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INFORMATION & PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
GOVERNMENT OF KERALAM

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KERALA CALLING

Celebrating

70 Years of Keralam

2026



ROOTED IN LEGACY, RISING TOWARDS TOMORROW



SABARIMALA 2026–27

Government Departments in Action



Illustration: **Reshmi R S, IPRD**

Celebrating

70 Years of Keralam

2026



what's inside



Celebrating 70 Years of Keralam 2026

6 Rooted in Legacy, Rising towards Tomorrow
V D SATHEESAN

10 Celebrating Seven Decades of Keralam



SABARIMALA

A Sacred Journey, A Shared Responsibility
K. MURALEEDHARAN ___ ___ ___ ___ **14**

Securing Every Step
RAMESH CHENNITHALA ___ ___ ___ ___ **16**

Digitally Empowered, Safer Pilgrimage
A. P. ANILKUMAR ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ **18**

Protecting Pilgrims and Wildlife
SHIBU BABY JOHN ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ **20**

Powering the Pilgrimage
SUNNY JOSEPH ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ **22**

A Seamless Journey to Sabarimala
C. P. JOHN ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ **24**

Eco-Friendly Pilgrimage
K. M. SHAJI ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ **26**

Ensuring a Safe Pilgrimage
MONS JOSEPH ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ **28**

Safeguarding the Sabarimala Pilgrimage
M. LIJU ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ **30**

Better Roads, Safer Journeys
P. K. BASHEER ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ **32**

From Plains to Hills
MADHUSOODANAN T. R ___ ___ ___ ___ **34**

Keeping Sabarimala Connected: BSNL's Role in the Pilgrimage
VINOD KUMAR K ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ **36**

Where Prayers Travel by Post ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ **37**

Through the mist to Sabarimala
SHAJI K ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ **38**



40 **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**
Makalkkoppam
A New Women's Policy for Keralam



42 **SPORTS**
Young Champions, Golden Dreams
SOUMYA CHANDRAN

46 **TRAVEL**
Positioning Nature as a Premium Experience
SINI K THOMAS





Where Heritage Blooms and Progress Unfolds

Keralam's journey over the past seven decades is a story of rich cultural traditions, social progress and collective achievement. Rooted in its heritage and guided by progressive ideals, the state has steadily moved forward through social reform, public participation and development. As Keralam marks seventy years since its formation, this is an occasion to reflect on its achievements, celebrate the values that have shaped its identity and look to the future with renewed confidence.

The 'Festival of Keralam', organised by the Government of Keralam, celebrates this remarkable journey by showcasing the state's cultural heritage and achievements on a national platform. Bringing together art, literature, music, sports and social development, the festival highlights the diverse facets of Keralam's growth over the decades. As part of the first phase of the year-long celebrations, programmes will be held in five major Indian cities—Chennai, Bengaluru, Mumbai, New Delhi and Kolkata. These events will introduce Keralam's artistic traditions, cultural diversity and achievements to audiences across the country. More than a celebration of statehood, the festival is an opportunity to revisit the values and aspirations that have shaped Keralam's distinctive identity.

Keralam's rich traditions also find expression in the annual Sabarimala pilgrimage, an important part of the state's cultural and spiritual life. The Mandala-Makaravilakku season draws lakhs of devotees, making extensive preparations and effective coordination among government departments essential. Ensuring a safe and comfortable pilgrimage involves careful planning in areas such as transportation, healthcare, sanitation, drinking water, security and environmental protection. In this issue, the ministers concerned share details of the preparations and measures undertaken by their respective departments for this year's pilgrimage season.

The state has made notable achievements in women's education, healthcare and social participation. However, ensuring greater economic independence, employment opportunities, leadership roles and safety remains a priority. The Government of Keralam's 'Makalkkoppam' initiative aims to strengthen women's participation and create greater opportunities for their advancement. As part of this initiative, 'Her Summit 2026' has provided a platform for discussions and the exchange of ideas to support the formulation of a new women's policy. Such efforts reflect the state's commitment to building a society where women have equal opportunities and a stronger voice in shaping their future.

As Keralam celebrates seven decades of statehood, its achievements offer both a reason for pride and a foundation for further progress. The strength of its cultural traditions, its commitment to public welfare and its pursuit of social equality continue to guide its development. The challenge ahead is to preserve this legacy while responding to changing needs and aspirations, ensuring that the benefits of progress reach every section of society.

This issue of Keralam Calling reflects these varied dimensions of Keralam's journey—a journey that draws strength from its heritage, celebrates its achievements and embraces the promise of a better tomorrow.

Sabin Sameed IAS
Editor

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PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
GOVERNMENT OF KERALAM

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As Keralam marks 70 years of its formation, the occasion calls for more than a celebration of past achievements. It is a chance to build on that legacy and shape a more inclusive, innovative and compassionate future—one that creates opportunities for the young and ensures that progress reaches everyone.

Rooted in Legacy, Rising towards Tomorrow

V D SATHEESAN
Chief Minister of Keralam

Seventy years after its formation, Keralam has much to look back on with pride. The state we know today has been shaped by generations of struggle, sacrifice and reform—from the freedom movement and campaigns against caste discrimination to remarkable progress in education, healthcare and social justice. These achievements form the foundation on which we must now build.

Keralam has earned national recognition for its advances in education, healthcare and social development. Yet the accomplishments of the past cannot define the limits of our ambition. We want Keralam to become the best state in India, and achieving that goal will require a collective effort and





a willingness to embrace new ideas.

Building a new Keralam means responding to a changing world while ensuring that the benefits of development reach every section of society. Our geographical limitations make it all the more important to use our resources wisely. Growth must respect the environment, address the challenges of climate change and bring tangible improvements to people's lives. With the right approach, Keralam can develop sustainable models that inspire others.

The 70th anniversary is therefore not only a time to remember our history, but also an opportunity to share our strengths and aspirations with a wider world. Festival Keralam will take our art, culture and heritage to major cities across India and to international audiences. Investment summits organised alongside these celebrations will introduce the state to potential investors and help open new avenues for economic growth.

Preparing the Next Generation

Our future will be shaped by the opportunities we create for children and young people today. They should be able to access quality education and build rewarding careers without having to leave their home state.

This calls for meaningful changes in higher education. We need institutions of international standing, contemporary courses in universities and colleges, and specialised training that keeps pace with the needs of a changing job market. Expanding investment and encouraging new industries will be equally important in creating the jobs our young people deserve.

Our ambition should go further. Keralam can become a preferred destination for students from other states and countries. We can also build on our strengths in healthcare to attract more people seeking high-quality medical treatment. Both sectors offer opportunities to serve a wider community while generating new avenues for growth.

Technology will be central to the economy of tomorrow. Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Computing, Machine Learning and Robotics are opening new possibilities for innovation and employment. We must prepare for these opportunities by developing data centres, semiconductor facilities and Global Capability Centres. Keralam was a pioneer in India's Information Technology revolution; we must now ensure that our young people have a place at the forefront of the next wave of technological change.

Harnessing the Maritime Economy

Keralam's coastline is one of its greatest assets. Through Mission Samudra, we aim to turn this advantage into a strong maritime and port-based economy.

At the heart of the plan is an integrated network built around the Vizhinjam International Seaport, supported by smaller ports, stronger road, rail and waterway links, logistics parks, maritime clusters and port-linked cities. Together, these investments can expand trade, attract businesses and create employment.

By 2031, the maritime sector has the potential to generate hundreds of thousands of jobs. In its first phase, Mission Samudra aims to shift at least half of the freight now transported by road to sea routes. The second phase will focus on cruise shipping, while the third will develop river-linked tourism.

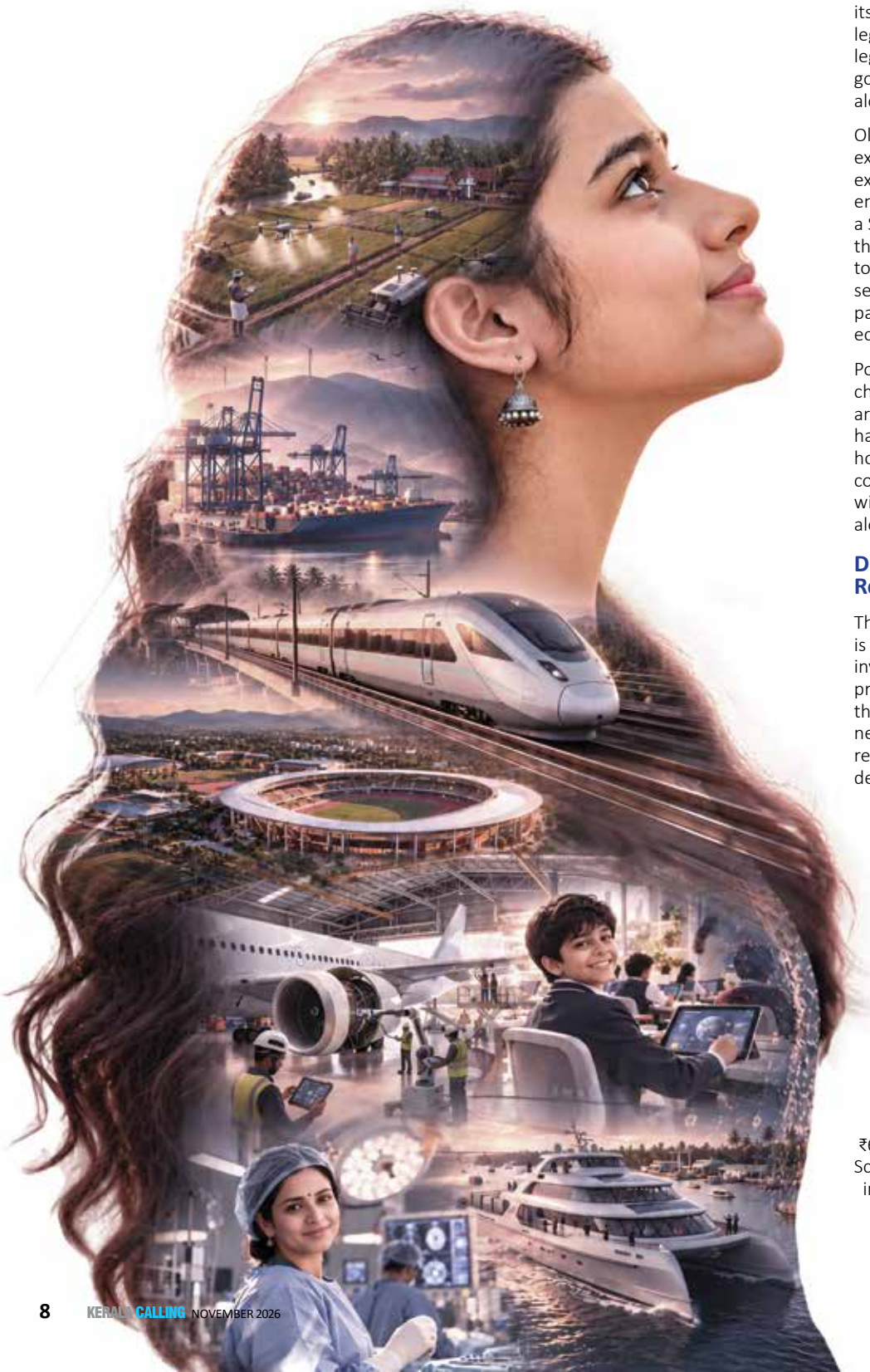
The maritime economy is only part of our wider connectivity vision. We also intend to develop Keralam's four international airports into aviation hubs, strengthening the state's links with national and global markets.

> "Seventy years of reform and progress have laid the foundation for a new chapter. From education and emerging technologies to maritime growth and compassionate governance, Keralam looks towards a future of opportunity for all.

Caring for an Ageing Society

Keralam is experiencing a significant demographic transition. As the number of senior citizens grows, ensuring their safety, dignity and well-being becomes an increasingly important responsibility.

We have taken steps in this direction by establishing a



dedicated department for senior citizens—the first of its kind in India—and passing legislation to strengthen their legal protection. But our vision goes beyond care and security alone.

Older people bring knowledge, experience and professional expertise that continue to enrich our society. The idea of a Silver Economy recognises this contribution and seeks to create opportunities for senior citizens to remain active participants in social and economic life.

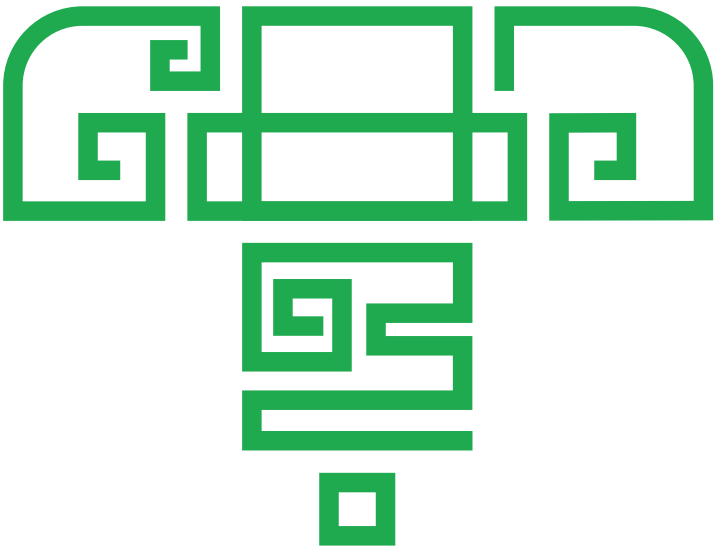
Population ageing is a challenge faced by societies around the world. Keralam has an opportunity to show how it can be addressed with compassion, foresight and a willingness to see possibility alongside responsibility.

Development that Reaches Everyone

The real measure of progress is not simply the scale of our investments or infrastructure projects, but how widely their benefits are shared. The needs of ordinary people must remain at the centre of every development decision.

Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities, fishing families and other disadvantaged groups deserve particular attention. A special housing scheme has been introduced for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and fishing families. Housing assistance for Scheduled Caste families and fisherfolk has risen from ₹4 lakh to ₹6 lakh, while support for Scheduled Tribe families has increased from ₹6 lakh to ₹8 lakh.

Keralam 70



WINDS OF CHANGE

Women's empowerment is another essential part of our vision. Under the Indira Guarantee initiative, the Priyadarshini Scheme provides free travel for women on KSRTC buses, making everyday journeys easier and recognising their vital role in society.

We must also protect our communities from drug abuse and trafficking. Our efforts to dismantle drug networks and confront the drug mafia will remain firm.

Equally important is the support we provide to children with autism and other disabilities, and to their families. Parents should not have to face uncertainty about their children's future without help. Keralam must stand with them through care, protection and practical support.

> "The real measure of progress is not simply the scale of our investments or infrastructure projects, but how widely their benefits are shared. The needs of ordinary people must remain at the centre of every development decision.

Making Keralam an Investment Destination

Creating more jobs and sustaining growth will require stronger investment and expanding industries. For that to happen, entrepreneurs and investors must be able to establish and grow businesses without avoidable hurdles.

The passage of the Saral Keralam legislation by the Kerala Legislative Assembly is an important step towards that goal. By simplifying procedures, reducing delays and making approvals quicker and more transparent, the law seeks to create a more welcoming business environment.

A state that encourages enterprise can attract new industries, create employment, strengthen public revenue and open up lasting opportunities for its people. Investment-friendly governance and people-centred development must go hand in hand.

Governance Rooted in Empathy

Development is ultimately about the difference it makes to everyday life. Roads, industries and economic growth matter, but so does the assurance that no individual's hardship will be overlooked.

People who need support must receive the consideration and assistance they deserve. This is the belief behind our guiding principle: "Good Governance with Empathy." It means placing people at the centre of decisions and bringing compassion to the way government works.

As we look ahead, we must also protect the secular and democratic values that have long shaped Keralam. No one should face exclusion or discrimination because of religion or caste. Equality, secularism and democracy are not merely part of our history; they remain essential to our future.

Seventy years of achievement have given us the confidence to aim higher. Our task now is to honour that legacy by embracing new opportunities and ensuring that progress improves the lives of all our people.

Let us move forward together towards a New-Era Keralam—progressive, inclusive, prosperous and prepared for tomorrow. ■

Marking seven decades of Keralam's formation, the State Government has launched the year-long 'Festival of Keralam', celebrating the state's rich cultural heritage, artistic traditions, sporting achievements and social progress.

Celebrating Seven Decades of Keralam

Festival of Keralam Begins on a Grand Note

STAFF REPORTER

Keralam's seven-decade journey of cultural excellence, social transformation and remarkable achievements has found a new platform for celebration with the launch of the Festival of Keralam, a year-long initiative organised by the State Government to commemorate 70 years of the state's formation.

The festival was officially inaugurated on Kerala Piravi Day at Nishagandhi Auditorium in Thiruvananthapuram by Minister for Culture and Tourism P. C. Vishnunadh. Transport Minister C. P. John presided over the ceremony.

Envisioned as a celebration of Keralam's unique identity, the festival brings together the state's cultural heritage, artistic traditions, sporting accomplishments and social achievements. It also seeks to introduce Keralam's distinctive character and contributions to a wider audience.



Minister P. C. Vishnunadh inaugurating the festival at Nishagandhi, Thiruvananthapuram. Minister C. P. John, Chief Secretary Biswanath Sinha, Higher Education Principal Secretary Dr. B. Ashok, and actor Tovino Thomas are also seen. Photo Credit : Ramesh.S IPRD

Taking Keralam's Cultural Legacy Beyond Borders

The Festival of Keralam aims to showcase the state's rich and diverse heritage while highlighting its achievements across various fields. From art and literature to music, sports and social development, the celebrations will reflect the many facets of Keralam's evolution over the past seven decades.

As part of the first phase of the year-long programme, the festival will be organised in five major Indian cities—Chennai, Bengaluru, Mumbai, New Delhi and Kolkata.

These events will provide an opportunity to present Keralam's artistic traditions, cultural diversity and achievements to audiences beyond the state, extending the celebrations to a wider national platform.

Encouraging Public Participation in Governance

The inaugural ceremony also



A glimpse of the cultural performances at the inaugural ceremony. Photo: Dalu Parameswaran IPRD

marked the launch of the The Business Policy and Process Re-engineering (BPPR) portal, an initiative designed to encourage public participation in administrative reforms.

The portal enables citizens to submit opinions and suggestions regarding changes to government rules, laws and administrative procedures, creating a platform for greater public involvement in governance.

The event also recognised excellence in the use of Malayalam as an official language. Transport Minister C. P. John and Chief Secretary Biswanath Sinha presented the Administrative Language Awards to various government departments.

Minister P. C. Vishnunadh administered the official language pledge, reaffirming the importance of Malayalam in public administration.

A Musical Tribute to Keralam's Soul

The inaugural celebrations continued with Gananjali: A Musical Tribute to the Soul of Keralam, a special cultural presentation tracing seven decades of Malayalam music.

Combining music with visual storytelling, the programme offered an artistic journey through the evolution of Keralam's musical traditions, reflecting the changing cultural landscape of the state.

The presentation was jointly organised by the Higher Education Department and the Additional Skill Acquisition Programme (ASAP) Keralam.

The cultural evening also featured a classical dance performance led by renowned dancer Suma Varma, adding elegance and artistic richness to the celebrations.

> "From the cultural splendour of Keralam's past to its remarkable journey of progress, the year-long festival celebrates the state's distinctive identity, taking the spirit of Keralam beyond its borders to major cities across India.



Minister P. C. Vishnunadh leads the Official Language Pledge. Photo: Ramesh S IPRD

Celebrating the Past, Embracing the Future

More than a commemoration of Keralam's formation, the Festival of Keralam offers an opportunity to reflect on the state's achievements and celebrate the cultural values that have shaped its identity.

By bringing together art, culture, sporting excellence and social progress, the festival seeks to highlight Keralam's journey over the past seven decades while introducing its heritage to new audiences.

As the celebrations extend across the country over the coming year, the Festival of Keralam promises to serve as a vibrant platform for showcasing the state's cultural richness and collective achievements.

Celebrating the legacy of its past and the achievements of its present, Keralam steps into its eighth decade with renewed pride in its identity and a vision for the future.■



SABARIMALA 2026–27

MANDALA–MAKARAVILAKKU PILGRIMAGE | VIRTUAL Q & TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

IMPORTANT PILGRIMAGE DATES

MANDALA–MAKARAVILAKKU SEASON 2026–2027

- **16 Nov 2026 (evening):** Temple opens for the Mandala season.
- **17 Nov 2026:** Mandala observances begin.
- **27 Dec 2026:** Mandala Pooja; temple closes that night.
- **30 Dec 2026:** Temple reopens for the Makaravilakku period.
- **14 Jan 2027:** Makaravilakku; expect peak demand.
- **20 Jan 2027:** Calendar-listed season closing date; reconfirm before travel.

NOTE Temple calendar dates may be updated. Confirm the final programme with TDB.

100% FREE VIRTUAL Q BOOKING

Protect yourself from fake agents and paid-pass scams

- **Zero booking fee:** Virtual Q slots are free; do not pay agents.
- **Official portal:** sabarimalaonline.org
- **2026–27 bookings:** Opened 29 October 2026 at 10:00 a.m.
- **Avoid scams:** Ignore unauthorized sites offering guaranteed slots or paid passes.

KEEP THESE DETAILS READY

Prepare the essentials before starting registration

- **Mobile number:** Keep a working number available for any OTP verification.
- **Photo ID:** Use valid identification, such as Aadhaar, voter ID or passport.
- **Recent photograph:** Use the file format and size requested by the portal.
- **Email address:** Have one ready if requested during registration.

WHERE EVERY STEP IS A PRAYER

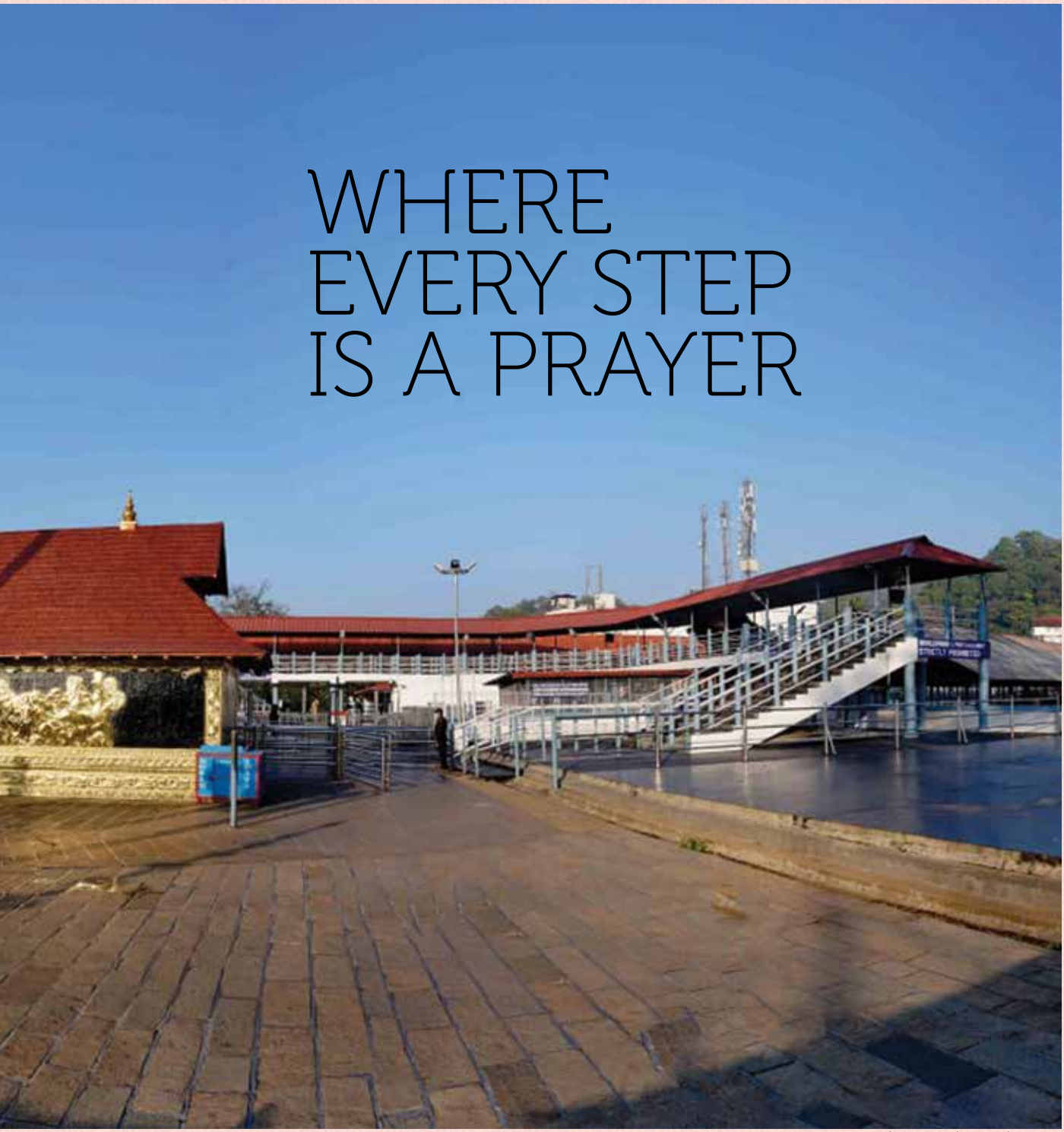


Photo: Sunil Central IPRD

HOW TO BOOK YOUR VIRTUAL Q PASS

A simple booking checklist

- Visit sabarimalaonline.org.
- Register or sign in to your account.
- Open the Virtual Q booking section.
- Select your available date, time slot and route (if prompted).
- Enter each pilgrim's details exactly as shown on the selected photo ID.
- Confirm the booking and save the QR-coded pass as a PDF; print a copy.

SPOT BOOKING & DAILY QUOTAS

Officially announced limits for 2026–2027

- **Daily darshan capacity:** 80,000 pilgrims in total.
- **Online Virtual Q:** 66,000 bookings per day.
- **Spot booking:** 14,000 bookings per day across three designated counters.
- **Nilackal:** 10,000 spot bookings per day.
- **Erumeli:** 2,000 spot bookings per day.
- **Vandiperiyar Sathram:** 2,000 spot bookings per day.
- **Pamba:** No spot-booking counter for the 2026–27 season.

NOTE Counter limits may be reached. Advance online booking is strongly recommended.

YATRA TRAVEL CHECKLIST

Make your journey to Sannidhanam smoother

- **Keep to your slot:** Follow the reporting time and route shown on your pass.
- **Carry two copies:** Save the digital PDF offline and bring a printout.
- **Bring original ID:** Carry the same photo ID used for registration.
- **Book early:** Popular dates may fill quickly.
- **Coordinate travel:** Plan train/bus journeys with a suitable buffer before your booked slot.



Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan lights the ceremonial lamp at Pamba to inaugurate a meeting to review preparations for the Sabarimala pilgrimage. Ministers C. P. John, Mons Joseph, K. Muraleedharan, Sunny Joseph, A. P. Anilkumar, Shibu Baby John, P. C. Vishnunath, Kodikkunnil Suresh MP, Travancore Devaswom Board President K. Jayakumar are also seen. Photo: R Prasanth IPRD

A Sacred Journey, A Shared Responsibility

K. MURALEEDHARAN
MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE, AND DEVASWOM

The Sabarimala pilgrimage is more than a religious observance. It is a sacred journey rooted in faith, spiritual discipline and devotion. Every year, lakhs of Ayyappa devotees, transcending barriers of caste, religion and language, make their way to Sannidhanam, united by the chant of "Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa." Ensuring a safe, smooth and fulfilling darshan experience for every pilgrim is a responsibility of immense importance. The government, together with the Travancore Devaswom Board and various departments, plays a vital role in making this possible.

Recognising the scale of the pilgrimage, the government began preparations well ahead of this year's Mandala-Makaravilakku season. Soon after assuming office, it convened meetings with the departments concerned in July and August to review preparations and coordinate activities. Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan also chaired meetings at Pamba and Sannidhanam, taking stock of the arrangements and issuing necessary directions.

Good road connectivity and reliable transport facilities are essential for a smooth pilgrimage. One of the major achievements in this year's preparations is the renovation of the Chalakayam-Pamba road, which comes under the Devaswom Public Works Department. The Public Works Department completed the work at a cost of ₹15 crore, improving an important stretch of the pilgrimage route.

The primary responsibility for organising the Sabarimala pilgrimage rests with the Travancore Devaswom Board, and the government is committed to providing all necessary support. An important part of the arrangements is ensuring the uninterrupted availability of prasadam, particularly Appam and Aravana, which hold special significance for devotees. The Devaswom Board President has announced that a buffer stock of 80 lakh units of Aravana will be maintained ahead of the Mandala-Makaravilakku season to meet the needs of pilgrims.

Given the sheer number of devotees visiting Sabarimala, the responsibility of ensuring their safety and comfort cannot rest with the Devaswom Board alone. Nearly 32 government departments work in close coordination to provide essential services and manage the various aspects of the

> For the first time, Sabarimala pilgrims will receive a ₹2 lakh death insurance cover, with premiums paid by the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB). Introduced in association with LIC, the scheme covers both virtual queue and spot-booking pilgrims, from one day before their ascent to three days thereafter.

pilgrimage.

Crowd management is among the most demanding responsibilities, particularly along the pilgrimage routes and at the sacred eighteen steps. The Keralam Police plays a crucial role in regulating the movement of devotees, maintaining security and facilitating an orderly darshan. With lakhs of pilgrims arriving during the season, effective crowd control and careful coordination are essential to ensuring their safety.

Adequate facilities will also be provided at major pilgrim transit centres, including Pandalam, Erumeli, Chengannur, Kottayam, Ettumanoor and Vaikom. The district administration, Local Self-Government Department, Devaswom Board and Health Department will work together to make the necessary arrangements at these locations.

The health and well-being of pilgrims remain a major priority. The Health Department has made extensive arrangements to provide timely medical care throughout the pilgrimage. In addition to hospitals at Nilackal, Pamba and Sannidhanam, medical assistance facilities have been arranged at Neelimala, Appachimedu, Charalmedu and Karimala. A network of 22 emergency medical centres will function round the clock along the pilgrimage routes, ensuring access to essential treatment and emergency medical assistance.

Equal attention has been given to food safety. Special food safety squads have been deployed at Sannidhanam, Pamba, Nilackal and Erumeli to carry out regular inspections and monitor food quality throughout the pilgrimage season. From this season, a dedicated inspection squad will also begin operations at Pandalam. It will inspect hotels, restaurants, temporary eateries, roadside food stalls and other food distribution establishments to ensure compliance with food safety standards.

Food testing facilities are also being strengthened. Mobile food testing laboratories will be used at Nilackal and Erumeli to conduct on-the-spot tests of food items. At Pamba, the existing food testing laboratory will be upgraded to improve its capacity and efficiency. These improvements will enable more effective testing of food samples and help ensure the quality and safety of raw materials and other food products.

Particular care will be taken to maintain the quality of Appam and Aravana prepared at Sannidhanam. Only raw materials that have undergone the required quality and safety checks will be permitted for use in the production units. This will help ensure that the prasadam distributed to devotees meets the prescribed safety standards.

Alongside these arrangements, protecting Sabarimala's fragile environment and preserving the sanctity of the Pamba River are equally important. Every pilgrim has a responsibility to help keep the sacred surroundings clean. Devotees are urged to follow the Green Protocol strictly and avoid littering, particularly with plastic and other waste. Keeping the holy Pamba River clean and preserving its sanctity must remain a shared commitment.

The Sabarimala pilgrimage brings together millions of devotees in a spirit of faith and unity. Through advance planning, coordinated efforts across departments and a continued focus on safety, essential services and environmental protection, the government is working to ensure that every pilgrim can undertake this sacred journey with comfort, confidence and peace of mind. ■

SABARIMALA NODAL OFFICERS

Sabarimala State Nodal Officer and DMO(H), Pathanamthitta	Dr Manikantan J	9447894073
Sabarimala District Nodal Officer, Pathanamthitta	Dr Syam Kumar K K	9446685049
EMC Nodal Officer	Dr Sajin K Reji	9961632380
Sabarimala District Nodal Officer, Kottayam	Dr Sithara C J	9447660590
Sabarimala District Nodal Officer, Idukki	Dr Jobin Joseph G	9745350926
Sabarimala District Nodal Officer, Alappuzha	Dr Dileep Kumar S R	8547373234
Sabarimala Nodal Officer, Govt.Medical College, Konni	Dr Thomas Antony	9894128041
Sabarimala Nodal Officer, Govt.Medical College, Kottayam	Dr Frederick Paul	9495106178
Sabarimala Nodal Officer, General Hospital, Pathanamthitta	Dr Preeja	9995602191
Sabarimala Nodal Officer, District Hospital, Kozhencherry	Dr Sujith Kumar	8281302257
Sabarimala Nodal Officer, THQH Thiruvalla	Dr Jayakumar	9495919629
Sabarimala Nodal Officer, THQH Konni	Dr Swabir	8547212023
Sabarimala Nodal Officer, THQH Ranni	Dr Anjana	9188522972
Sabarimala Nodal Officer, GH Adoor	Dr Adarsh Surendran	7012207401
Sabarimala Nodal Officer, CHC Erumeli	Dr Dhanya Susheelan	9447102968
Sabarimala Nodal Officer, GH Kanjirapally	Dr Savan Sarah Mathew	9008026081

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Pamba Emergency Control Room	04735 203232
Pamba Government Hospital	04735 203318, 203319
Neelimala Cardiology Centre	04735 203384
Appachimedu Cardiology Centre	04735 202050
Sannidhanam Government Hospital	04735 202101
Charalmedu Dispensary (Forest Department Building)	04735 202005
Nilackal Government Hospital (Devaswom Building)	04735 205202
Erumeli Community Health Centre	04828210454
Food Safety officer, Sannidhanam	7593861767
Food Safety officer, Pamba	8592999666
Food Safety officer, Nilackal	7593861767
Toll free number	1800 425 1125

A Keralam Sadya for Sabarimala Pilgrims

At the Annadana Mandapam in Sannidhanam, up to 5,000 pilgrims can share a meal at a time.

This year, the Annadana Mandapam has introduced a traditional Keralam sadya for pilgrims visiting Sabarimala. The feast is served at lunchtime and includes payasam, a traditional Keralam dessert. At least one sweet dish is on the menu every day.

Breakfast options include idli or dosa. In the evening, pilgrims are served kanji (rice porridge) with cooked pulses, pickle and pappadam.

> The Home Department has deployed a multi-tier safety grid, advanced aquatic rescue teams, high-tech surveillance, and expanded logistics to protect millions of devotees throughout the Sabarimala Mandala-Makaravilakku season.

Securing Every Step

The Home Department's Comprehensive Safety Grid

RAMESH CHENNITHALA
MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS, VIGILANCE & COIR INDUSTRY

As millions of devotees prepare to undertake the holy pilgrimage to Sabarimala for the upcoming Mandala-Makaravilakku season, the Government of Keralam's Home Department has deployed an unprecedented multi-agency safety, security, and emergency response framework. Under the direct supervision of the Chief Minister and the Minister for Home Affairs, state administrative bodies—led by the Keralam Police and the Fire and Rescue Services Department—have seamlessly integrated high-tech surveillance, specialized tactical units, aquatic rescue teams, and enhanced welfare infrastructure to guarantee a smooth and spiritually fulfilling journey for every pilgrim.

Unified Police Command and Strategic Force Deployment

To ensure real-time command continuity across the intensive pilgrimage window running from mid-November to late January, a top-tier operational matrix has been established:

Executive Oversight: The Additional Director General of Police (Law & Order) serves as the Chief Police Coordinator, supported by the Inspector General of Police (South Zone) as Joint Coordinator, alongside Additional Coordinators from Kochi, Thiruvananthapuram, and Ernakulam.

Phased Officer Rotations: The pilgrimage core is split into three primary zones—Sannidhanam, Pamba, and Nilackal. To prevent duty fatigue and eliminate operational unfamiliarity, Special Officer rotations (managed by SP-rank officers) have been optimized into five focused phases. Dedicated SPs also head specialized wings, including Telecommunications, Motor Transport, and Inter-Departmental Coordination.

ADGP P. Vijayan addressing the first batch of police personnel deployed at Sannidhanam.





Multi-Tiered Zonal Forces

Sannidhanam: Led by an SP and Addl. SP/Sr. DySP, each phase features 10 ASP/DySP/ACs, 34 Inspectors/APIs/RIs, 97 SIs/ASIs, and 1,402 Civil Police Officers (CPOs).

Pamba: Supported by an SP, Addl. SP, 6 DySPs, 25 Inspectors, 70 SIs/ASIs, 6 Women Inspectors, 691 CPOs, and 51 Women CPOs.

Nilackal: Managed by an SP, Addl. SP, 3 DySPs, 12 Inspectors, 165 SIs/ASIs, 537 CPOs, and 9 Women CPOs.

Erumeli & Kottayam Transit Hubs: Heavy crowd control, parking, and traffic regulation are managed by dedicated teams led by regional DySPs, utilizing hundreds of police officers and Special Police Officers (SPOs).

Inter-State Coordination & Language Support: Directors General of Police from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Maharashtra have been requested to deploy anti-crime squads and language-proficient officers. This initiative serves a dual purpose: intercepting interstate criminal syndicates attempting to blend in with pilgrims and eliminating linguistic barriers to better assist arriving devotees.

Crowd Dynamics, Electronic Surveillance & Logistics

Modern technology and expanded physical capabilities form the core of this season's logistics:

Integrated CCTV Grid: An extensive camera network—combining Police surveillance with Devaswom Board and Devaswom Vigilance cameras—monitors crowd density at Sannidhanam, Pamba, Nilackal, and Erumeli in real time. An additional 36 CCTV cameras are being installed within the Erumeli station limits.

Expanded Nilackal Parking: Following extensive clearing and land leveling, Nilackal's parking capacity has been expanded from 7,350 to over 9,625 Heavy and Light Motor Vehicles.

Traditional Trekking Route Safety: Anti-sabotage units equipped with Door Frame Metal Detectors (DFMDs), State Intelligence teams, and a dedicated company of the Rapid Action Force (RAF) are deployed alongside mobile patrols covering traditional forest routes (Erumeli–Pamba, Satram–Pullumedu, and Vandiperiyar).

Virtual Queue & Health Verification: The Virtual Queue system incorporates explicit health and age guidelines (strictly permitting physically fit pilgrims over 18 years on high-altitude forest paths) to prevent medical emergencies along remote stretches.

Frontline Personnel Welfare

Acknowledging that optimal security relies on well-supported personnel, the state has significantly upgraded living conditions for duty staff:

Upgraded Lodging & Sanitation: Five new permanent buildings have been provided at Nilackal to accommodate over 1,150 police officers. Barracks and police messes across Pamba and Sannidhanam have undergone complete floor, plumbing, electrical, and painting overhauls.

Enhanced Allowances: Government orders have doubled the luggage allowance provided to police personnel assigned to demanding Sannidhanam duty (from ₹300 to ₹600).

Advanced Fire & Rescue Infrastructure and Aquatic Safety

The Keralam Fire and Rescue Services Department has mobilized extensive emergency response machinery to mitigate fire hazards, conduct swift extractions, and secure dangerous water bodies along the trek:

Temporary Fire Stations: Eight strategic fire stations have been activated across key transit and camping points—Sannidhanam, Pamba, Nilackal, Pallirakkavu, Plappally, Pandalam, Erumeli, and Kalaketty.

Deployment Strength: Approximately 2,000 personnel will operate across six phases (roughly 325 personnel per phase), supported by 400 trained Civil Defence and Aapda Mitra volunteers.

Aquatic Rescue and Bathing Ghat Security: Recognizing the hazards of river currents, 18 certified scuba divers are stationed per phase across nine designated bathing ghats to safeguard pilgrims undertaking holy dips.

Emergency Response Fleet: A fleet of 32 fully equipped fire and rescue vehicles carrying specialized extraction devices remains on constant standby.

Makaravilakku Special Contingent: During the high-density Makaravilakku festival, an additional 150 Fire and Rescue personnel along with 30 emergency vehicles will be stationed across 11 critical observation points: Kumily, Vandiperiyar, Parunthumpara, Panchalimedu, Nellimala, Ayyanmala, Laha, Elavungal, Attathode, Panjippara, and Vadasserikkara. ■

EMERGENCY CONTACT DIRECTORY

Devotees and administrative coordinators can reach emergency response authorities via the following dedicated hotlines:

Pathanamthitta District Fire Officer: 94979 20112

Pathanamthitta Station Officer (Nodal Officer) 94979 20089

Sannidhanam Fire Station: 04735-202033

Pamba Fire Station: 04735-203333

Nilackal Fire Station: 04735-205205

Pathanamthitta Fire Station: 0468-2222001

As over 50 lakh devotees prepare to visit Sabarimala for the 2026–27 Mandala–Makaravilakku season, the Revenue Department has introduced a digitally enabled, multi-agency action plan. The key initiatives include round-the-clock integrated control rooms, a Zero Death Policy and real-time information services through the Sabari Portal.

Digitally Empowered, Safer Pilgrimage

Revenue Department Introduces Smart Initiatives for Sabarimala

A. P. ANILKUMAR
MINISTER FOR LAND AND REVENUE,
SURVEY AND LAND RECORDS, AND LAND REFORMS

Extensive preparations have been underway for months under the leadership of the Revenue Department for the 2026–27 Sabarimala Mandala–Makaravilakku pilgrimage season, which begins on November 17. With over 50 lakh devotees visiting Sabarimala each season, the Pathanamthitta District Administration, under the Revenue Department, serves as the nodal agency for coordinating arrangements made by the State Government. From sanitation and price regulation to emergency medical assistance, disaster management and law and order, the department oversees a wide range of essential services. This year, digital technology will play a significant role in strengthening these efforts.



Major Initiatives of the Revenue Department

Through the District Administration, the Revenue Department coordinates the activities of more than 20 departments and the Travancore Devaswom Board. These include the Police, Revenue, Forest, Local Self-Government, Health, AYUSH, Fire and Rescue Services, Excise, Irrigation, Food Safety, Public Works, Keralam Water Authority, KSEB, Suchitwa Mission, KSRTC, Motor Vehicles Department, Legal Metrology and Kudumbashree, among others. Each department has appointed a Nodal Officer and an Assistant Nodal Officer to ensure effective coordination.

Preparations formally began with a review meeting chaired by the Chief Minister in Thiruvananthapuram on September 11. Another review meeting, chaired by the Chief Minister at Pamba on October 17, was attended by eight Ministers to assess the progress of preparations. The State Government aims to make this pilgrimage season safer and better organised through the effective use of digital technology and coordinated services.

1. Integrated Control Rooms

Integrated control rooms will function round the clock at three major centres: Sannidhanam, Pamba and Nilackal. Officers from key departments, including Police, Revenue, Health, Fire and Rescue Services, Forest, KSRTC and Devaswom, will work together under one roof. This arrangement will facilitate faster decision-making, effective communication and coordinated responses during emergencies.

2. Vishuddhi Sena: Strengthening Sanitation

The Sabarimala Sanitation Society, established in 1995, plays a central role in maintaining cleanliness across the pilgrimage centres. Headed by the District Collector as Chairman and the Adoor Revenue Divisional Officer as Member Secretary, the Society deploys 1,000 Vishuddhi Sena personnel through the Tamil Nadu Ayyappa Seva Sangham.

The sanitation teams will work round the clock at major pilgrimage centres, from Sannidhanam to Pandalam and Kulanada.

Deployment of Vishuddhi Sena Personnel

Location	Personnel
Nilackal Base Camp	450
Sannidhanam	300
Pamba	210
Pandalam	30
Kulanada	10
Total	1,000

The plastic ban imposed in accordance with High Court orders will be strictly enforced. With the support of the Clean Keralam Company, a dedicated collection system will be arranged to remove discarded clothes and plastic waste from the Pamba River. Cleaning activities along forest routes will also be carried out in coordination with the Periyar Tiger Reserve.

3. Price Regulation and Quality Assurance

Maximum prices for food items and utensils have been fixed through an official order issued by the District Collector, with separate rates prescribed for Sannidhanam and the Nilackal–Pamba area. All shops and eateries must prominently display the approved price lists.

Joint inspection squads comprising officials from the Revenue, Health, Food and Civil Supplies, Legal Metrology and Local Self-Government departments will conduct inspections in 10-day shifts. These squads will monitor prices, weights and measures, and food quality to prevent unfair trade practices. Health cards have also been made mandatory for all shop employees.

4. Magistrates for Law and Order

The Additional District Magistrate (ADM) will oversee departmental coordination and preparatory activities. Deputy Collectors will be deployed as Duty Magistrates, while Tahsildars will serve as Executive Magistrates at Sannidhanam, Pamba and Nilackal.

These officers will play a key role in crowd management, maintaining law and order and coordinating administrative responses. They will undergo specialised training at the Institute of Land and Disaster Management (ILDM) to prepare for their responsibilities during the pilgrimage season.

5. Safe Sabarimala: Zero Death Policy

Multilingual Helpline: 04735 2032325

With cardiac arrest accounting for 93 per cent of deaths at Sabarimala, the Government is introducing a Zero Death Policy based on 35 targeted recommendations aimed at reducing fatalities.

During the previous pilgrimage season, emergency medical intervention helped revive seven of the 38 cardiac arrest patients treated across 22 Emergency Medical Centres.

This season, additional medical facilities are being established at key locations, including the Queue Complex, Marakkootam, Valiyanavattam and Thirumuttam. The arrangements include Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs), CPR instruction boards with QR codes and multilingual teleconsultation services.

Pathanamthitta General Hospital and Konni Medical College will serve as referral centres, strengthening emergency medical support for pilgrims.

6. Safe Zone Project

The Motor Vehicles Department's Safe Zone initiative, headquartered at Elavumkal, will provide round-the-clock mobile patrolling along the Pamba–Laha stretch. The service will offer immediate technical assistance and recovery vehicle support for vehicles that break down along the pilgrimage route.

At nine designated river bathing ghats (Kulikadavu), 18 scuba divers and lifeguards from the Fire and Rescue Services will be deployed to ensure pilgrim safety.

Multilingual warning boards in Malayalam, English, Tamil, Kannada and Telugu will be displayed at these locations.

In addition, a multi-agency Disaster Management Safety Inspection will identify potential hazards along the pilgrimage routes and recommend measures to minimise risks.

7. Sabari Portal: Digital Services for Pilgrims

Developed jointly by the District Administration and the District Disaster Management Authority, the Sabari Portal (https://sabariportaldcpta.in) offers real-time information and monitoring services to support pilgrimage management.

The portal enables officials to monitor sanitation activities, price regulation, squad inspections, medical services, transport arrangements, weather conditions and river water levels.

Dedicated dashboards have been created for the District Collector, Sabarimala ADM, Duty and Executive Magistrates, and the control rooms at Sannidhanam, Pamba and Nilackal.

These dashboards provide live updates on crowd density, weather conditions, water levels in the Pamba River, wild animal movements and traffic accidents. By improving information-sharing among departments, the system helps reduce communication delays and enables quicker responses to emergencies.

'My Bill' and 'Report a Shop'

The portal also introduces practical services for pilgrims. Official price lists are available in multiple languages, while the My Bill calculator allows devotees to verify hotel bills against approved rates.

Through the Report a Shop feature, pilgrims can scan QR codes displayed at shops to register complaints about overcharging.

Previously accessible only to administrators, the Sabari Portal is now open to the general public. It provides easy access to Virtual Queue guidelines, pooja timings, live KSRTC and train schedules, the Sabari Map, emergency helplines and Lost and Found services.

8. Sabari Chatbot and Helplines

The Sabari Chatbot, accessible through WhatsApp at 9400967300, provides automated information on pilgrimage-related services round the clock.

Devotees can also submit complaints through WhatsApp and receive digital acknowledgements and updates on their status. This service is intended to make information and grievance redressal more accessible throughout the pilgrimage season. ■

KEY OFFICIAL EMERGENCY

Police Control Rooms
Pamba: 04735-20201612
Sannidhanam: 04735 20201412

Medical & Ambulance
Emergency Ambulance: 10812
Government Hospital Pamba: 04735-20202512

Fire & Rescue Services
Toll-Free Hotline: 10112
Fire & Rescue Station Pamba: 04735-20203012

Emergency Operations & District Control
District Emergency Operations Centre (DEOC): 107712
Pamba District Control Room: 04735-20204812

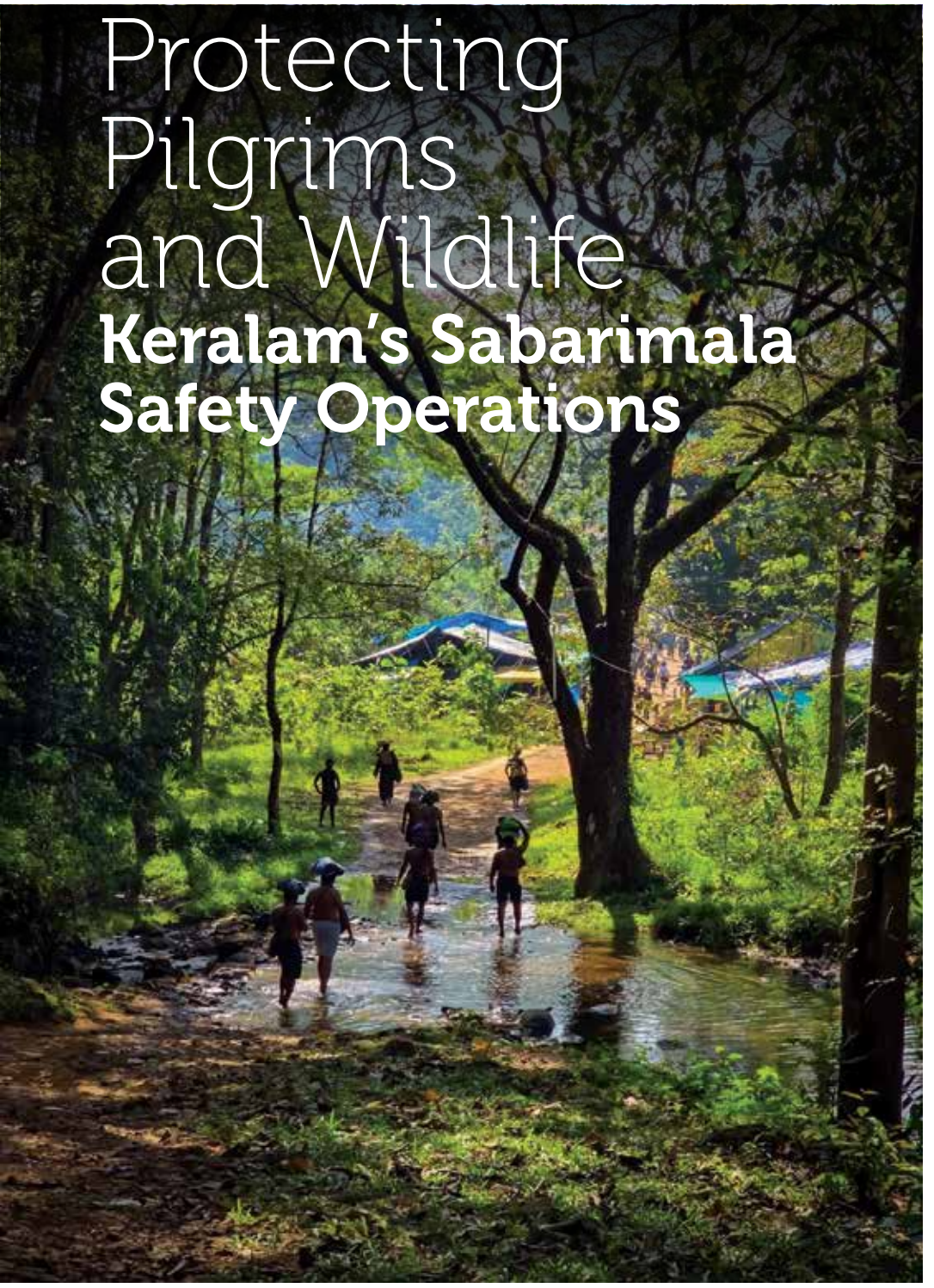
KSRTC Control Cells
Nilackal: 04735-20201913
Special Cell (Pamba): 04735-20201813

Forest Department
Rapid Response Team (RRT): 04735-20203313

> The Forest Department has launched Ayyan 3.0, an upgraded version of its mobile application designed to assist Sabarimala pilgrims.

Protecting Pilgrims and Wildlife

Keralam's Sabarimala Safety Operations



SHIBU BABY JOHN
MINISTER FOR FORESTS AND WILDLIFE PROTECTION

Centralised control rooms at Pamba and Sannidhanam, operating under the direct supervision of the Assistant Conservator of Forests, ensure coordinated monitoring and swift response along the forest pilgrimage routes.

Every year, millions of Ayyappa devotees undertake the sacred pilgrimage to Sabarimala, travelling through dense forests to reach the hill shrine. Ensuring their safety while protecting the region's fragile ecosystem is a major responsibility of the State Government and the Forest and Wildlife Department.

The Forest Department has made extensive arrangements along the Pamba–Sannidhanam route and the traditional forest trekking routes of Azhuthakkadavu–Pamba and Sathram–Sannidhanam.

Along the Pamba–Sannidhanam route, 22 hazardous trees have been removed and branches of 27 others trimmed to prevent accidents. Resting benches along the route have been repaired, and safety barricades reinstalled. Eco-shops at Pamba, Neelimala and Marakkootam have also been renovated. In coordination with the Food Safety Department, temporary staff have received specialised training, while dedicated dining facilities have been arranged at Pamba and Sannidhanam for Forest Department personnel on duty.



To ensure effective monitoring and coordination, centralised control rooms have been established at Pamba and Sannidhanam under the direct supervision of the Assistant Conservator of Forests. Each control room is staffed by one Range Forest Officer, one Section Forest Officer and eight Beat Forest Officers. Information centres have also been set up at Mukkuzhi, Cheriyayanavattom, Pamba and Sathram to assist pilgrims.

The ban on single-use plastics will be strictly enforced along all forest routes and at service centres. Eco-Guards will patrol the trekking paths to prevent littering and maintain cleanliness, while waste bins have been placed at strategic locations. The traditional forest trekking routes are scheduled to open fully to devotees by November 5, with Eco-Development Committee (EDC) service centres becoming operational from November 15.

Building Maintenance and Medical Facilities

Forest Department buildings and facilities at Charalmedu, Neelimala and the 11th curve (Pathinonnam Valavu) have been repaired and restored. In coordination with the Health Department, Emergency Medical Centres have been made fully operational. Accommodation for medical teams has also been arranged in camp sheds at Azhuthakkadavu, Mukkuzhy and Karimala.

Wildlife Protection and Rapid Response

Rapid Response Teams and specialised elephant squads, led by an Assistant Forest Veterinary Officer, have been deployed at Pamba, Sannidhanam, Azhuthakkadavu, Mukkuzhi, Karimala and Uppupara. Trained snake rescuers will also be stationed at Pamba and Sannidhanam to respond promptly to snake-related emergencies.



Ayyan 4.0 Mobile App

The Forest Department has launched Ayyan 3.0, an upgraded version of its mobile application designed to assist Sabarimala pilgrims. The app provides essential information on forest trekking routes, EDC service centres and emergency contact numbers, making important services and safety information more accessible to devotees.

Emergency Rescue Facilities

Off-road ambulances and emergency medical services will be available at Kallidamkunnu, Koottakkallu, Kariyilamthodu, Manjappodithattu and Valiyayanavattom. Stretcher facilities have also been arranged at all transit camps to assist pilgrims requiring emergency medical attention.

Essential Services for Pilgrims

Eco-Development Committees will provide free herbal drinking water, food at prices approved by the District Collector, resting mats, clean toilets and lighting at all Thavalams (resting points). These facilities are intended to make the journey safer and more comfortable for devotees travelling through the forest routes.

Additional Drinking Water and Service Centres

Additional free drinking water stations and dedicated service centres have been arranged at Seethakkulam, Zero Point, Uppupara and Kazhuthakuzhi to meet the needs of pilgrims along the trekking routes.

Coordination with Police

Night trekking along the Azhuthakkadavu–Pamba route will be strictly regulated in coordination with the Police Department. Wireless communication networks have also been upgraded to ensure reliable communication and effective coordination during emergencies.

Public Address and Information Systems

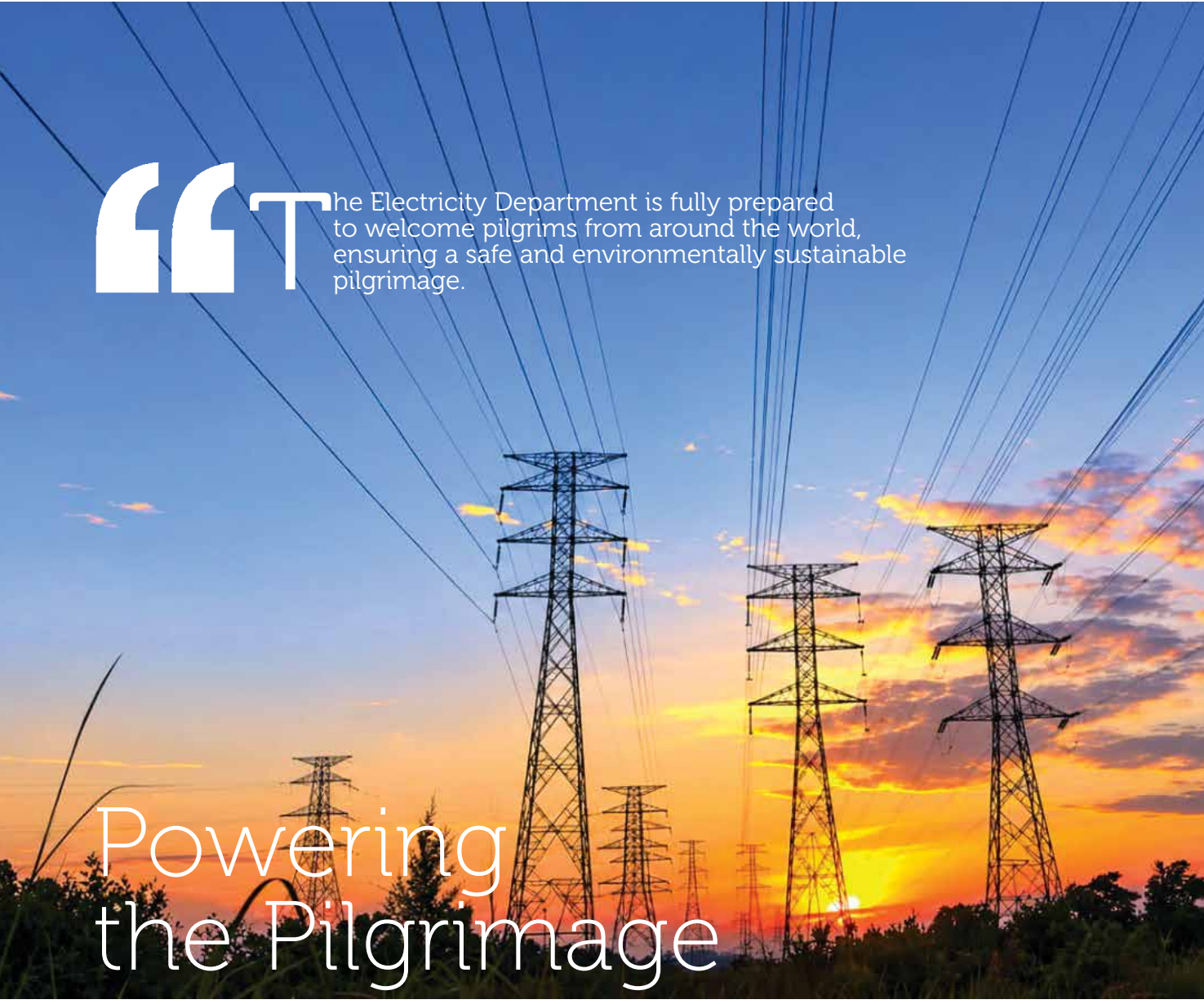
Public address systems installed at Azhuthakkadavu, Mukkuzhi and Karimala will provide timely announcements, safety instructions and important information to pilgrims. Directional and information signboards have also been installed along the trekking routes to help devotees navigate safely. ■

IMPORTANT CONTACT

ACF Control Room, Sabarimala: 8547603161

Forest Emergency: 9188407523

Sannidhanam Forest Station: 8547603162



> The Electricity Department is fully prepared to welcome pilgrims from around the world, ensuring a safe and environmentally sustainable pilgrimage.

Powering the Pilgrimage

SUNNY JOSEPH
MINISTER FOR ELECTRICITY AND ENVIRONMENT

The Mandala–Makaravilakku season is a period of immense spiritual significance, placing considerable demands on the infrastructure and essential services supporting the pilgrimage. Ensuring a safe, peaceful and comfortable journey for every devotee remains a priority for the Government. The Keralam State Electricity Board Limited (KSEB) plays a vital role in achieving this objective.

Lighting Up the Season

Ahead of the 2026–27 Sabarimala pilgrimage season, commencing on November 16, 2026, KSEB has undertaken extensive preparations to ensure a reliable and uninterrupted power supply at Sannidhanam, Pamba, Nilackal and Erumeli. Sabarimala has one of the most advanced electricity distribution networks in the State, with a fully insulated distribution system.

KSEB maintains 3,540 permanent lights at Sannidhanam and 2,194 at Nilackal, in addition to providing temporary lighting arrangements during the festival season. Extensive maintenance of transmission lines, distribution networks and transformers is being carried out to ensure a dependable power supply throughout the pilgrimage period.

Electrical safety is a major priority, particularly given the large number of pilgrims and the ecologically sensitive surroundings. Preventive maintenance, safety inspections, regular patrolling and improvements to electrical installations are underway. Dedicated teams of engineers and technical personnel will be available round the clock at Sabarimala and Nilackal. A dedicated service facility at Kanamala will further strengthen emergency response along the pilgrimage route.

Towards a Cleaner, Greener Pilgrimage

Our responsibility extends beyond ensuring a reliable electricity supply. Sabarimala is surrounded by ecologically valuable forests, making the protection of its biodiversity and natural environment equally important. Infrastructure development and the provision of public utilities must therefore



ESSENTIAL HELPLINES AND KEY CONTACT NUMBERS

Electric vehicle fast-charging facility -
Near the Maramath Complex at Pamba (functional from 10 November)

State Nodal officer Sabarimala 9446008016

Deputy Chief Engineer, Electrical Circle, Pathanamthitta 9446008275

Executive Engineer, Electrical Division, Pathanamthitta 9446008276

Executive Engineer, PMU, Pathanamthitta 9446009346

Liaison Officer, Sabarimala 9496008709

KSEB Sannidhanam 9446 009 462

KSEB Pamba 04735 203424

KSEB Nilackal 9446 009 448

Toll-Free Helpline (Inside Keralam) 1912

Helpline (Within & Outside Keralam) 0471-2555544

Automatic Complaint / Service Registration & WhatsApp 9496001912

Email: ccc@kseb.in

KSEB Pamba Office / Complaint Room 04735-202424, 04735-203424

KSEB Sannidhanam Inspection Bungalow / Office 04735-202024



HOW TO REGISTER A COMPLAINT

- Call / WhatsApp: 9496001912
- Dial toll-free number 1912
- **Online:** File a request or check your complaint status directly on the KSEB Self-Service Portal https://wss.kseb.in/selfservices/showAnonymousComplaint.do
- Keep 13-digit consumer number ready when registering a complaint.



Aravana at the Tap of a Screen

A new aravana vending machine near Malikappuram is making it easier for pilgrims visiting Sabarimala for darshan to buy the temple's prasadam. Pilgrims can pay via UPI and collect up to five tins of aravana from the machine in a single transaction.

A separate self-service billing kiosk near Sannidhanam allows pilgrims to pay for both unniyappam and aravana.

be guided by environmental responsibility and sustainability.

To encourage cleaner transportation, KSEB has established an electric vehicle fast-charging facility near the Maramath Complex at Pamba. The facility will provide round-the-clock charging services from November 10, 2026. This initiative marks another step towards promoting environmentally responsible mobility in the pilgrimage region.

Coordination and Dedicated Service

The successful conduct of the Sabarimala pilgrimage depends on close coordination among various Government departments, the Travancore Devaswom Board, the Police Department and other agencies.

I sincerely appreciate the dedication of KSEB engineers, field staff and other employees who work under challenging conditions to provide essential services to millions of devotees. Our commitment is to ensure a safe, comfortable and environmentally sustainable pilgrimage while preserving the sanctity and natural surroundings of Sabarimala. ■

Expanded bus services, improved pilgrim facilities and round-the-clock road-safety support are set to make travel to Sabarimala safer and easier during the Mandala Pooja–Makaravilakku season.

A Seamless Journey to Sabarimala

C. P. JOHN
MINISTER FOR ROAD TRANSPORT, MOTOR VEHICLE AND WATER TRANSPORT

Every year, the Mandala Pooja–Makaravilakku season draws large numbers of Ayyappa devotees to Sabarimala. For many, the pilgrimage begins with a long road journey through busy towns and winding hill routes. To ensure safe and comfortable travel for devotees, the Keralam State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) has planned additional bus services, staff deployments and improvements at key transit centres. These arrangements are complemented by the Motor Vehicles Department's Sabarimala Safe Zone Project, which provides road-safety and emergency assistance along major pilgrimage routes.

More Buses, Easier Connections

KSRTC plans to operate 461 buses during Mandala Pooja and 561 during Makaravilakku. Additional vehicles, including leased buses, will be arranged if demand increases. The Pamba–Nilackal chain service will remain a key part of the transport network, while special services from major depots and service centres across Keralam will be introduced in phases.

Special services are planned from Pamba, Nilackal, Chengannur, Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, Erumeli, Thiruvananthapuram Central, Ernakulam, Kumily, Kottarakkara, Punalur, Adoor, Thrissur, Guruvayur and Kayamkulam.

Nilackal will have 180 buses during Mandala Pooja, increasing to 220 for Makaravilakku. The allocation at Chengannur will rise from 60 to 80 buses, while Kottayam will see an increase from 50 to 60. This phased deployment will enable KSRTC to respond effectively to changes in passenger demand.

AC Bus Services from Airports to Pamba

To further enhance travel convenience for pilgrims arriving by air, KSRTC is set to introduce special air-conditioned bus services from Thiruvananthapuram and



Transport Minister C. P. John flags off the newly launched KSRTC air-conditioned bus service connecting Thiruvananthapuram International Airport to Pamba.

FOR BOOKINGS

Thiruvananthapuram North
9188619378

Thiruvananthapuram South
9188938522

Kollam : 9188938523

Pathanamthitta: 9188938524

Alappuzha: 9188938525

Kottayam: 9188938526

Idukki : 9188938527

Ernakulam : 9188938528

Thrissur : 9188938529

Palakkad : 9188938530

Malappuram : 9188938531

Kozhikode : 9188938532

Wayanad : 9188938533

Kannur : 9188938534

Kasaragod : 9188938534

Pamba : 9446592990

Pathanamthitta (Additional Contact) : 9188933744

Pandalam : 9188933743

Thiruvananthapuram Central
9188933716

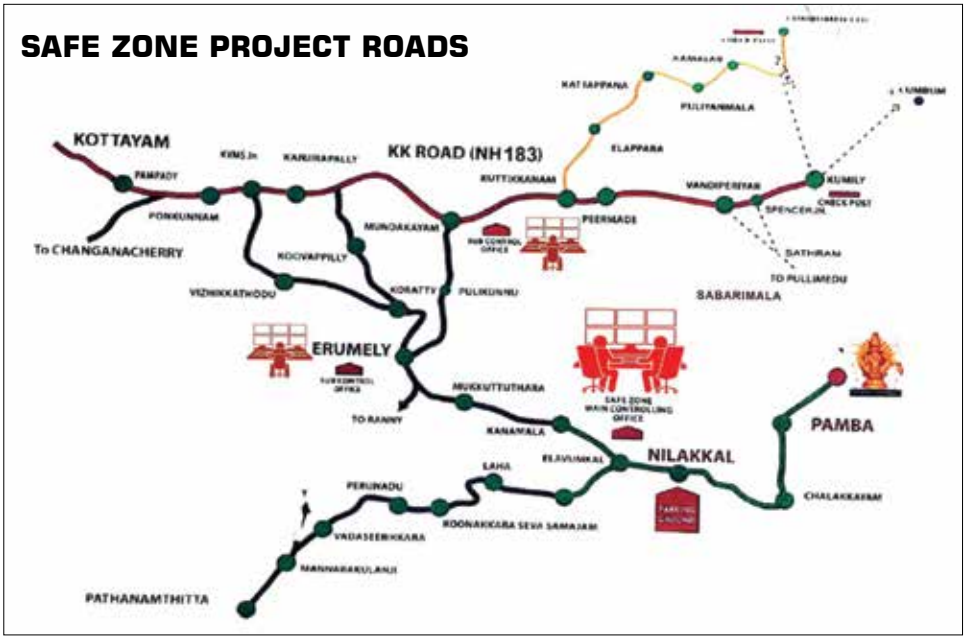
Chengannur : 9188933750

KSRTC Control Cells

Nilackal : 04735-20201913

Special Cell (Pamba)
04735-20201813

Online booking
onlineksrtcswift.com



Nedumbassery International Airports to Pamba.

The AC bus from Thiruvananthapuram International Airport will depart for Pamba at 9:30 p.m. The return service from Pamba will be scheduled to reach the airport by 7:00 p.m.

Similarly, the AC bus from Nedumbassery International Airport will depart for Pamba at 8:30 p.m., with the return service scheduled to reach the airport by 7:00 p.m.

These services are expected to provide pilgrims with a smoother and more comfortable journey to Pamba, the gateway to the Sabarimala temple. By improving connectivity between major airports and the pilgrimage centre, the initiative will make travel arrangements more convenient for devotees, particularly those arriving from other states and abroad.

People and Facilities Behind the Service

To support the additional services, KSRTC plans to deploy 678 employees at Pamba and Nilackal during Mandala Pooja and 778 during Makaravilakku, amounting to 1,456 personnel deployments across the two phases. Staff will oversee bus operations, guide passengers and coordinate services during peak pilgrimage days.

KSRTC is also upgrading bus parking areas, garages, staff rest spaces, accommodation and sanitation facilities at Pamba and Nilackal. The corporation will closely monitor pilgrim arrivals and return journeys, arranging additional buses when necessary to ease congestion and minimise delays.

Chartered Pilgrimage Services and Online Reservations

KSRTC's Budget Tourism Cell is arranging chartered pilgrimage trips for organised groups. Online reservation facilities are also being planned to simplify travel arrangements and improve accessibility for pilgrims.

Depending on demand, special services to Pamba will operate from locations near temples, KSRTC depots and designated service centres. These arrangements will provide devotees with greater flexibility when travelling from different parts of Keralam.

Safer Roads to the Shrine

Road safety is another important component of the pilgrimage arrangements. The Sabarimala Safe Zone Project, implemented by the Motor Vehicles Department (MVD) in collaboration with the Kerala Road Safety Authority (KRSA), aims to prevent accidents and assist pilgrims during vehicle breakdowns and other emergencies.

Launched around 2012–13, the initiative focuses on busy and accident-prone routes leading to the hill shrine. MVD patrol vehicles operate around the clock on key stretches in Pathanamthitta, Idukki and Kottayam. Bases at Elavunkal, Erumeli and Kuttikkanam help coordinate emergency assistance.

Mobile repair units, tow trucks and cranes attend to broken-down vehicles and clear road obstructions, while ambulances provide first aid and transport injured travellers to hospitals when necessary.

Safety guidance is particularly important for drivers from other states who may be unfamiliar with the region's sharp hairpin bends, steep slopes and foggy conditions. MVD teams provide guidance and helpline information in Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Hindi and English.

At night, announcements at major stopovers remind tired drivers to take adequate rest before continuing their journey. QR-code-enabled brochures and helpline cards also allow travellers to access emergency contact details conveniently through their smartphones.

A Safer, More Comfortable Pilgrimage

Reliable transport services and timely roadside assistance can make a demanding pilgrimage safer and more comfortable for everyone. Through expanded bus services, improved pilgrim facilities and coordinated road-safety measures, KSRTC, MVD and KRSA are working towards a common goal: ensuring that devotees can travel to Sabarimala and return home safely, with greater comfort, convenience and confidence. ■

> Preserving the sanctity of Sabarimala, every step towards a plastic-free, waste-free pilgrimage is a promise to protect nature and keep the sacred hills pristine for generations to come.

Eco-Friendly Pilgrimage
LSGD Fully Prepared for Sabarimala Season

K. M. SHAJI
MINISTER FOR LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

The Mandala-Makaravilakku festival for the year 2026-27 at the Sabarimala Sree Dharma Sastha Temple commences on November 17, 2026. The Local Self-Government Department (LSGD) is fully prepared to provide smooth and peaceful pilgrimage facilities for the crores of Ayyappa devotees arriving for the Sabarimala pilgrimage. By coordinating three municipalities (Pathanamthitta, Pandalam, and Thiruvalla) and 17 gramapanchayats (including Ranni-Perunad), comprehensive advance preparations have been completed ahead of previous years.

Enhanced Facilities at Transit Camps

In addition to facilities for devotees to rest (virivaippu), drinking water, toilet facilities, electricity, and parking, based on past experiences and as decided in the review meeting held in Pathanamthitta on October 8, 2026, measures have been taken to set up mobile recharging facilities, internet connectivity, and a QR code system for grievance redressal at transit camps (Edathavalam). To ensure essential services for pilgrims, Information Centers are being set up adjacent to transit camps to provide information regarding bus services, nearby healthcare institutions, Police–Fire Force and other related toll-free numbers, and phone facilities for emergency situations. Preparations are progressing at a rapid pace in panchayats including Ranni-Perunad in connection with the Sabarimala pilgrimage.



SARAN App
A Digital Guide for Sabarimala Pilgrims

The SARAN digital platform, developed by the IT Division of Keralam's Local Self-Government Department, has been launched to make the Sabarimala pilgrimage safer, smoother, and more convenient for devotees.

The platform provides essential information about resting centres (Edathavalams) along the pilgrimage routes, including available facilities, travel information, and local announcements—all in one place.

One of SARAN's key features is that no separate app download is required. Pilgrims can simply scan a QR code to access the platform through their mobile browsers and add it to their phone's home screen for easy access.

Available in six languages—Malayalam, English, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Hindi —SARAN ensures that devotees from different states can access important information without language barriers.

This innovative initiative marks another step towards a smarter, safer, and more convenient Sabarimala pilgrimage.



Recruitments and Workforce Deployment

In Ranni-Perunad Grama Panchayat, where the Sabarimala Temple is located, applications were invited and the interview process has been completed to recruit temporary staff for temporary posts including Lifeguard, Sanitation Workers, Tractor Helper for waste management, Pamba Information Kiosk-Data Entry Operator, and Transit Camp Night Watchman to ensure a smooth pilgrimage. Over 100 additional sanitation workers will be deployed across the district during the pilgrimage period.

Safety and Infrastructure Preparedness

Keeping the safety of pilgrims in mind, multi-lingual hazard warning boards have been installed at all bathing ghats, and 24-hour service of lifeguards has been ensured.



Transit Camps (Idathavalam) & Nodal Officers

To ensure a seamless, safe, and comfortable pilgrimage during the Sabarimala Mandala-Makaravilakku season, the Local Self-Government Department (LSGD) in Pathanamthitta District has established and managed a network of transit camps (Idathavalam) across various Grama Panchayats and Municipalities. This official record outlines the locations, ownership details, and basic amenities provided at each transit hub, alongside key nodal contact officers.

Tender procedures have been completed to clear bushes along the Thiruvabharanam (sacred ornaments) routes to make them motorable/passable and to install streetlights. Drinking water distribution centres are being set up at 11 major hubs in Ranni-Perunad Panchayat—including Poovathummoodu Junction, Kakkattukoikkal Temple, Madathummoozhi, Laha, Attathode, and Kanamala and work is progressing on constructing temporary barricades at Makaravilakku viewpoints such as Ayyanmala, Nellimala, and Attathode.

Transit Camp

- Ayiroor Puthiyakavu, Ayiroor Grama Panchayat
  04735 230226,9496042626
- Chittar, Chittar Grama Panchayat - 04735 255225, 9496042662
- Konni Muringamangalam Shiva Temple
  Konni Grama Panchayat - 0468 2242223, 9496042670
- Temporary Idathavalam in Kozhencherry Town
  Kozhencherry Grama Panchayat - 0468 2212052, 9496042646
- Temporary Idathavalam at Sreevalsam Parking Ground
  Kulanada Grama Panchayat - 04734 260272, 8547611108
- Arakkamonn Idathavalam, Naranamoozhi Grama Panchayat
  04735 270228, 9496042666
- Ramapuram Temple, Ranni Grama Panchayat
  04735 22678, 9496042654
- Placherry Junction, Ranni Pazhavangadi Grama Panchayat
  04735 226257, 9496042652
- Madathummoozhi Sabarimala Idathavalam, Kakkattu Koyikkal Temple, Madamon Rishikesha Temple, Nilackal Base Camp
  Ranni Perunad Grama Panchayat - 04735 240230, 9496042658
- Mahavishnu Temple, Vadasserikkara Grama Panchayat
  04735 252029, 9496042660
- Sabarimala Idathavalam, Vettippuram, Pathanamthitta Municipality
  0468 2222249, 9188955140
- Valiyakoikkal Temple, Pandalam Municipality
  04734 252251, 9188955144
- Pushpagiri (Ward 14), Meenthalakkara Sree Dharma Sastha Temple, Idinjillam Sree Dharma Sastha Temple
  Thiruvalla Municipality - 0469 2701315, 0469 2738205, 9446039089
- Aranmula Temple, Aranmula Grama Panchayat
  0468 2319139, 9496042706
- Omalloor Temple, Omalloor Grama Panchayat
  0468 2350237, 9496042638

Cleanliness, Waste Management & Stray Dog Control

To ensure a waste-free pilgrimage, waste bins will be installed in local bodies through which pilgrims frequently pass, such as Adoor Municipality and Kalanjoor, utilizing the services of sanitation workers in addition to the activities of the Haritha Karma Sena.

Since the construction of the stray dog shelter home in Pathanamthitta district is currently in its final stages, the department has limitations in achieving 100% stray dog control during this pilgrimage period. Considering the safety of pilgrims, directions have been issued to local self-government institutions that have not yet formed Stray Dog Control Committees to form them urgently and take all possible measures for stray dog control.

> “Keeping the safety of pilgrims in mind, multi-lingual hazard warning boards have been installed at all bathing ghats, and 24-hour service of lifeguards has been ensured.

Amenities for Pilgrims & Duty Staff

Across the district, 29 transit camps (including various trusts) and 38 public toilets, including ‘Take a Break’ units, have been made operational for the needs of pilgrims. Special drives to ensure the hygiene and licensing of eateries and enforcement squad inspections in coordination with the Suchitwa Mission will be intensified.

Required rest facilities will be provided for police officers on duty at Kanamala and KSRTC staff at Pathanamthitta.

Commitment to a Green Pilgrimage

The government is committed to taking all necessary measures to deliver a completely eco-friendly and devotee-friendly pilgrimage season while preserving the purity of the Pamba River and ensuring the safety of the devotees climbing the holy hill. ■

> With every drop of care and every step towards safety, the Minor Irrigation Department helps pave the way for a safer, smoother and more fulfilling pilgrimage to Sabarimala.

Ensuring a Safe Pilgrimage

Water Resources & Irrigation Infrastructure Revamp for Sabarimala

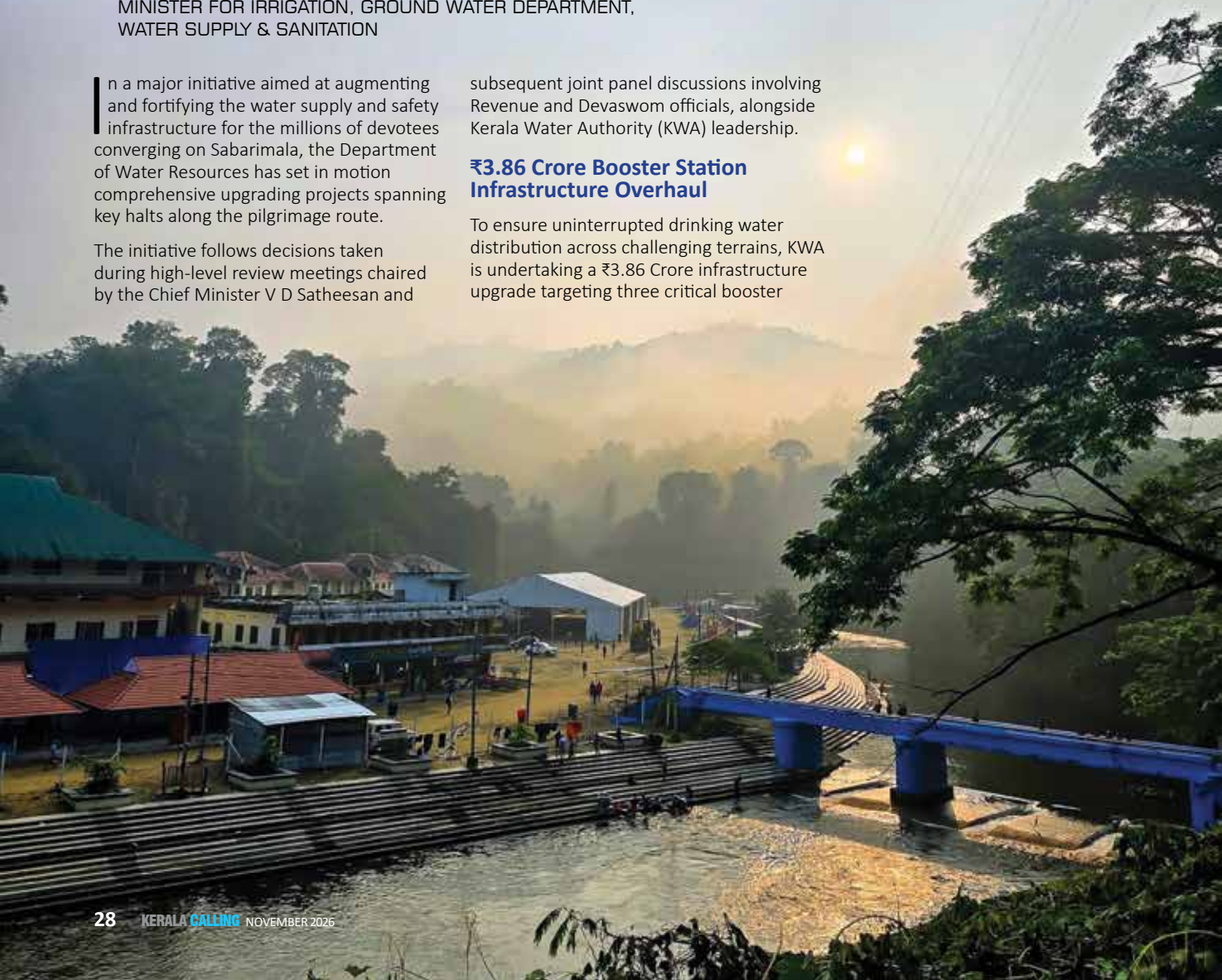
MONS JOSEPH
MINISTER FOR IRRIGATION, GROUND WATER DEPARTMENT, WATER SUPPLY & SANITATION

In a major initiative aimed at augmenting and fortifying the water supply and safety infrastructure for the millions of devotees converging on Sabarimala, the Department of Water Resources has set in motion comprehensive upgrading projects spanning key halts along the pilgrimage route.

The initiative follows decisions taken during high-level review meetings chaired by the Chief Minister V D Satheesan and subsequent joint panel discussions involving Revenue and Devaswom officials, alongside Kerala Water Authority (KWA) leadership.

₹3.86 Crore Booster Station Infrastructure Overhaul

To ensure uninterrupted drinking water distribution across challenging terrains, KWA is undertaking a ₹3.86 Crore infrastructure upgrade targeting three critical booster



Potable Water Distribution & Emergency Readiness

Facility / Service	Operational Details
Purified Water Brand	Reverse Osmosis (RO) purified water supplied by KWA under the official trademark "Pamba Theertham".
Kiosk Sanitation	All public drinking water kiosks will undergo hourly sanitization drives.
Emergency Hydrants	Dedicated fire hydrants installed near Plappally and the Nilackal storage tank for Police and Fire Services.
Pipeline Extensions	Direct pipeline connectivity extended to the newly constructed Police Barracks at Nilackal; distribution to Valiyanavattam scheduled closer to Makaravilakku.
Rapid Response	A dedicated Blue Brigade engineering team will maintain 24/7 on-ground readiness across Nilackal, Pamba, and Sannidhanam.

station facilities:

- Neelimala Bottom
- Neelimala Top
- Appachimedu

Interim Safety Protocol & Structural Audits

Recognizing that extensive structural modifications cannot be executed without interrupting the ongoing pilgrimage season, a two-phase strategy has been adopted:

- **Structural Stability Inspection:** KWA and the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) are jointly facilitating a thorough structural audit by the Buildings Wing of the Public Works Department (PWD).
- **Conditional Operation:** Booster stations will operate during the 2026–27 season strictly after implementing all mandatory safety measures and precautions recommended by the PWD.
- **Permanent Upgrades:** Major structural work will commence immediately after the temple closes following the Makaravilakku festival in early 2027.



Water Quality Testing

Test the water used in your home to ensure that it is safe. This facility is available in all district quality control labs of Keralam Water Authority. Consumers can contact the State referral institute (Aqua Sree) of Keralam Water Authority for more information.

1. Quality Control District Laboratory, Thiruvalla, Pathanamthitta: 0473 4276525, 8547638120
2. Quality Control Sub District Laboratory, Parakkode, Adoor: 0469 2600833, 8547638120
3. Quality Control Sub District Laboratory, Elanthoor, Pathanamthitta: 0468 2990129, 8547638120
4. Quality Control Sub District Laboratory, Pulikkeezhu, Thiruvalla: 0469 2600833, 8547638120
5. Quality Control Sub District Laboratory, Ranni, Pathanamthitta: 0473 5294249, 8547638120

Irrigation Department Safeguards & Pamba River Management

Alongside KWA's drinking water projects, the Irrigation Department is implementing widespread safety and civil measures across Pamba, Triveni, and surrounding bathing ghats (Snana Ghats).

Water Level Control & Dam Releases

To guarantee adequate water flow at the Pamba bathing ghats throughout the season, maintenance of existing Ventilated Cross Bars (VCBs) and installation of control shutters are underway. If river water levels dip drastically, coordination with the District Administration will enable controlled water releases from KSEB's Kullar and Kakki dams.

Post-Flood Restoration & Debris Removal

Following the severe landslides and flash floods of August 2026, large concrete debris that had accumulated on the riverbed and bathing zones at Pamba Triveni has been fully cleared. Damaged tiles along the Triveni ghats are being systematically replaced to secure safe footing for pilgrims.

Pilgrimage Safety & Fencing Measures

- **Riverbank Safety Fencing:** Temporary safety barriers and fencing are being erected along high-risk stretches adjoining the Pamba River.
- **Ghat Cleanliness & Warning Signs:** Over 30 river crossings along the pilgrimage trail are undergoing targeted sanitation drives. Clear Warning Boards and protective barricades are being installed at unauthorized or hazardous bathing spots to control crowd movement.
- **Levelling & Beautification:** Ground levelling at Pamba ghats is complete, with painting and cosmetic restoration of river bridges currently in progress. ■

Key Emergency Contact Directory

For seamless coordination during the Mandala-Makaravilakku festival, official helpline and division numbers have been activated:

- Nodal Officer (Ranni Sub-Div AEE): +91 85476 38348
- Executive Engineer: +91 85476 38053
- Assistant Engineer (Vadasserikkara): +91 85476 38350
- Pathanamthitta Division Office: 0468-2222687
- Ranni Office: 04735-227160
- Pamba Control Office: 04735-203360
- Sannidhanam Office: 04735-202111
- Pamba Storage Tank: 04735-203364
- Water Intake Station: 04735-203361
- Neelimala Bottom Station: 04735-203362
- Neelimala Top Station: 04735-203363
- Appachimedu Station: 04735-202064
- Saramkuthi Station: 04735-202141

Statewide Consumer Helpline Numbers : 1916
0471 – 2324903, 0471 – 2328486, 0471 – 2323914, 18004255313

Email: 1916cckwa@gmail.com

> Round-the-clock surveillance, dedicated Excise Range Offices and strict enforcement measures form the foundation of the Excise Department's efforts to safeguard the Sabarimala pilgrimage.

Safeguarding the Sabarimala Pilgrimage

Special Excise Operations to Ensure a Safe and Peaceful Pilgrimage

M. LIJU
MINISTER FOR CO-OPERATION AND EXCISE

Every year, millions of devotees undertake the sacred pilgrimage to the hill shrine of Sabarimala. To preserve the sanctity of the pilgrimage and maintain law and order, the Kerala Excise Department makes extensive enforcement arrangements across the major pilgrimage centres of Sannidhanam, Pamba and Nilackal.

The primary objective of these special operations is to prevent the smuggling, illegal sale and public consumption of alcohol, illicit distillation and the trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

Special Administrative Arrangements and Temporary Range Offices

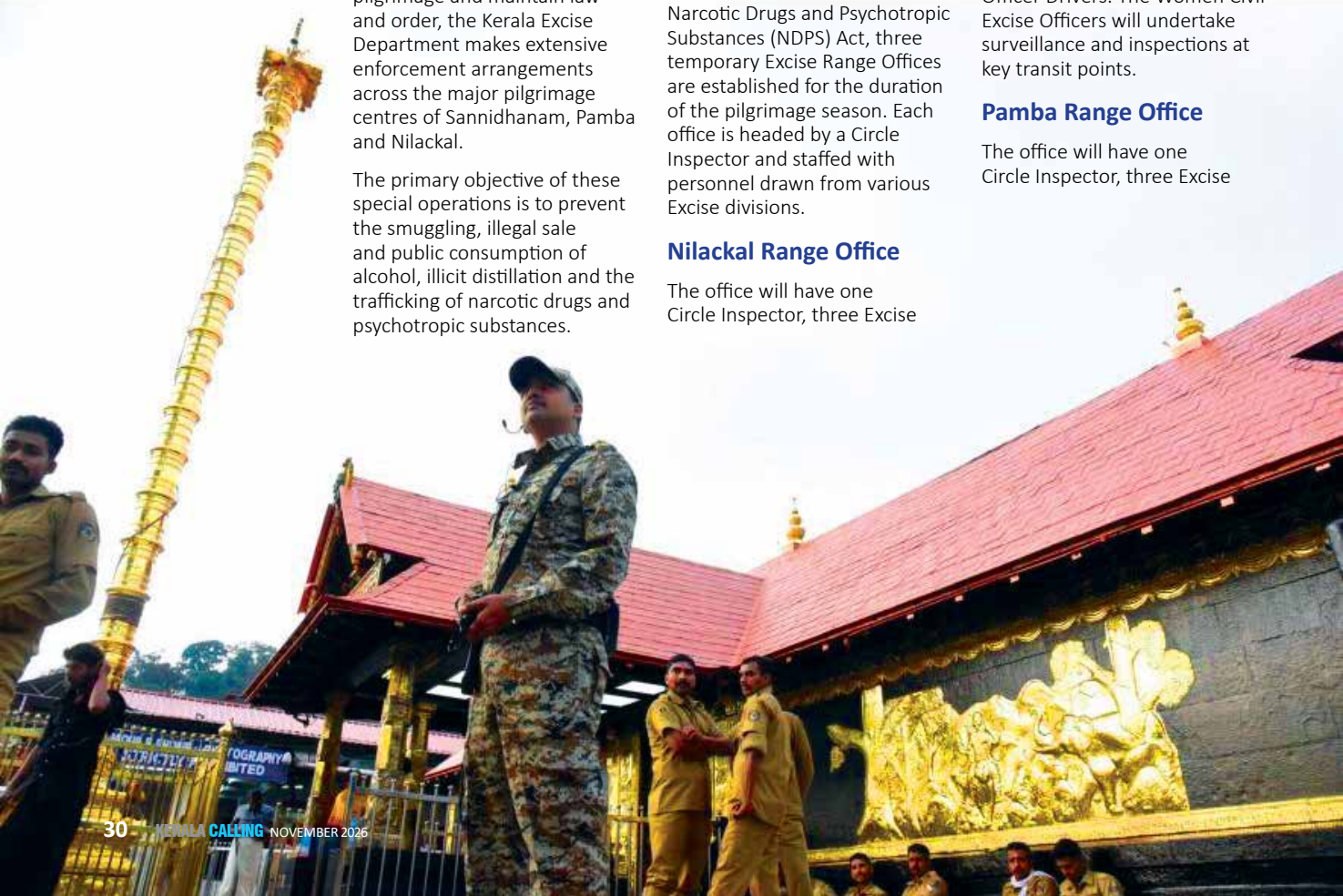
To ensure effective enforcement of the Abkari Act and the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, three temporary Excise Range Offices are established for the duration of the pilgrimage season. Each office is headed by a Circle Inspector and staffed with personnel drawn from various Excise divisions.

Nilackal Range Office

The office will have one Circle Inspector, three Excise Inspectors/Assistant Excise Inspectors, nine Preventive Officers, 11 Civil Excise Officers, three Women Civil Excise Officers and two Civil Excise Officer Drivers. The Women Civil Excise Officers will undertake surveillance and inspections at key transit points.

Pamba Range Office

The office will have one Circle Inspector, three Excise





Excise Department officials conduct inspections at shops in Sabarimala Sannidhanam as part of routine enforcement and monitoring activities.

Inspectors/Assistant Excise Inspectors, six Preventive Officers, eight Civil Excise Officers and two Civil Excise Officer Drivers.

Sannidhanam Range Office

The office will have one Circle Inspector, three Excise Inspectors/Assistant Excise Inspectors, six Preventive Officers and 14 Civil Excise Officers.

These dedicated teams will maintain round-the-clock vigilance and carry out enforcement activities to ensure a safe and peaceful environment for pilgrims.

Command, Control and Field Operations

A clear supervisory structure has been established to ensure effective coordination of Excise operations across the pilgrimage centres.

Pamba and Sannidhanam: Operations will be supervised by the Deputy Excise Commissioner/Assistant Excise Commissioner stationed at the control office in Pamba.

Nilackal: Operations will be directly supervised by the Deputy Excise Commissioner, Pathanamthitta.

Key Enforcement Measures

Joint Forest Raids

The Excise Department will conduct intensive joint inspections and combing operations in coordination with the Forest Department and Police. These operations will focus on forest areas adjoining the pilgrimage routes to detect and dismantle illicit distillation units and seize illegally stored alcohol and other prohibited substances.

Strategic Checkpoints

Temporary Excise checkpoints will operate round the clock at Aranmula and Pandalam, two important routes used by vehicles carrying pilgrims. Surprise inspections will be conducted to prevent the transportation of alcohol, narcotic drugs and other prohibited substances into the pilgrimage areas.

Special Surveillance

Special surveillance arrangements and intelligence teams will monitor footpaths, parking areas and commercial establishments along the pilgrimage routes. These measures are intended to prevent the movement and distribution of prohibited substances within the shrine precincts.

Through coordinated enforcement, continuous surveillance and the deployment of dedicated personnel, the Excise Department remains committed to maintaining a safe, peaceful and orderly environment throughout the Sabarimala pilgrimage season.

Command, Control, and Field Operations

To ensure smooth coordination across the rugged terrain, a clear hierarchy of command has been put in place:

- **Pamba & Sannidhanam Supervision:** Managed by the Deputy Excise Commissioner / Assistant Excise Commissioner stationed directly at the control office in Pamba.
- **Nilackal Operations:** Directly supervised by the Pathanamthitta Deputy Excise Commissioner.

Key Enforcement Measures

- **Joint Forest Raids:** The Excise Department, in coordination with the Forest Department and Police, conducts intensive joint combing operations in the dense forest stretches surrounding the pilgrimage routes to identify and destroy illicit brewing setups and hidden contraband caches.
- **Strategic Checkpoints:** Temporary Excise checkpoints operate 24/7 at Aranmula and Pandalam—key entry routes for vehicles carrying pilgrims—to perform surprise inspections and intercept illegal substances early in transit.
- **Special Surveillance:** Advanced monitoring systems and undercover intelligence units are deployed along footpaths, parking grounds, and commercial stalls to ensure that no prohibited items enter the sacred shrine precincts. ■

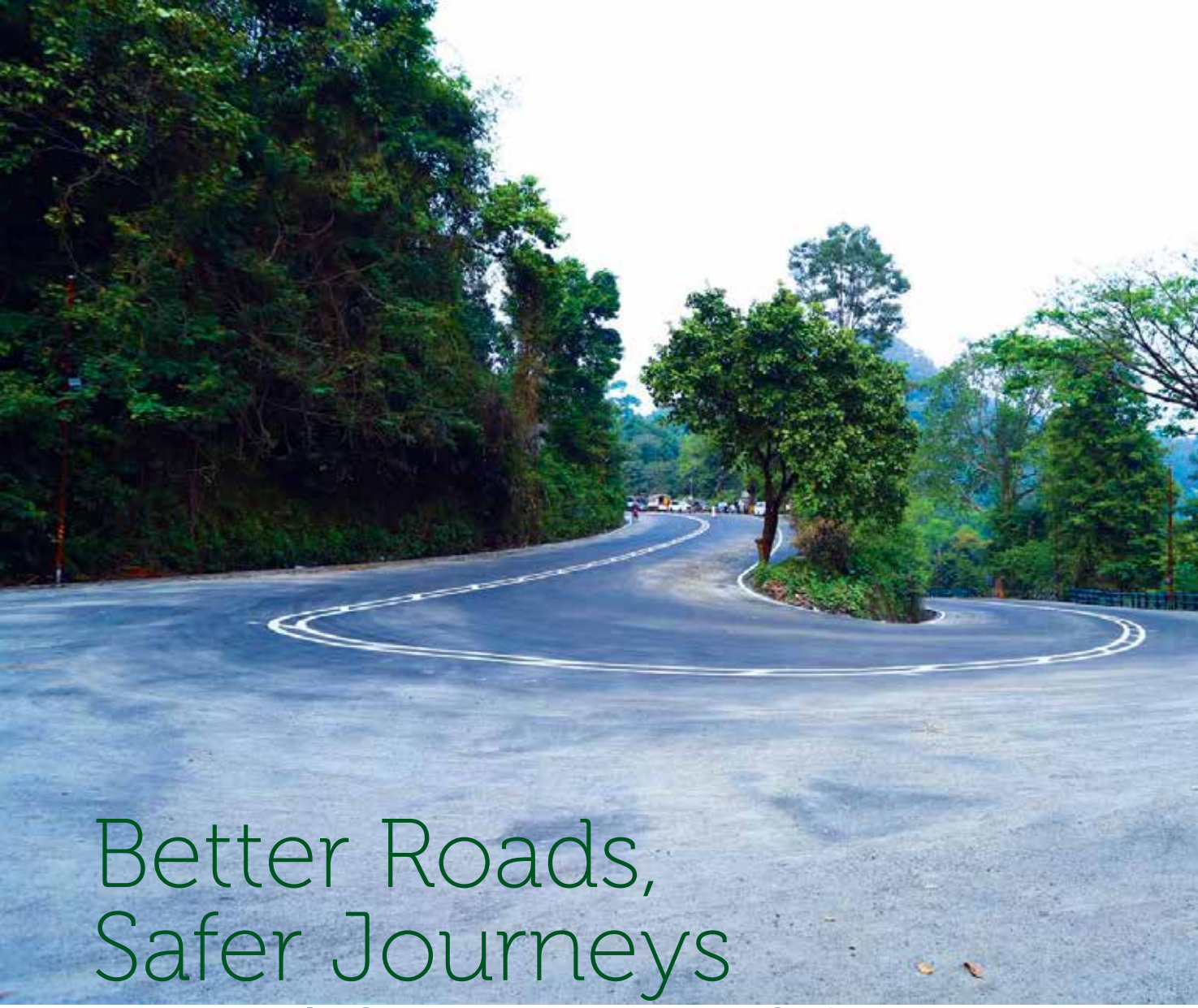
Excise Special Squad

Krishnakumar, AEC
(In Charge of three offices in Sabarimala) - 8891516004

Rajesh, Circle Inspector,
Nilackal - 9567955078

Raju, Circle Inspector,
Pamba - 9946260672

Arun, Circle Inspector,
Sannidhanam - 8921431689



Better Roads, Safer Journeys

The PWD's Commitment to a Safe and Smooth Sabarimala Pilgrimage

P. K. BASHEER
MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

The Sabarimala pilgrimage is one of Keralam's most significant spiritual traditions, bringing together millions of devotees from across the country. Ensuring their safe and seamless journey is a responsibility that the Government of Keralam takes seriously. Adequate infrastructure, safe roads and effective coordination among departments are essential to the successful conduct of the pilgrimage. The Public Works Department's Sabarimala preparations are proactive and systematic. The roads leading to the shrine must be ready to handle the substantial increase in traffic during the pilgrimage season. Road maintenance, infrastructure improvement and safety interventions are

> PWD initiatives extend beyond the pilgrimage season. Improved roads, better drainage and strengthened safety infrastructure will also serve local communities, support regional economic activity and improve everyday connectivity.



The Chalakkayam–Pamba road, completed in record time by Keralam's Public Works Department
Photo: Rahulnath M R IPRD

Important Contacts

Roads Division Pathanamthitta	Executive Engineer (Civil)	8086395054
Roads Sub Division Pathanamthitta	Assistant Executive Engineer (Civil)	8086395055
Roads Sub Division Adoor	Assistant Executive Engineer (Civil)	8086395059
Roads Sub Division Ranni	Assistant Executive Engineer (Civil)	8086395056
Roads Sub Division Mallappally	Assistant Executive Engineer (Civil)	8086395058
Roads Sub Division Thiruvalla	Assistant Executive Engineer (Civil)	8086395057
Roads Section Pathanamthitta	Assistant Engineer (Civil)	7594972121
Roads Section Konni	Assistant Engineer (Civil)	7594975252
Roads Section Kozhencherry	Assistant Engineer (Civil)	7594975353
Roads Section Pandalam	Assistant Engineer (Civil)	7594976060
Road Maintenance Sub Division Pathanamthitta	Assistant Executive Engineer (Civil)	7594975403





therefore being accorded priority, with particular attention to vulnerable stretches and routes carrying heavy pilgrim traffic.

For the 2026–27 pilgrimage season, the State Government has allocated ₹551.5 crore to the Public Works Department for Sabarimala-related preparations. This allocation underlines the Government's commitment to strengthening pilgrimage infrastructure.

Road safety is non-negotiable. Narrow roads, sharp curves, steep gradients and reduced visibility pose challenges along several pilgrimage routes.

Crash barriers at vulnerable locations, improved road markings, warning signboards, convex mirrors, solar-powered blinkers and enhanced night-time visibility are among the interventions that can make a meaningful difference. Special road safety projects worth approximately ₹13.88 crore have been approved by the Keralam Road Safety Authority for Sabarimala routes through PWD and related agencies.

PWD is also focusing on the timely maintenance and improvement of roads, repair of damaged surfaces, drainage and the upkeep of essential road infrastructure. Priority works must be completed within stipulated timelines, and deficiencies identified during inspections must receive prompt attention. Monitoring and accountability will remain integral to the implementation process.

PWD will continue to work closely with the Police, Motor Vehicles Department, Transport Department, Health Department, District Administration and Travancore Devaswom Board.

PWD initiatives extend beyond the pilgrimage season. Improved roads, better drainage and strengthened safety infrastructure will also serve local communities, support regional economic activity and improve everyday connectivity. Sabarimala-related development must therefore deliver lasting public value.

Every pilgrim must have access to safer and more reliable travel infrastructure. The Department will continue to pursue this objective through careful planning, timely execution, effective coordination and responsible use of public funds. Every journey to Sabarimala is supported by infrastructure worthy of the faith and trust of the people. ■

Navigating the steep gradients, sharp bends and narrow forest roads leading to Sabarimala requires skill, caution and constant vigilance. As the pilgrimage season approaches, the Kerala Motor Vehicles Department is promoting safe driving practices, supported by round-the-clock assistance under its Safe Zone Project 2026–27.



From Plains to Hills

Safe Driving on the Road to Sabarimala

MADHUSOODANAN T. R

As the Mandala–Makaravilakku season approaches, roads leading to Sabarimala through Sathram, Pullumedu, Erumeli, Nilackal and Pamba witness a sharp increase in vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Narrow forest roads, steep gradients, sharp bends and unpredictable weather make road safety a major concern.

Ensuring a safe pilgrimage requires the cooperation of motorists, pedestrians, pilgrims and government agencies. Responsible driving and adherence to traffic regulations are essential to preventing accidents and ensuring smooth travel.

Essential Safety Guidelines for Pilgrims

The Kerala Motor Vehicles Department has issued seven key instructions for motorists travelling to Sabarimala:

1. **Keep registration plates visible:** Vehicle registration numbers must not be concealed by decorations or other materials.
2. **Avoid unauthorised lights and horns:** Vehicles fitted with unauthorised high-intensity lights or horns must not be used.
3. **Use appropriate passenger vehicles:** Autorickshaws and goods vehicles must not be used to transport pilgrims.
4. **Ensure clear visibility:** Decorations or other objects must not obstruct the driver's view through the windscreen.
5. **Get adequate rest:** Drivers must ensure sufficient sleep before undertaking long journeys.

6. **Check fuel and documents:** Vehicles must have sufficient fuel and valid documents, and drivers must carry valid driving licences.
7. **Use suitable gears on descents:** Avoid continuous braking on steep downhill stretches. Use an appropriate low gear to control speed and prevent brake overheating.

Navigating Challenging Hill Roads

The roads leading to Sabarimala demand particular caution from motorists arriving from other states who may be accustomed to wide, level highways. Steep climbs, sharp curves and narrow stretches require careful driving and proper vehicle control.

Drivers must maintain safe speeds, avoid dangerous overtaking and follow traffic instructions. Rain, fog and reduced visibility call for additional vigilance.

Before setting out, motorists should check their vehicles' brakes, tyres, headlights and windscreen wipers. On steep descents, using an appropriate low gear helps control speed and prevents brake overheating caused by continuous braking.

Responsible Driving and Pedestrian Safety

Overspeeding, reckless overtaking, sudden lane changes and distracted driving can lead to serious accidents. Driving under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicating substances and using mobile phones while driving must be strictly avoided.

> From safe driving on challenging hill roads to pedestrian protection and emergency assistance, road safety remains a shared responsibility during the Sabarimala pilgrimage season.





Many devotees undertake part of the pilgrimage on foot. Pedestrians should use designated walkways wherever available and avoid walking in the middle of the road. Reflective clothing or suitable lighting devices can improve their visibility during nighttime journeys.

Motorists must remain especially alert near temples, parking areas and crowded pilgrimage centres.

Traffic Discipline and Safe Travel

Pilgrims and motorists must follow traffic regulations, police instructions and temporary restrictions introduced during the pilgrimage season. Vehicles should be parked only in designated areas to prevent congestion and ensure access for emergency services.

Overloading must be avoided, while children and elderly passengers should receive special attention.

Drivers should also get adequate rest before long journeys. Fatigue can impair concentration and reaction time, making regular breaks and careful journey planning essential, particularly on unfamiliar hill roads.

In emergencies, motorists must give way to ambulances and rescue vehicles. Pilgrims should avoid crowding accident sites and cooperate with emergency personnel.

Safe Zone 2026–27: Strengthening Road Safety

The Kerala Motor Vehicles Department is implementing the Sabarimala Safe Zone Project 2026–27 from November 16, 2026, to January 19, 2027, to enhance safety along pilgrimage routes.

The project provides round-the-clock road patrolling, mechanical assistance for vehicle breakdowns, crane services and ambulance support.

Three dedicated control rooms at Elavunkal, Erumeli and Kuttikkanam will coordinate road safety operations and emergency assistance throughout the pilgrimage season. ■

The author is Motor Vehicles Inspector at RTO Enforcement Office, Idukki.

Safe Zone Helpline Numbers

Elavunkal: 9400044991
Erumeli: 9496367974
Kuttikkanam: 9446037100

Pilgrims are advised to save these numbers before beginning their journey.

A safe pilgrimage is not just about reaching the shrine, but ensuring that every devotee returns home safely.

“From Sabarimala Sannidhanam and Pamba to Nilackal and the remote forest routes, BSNL provides essential communication services throughout the year. With expanded mobile coverage, optical fibre connectivity and dedicated support for government agencies, the public sector telecom provider is strengthening its network to meet the demands of the Mandala-Makaravilakku pilgrimage season.

Keeping Sabarimala Connected

BSNL’s Role in the Pilgrimage

VINOD KUMAR K

Reliable communication is essential to the smooth conduct of the Sabarimala pilgrimage, which draws millions of devotees every year. Whether it is helping pilgrims stay in touch with their families or enabling government agencies to coordinate essential services, a dependable telecommunications network plays a vital role. Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) provides a wide range of communication services across Sabarimala Sannidhanam, Pamba, Nilackal and the forest routes, ensuring connectivity throughout the year.



BSNL is the only telecom service provider offering a comprehensive range of telecommunications services year-round in the Sabarimala, Pamba and Nilackal areas. It is also the only operator with its own underground Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) network at Sabarimala and Pamba. This network forms the backbone of the region’s telecommunications infrastructure, supporting mobile services, broadband connectivity and other essential communication facilities.

BSNL’s reach extends even to Gavi, one of the remotest villages within the Periyar Tiger Reserve. Through a digital microwave link connected to the Sabarimala Telephone Exchange, the company provides mobile and internet services to this isolated settlement.

Strengthening Mobile Coverage

The Mandala-Makaravilakku pilgrimage season brings a substantial increase in mobile phone and internet usage. To meet this demand, BSNL is expanding its network capacity at the main pilgrimage centres.

At Sabarimala Sannidhanam, BSNL operates three permanent mobile tower sites offering 2G, 3G and 4G services. Four temporary sites will be added during the festival season at Kailash Building, Pranavam Building, Guest House and Police Barrack, increasing the total to seven. These additional installations will help accommodate higher voice and data traffic during the peak pilgrimage period.

At Pamba, four permanent mobile sites operate at the Telephone Exchange, BSNL Customer Service Centre, Devaswom Guest House and KSRTC Pamba. Three more temporary sites will be

deployed during the season to meet the increased communication needs of pilgrims, government departments and emergency services.

Nilackal, a major base camp for pilgrims, currently has one permanent mobile site. Three additional temporary sites will be established during the pilgrimage season to strengthen coverage and network capacity.

Together, these measures will help improve connectivity across the main pilgrimage centres during periods of heavy demand.

Supporting Essential Services

Beyond mobile connectivity, BSNL provides dedicated communication facilities that support the functioning of government departments and other institutions in the Sabarimala region.

Its optical fibre network also provides backend connectivity and bandwidth support to other telecom operators. In addition, BSNL offers free Wi-Fi services at Sabarimala, Pamba and Nilackal, enabling pilgrims to access the internet.

The company's services extend along the forest routes, including Plappally and Elavumkal. These include Internet Leased Line (ILL) connections, point-to-point communication circuits, emergency hotlines, Fibre-to-the-Home (FTTH) broadband and dedicated voice and data connectivity.

BSNL also provides telecommunications services to media organisations, police establishments, banks, government departments and the Travancore Devaswom Board. These facilities support their administrative work, daily operations and coordination during the pilgrimage season.

A Commitment to Reliable Connectivity

BSNL continues to strengthen its telecommunications facilities to meet the growing demands of the Mandala-Makaravilakku season. By expanding network capacity and maintaining year-round services, the company aims to ensure that pilgrims, government departments and emergency service providers have access to dependable communication facilities throughout the Sabarimala region. ■

The author is Assistant General Manager& Nodal Officer BSNL, Sabarimala

Where Prayers Travel by Post

■ STAFF REPORTER



Every post office has an address, but few receive letters addressed to a deity. Nestled high in the Western Ghats, the Sabarimala Post Office holds a unique place in India's postal network, serving as a remarkable link between devotees and Lord Ayyappa.

Identified by the PIN code 689713, it is the only post office in the country where every letter, postcard and money order bears a distinctive cancellation seal featuring the image of Lord Ayyappa and the sacred Pathinettampadi, the eighteen holy steps of Sabarimala. For thousands of devotees, this special postmark is a treasured reminder of their pilgrimage. Many pilgrims send letters and postcards to their own homes, relatives and friends simply to preserve the unique seal as a keepsake of their visit to the holy shrine.

But not every letter is meant for family or friends. Some carry invitations addressed to Lord Ayyappa Himself. Wedding invitations, engagement announcements, housewarming invitations and notices of new business ventures arrive seeking the deity's blessings before important occasions in life.

Along with letters and postcards, devotees also send kanikka and other offerings through money orders. Every letter received at the Sannidhanam Post Office is carefully handed over to the Devaswom Executive Officer.

Like the temple itself, the Sabarimala Post Office follows the pilgrimage calendar. It operates during the Mandala–Makaravilakku season and the Vishu festival, when the shrine welcomes large numbers of devotees.■

The Sabarimala Post Office:
Where Letters Carry Faith and Tradition
Swami Saranam Ayyappa Temple, Sabarimala – 689713

IPRD Media Centre at Sabarimala

The Media Centre operated by the Information and Public Relations Department at Sannidhanam in connection with the Sabarimala Mandala-Makaravilakku Festival was inaugurated by the Minister for Health and Devaswom, K. Muraleedharan.

The Media Centre has been established to facilitate uninterrupted news coverage throughout the Mandala-Makaravilakku pilgrimage season. Officials will be available at the centre to provide essential information, coordination and assistance to media personnel, ensuring the timely and efficient dissemination of festival-related news and updates.



Minister for Devaswoms K. Muraleedharan inaugurates IPRD Media Centre at Sannidhanam.

Media Centre Phone 04735 202664

Shrouded in mist and surrounded by the wilderness of the Periyar Tiger Reserve, the Sathram–Pullumedu route offers Ayyappa devotees a pilgrimage unlike any other. With its breathtaking landscapes, challenging terrain and sacred views, the forest trail brings together the beauty of nature and the spirit of devotion.

Through the mist to Sabarimala

A Journey of Faith Along the Sathram–Pullumedu Forest Trail

SHAJI K

As the first light of dawn falls upon the mist-covered hills of Pullumedu, the silence of the forest gives way to the familiar chants of "Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa." Devotees make their way through rolling grasslands and rugged forest paths, driven by faith and the desire to reach the sacred shrine of Lord Ayyappa.

During the Mandala–Makaravilakku pilgrimage season, the Sathram–Pullumedu route near Vandiperiyar in Idukki district offers a memorable alternative to the more frequented paths to Sabarimala. Though the journey involves steep climbs, sharp descents and rocky stretches, the beauty of the surrounding wilderness makes it a rewarding experience.

Located about 14 kilometres from Vandiperiyar, Sathram serves as the starting point of the forest trek. From here, pilgrims walk six kilometres to Pullumedu and another six kilometres to reach Sabarimala Sannidhanam.

A Landscape Wrapped in Mist

The most striking feature of this route is the thick mist that blankets the hills and grasslands, particularly during the early morning hours. At times, visibility drops so sharply that even pilgrims walking a short distance ahead are barely visible.

As the mist drifts across the meadows, groups of devotees continue along the trail, their chants echoing through the hills. The cool mountain air, sweeping grasslands and forested slopes lend a distinctive charm to the journey.

Pullumedu also offers a rare view of two sacred landmarks: Sabarimala Sannidhanam and Ponnambalamedu, the hill associated with the Makarajyothi during the Makaravilakku festival. On a clear day, both can be seen from the same vantage point. For many pilgrims, this view is among the most cherished moments of the journey and a compelling reason to choose the route.

In the Heart of the Forest

The trail passes through the Periyar Tiger Reserve, home to a rich variety of wildlife. Elephant herds and other wild animals are occasionally spotted in the distance, offering pilgrims a glimpse of life in the protected forest.

The presence of wildlife also calls for caution. Forest Department personnel and specially deployed Elephant Squads maintain a watch along the route to ensure the safety of pilgrims.

Another memorable stop along the journey is Uppupara, where weary devotees can enjoy a simple, traditional meal. Hot kanji (rice porridge), served with pulses and pickles under arrangements made by the Forest Department, provides welcome relief after the long walk. In the cool surroundings of the forest, this humble meal takes on a special appeal and remains a fond memory for many pilgrims.

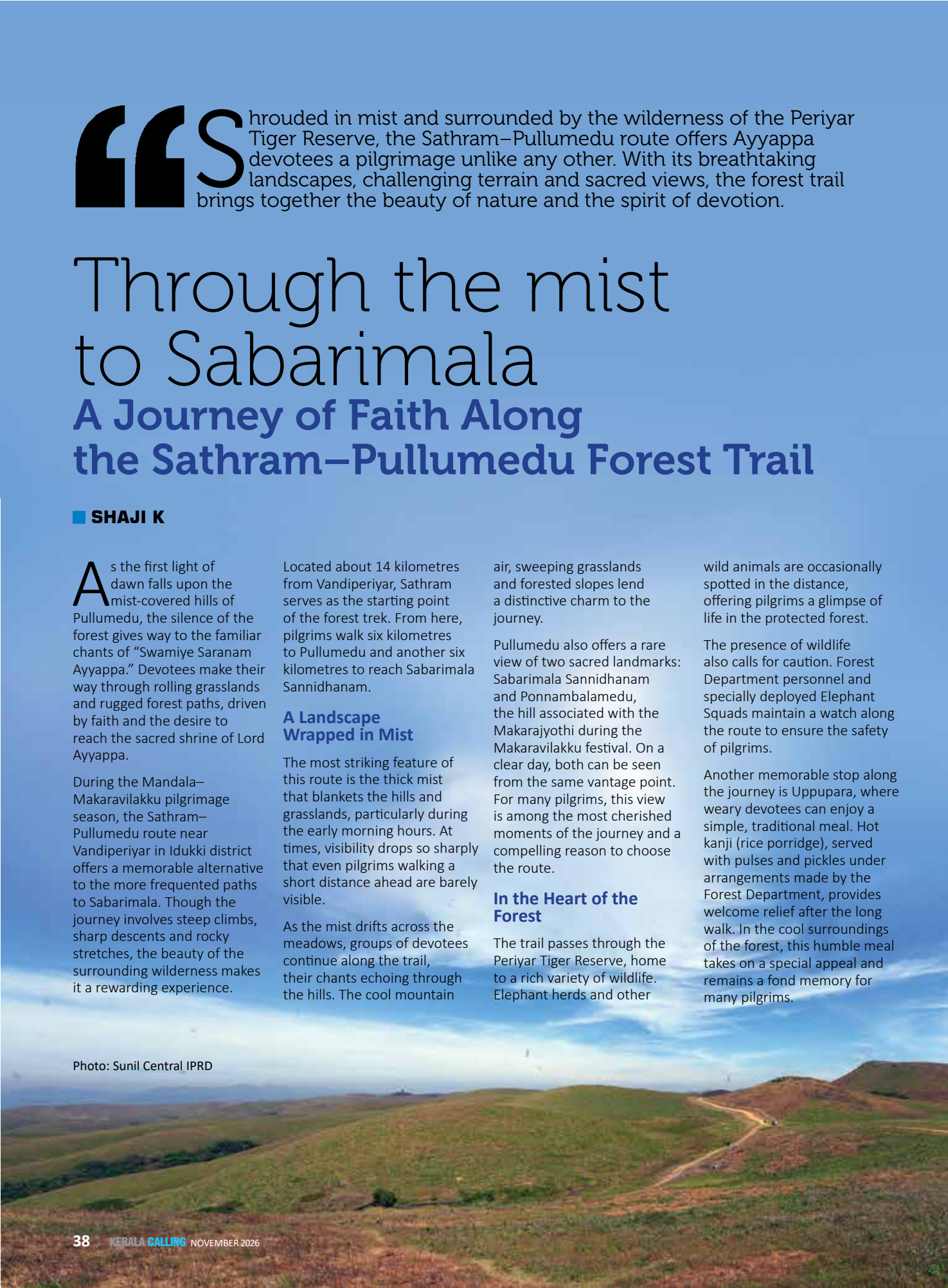


Photo: Sunil Central IPRD





A Journey That Calls for Preparation

The scenic beauty of the Sathram–Pullumedu route should not overshadow the challenges it presents. The steep and uneven terrain demands physical fitness, while the presence of wild animals makes strict travel regulations essential.

Night travel through the forest is prohibited. Pilgrims are allowed to enter the trail from Sathram between 7 a.m. and noon, while those returning from Sannidhanam are not permitted to proceed towards Pullumedu after 2 p.m.

Medical screening is another important requirement. Pilgrims undergo health checks at Vallardi, near Vandiperiyar, before being allowed to continue. Those with heart ailments or other serious medical conditions may be denied permission to undertake the demanding trek.

With no shops, hotels or overnight accommodation facilities available along the forest route, pilgrims must carry sufficient drinking water and other essential supplies.

Revised Booking Arrangements

This pilgrimage season also brings changes to the spot booking arrangements for devotees using the forest route.In previous years, spot booking was available at Sathram. Under the revised system, the facility will instead be provided at Vallardi on K.K. Road and at the Vandiperiyar Bus Stand.

The daily limit for pilgrims travelling through the route has been fixed at 5,000, including 3,000 devotees with online bookings. The remaining 2,000 slots will be available through spot booking, with 1,000 slots allotted to each of the two centres.

The arrangements are intended to regulate the flow of pilgrims and facilitate safer movement through the protected forest.

Where Nature Meets Devotion

For those who choose the Sathram–Pullumedu trail, the pilgrimage offers much more than a journey to a sacred destination. It is an opportunity to experience the quiet beauty of the forest, the freshness of the mountain air and the sense of togetherness that binds devotees along the way.

The challenges of the terrain, the changing moods of the mist and the occasional glimpses of wildlife make every stretch of the route memorable. Yet, it is the unwavering faith of the pilgrims that gives the journey its deeper meaning.

As groups of devotees cross the mist-laden grasslands and winding forest paths, their chants of “Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa” carry across the hills, adding a spiritual dimension to the natural splendour around them.

Along this remarkable forest trail, the beauty of the journey lies as much in the path itself as in the sacred destination that awaits. ■

The author is a Freelance Writer

> Her Summit 2026 brings women's voices to plans for safer lives, wider opportunities and greater participation in public affairs.

Makalkkoppam

A New Women's Policy for Keralam

Staff Reporter



Safety, financial independence and a stronger voice in decision-making are at the heart of Keralam's proposed new women's policy. Under the 'Makalkkoppam' initiative, the framework is taking shape through consultations with women from different walks of life.

The discussions gained momentum at Her Summit 2026, a two-day event organised by the Department of Women and Child Development in Thiruvananthapuram on November 2 and 3. Homemakers, working professionals, entrepreneurs, elected representatives and subject experts contributed ideas on safety, employment, leadership, education and healthcare.

Stronger Protection, Including Online

A central concern is the harassment women face at home, in public spaces, at work and online. Inaugurating the summit, Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan said the government was examining the legal aspects of a special law to address insults and attacks against women on social media. The proposed legislation could provide stronger penalties for offenders, but it has not yet been enacted.

The Chief Minister also stressed the need for a women's policy shaped by public participation rather than prepared solely within government. He said the administration was committed to





Chief Minister V D Satheesan inaugurates Her Summit 2026 at Trivandrum. Ministers Bindhu Krishna, K A Thulasi are also seen. Photo: Ramesh S IPRD

implementing the eventual policy and would not allow financial difficulties to stand in the way of its major initiatives.

Economic Independence and a Greater Say

Economic empowerment is another major priority. The government is planning initiatives to help women, including Kudumbashree members, build sustainable livelihoods. Support for region-specific enterprises, access to markets and assistance from knowledge partners are among the approaches being explored.

Minister for Women and Child Development Bindhu Krishna highlighted the importance of expanding opportunities for women in fields such as green energy, emerging industries and technical entrepreneurship. The proposed policy also seeks to strengthen women's participation in policy-making, budget discussions and public administration, extending their role beyond elected representation alone.

Health, Education and Inclusion

The summit also examined the need for more responsive healthcare, including adolescent menstrual health, mental health and postpartum depression. Bringing gender equality and awareness of rights into education formed part of the broader discussion. These issues sit alongside women's safety, political leadership and cyber security in the policy-making process.

The government plans to announce the policy on International Women's Day, March 8, 2027. Its true test will be whether it delivers greater safety, opportunity and influence for women across Keralam. ■

With record-breaking performances, inspiring displays of inclusivity and the electrifying energy of over 10,000 young athletes, the 68th Keralam State School Sports Meet transformed Kozhikode into a vibrant celebration of sporting excellence, determination and youthful ambition.

Young Champions, Golden Dreams

Keralam's Sporting Spirit Soars in Malabar

SOUMYA CHANDRAN



Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan inaugurates the 68th Keralam State School Sports Meet at the NIT Calicut Stadium in Chathamangalam, Kozhikode, on October 25, 2026

The roar of cheering crowds, the rhythmic thunder of running feet and the triumphant smiles of young champions filled the air as Kozhikode played host to the 68th Kerala State School Sports Meet. For seven unforgettable days, the historic land of Malabar became the beating heart of Keralam's sporting dreams, witnessing an extraordinary celebration of talent, perseverance and unity.

Organised on the lines of the Olympics, the grand sporting extravaganza brought together more than 10,000 budding athletes from Keralam's 14 districts and Gulf countries. Spread across 10 venues, the competitions showcased the remarkable athletic potential of a generation eager to make its mark on the national and international sporting arenas.

The synthetic track at the Major Dhyan Chand Stadium of the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Chathamangalam, served as the principal venue. Hosting the prestigious event after a decade-long interval, Kozhikode embraced the sporting spectacle with enthusiasm, transforming the city into a vibrant arena of athletic excellence.

A Celebration with a Powerful Message

The sporting carnival opened on October 25 with a spectacular ceremony that blended athletic enthusiasm with cultural splendour. Raising the powerful message 'Say No

to Drugs', Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan inaugurated the meet at the NIT Stadium.

The ceremonial lighting of the flame, following the handing over of the torch by Olympian and meet brand ambassador Dr. P. T. Usha, MP, marked the beginning of an exciting week of competition.

With more than 4,000 athletes participating in a magnificent march past and nearly 3,000 students presenting colourful cultural performances, the inauguration offered a fitting prelude to the sporting extravaganza.

Presiding over the ceremony, General Education Minister Adv. N. Shamsudheen highlighted the significance of the event, which went beyond sporting achievements to promote discipline, unity and healthy lifestyles.





In his inaugural address, the Chief Minister emphasised the transformative power of sports in protecting young people from drug abuse. Reaffirming the government's commitment to nurturing sporting talent, he announced comprehensive initiatives aimed at preparing Keralam's athletes for the 2036 Olympics.

The proposed measures included developing playgrounds and stadiums, appointing physical education teachers, meeting the expenses of students participating in competitions outside the state and ensuring direct payment of rewards to international medal winners. A coordinated



special package involving the General Education and Sports Departments was also announced.

Breaking Barriers, Building Bonds

Among the most inspiring highlights of the meet was its emphasis on inclusive sports, which redefined the meaning of sporting achievement.

In a powerful demonstration of equality and companionship, students with disabilities joined their peers from the general category on the same teams, proving that the true spirit of sports transcends physical limitations.

More than 2,000 differently abled athletes from across Keralam participated enthusiastically, turning the playing fields into spaces of friendship, confidence and shared accomplishment.

Palakkad emerged as the champion in the inclusive athletics category with 44 points, followed closely by host district Kozhikode with 42 points. Thiruvananthapuram secured third place with 22 points, while Kozhikode claimed the championship in the inclusive games category.

Beyond the medals and rankings, these competitions offered a powerful reminder that the greatest sporting victories are often those that break barriers and bring people together.

The Golden Race for Glory

As the competitions gathered momentum, the battle for the coveted Chief Minister's Ever-Rolling Golden Trophy intensified.

Displaying exceptional consistency across aquatics, games and athletics, Thiruvananthapuram district emerged as the overall champion with an impressive 2012.3 points, lifting the prestigious trophy weighing 117.5 sovereigns of gold.

Thrissur claimed the runners-up position with 965.3 points, while Malappuram secured third place with 923.3 points.

In athletics, however, Malappuram asserted its supremacy, clinching the championship with 204.3 points. Palakkad followed with 161.5 points, while Alappuzha finished third with 109 points.

At the school level, Ideal School, Kadakassery, Malappuram, topped the standings with 75.3 points. VMHS Vadavannur, Palakkad, and KHMHS Alathiyur, Malappuram, shared second place with 34 points each, followed by St. Joseph's GHSS, Alappuzha, with 31 points.

G. V. Raja Sports School, Thiruvananthapuram, reinforced its sporting legacy by winning the Best Sports School award with 85.3 points, while SAI Thalassery secured second place.

New Records, New Sporting Heroes

The tracks and fields of Kozhikode witnessed the emergence of promising young stars whose extraordinary performances rewrote the record books.

Six new meet records were established, reflecting the growing standards of school-level athletics in Keralam.

The Malappuram team delivered a record-breaking performance in the Senior Boys' 4×400-metre Relay, while Anamika Ajesh of Alappuzha created a new record in

the Senior Girls' 100-metre Hurdles.

T. M. Athul of Alappuzha made his mark in the Senior Boys' 100 metres, while Vishnu Yadav of Kottayam soared to a new record in the Junior Boys' Long Jump.

Sreehari Karikkan of Thiruvananthapuram produced a remarkable double, setting new records in the Junior 400 metres and 400-metre Hurdles.

The individual championships provided further moments of sporting brilliance.

Vishnu Yadav of CKMHSS, Koruthode, Kottayam, claimed the Junior Boys' championship with 13 points, while Alka Shinoj of St. George HSS, Kulathuvayal, Kozhikode, emerged victorious in the Junior Girls' category with an equal tally.

Sreehari M. of G. V. Raja Sports School, Thiruvananthapuram, secured the Sub-Junior Boys' title with 11 points, while Harsha John of St. Joseph's HSS, Alappuzha, claimed the Sub-Junior Girls' championship with 13 points.

In the senior categories, Ebin K. J. of Government VHSS Boys, Kunnamangalam, Kozhikode, became the Senior Boys' champion with 10 points, while Nivedya Kaladhar of VMHS Vadavannur, Palakkad, emerged as the Senior Girls' champion with 15 points.

Each medal represented countless hours of training, unwavering dedication and the determination of young athletes to push beyond their limits.

Behind the Glory: A Triumph of Teamwork

While the athletes captured the spotlight, an extensive network of organisers, volunteers and support personnel worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the smooth conduct of the event.

Under the supervision of the General Education Department, 17 subcommittees coordinated arrangements ranging from accommodation and transportation to healthcare and food services.

Accommodation was provided across more than 50 schools, while a dedicated transportation service, aptly named 'Olympics Express', facilitated the movement of athletes between venues.

Renowned chef Pazhayidom Mohanan Namboothiri and his team ensured the timely distribution of nutritious meals.

A medical workforce of more than 280 professionals, supported by the Sports Ayurveda and KMCT medical teams, provided essential healthcare services.

The Kerala Police ensured security, while the Excise Department arranged medicated drinking water. KITE's live coverage brought the excitement of the competitions to a wider audience, and the Suchitwa Mission's Green Protocol reinforced the event's commitment to environmental responsibility.

Together, these coordinated efforts transformed an ambitious sporting event into a remarkable organisational success.

From Malabar to Kollam: The Dream Continues

The seven-day celebration reached its grand finale on October 31 with a colourful closing ceremony that honoured the achievements of Keralam's young sporting talents.

Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala presented awards to the winners at the valedictory function, presided over by General Education Minister Adv. N. Shamsudheen. Olympian Anju Bobby George, distinguished athletes and public representatives joined the celebrations.

The announcement of plans to introduce a new Sports Law Bill in the next Legislative Assembly session added fresh momentum to the state's long-term sporting ambitions.

As the ceremonial torch prepares to travel to Kollam, the host of the 69th Kerala State School Sports Meet, the memories of Kozhikode's sporting spectacle will continue to inspire aspiring champions.

The 68th State School Sports Meet was more than a contest of speed, strength and skill. It was a celebration of youthful dreams, inclusion and the extraordinary power of determination.

For every medal won, a dream found its wings. For every record broken, a new possibility emerged. And on the vibrant soil of Malabar, Keralam's sporting future shone brighter than ever. ■

The author is an Assistant Editor with the Information and Public Relations Department (IPRD), Kozhikode
Photos: K. V. Sreejesh





Branding forests as a premium biodiversity experience represents a quantum leap in the state's commitment to nature conservation. The vision seeks to pass the baton to Gen Z, paving the way for a new approach to environmental protection. The newly launched workation initiative brings together professional productivity and the rejuvenating power of nature.

Positioning Nature as a Premium Experience

SINI K THOMAS

Few literary works depict the beauty and tranquillity of nature as vividly as the timeless poetry of William Wordsworth. For him, poetry emerges from powerful feelings recollected in tranquillity, spontaneously overflowing into creativity.

In Keralam, where a remarkable 82.6 per cent rate of functional urbanisation, according to the Economic Survey 2025–26, has sparked a debate over the rural–urban continuum, the Forest Department is inviting professionals, writers, netocrats and creative minds to experience its recently launched premium biodiversity centres deep within the forests. These centres allow individuals to soothe their senses amid nature's spontaneity and richness without taking a break from work.

With the recent inauguration of workation facilities at Gavi and Suryanelli by Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan, the concept of a premium biodiversity experience has gained momentum. Launched by the Keralam Forest Development Corporation (KFDC), the



introducing forests to the right audience.

He adds, “However, any such exposure should not be an encroachment on the forests, which are a very fragile ecosystem. This is a primary concern for us when implementing each project. Nature receives everything well if approached with sustainability and equilibrium. Moving a step ahead from shedding our old feathers of colonial conservatism to embracing the vibrant vibes of Gen Z—while bringing the new generation into the fold of sustainability—is the new task added to the department. The vision highlights our responsibility to frame the forest experience as premium, connecting people to a new-age language of superior-quality products and services. Thus, it places the ‘biodiversity experience’ above all,” he observes.

Workations at Gavi and Suryanelli offer netocrats, professionals and writers from across the world a premium biodiversity experience. The reasonably priced four-day, three-night package offers accommodation for two guests per room and includes high-speed Wi-Fi and cafeteria facilities.

workation model was proposed by Forest Minister Shibu Baby John. The initiative, which combines work and vacation by offering professionals an opportunity to work from the forest, went viral on the very day of its inauguration. KFDC implemented the project without undertaking any new construction.

Brand Keralam

Along with the workation centres, KFDC launched an innovative brand, SHOLA, to encompass its future endeavours. The acronym stands for Seek, Hike, Observe, Lodge and Absorb. Additionally, the ‘ATMA’ brand of tea and coffee produced on KFDC plantations, a premium pod-stay project at Vagamon and the ‘Travel Today, Pay Tomorrow’ credit card scheme were also launched.

Branding Keralam’s forests as a premium biodiversity experience holds considerable significance for the state’s Forest Department and its associated institutions.

Head of Forest Force and Chief Conservator of Forests Rajesh Ravindran views this as an innovative initiative that places greater responsibility on the department to conserve and protect nature while





Workation at Gavi

Nestled amid the forest, the workation facility at Gavi has a maximum capacity of eight guests across four rooms, while Suryanelli offers three rooms. Bookings can be made online.

Trading the urban chaos of skyglow, light trespass and concrete buildings for the soothing murmur of rustling leaves, gentle breezes and flowing streams, guests can enjoy the serene environment while attending video conferences and carrying out their regular work-from-home responsibilities.

Whenever they need a break, designated guides will take them on rejuvenating treks, guided nature walks, deep-forest stargazing excursions, boat trips or twilight wildlife trails—all of which are integrated into the package.

Mountain Highs and Soothing Valleys

Gavi is a serene, low-footfall ecotourism destination nestled within the dense evergreen forests of Pathanamthitta in southern Keralam, whereas Suryanelli is a high-elevation mountain village known for its tea plantations and sweeping mountain vistas, located near Munnar in Idukki.

Packages & Amenities

Facilities: High-speed Wi-Fi, power outlets, cafeteria services and designated discussion areas.

Activities: Guided nature walks, wildlife trails, bird-watching, boating and forest trekking during breaks.

Pricing: A standard three-day package costs approximately ₹14,000, covering food, accommodation for two guests and trekking activities. Each room accommodates a maximum of two guests.

By road, Gavi and Suryanelli are located approximately 170 km and 130 km, respectively, from Kochi International Airport, and 185 km and 270 km, respectively, from Trivandrum International Airport. Bookings are available through the Keralam Forest Development Corporation's website. More workation centres are planned under the eco-brand SHOLA.

The project embodies a holistic vision, replacing the notion that remote work must be confined within the four walls of a flat or a crowded café with a new philosophy that combines a premium vacation experience with enhanced, uninterrupted productivity.

> "Moving a step ahead from shedding our old feathers of colonial conservatism to embracing the vibrant vibes of Gen Z—while bringing the new generation into the fold of sustainability—is the new task added to the department. The vision highlights our responsibility to frame the forest experience as premium, connecting people to a new-age language of superior-quality products and services.

Pointing to the encouraging response reflected in frequent enquiries from netocrats, professionals and creative individuals, KFDC Managing Director Raju K Francis says, "The response to this project was immediate. In a short span of time, the facility has drawn remarkable interest from





creative professionals. This is an indication of the new trend where people look for unique locations for serious work."

The real operational challenge was providing reliable internet connectivity in the interiors of reserve forests, where laying kilometres of optical fibre cables is impractical.

"This was resolved by beaming high-speed internet through the air from Sabarimala directly to Gavi," Raju K Francis recalls.

Supported by backup generators, the network delivers speeds ranging from 100 Mbps at Gavi to 500 Mbps at Suryanelli.

"Remote workers can host video calls or upload large files and enjoy the forest experience without any worries of dropped connections," he informs.

The facilities feature guest rooms with additional power outlets, dedicated discussion spaces and outdoor routers that enable guests to work from lawn tents or open verandas while enjoying unlimited Keralam-branded tea, locally produced aromatic coffee and complimentary meals.

For oft, when on my couch I lie

In vacant or in pensive mood,

They flash upon that inward eye

Which is the bliss of solitude.

When the laptop closes, the workday gives way to mindful nature walks. Forest guides lead guests towards a misty lake for boating trips. Beside the lake, beneath the trees, one can imagine thousands of daffodils fluttering and dancing in the breeze, as envisioned by the nature poet—an evocative reflection of the beauty and tranquillity that define the true biodiversity experience. ■

(The author is Public Relations Officer at the Forest Department and former Editor-in-Charge of Keralam Calling Photo Credit: Keralam Forest Development Corporation)



Mirroring Keralam's Soul

KERALAM PAVILION – IITF 2026

Inspired by the IITF 2026 theme, "Vikas aur Virasat" (Development and Heritage), the Keralam Pavilion showcases Keralam as a land where modern development thrives alongside its rich cultural and natural heritage.

The Keralam Pavilion at the 45th India International Trade Fair (IITF), held at Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, was inaugurated by Kerala House Resident Commissioner Puneet Kumar, IAS.

The pavilion is attracting visitors with its unique theme, "Seeing Keralam Through the Aranmula Kannadi." It highlights Keralam's vision for development while promoting local entrepreneurs and traders. The pavilion also features food courts operated by Kudumbashree and the Society for Assistance to Fisherwomen (SAF), offering visitors a taste of Keralam's traditional cuisine.

The trade fair brings together participants from various Indian states, Union Territories, and several foreign countries, providing a platform for showcasing diverse products, cultural traditions, and trade opportunities.

Photo: Sreelas Olari IPRD















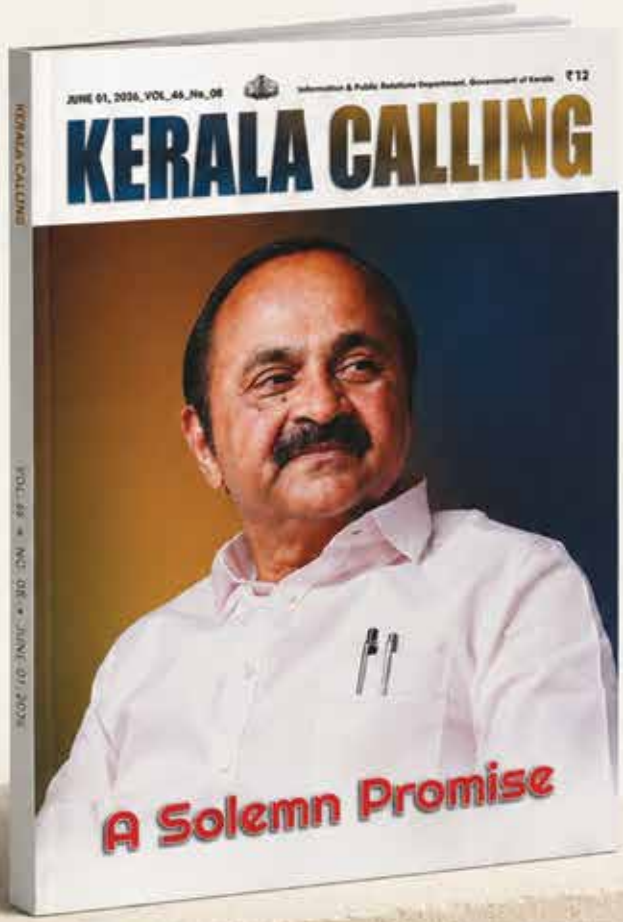
Keralam House Resident Commissioner Puneet Kumar, IAS, inaugurating the Keralam Pavilion at IITF, New Delhi. Also seen are IPRD Additional Director K. G. Santhosh, Deputy Directors Nafih M. and K. S. Sailendran, and Information Officer Pratheesh D. Mony.

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