals is a virtue and a social responsibility. The palliative care movement in Keralam promoted this by creating a social network of volunteers, supported by professionals, to facilitate community care. Similarly, Keralam can develop a volunteer pool to support home-based dementia care. The 10/66 Dementia Research Group (https://1066.alzint.org/) demonstrated both the need for and feasibility of such efforts. The W.H.O.'s mhGAP Intervention Guide (https://www.who.int/publications/b/50860) can serve as a resource. The Department of Social Justice has launched 'Ormathoni', a statewide initiative to support people with dementia. Designing and implementing a District Dementia Care Programme is also worth considering, as it could create a unified framework across the state and expand dementia care services through an integrated district-level care system that links community, primary care, specialist care, and social support services. The District Dementia Care Programme (DDCP) may consider developing seven interlinked processes for community care:

1. Development of a community case-finding method for the identification of People Living With Dementia
2. Providing Access to Clinical Assessment and Diagnosis
3. Development of an Individualised Care Plan
4. Initiation of a Sustainable Caregiver Support Service
5. Access to Specialist Care/Services
6. Access to Institutional Care/Assisted Living
7. District-level Co-ordination of Dementia Care Services

Keralam needs a coordinated, accessible, and affordable model of senior care that brings services closer to home. This article outlines a three-layer care system and proposes dementia care as a model for integrating community support, primary care, specialist services, caregiver assistance, and social care.

Care for chronic diseases should integrate health and social care, with support for carers and other family members. Dementia care can thus serve as a model for designing and delivering care for functionally impaired older people. Support systems may need to offer more spaces and a wider range of support in the coming decades. We need a carer workforce available to provide assistance in both home-based and institutional care. We need courses to train people to enter this workforce, and this training shall be evidence-informed and delivered by health care professionals, ideally under the supervision of health science institutions.

The state government and local self-governments shall develop a system that fosters collaboration and the creation of user-friendly programmes grounded in evidence-informed policy-making. The newly formed Department for the Welfare of Senior Citizens and the Kerala University of Health Sciences can jointly develop a platform that enables seamless connectivity among administrators, policymakers, service providers, service users, and researchers. This will lead to the development of high-quality services and care for people in Keralam.



HEALTHY AGEING:

FOOD, ROUTINE AND LIFESTYLE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

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Indranil Saha
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Background

India is experiencing a swift demographic transition, with the elderly population (aged 60 years or above) expected to more than double from 100 million in 2011 to 230 million by 2036. According to the Press Information Bureau, India's senior citizen population is expected to rise to about 230 million by 2036, constituting roughly 15% of the overall population. Around that time, almost one in seven Indians will be 60 years old or older. This has been possible due to increased life expectancy, driven by improved healthcare practices and related factors. At the same time, it is a challenge to provide adequate support so they can lead a good quality of life.

Old age brings inevitable changes such as loss of appetite, loss of memory, decreased muscle mass, loss of bone density, sleep disturbances, loss of balance, mental health problems, etc. These changes might lead to frailty, a condition marked by a decline in the body's ability to cope, often characterized by unintentional weight loss, exhaustion, weakness, slow walking speed, and low physical activity. Frailty of older adults is classified as robust (normal), pre-frail, or frail.

These conditions can be identified early and are manageable. Diet, physical activity, and daily routines are among the most malleable influences on whether they move in either direction.

Importance

Undernutrition is common in this age group, and it often goes unnoticed. Reduced appetite, skipping meals, or unintentional weight loss can be mistaken for normal ageing. However, inadequate energy and protein intake can accelerate muscle loss, weaken the immune system, slow wound healing, and increase the risk of falls, fractures, hospitalizations, and loss of independence. Additionally, deficiencies in vitamin D, B12, iron, and zinc can contribute to weakness, anaemia, and cognitive decline. Recognizing these signs early can significantly help preserve health and enhance quality of life. A multicomponent frailty management model, which includes nutritional guidelines, physical exercise, and mental health promotion, can address frailty status, and participants, with proper guidance and supervision, can improve from any frailty category.

Five warning signs of frailty: when to seek advice

Unintentional weight loss, constant tiredness, weakness (for example, trouble opening a jar or rising from a chair), slow walking, and very low physical activity. If one or two are present, the person may be pre-frail, and if three or more are present, frail. Either way, consult a doctor or dietitian early, because the earlier the stage, the easier it is to reverse.

Strategy

Healthy ageing rests on three pillars: the right food, regular movement and sensible daily habits that will promote mental health. The ICMR-National Institute for Research in Bacterial Infections (ICMR-NIRBI) guidelines for frailty management follow the ICMR-NIN Dietary Guidelines for Indians.

Four principles run through them.

- Stage-specific nutrition. Energy, protein, and micronutrient targets rise from robust to pre-frail to frail (Figure 1 and Table 1).
- Food first, fortification next. Needs are met mainly through familiar foods such as cereals and millets, dal, vegetables, milk and curd, nuts, eggs, fish and lean meat. Fortified foods and oral nutritional supplements are added when diet alone falls short, especially in frailty.
- Small, frequent, soft meals. Reduced appetite and early satiety are common, so intake is spread across the day in portions suited to chewing and swallowing ability.
- Regular monitoring. Screening becomes more frequent as frailty advances. Frail older adults should be assessed every 4–6 weeks with tools such as the Mini Nutritional Assessment, and caregivers should keep simple notes on appetite, intake, and weight.

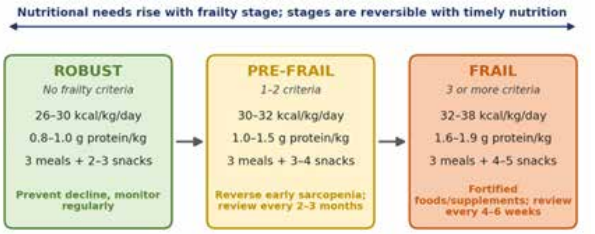


Figure 1. Nutrition across the frailty continuum (adapted from ICMR-NIRBI guideline)

Guidelines

1. Eating well

Table 1. Daily nutrient targets for older Indians by frailty stage

Food components	Robust	Pre-frail	Frail
Energy (kcal/kg/day)	26–30	30–32	32–38
Protein (g/kg/day)	0.8–1.0	1.0–1.5	1.6–1.9
Protein, % of energy	10–15	15–20	20–25
Calcium (mg/day)	1200	1200	1400–1600
Vitamin D (IU/day)	800	800	1200
Vitamin B12 (µg/day)	2.2	2.2	2.4
Snacks, besides 3 meals	2–3	3–4	4–5

Across all stages, carbohydrates should supply 50–60% of energy and fat 25–35%, individualised for body size, activity and comorbidity. For a 65 kg man, protein works out to about 52–65 g a day if robust, 65–97 g if pre-frail and 104–124 g if frail. In practical terms, this means a protein source such as dal, egg, fish, chicken, milk or curd at every meal. Protein should be spread evenly across meals rather than concentrated at dinner, at about 25–30 g per meal for the robust and 30–40 g for pre-frail and frail older adults, with casein-rich protein, such as milk or curd, at night for frail individuals.

Building the plate. The model diets combine cereals and millets (about 30% of cereals from millets and 50% from whole grains), pulses (partly replaceable by egg, fish or lean meat), green leafy and other vegetables, roots and tubers, fruit, 400–600 ml of milk or milk products, unrefined cooking oil, and a small portion of nuts and oilseeds. Portions increase from the robust to the frail diet. The same plan can be adapted to regional staples, ranging from rice and ragi in the south to wheat, jowar, and bajra in other regions, as well as to vegetarian or non-vegetarian dietary preferences. The importance of healthy fats must also be acknowledged. Fish, nuts, seeds, and unrefined oils are recommended, while the intake of saturated and trans fats should be minimized.

Hydration. The target is 33–38 ml of fluid per kg body



weight daily, roughly 2–2.5 litres, with 8–10 glasses of water as the base, if not contraindicated. Buttermilk, coconut water, clear soups, and fruit juice add nutrients. Frail older adults benefit from scheduled drinking because thirst isn't always a reliable signal. They may also need high-protein beverages or thickened fluids if they have difficulty swallowing, ensuring they stay well-hydrated and nourished.

Making food easy to eat. Keep food soft and well cooked, with mild spices. Pressure-cook vegetables, add extra water to rotis and rice, and use mashed fruit and soft proteins such as eggs, paneer, boneless fish, and well-cooked moong dal. For constipation, use cooked fruit, curd or buttermilk, ginger, and plenty of water. For digestive discomfort, soak pulses, discard the water, and season with asafoetida, cumin, and ginger.

2. A healthy daily routine

The guidelines suggest three main meals and two to three snacks, spaced 2–3 hours apart, with breakfast 2–3 hours after waking and the last meal 2–3 hours before bedtime. Meal times should follow the person's wake–sleep pattern and align with medication schedules. Figure 2 shows what a day could look like.

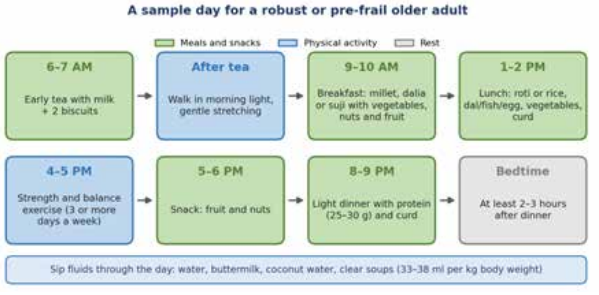


Figure 2. A sample daily routine

Good appetite also depends on the setting. Good lighting, colourful food, mild aromatic spices such as cumin, coriander and mint, a contrast of textures, and eating together with family all make meals more inviting. Because older people make less vitamin D in the skin, and many now live largely indoors, time outdoors in daylight is a useful habit alongside adequate dietary vitamin D, like egg yolks, milk, etc.

3. Staying active

Food and exercise work together because protein builds muscle most effectively when muscles are used. The World Health Organization advises older adults to do at least 150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week, such as brisk walking, and to include muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days. It also recommends varied activity, including balance and strength training on three or more days a week, to improve function and prevent falls. Those who are frail, or who have heart disease, joint problems, or other conditions, should seek medical advice and begin gently. Walking alone might not be sufficient. Additionally, different types of stretching, balance, and resistance training are beneficial. All these types of training can be done at home, even while sitting in chairs or lying down on the bed. Resistance training can be performed with 500 ml water bottles filled with water in both hands.

4. Moderation in everyday life

A healthy lifestyle in older age is not governed by rigid rules. Instead, it centers on balance, as shown in Table 2. Low-sodium salt is recommended, with total sodium below 2000 mg a day, which is about 5 g of salt. Added sugar should supply less than 5% of energy, mild spices suit sensitive stomachs, and supplements should be taken only on a

doctor's or dietitian's advice after blood tests, since needs and doses vary with requirements.

Table 2. Choose more, moderate, avoid

Choose more
• Water, buttermilk, coconut water, clear soups • Vegetables, fruit, whole grains and millets • Dal, eggs, fish, milk and curd at every meal • Walking, strength, balance and resistance exercises • Time outdoors and meals with family
Keep in moderation
• Salt: sodium under 2000 mg a day, about 5 g of salt • Added sugar: under 5% of daily energy • Fried foods, saturated and trans fats • Carbonated drinks and concentrated juices • Very spicy food, if you have gastric trouble
Avoid
• Skipping meals or going hungry • Tobacco and excess alcohol • Self-prescribed, high-dose supplements • Long hours of sitting without a break • Late, heavy dinners close to bedtime

5. Promotion of mental health

Due to many issues, such as retirement from a regular job or separation from close family members or friends for any reason, older adults are vulnerable to loneliness, depression, anxiety, and cognitive impairments. In the early stages, it is best to consult a physician. In addition, there are ways to stay active and engaged in household activities. Always try to contribute something to your family or society, which will keep your cognitive abilities strong. At the same time, this will promote your mental well-being through social connectedness. Always try to engage in activities you enjoy, such as drawing, cooking, gardening, listening to music, watching games, and playing video games. Social media usage can also help one connect with peers, friends, and family members. Moreover, it can provide a cognitive boost as well.

6. Other health considerations

- Check weight and appetite regularly. Weigh at home about once a month. Unplanned weight loss is an early warning sign, and the family can keep short notes on appetite and intake.
- Review medicines. Many older people take several medicines, which can affect appetite and nutrient absorption. This is known as polypharmacy and is a common problem for older adults. Ask the doctor or pharmacist about drug–nutrient interactions at each review.
- Look after teeth and swallowing. Dental problems and difficulty swallowing quietly reduce intake. Soft food, ground nuts and seed pastes, and well-cooked fish with bones removed can help, and a doctor should assess persistent swallowing trouble.
- Ask for periodic blood tests. Vitamin D, B12, folate, and iron are commonly low in later life and are checked every





few months in pre-frail and frail older adults. Blood pressure, blood sugar, and HbA1C (glycated hemoglobin – gives a picture of average blood sugar level for the last 3 months) should also be reviewed regularly, as the doctor advises.

Way forward

Good nutrition for India's older population will need coordinated action across households, communities and the health system.

- Screen early and routinely: Nutritional screening should become part of primary-care and community visits for everyone above 60 years, through Health and Wellness Centres, so that frailty related conditions can be identified at early stage while it is still reversible.
- Equip families and caregivers: Simple guidance on soft, protein-rich meals from local foods, and on warning signs such as weight loss, poor appetite and low fluid intake, should reach homes through ASHA workers, anganwadi centres, senior citizen groups and older adult-care programmes, in local languages.
- Combine nutrition with exercises: Nutrition works best alongside resistance and balance exercises, and the two should be promoted together.
- Mental health promotion: It will help older adults perform their own activities.

Healthy aging is built over decades, but it can be supported at any age. Let us take the initiative for this holistic approach to ensure the success of this decade (2021–2030) of healthy ageing.

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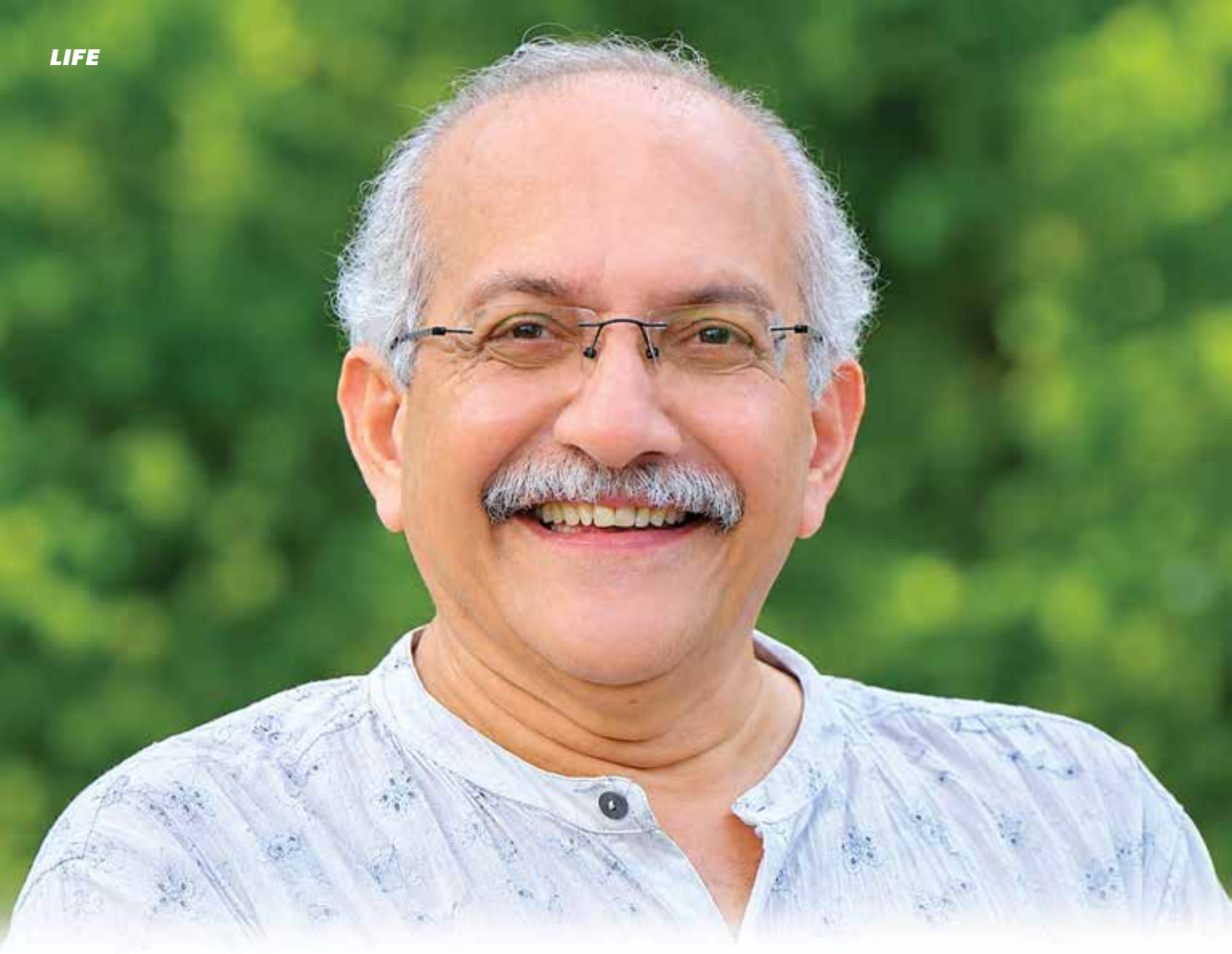
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THE GOLDEN ERA OF THE SOUL

A luminous smile, an ever-curious mind, a deep faith in human connection, and never an "I" moment define Raghunath Paleri's way of looking at life.

Anjana George

At seventy-three, Raghunath Paleri keeps his mind like a bustling sports arena, cycling, playing football and doing gymnastics all at once, even as a fresh screenplay occupies his thoughts from morning until sleep. "It is great fun," he says.

When the Kozhikode native steps down at Ernakulam South railway station, his familiar smile arrives before anything else. People recognise the writer of My Dear Kuttichathan and Onnu Muthal Poojyam Vare. Some know him as the father in Lalitham Sundaram and Sarvam Maya. He pauses for selfies, smiles and obliges without impatience.

There is something disarming about that ease. The Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award-winning writer and filmmaker seems more interested in people than in

protecting an image of himself. His curiosity remains intact, perhaps because he has never allowed "writer", "filmmaker" or "celebrity" to become the whole of who he is.

That may explain why his thoughts on ageing keep returning to something basic: human connection.

One of six children, Paleri remembers a family where parents and children constantly interacted, argued, laughed and simply lived around one another. That closeness, he feels, has weakened. The simple connection between people has become harder to preserve.

His memories of train journeys capture the difference. As a child, strangers in railway compartments spoke, exchanged food and formed friendships. Today, passengers sit beside each other while disappearing into their phones. What troubles Paleri is not technology itself, but the erosion of trust and the casual human contact that once came naturally.

Yet there is no bitterness in the voice of the man who wrote Avashyamillatha Achanammamar. There is concern, but also faith that people can find their way back to one another.

He does not like the idea of calling these years a "silver era". For him, this is the golden era.

People now in their sixties and seventies, he believes, have a certain survival fitness. They grew up learning to manage uncertainty and adjust to circumstances. His greater worry is about today's young people. Technology may make life easier, but will they have the inner resources to deal with a slower body, loneliness and the questions that arrive with age?

When the Kozhikode native steps down at Ernakulam South railway station, his familiar smile arrives before anything else. People recognise the writer of My Dear Kuttichathan and Onnu Muthal Poojyam Vare.

Loneliness, he feels, already cuts across generations

Years ago, at a tennis club in Thiruvananthapuram, Paleri met a man troubled by the fact that, living abroad, he had been forced to send his mother to an old-age home. His suggestion was simple: find people of her generation nearby and create a circle of companionship around her.

Eight years later, the man wrote to him. His mother had died peacefully. He had found a way to deal with the situation.

The same thinking informs Paleri's views on families. Parents caring for grandchildren may receive immense love, but their own identities can slowly disappear into caregiving. He wonders why workplaces can provide maternity and paternity leave, but rarely consider employees caring for ageing parents. Flexible working arrangements and parental-care leave, he suggests, could help families carry responsibility without turning it into guilt.

At the heart of all this is empathy

For the author of Avar Moovarum Oru Mazhavillum, art is one way to nurture it. Music, theatre, dance, craft and cinema can help children look beyond marks, competition and rigid identities. When he teaches, most of his students are young. What he sees reassures him: curiosity is alive, and so is the desire to learn.

Paleri does not expect Keralam to change overnight, nor does he romanticise the past. Families change, technology changes, cinema changes. But cultures, he believes, have their own way of finding balance, returning to roots and rediscovering what was lost.

Perhaps that is the real meaning of his 'golden era'.

The man who has written, directed, acted and won awards seems increasingly free simply to observe, create, teach, laugh and remain curious. Another screenplay is taking shape in his head. Another story is waiting.

And somewhere, at another railway station, someone will recognise the father from Sarvam Maya and ask for a selfie.

He will smile

After all these years, the world has given him plenty of reasons to become serious. He has chosen, instead, to remain open to it.

Perhaps that is his golden era: a life lived without allowing the world to take away the wonder of being alive. ●

Raghunath Paleri is an acclaimed Malayalam screenwriter, director, and author known for his distinct narrative style, warm humour, and soulful storytelling. As a celebrated screenwriter, he has penned timeless classics including My Dear Kuttichathan (India's first 3D film), Ponmuttayidunna Tharavu, Meleparambil Aanveedu, Pingami, and Devadoothan. He made his directorial debut *with the critically acclaimed Onnu Muthal Poojyam Vare (1986) and went on to direct films like Vismayam (1998) and Kanneerinu Madhuram. He has also acted in films like Sarvam Maya, Lokah Chapter 1: Chandra, and Officer on Duty. An established literary voice, his notable published works include novels and short story collections such as Paleri Puranam, Orkkunnuvo En Krishnaye, Ezham Nilayile Akasham, and Anandhavedam.*

The writer is an independent journalist, media researcher, and communications expert driven by culture, art, and social justice ●

AGELESS AMBITION

REDEFINING THE GOLDEN YEARS

Spotlight on seniors who prove it's never too late to start over, launch a business, learn a new craft, or chase the dreams they put on hold.

Retirement is often seen as a sunset, but for many, it's a brilliant new sunrise. Through international travel, organic farming, lifelong scholarship, holistic fitness, and selfless philanthropy, Keralam's most inspiring seniors show us that life's best adventure is always the one you are on right now.

Reshmi R.S.



Ramani Menon and Valsala Menon

Chasing Dreams across Continents

At 86 and 84, sisters Valsala and Ramani Menon prove that curiosity has no expiration date. Inspired by a family trip to visit their grandson in Germany, the Keralam duo embarked on a lifelong dream to explore Europe.

The sisters didn't start travelling until after turning 70. Following years of widowhood, they reunited in Wadakanchery, Thrissur, and kicked off their adventures with local pilgrimages before expanding globally to destinations like Vietnam, Singapore, and Sri Lanka.

When they finally reached Europe, their spirits soared—from marvelling at Swiss alpine views from a cable car to smiling beneath the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

Having just returned home from the Andaman Islands, Ramani and Valsala are already planning a Disney Cruise in December. In their words, they are "just enjoying the moment to the fullest".



Annamma Trueb Vayalunkal

A Well-Rounded Physical Trainer

Annamma Trueb's day begins with a 30-minute aqua yoga session in the swimming pool at her establishment, "Ann's Eco Fitness Centre and Organic Farm," in Pampady, Kottayam.

Born in Pangada, Kottayam, Annamma completed her nursing course in Germany in 1970 and subsequently built a career across various hospitals in Switzerland until 2001. She married Hannes Trueb of Switzerland and returned to Kottayam following his passing away in 2014.

First introduced to aqua yoga during her time in Switzerland, Annamma now puts that experience to work on her three-acre property. She stays actively involved in organic farming, runs a women's gym, manages a swimming academy, operates a meditation centre, and oversees a village agri-tourism project. She is also currently penning a book on yoga to make it easily accessible to the general public.

An Exemplary Farmer

At 85, Ambalavan Puthanpeediyekkal Hamsa shows no signs of slowing down. This dedicated farmer has worked the land for 70 years, cultivating a wide variety of crops—from paddy, tapioca, and sweet potatoes to betel leaves, coconuts, areca nuts, and seasonal vegetables.

Although Hamsa owns just 27 cents of homestead land, he actively cultivates five and a half leased acres in Chemmad, Kodinji in Malappuram district. He grows the 'Uma' paddy variety for Supplyco and previously cultivated Basmati rice exported to the Gulf region. His produce travels far and wide: his tapioca is shipped to Tamil Nadu via the Chelari market, his betel leaves reach neighbouring states through Kottakkal Parambilangadi, and his seasonal vegetables and sweet potatoes supply local markets.

Supported by agricultural subsidies and honoured by the Agriculture Department with hand tools, Hamsa credits his longevity and strength to a lifetime of honest physical labour.

Ambalavan Puthanpeediyekkal Hamsa





E. G. Namboothiri

The Passionate Scholar

E. Govindan Namboothiri-fondly known as Govindan Mash-is the ultimate embodiment of lifelong learning. Driven by a relentless quest for knowledge, this veteran educator spent decades expanding his academic horizons while shaping generations of students across India and abroad.

Govindan Mash boasts a remarkable repertoire of qualifications, holding postgraduate degrees in English, Economics, Managerial Economics, Gandhian Philosophy, Sociology, Public Administration, and Education, as well as an M.Ed. and an M.Phil. His impressive academic repertoire also includes five postgraduate diplomas, three diplomas, and three certificate courses.

His career began in 1979 as a school teacher at Aluva Vidyadhiraja Vidyabhavan. Over the years, he served as an SCERT resource person for English and Geography, trained teachers in Lakshadweep, managed examinations for State Board-affiliated schools in Dubai, and was selected by the Indian government in 2007 to join a five-member educational delegation to Japan. During an official dinner in Japan, two of his former students stepped in to assist with translation-a moment he considers one of his greatest joys as an educator.

A two-time recipient of the President's Award (in 1997 and 2003), Govindan Mash retired as an Assistant Professor from a B.Ed. college and remains a living testament to the belief that a true passion for learning never fades.

Inspiring Second Chapter

For 26 years since retiring as an Accounts Officer in the General Education Department, 81-year-old Ramanikutty Teacher from Chathannoor, Kollam, has proven that childhood dreams have no age limit. While many view retirement as a period of rest, she embraces it as a vibrant second chapter filled with youthful energy and passion.

With 15 published books and numerous artwork collection pieces to her name, she continues to immerse herself in writing, painting, and community service. She has pledged her body and organs to the Parippally Government Medical College, leaving behind an inspiring legacy of positivity and selflessness.

P. Ramanikutty



The writer is an Assistant Information Officer in the Department of Information and Public Relations

THE GROWTH BLUEPRINT FOR NEW KERALAM

Bringing together fresh ideas, expert insights, and ambitious development plans, the 'Reimagining Keralam' Round Table Conference sets the stage for a new era of growth, investment, and innovation, with a focus on turning policy promises into meaningful action.



Photo: R. Prashanth, IPRD

Staff Reporter

In a significant step towards strengthening transparent governance and accelerating development, the Government of Keralam recently concluded the three-day "Reimagining Keralam" Round Table Conference in Thiruvananthapuram. The conference brought together ministers, policy experts, industry leaders, academicians, financial institutions, and other key stakeholders to transform budget announcements into concrete, time-bound action plans. The initiative marked a shift from conventional administrative processes towards a more collaborative and implementation-oriented model of governance.

Moving Beyond Tradition: A New Approach to Budget Implementation

Inaugurating the conference, Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan emphasised the need for innovative administrative approaches to achieve transformative growth. As part of this new model, non-governmental agencies, industry stakeholders, and domain experts were involved in the preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs), development of financial models, and formulation of clear implementation timelines.



Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan Inaugurating Reimagining Keralam Round Table Conference

To ensure greater coordination and minimise interdepartmental delays, major projects were organised into strategic clusters. This integrated approach is expected to improve efficiency, strengthen accountability, and enhance public confidence in the implementation of development initiatives.

Addressing Land Constraints and Talent Migration

The conference placed considerable emphasis on addressing two major challenges affecting Keralam's development prospects: land availability for investment and the migration of skilled youth.

The proposed Asset Mapping Registry seeks to identify suitable land parcels near the airports of Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, and Kozhikode, helping facilitate large-scale investment and infrastructure development.

To further improve the ease of doing business, the government has proposed 19 legislative amendments aimed at strengthening the single-window clearance mechanism for industries.

Another major initiative, the Global Watchtower, is designed to monitor global market developments across 12 key sectors and provide timely inputs to the higher-education system. These insights are expected to support the introduction and expansion of future-oriented programmes in areas such as Artificial Intelligence, Logistics, and Maritime Law.

Recognising the changing demographic profile of the state, the government has also proposed a dedicated department for senior citizens, with a focus on effectively utilising their knowledge, skills, and experience.

Mission Samudra: Harnessing Keralam's Maritime Potential

One of the major highlights of the conference was Mission Samudra, an ambitious initiative aimed at unlocking the economic potential of Keralam's coastline.

The project envisages integrating international ports, minor ports, and container facilities into a coordinated maritime network. A key objective is to shift a substantial share of heavy freight movement from congested road networks to inland waterways and coastal shipping routes.

The initiative is expected to begin with the transportation of hazardous cargo, including oil and gas, through safer and more efficient maritime channels.

Mission Samudra also includes proposals for an Oceanarium, Maritime Museum, and eco-friendly aquaculture hubs, with the objective of strengthening the marine economy, supporting seafood exports, and generating new employment opportunities for coastal communities.

J. C. Daniel International Film City: Strengthening Kerala's Creative Economy

The conference also gave considerable attention to the development of Keralam's cultural and creative sectors.

Under Cluster 2, covering Culture, Tourism, and



Heritage, plans were presented for the J. C. Daniel International Film City in Kochi.

The proposed Film City aims to address the need for advanced film production and post-production infrastructure in the State. It is expected to feature virtual production stages, sound stages, Dolby Atmos facilities, and VFX laboratories under one roof.

A unified location management system is also envisaged to provide easier access to Keralam's diverse filming locations, including its beaches, backwaters, hill stations, and heritage destinations.

The initiative is expected to strengthen Keralam's position as a competitive destination for film production while also creating new opportunities in cinema tourism and allied industries.

Promoting Investment and Inclusive Growth

The valedictory session reaffirmed the government's commitment to creating a more investment-friendly environment in Keralam.

Health and Devaswom Minister K. Muraleedharan highlighted the importance of changing outdated perceptions regarding the state's industrial environment and expanding opportunities in sectors such as healthcare, trade, tourism, and regional development.

Special attention was also given to the development potential of districts such as Wayanad and Idukki.

Cooperation and Excise Minister M. Liju underlined the role of the cooperative sector in the state economy and emphasised the importance of faster approvals and supportive policy measures to enhance its contribution to economic growth.

Towards a New Model of Governance

The "Reimagining Keralam" Round Table Conference represents an important step towards building a more coordinated, accountable, and result-oriented system of governance.

By bringing together government departments, financial institutions, industry representatives, academic experts, and other stakeholders on a common platform, the initiative seeks to bridge the gap between policy formulation and project implementation.

The proposed Film City aims to address the need for advanced film production and post-production infrastructure in the State.

Programmes such as Mission Samudra, higher-education reform, industrial facilitation, and the development of new cultural and creative infrastructure reflect the government's broader vision for sustainable and inclusive growth.

With a strong emphasis on collaboration, timely execution, and institutional accountability, the conference has laid the groundwork for a development model that seeks to combine innovation, efficiency, and long-term public value.

Bindhu Krishna, Minister for Labour , Animal Husbandry ,Dairy Development,Milk Co-operatives, Woman & Child Development and Kerala Veterinary & Animal Sciences University ●

REST, RECHARGE, REWORK:
'GIGON'–A NEW ERA FOR GIG WORKERS



Keralam's pioneering 'Gigon' initiative is set to transform the working conditions of the State's growing platform workforce by launching dedicated rest and wellness hubs across the State.

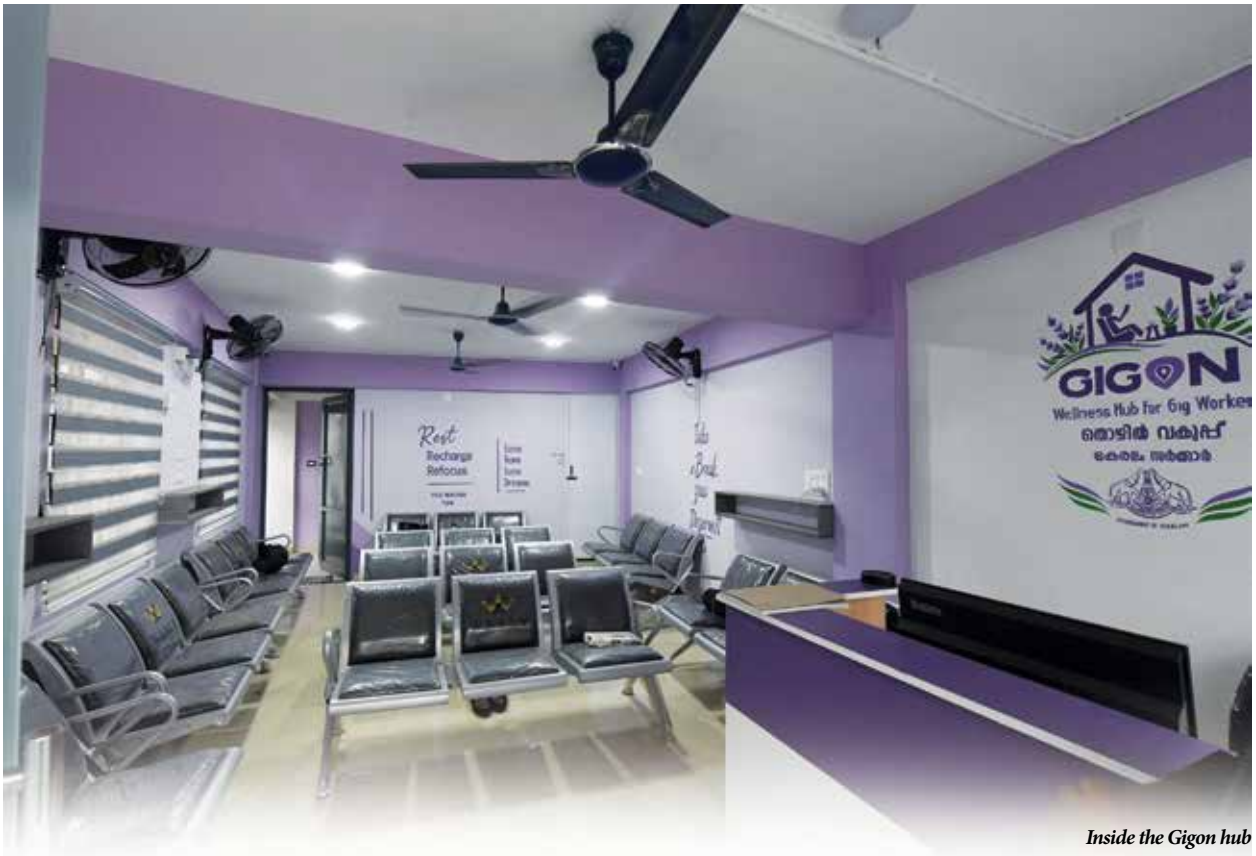
Bindhu Krishna
Minister for Labour

Every day, even before most of us begin our routines, thousands of workers are already on the move. They ride through busy streets carrying food, medicines and parcels; they take passengers to their destinations; they keep the expanding networks of delivery and digital commerce moving. For many of us, their work has become so much a part of everyday life that we hardly pause to think about the people behind the convenience.

We order a meal, and it arrives at our doorstep. We book a ride, and someone reaches us through the traffic. We place an order, and within hours, it is delivered. What often remains unseen is the worker who spends hour after hour on the road to make all this possible.

For a gig worker, the road is not merely a route from one destination to another. It is the workplace.

That workplace can be demanding. Long hours on a two-wheeler, heavy traffic, scorching heat, sudden rain and the pressure of completing one assignment before moving on to the next are part of the everyday reality of many workers. In the middle of such a working day, something as basic as a safe place to sit, a glass of drinking water, a clean restroom or a place to charge a mobile phone can matter greatly.



Inside the Gigon hub

It was with this simple but important understanding that the Government of Keralam introduced dedicated rest centres for gig workers as part of its 100-day action programme.

At first glance, a rest centre may appear to be a modest intervention. But worker welfare has never been only about the size of a project. It is also about whether we recognise the needs of a worker that may otherwise remain invisible.

A Place to Pause

A break is not the same as being idle.

For someone who spends most of the working day on the road, a few minutes of rest can mean an opportunity to recover from physical exertion, drink water, use a clean restroom, charge a phone that is essential to the next assignment, or simply sit down safely before returning to work.

The first phase of the project has therefore been designed around these everyday needs.

The Government has allocated ₹1 crore in the 2026–27 Budget for the Gig Workers' Rest Centre project, with ₹70 lakh earmarked for infrastructure development and ₹30 lakh for operational expenditure.

The first three centres have been established in Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam and Kozhikode. The Thiruvananthapuram centre is located at KAM Tower, Vanross Junction; the Ernakulam centre at Martin Eva Holy Tuesday Shopping Mall, Kaloor; and the Kozhikode centre at Jaya Building, Nadakkave. The infrastructure has been developed through ARTCO Ltd., an authorised government agency.

The centres provide air-conditioned seating, drinking water, hygienic toilet facilities and mobile charging points. First-aid facilities, fire-safety equipment, television and CCTV surveillance have also been provided. Each centre can accommodate around 50 workers at a time.

These may sound like simple facilities. But perhaps that is precisely the point.

Public policy does not always have to begin with something grand. Sometimes, it begins by asking a very ordinary question: What does a person need during a long working day?

Dignity at Work

Labour welfare is ultimately about more than wages and employment. It is about dignity.

The world of work is changing rapidly. Platform-based employment and the gig economy have opened new avenues for earning and have given many people greater flexibility in choosing when and how they work. At the same time, these new forms of employment have brought new questions about working conditions, social protection and the responsibilities of a changing labour market.

Government must respond to these changes without losing sight of something fundamental: every worker deserves to be treated with dignity.

For a gig worker, there may be no conventional office, factory floor or workplace cafeteria. There may be no fixed place where the worker can sit down at the end of an assignment. The workplace is often the city itself—the roads, junctions and public spaces through which the worker



of contemporary labour welfare.

The rest centres are an attempt to respond to that reality.

Welfare that Works Every Day

A welfare facility is meaningful only when it remains accessible and functional in everyday life. The centres will operate from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day, with two seven-hour shifts arranged for their regular functioning.

Each centre has two Caretaker-cum-Facilitators and two Sweeper-cum-Sanitation Workers. The caretakers will assist workers, maintain visitor records and ensure that the facilities and equipment remain functional. The sanitation workers will maintain cleanliness in the centre and its toilet facilities.

The respective District Labour Officers will oversee the functioning of the centres, including the deployment and payment of staff.

These arrangements may appear administrative, but they reflect an important principle: a welfare project should not end with its inauguration. Its real test begins the next morning, when a worker walks through its doors looking for a place to rest.

Listening to a Changing World of Work

The first three centres were formally inaugurated on September 23, 2026, with the State-level inauguration held in Thiruvananthapuram and corresponding programmes organised in Ernakulam and Kozhikode.

These centres mark the beginning of the first phase. Based on their functioning and the needs expressed by workers, the Government proposes to extend the network to other districts and major towns across Keralam.

Such expansion must be guided not merely by numbers, but by listening to workers themselves. Their experiences, their difficulties and their everyday realities must inform how labour welfare evolves.

be understood through the experience of the person who spends eight, ten or more hours navigating the roads to earn a living.

Seeing the Person Behind the Service

Perhaps the most important change we need is not infrastructural, but human.

The next time a delivery worker arrives at our doorstep in the middle of a hot afternoon, or a rider reaches us through a heavy downpour, we should be able to see more than the service being delivered. We should see the worker.

Behind every delivery is a person who has spent hours on the road. Behind every completed trip is someone who has negotiated traffic, weather and time. Behind the speed and convenience of the digital economy are thousands of workers whose efforts keep it moving.

A chair may be a simple thing. So may be a glass of water, a clean restroom or a place to charge a phone. But when a person has been on the road for hours, these simple things can become a matter of comfort, safety and dignity.

That is the spirit behind Keralam's gig workers' rest centres.

Keralam has a long tradition of placing the worker at the centre of its social and economic development. As employment patterns evolve, that commitment must evolve with them. New forms of work should bring new opportunities, but they should not make workers invisible.

A changing economy must never mean a diminishing concern for the worker.

As Keralam moves towards a new generation of employment, our responsibility is to ensure that progress is measured not only by how fast services reach our homes, but also by how well the people who make that progress possible are treated.

Worker welfare begins with recognising the worker. And sometimes, recognition begins with something as simple as giving a person a safe place to pause. ●

'TOOFAN' EARNS DIPLOMATIC PRAISE FROM AUSTRALIA

Keralam's comprehensive campaign against drug abuse has drawn international appreciation, with Australian Consul General Silai Zaki commending the State's integrated approach combining stringent enforcement, public awareness, interdepartmental coordination and digital interventions.



Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan with the Australian Consul General Silai Zaki and Vice Consul Kat Knapp.

Staff Reporter

Keralam's relentless campaign against drug abuse has gained international recognition, with Australian Consul General in Chennai, Silai Zaki, praising the State's proactive anti-narcotics initiatives during an official meeting with Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan and Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala in Thiruvananthapuram.

The Australian diplomat commended the State's multi-layered approach to combating narcotics, with particular emphasis on extensive public awareness campaigns and targeted enforcement initiatives such as "Operation Toofan."

Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala briefed the Australian delegation on Keralam's twin-pronged



Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala with the Australian Consul General Silai Zaki and Vice Consul Kat Knapp. *Photo: Ajayakumar R. IPRD*

strategy, which combines firm enforcement action against narcotics networks with community-driven awareness and prevention programmes.

Operation Toofan: The Narco Hunt

"Operation Toofan: The Narco Hunt" is a targeted initiative of the Kerala Police aimed at combating drug trafficking through systematic enforcement and coordinated action across the State. The initiative received particular appreciation for its focused approach to tackling narcotics networks.

The project is being implemented in coordination with the Education, Health and Excise Departments, reflecting the Government's comprehensive approach to addressing the social and public-health dimensions of drug abuse.

Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan inaugurated the project at the State level in June 2026 at Cotton Hill School, Thiruvananthapuram. Through the initiative, the Kerala Police aims not only to take stringent legal action against drug mafias but also to build a strong public defence against narcotics through widespread community participation.

Designed to respond to the challenges of the digital age, the initiative places particular focus on countering the growing threat posed by synthetic drugs. It also seeks to strengthen public confidence and ensure a greater sense of security among citizens.

As part of efforts to dismantle interstate drug networks, joint action plans will be formulated in consultation with the police chiefs of other South Indian states. The initiative also envisages an extensive digital surveillance and reporting mechanism, including mobile applications and WhatsApp chatbots, through which citizens can anonymously share information on drug trafficking.

The Kerala Police has assured protection and confidentiality for individuals who provide sensitive information, encouraging greater public participation in the campaign against narcotics.

Strengthening International Cooperation

Beyond security and counter-narcotics efforts, the meeting also explored opportunities to expand cooperation across various ongoing development initiatives in Keralam.

Australian Vice Consul Kat Knapp also attended the discussions, which reflected the growing international interest in Keralam's governance model and developmental initiatives.

The appreciation from the Australian delegation marks another significant recognition of Keralam's efforts to address the drug menace through a coordinated model that brings together law enforcement, government departments, technology and the public.



Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan flies a drone at the closing ceremony of c0c0n 2026, expressing gratitude to the delegates and inviting them to the next edition, scheduled for September 2027.

CoCoN: A PREMIER PLATFORM FOR CYBERSECURITY

Marking a new milestone with its first-ever eight-day edition, c0c0n 2026 brought together cybersecurity experts, law enforcement agencies, policymakers, and technology leaders in Kochi to address emerging cyber threats, strengthen investigative capabilities, promote digital safety, and foster global collaboration towards a more secure and resilient digital future.

Manoj Abraham IPS
Director General of Police & Director
Vigilance & Anti-Corruption Bureau

Marking a significant milestone in its history, The 2026 edition of c0c0n was held over eight days for the first time, underscoring the growing importance of cybersecurity. The event was conducted in three phases. The Pre-Conference Technical Training sessions were held from October 6 to 8, followed by the Main Conference on October 9 and 10. The Post-Conference Technical Training sessions were scheduled from October 11 to 13.

Home and Vigilance Minister Ramesh Chennithala inaugurated the event, highlighting the increasing sophistication of cyberattacks. He drew attention to the growing use of ransomware and malware, as well as cyber theft, by malicious actors. The minister



Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala with distinguished guests in front of the Cyber Trojan Horse installation.

emphasised the need to strengthen coordination between ethical hackers and law enforcement agencies to address emerging security threats and vulnerabilities effectively.

Alongside keynote sessions, technical talks, masterclasses, round-table discussions, and networking sessions, the event featured Capture the Flag (CTF) competitions, cybersecurity villages, and live bug bounty activities, providing participants with opportunities for practical learning, collaboration, and technical engagement.

An exhibition area spanning over 25,000 square feet showcased cutting-edge technologies and innovative cybersecurity solutions, offering participants hands-on exposure to the latest advancements in the field.

MoU to Strengthen Cybersecurity

In a related development on the sidelines of the summit, Kerala Police Cyberdome signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with I HUB Research and Robotics Private Limited. The public-private partnership aims to strengthen the state police's cybersecurity, information security, and cyberforensics capabilities.

Under the agreement, I HUB will provide technical expertise, technological support, and professional assistance for approved police projects, primarily on a non-monetary basis. The collaboration will also facilitate reciprocal knowledge-sharing, granting the firm access to relevant police training programmes and seminars, thereby contributing to efforts to prevent future information security breaches.

Creating a Child-Friendly Keralam

Placing special emphasis on children's online safety, c0c0n 2026 featured a dedicated Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA) Track, addressing growing concerns over the online exploitation and abuse of children.

Experts from law enforcement agencies, along with researchers, technologists, policymakers, and child protection specialists, engaged in discussions on child online safety, emerging digital threats, technological solutions, investigative methodologies, and policy interventions.

Investigative Support and Assistance

The conference also prioritised strengthening law enforcement capabilities in cybercrime investigation

and enhancing technical expertise to tackle increasingly complex cross-border cybercrimes.

Through specialised programmes such as LEA CTF 2.0, law enforcement officers gained opportunities to develop practical knowledge and skills in cybercrime investigation, digital forensics, and cybersecurity. These initiatives provided valuable exposure to contemporary investigative techniques and advanced technological tools.

As part of the post-conference training programme of c0c0n 2026, a dedicated session was organised for law enforcement agencies under the theme "The Dark Web: Beyond the Anonymity". The training focused on strengthening investigative capabilities in the context of evolving cybercrimes.

Participants gained in-depth technical and practical knowledge of the Dark Web, the Tor network and its architecture, layered routing mechanisms, anonymity features, and the challenges involved in identifying individuals operating within these networks.

Aligned with the Kerala Police's ongoing Operation Toofan initiative, the training aimed to enhance law enforcement capabilities to detect and investigate crimes occurring beyond the conventional internet, analyse digital evidence, and examine cryptocurrency transactions linked to criminal activities.

Through the LEA Call for Papers initiative, c0c0n 2026 provided police officers, investigators, cybersecurity professionals, and technologists with an opportunity to present innovative ideas, investigative methodologies, practical solutions, and technical tools aimed at improving the efficiency of cybercrime investigations.

The initiative addressed real-world challenges faced by investigators by leveraging technology, strengthening collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the cybersecurity community, and exploring more effective and practical approaches to combating emerging cybercrimes.

India's First Cyber Trojan Horse

Home and Vigilance Minister Ramesh Chennithala unveiled India's first Cyber Trojan Horse at the conference.

Standing 25 feet tall and weighing approximately two tonnes, the imposing installation was created by renowned artist DaVinci Suresh using around

From the Cocoon Inauguration Ceremony





Kerala Police Pavilion at the Conference Venue

850 pieces of discarded electronic scrap, including motherboards, processors, memory modules, circuit boards, cables, and other electronic components.

Believed to be the world's tallest cybersecurity art installation, this remarkable fusion of art, technology, and environmental consciousness transforms discarded electronic materials into a powerful symbol of cyber awareness.

The Trojan Project draws inspiration from the legendary Trojan Horse, a symbol of danger concealed behind an apparently harmless or attractive exterior. By bringing this concept to life through a monumental installation, the project seeks to make the risks of the digital world more tangible and understandable to the public.

Its central message is clear: what appears harmless online may conceal serious risks, making digital vigilance essential for everyone.

Evolving into a Premier Platform

The valedictory ceremony of the 19th edition of the c0c0n Security and Hacking Conference, held at the Grand Hyatt, Kochi, was inaugurated by Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan with the launch of a drone.

Higher Education Minister Roji M. John and actor Dulquer Salmaan attended the ceremony. Addressing the gathering, Dulquer Salmaan remarked that while heroes in cinema receive applause and recognition, the real heroes of the cyber world work silently behind the scenes, preventing disasters and safeguarding people they have never met.

Over the years, c0c0n has evolved into a premier platform bringing together government institutions, law enforcement agencies, industry leaders, academia, researchers, and the global cybersecurity community in a collective effort to build a safer and more resilient digital future.

Against the backdrop of a rapidly transforming digital landscape driven by emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), c0c0n 2026 provided a dynamic forum for knowledge-sharing, meaningful dialogue, collaboration, and the exchange of innovative ideas.

By bringing together diverse expertise and fostering international cooperation, the conference reinforced the importance of collective action in strengthening cyber resilience and shaping a secure digital tomorrow.

Photos : Mahesh M. Prabhu, IPRD



WHERE STORIES FIND THEIR FRAME

The 18th edition of the International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Keralam (IDSFFK), held in Thiruvananthapuram, emerged as a global meeting ground for documentary and short-form cinema.

Sruthi A. Sreekumaran

Documentaries and short films hold a uniquely important place in world cinema, serving as powerful forms of expression that bring urgent realities, overlooked experiences and distinctive voices to the screen. Their strength lies in their ability to engage deeply with people, places and ideas that often remain outside the frame of mainstream cinema. Documentaries, in particular, preserve lived realities, question established narratives and create space for social, cultural and political reflection, while short films offer filmmakers the freedom to experiment with form, style and storytelling with remarkable precision. Together, they expand the language of cinema, encourage new perspectives and ensure that stories which might otherwise remain unseen or unheard find a meaningful place in the cinematic



Nina Sabnani receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award from Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan.

landscape.

The 18th edition of the International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Keralam (IDSFFK) was held from September 25 to 30 in Thiruvananthapuram, bringing together a diverse selection of documentary and short-form cinema from around the world. Over six days, the festival screened 299 films from 56 countries across 29 categories at Kairali, Nila and Sree theatres.

The festival was inaugurated at Kairali Theatre by Minister for Culture and Tourism P. C. Vishnunath, marking the beginning of six days devoted to documentary and short-form filmmaking. "Cinema has the power to transform lives, and film festivals are where that transformation begins," the Minister said at the inauguration. He also highlighted the State's historic decision to accord industry status to cinema, noting that Keralam is the first state in India to take such a step. Since there was no established model for such an initiative, he said the government's efforts were continuing to develop the framework and mechanisms required to implement the decision. The inaugural ceremony was followed by a screening of the festival's opening film, A Fox under a Pink Moon, directed by Mehrdad Oskouei and Soraya Akhlaghi.

Curated Windows into World Cinema

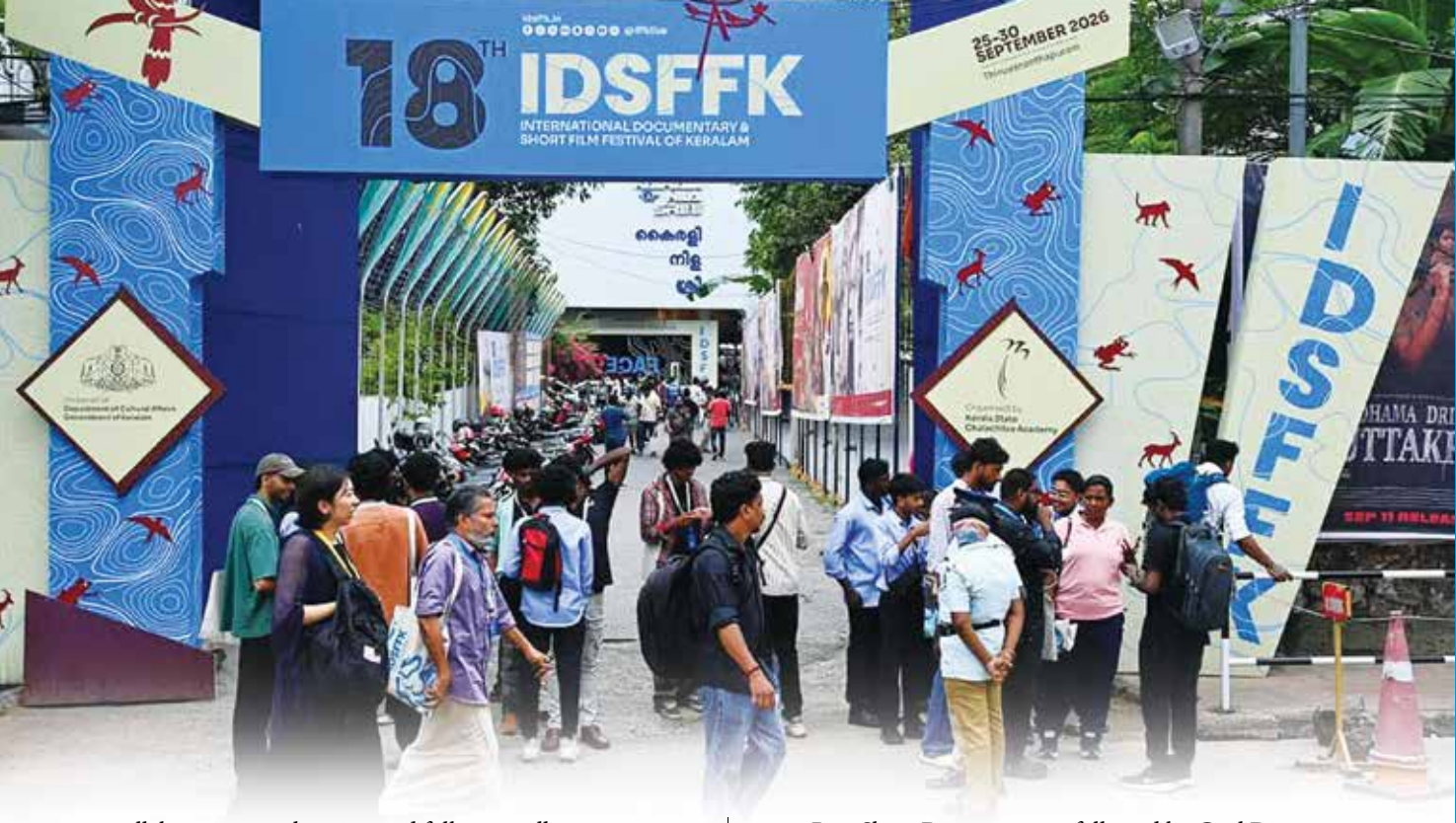
Among the festival's highlights were a series of carefully curated packages that explored diverse traditions, movements and approaches within documentary and short-form filmmaking. Best of Annecy, Anatomy of a Reverie: The Masterworks of Alain Resnais, Whispers of the Window: Voices of Nepal, The Compassionate Eye: A Tribute to Shashi Anand, and Vanguard Motion: International Animation were among the featured packages, offering audiences distinct perspectives on the possibilities of cinematic expression.

The interactive sessions, Meet the Director and Face to Face, further expanded the festival beyond screenings, turning it into a space for dialogue and exchange. Conversations with filmmakers and audiences examined the intersections of literature, dance, science and artificial intelligence, as well as the use of soundscape and music to express grief and loss. The sessions also explored audiovisual language as a powerful creative tool, particularly for younger filmmakers.

Other discussions considered artistic expression under restrictions, the use of metaphor and implication, grassroots filmmaking and the documentation of living histories. Ecology and cinema, accessibility and health in remote communities, and questions surrounding the body, identity and queer representation also formed part of the conversations. The sessions further reflected on dystopian visions, the evolving relationship between humans and artificial intelligence, the role of film festivals and art spaces in creating dialogue and community, and the often-solitary nature of filmmaking.

Nina Sabnani: A Lifetime of Expanding the Language of Animation

Animation filmmaker, illustrator, researcher and educator Nina Sabnani received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 18th IDSFFK in recognition of her distinguished contribution to animation and documentary filmmaking in India. Her practice brings together animation, ethnography, oral traditions and visual storytelling, often developed through



collaborations with artists and folk storytellers.

A graduate of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Vadodara, and a Fulbright Fellow at Syracuse University, Sabnani taught at the National Institute of Design for more than two decades before continuing her academic work at IIT Bombay. Her films, including Mukand and Riaz, Tanko Bole Chhe, Baat Wahi Hai and the National Award-winning Hum Chitra Banate Hain, have explored memory, traditional art and lived histories through distinctive visual forms.

Remembering Frederick Wiseman

The 18th IDSFFK also paid tribute to Frederick Wiseman, one of the defining figures of documentary cinema, through the curated package Behind Closed Doors: Frederick Wiseman's Human Mosaic. Presented in the year of his death, the package featured Law and Order (1969) and Model (1981), two works that reflect Wiseman's enduring interest in institutions, human behaviour and the complex relationship between individuals and the systems they inhabit.

Honouring Excellence Across Competition Sections

The festival also recognised outstanding works across its competition sections. Marrah, directed by Muhammed Jaseel K, received the Best Campus Film award, while Ozhukku, directed by Vishnu Pushkaran, received a Special Jury Mention.

In the Short Fiction section, Bhintila Paath, directed by Shekhar Bapu Rankhambe, was named Best Film, while A Mouse And A Man/Khoabjomin, directed by Sahadeb Das, received the Second Best Film award. Friends of Jilipibala, directed by Debalina Majumder, won Best Short Documentary, followed by Coal Diggers of India, directed by Ashutosh Jare, which received the Second Best Short Documentary award.

In the Long Documentary section, Close Up Up Close – The Making of Political UBU, directed by Kamal K M, won Best Long Documentary, while My Otter Diary, directed by Sugandhi Gadadhar, received the Second Best Long Documentary award. Close Up Up Close – The Making of Political UBU also received the Kumar Talkies Award for Best Editing, awarded to Sajeesh Swaminathan. The Shashi Anand Memorial Award for Best Cinematography in a Documentary went to Premkrishna Akkattu for Auto Queens.

The festival concluded on September 30 with a closing ceremony inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Keralam, V. D. Satheesan, who also presented the Lifetime Achievement Award to Nina Sabnani.

Documentary and short-form cinema provide filmmakers with a vital space in which to learn, experiment and develop their individual cinematic languages before moving into the more demanding terrain of commercial and feature filmmaking. For emerging practitioners in particular, a festival such as IDSFFK offers not only an encounter with diverse forms of cinema but also an opportunity to meet fellow filmmakers, exchange ideas and discover new ways of seeing and telling stories.

The enduring value of a film festival lies not only in the films it screens, but also in the conversations, connections and perspectives it leaves behind. •

The writer is a freelance journalist.



At a grand celebration of athletic excellence, the Sports Night Kerala gathering at Nishagandhi Auditorium, Thiruvananthapuram, reaffirmed the State's vision of building a vibrant sporting culture. The evening was highlighted by Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan's announcement of government employment for international medal winners and the presentation of the G. V. Raja Sports Awards, linking sports promotion with youth welfare and anti-drug campaigns. Anchoring this ambitious vision is the Kerala Olympic Talent Pathway Project, an initiative dedicated to moulding tomorrow's champions for the 2036 Olympic Games. Ministers N. Samsudheen and O. J. Janeesh also attended the function.



Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan shares a warm moment with Asian Games coach Anoop Joseph's child, with Ministers N. Samsudheen and O. J. Janeesh nearby.



Launch of the "Kerala Olympics Talent Pathway" Project, Aimed at the 2036 Olympic Games

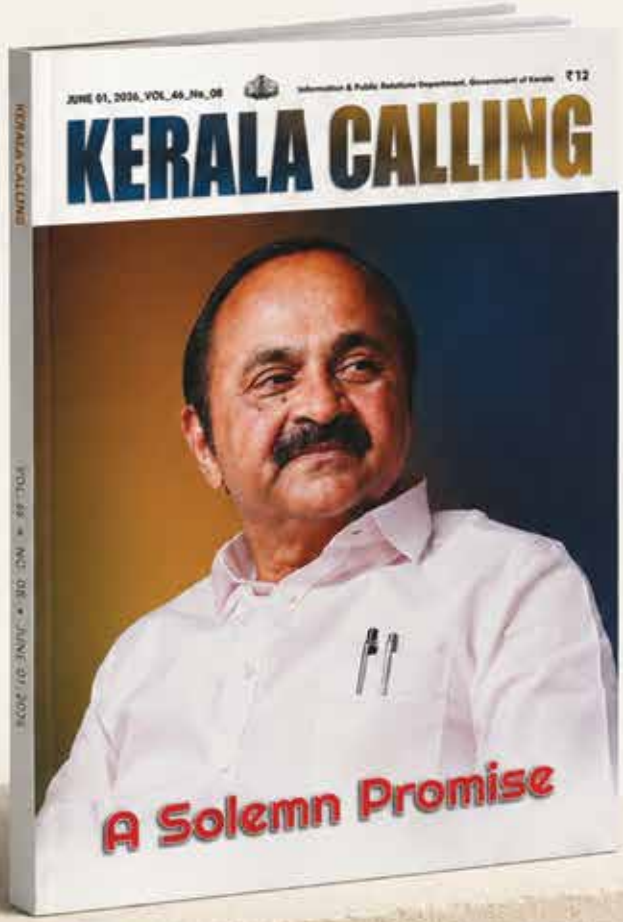
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