

IN THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA AT ERNAKULAM
PRESENT
THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V
&
THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE K. V. JAYAKUMAR

Monday, the 30th day of March 2026 / 9th Chaithra, 1948
WP(C) NO. 8529 OF 2026(M)

PETITIONER:

SUO MOTU

(AS PER THE ORDER DATED 06.02.2026 IN SSCR 37/2025 - CROWD MANAGEMENT DURING MANDALA – MAKARAVILAKKU SEASON – DIRECTIONS ISSUED TO CONSTITUTE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND ENSURE COORDINATED PLANNING.)

RESPONDENTS:

1. STATE OF KERALA REPRESENTED BY THE CHIEF SECRETARY, GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695001.
2. THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF SECRETARY, REVENUE (DEVASWOM) DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695001.
3. THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF SECRETARY, HOME DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695001.
4. THE STATE POLICE CHIEF, POLICE HEADQUARTERS, VAZHUTHACAUD, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695010.
5. THE DISTRICT COLLECTOR, CIVIL STATION, PATHANAMTHITTA, PIN - 689645.
6. THE DISTRICT POLICE CHIEF, PATHANAMTHITTA DISTRICT, PATHANAMTHITTA, PIN - 689645.
7. TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD DEVASOM, HEAD QUARTERS, NANDANCODE, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY, PIN - 695003.
8. THE DEVASWOM COMMISSIONER, TRAVANCORE DEVASOM BOARD, DEVASOM HEADQUARTERS, NANDANCODE, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695003.
9. THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER SABARIMALA, PATHANAMTHITTA DISTRICT, PIN - 689670.
10. THE SECRETARY, ERUMELI GRAMA PANCHAYAT, ERUMELI, KOTTAYAM DISTRICT, PIN - 686509.
11. THE SECRETARY, RANNY-PERUNAD GRAMA PANCHAYATH, RANNY PERUNAD, PATHANAMTHITTA, PIN - 689711.
12. THE MANAGING DIRECTOR, KERALA WATER AUTHORITY, JALABHAVAN, VELLAYAMBALAM, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695033.
13. THE CHAIRMAN & MANAGING DIRECTOR, KERALA STATE ELECTRICITY BOARD LTD., VYDYUTHI BHAVANAM, PATTOM, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695004.
14. THE ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEER, KERALA STATE POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD, DISTRICT OFFICE, PATHANAMTHITTA, PIN - 689645.
15. THE CHIEF POLICE COORDINATOR (ADDITIONAL DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE – POLICE HEADQUARTERS), SANNIDHANAM, SABARIMALA, PATHANAMTHITTA, PIN - 689713.
16. THE EXECUTIVE MAGISTRATE SANNIDHANAM, SABARIMALA, PATHANAMTHITTA, PIN - 689713.
17. THE CHIEF VIGILANCE AND SECURITY OFFICER, (SUPERINTENDENT OF

- POLICE), TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD, NANTHANCOD, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695003.
18. THE PRINCIPAL CHIEF, CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS FOREST HEADQUARTERS, VAZHUTHACAUD, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695014.
 19. THE FOREST RANGE OFFICER, PAMBA RANGE, VALLAKKADAVU P.O., VANDIPERIYAR (VIA), IDUKKI, PIN - 685553.
 20. THE MANAGING DIRECTOR, KERALA STATE ROAD TRANSPORT CORPORATION, TRANSPORT BHAVAN, FORT P.O., THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695035.
 21. THE TRANSPORT COMMISSIONER, KERALA TRANSPORT COMMISSIONERATE, VAZHUTHACAUD, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695014.
 22. THE REGIONAL TRANSPORT OFFICER (ENFORCEMENT) STADIUM JUNCTION, KAIPATTOOR ROAD, NH 183A, PATHANAMTHITTA, PIN - 689645.
 23. THE DIRECTOR OF HEALTH SERVICES, DIRECTORATE OF HEALTH SERVICES, GENERAL HOSPITAL JUNCTION, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695035.
 24. THE DIRECTOR GENERAL, KERALA FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES, FIRE FORCE JUNCTION, PULIMOODU P.O., THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695001.
 25. THE DEPUTY INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE CRPF, GROUP CENTRE, PALLIPURAM, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695316.
 26. THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR (PERIYAR WEST DIVISION) PERIYAR TIGER RESERVE, PEERUMEDU P.O., IDUKKI, PIN - 685531.

BY GOVERNMENT PLEADER FOR R1, R6, R15, R18, R19, R21, R22, R23, R24, R25, R26

SRI. G.BIJU, STANDING COUNSEL for R7, R8, R9, R16 and R17

SMT. CHITRA CHANDRASEKHARAN, STANDING COUNSEL for R10 and R11,

SRI. GEORGE JOHNY, STANDING COUNSEL for R12,

SRI. B PREMOD, STANDING COUNSEL for R13,

SRI. T NAVEEN, STANDING COUNSEL for R14,

SRI. DEEPU THANKAN, STANDING COUNSEL for R20 AND

SRI.NAGRAJ NARAYANAN, SPECIAL GOVERNMENT PLEADER (FOREST)

This Writ Petition (Civil) again coming up for orders on 30.03.2026 upon perusing this courts order dated 04.03.2026, the Court passed the following:

**RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V.,
&
K.V. JAYAKUMAR, JJ.**

WP(C) No. 8529 of 2026

Dated this the 30th day of March, 2026

ORDER

Raja Vijayaraghavan V, J.

This suo motu proceeding was initiated pursuant to the order dated 06.02.2026 in SSCR No. 37 of 2025, in light of the experience gained and the difficulties encountered in crowd management during the Mandala–Makaravilakku Season 2025–26. Taking note of these concerns, this Court had issued directions for the constitution of an institutional framework and for ensuring coordinated, advance planning across all stakeholders.

2. Pilgrimage management on the scale witnessed at Sabarimala necessitates a well-structured and coordinated institutional mechanism. Such a framework must comprehensively address infrastructural works, transport logistics, utility provisioning, local body services, grant of kuthakas, inter-departmental coordination, procurement processes, contractual engagements, repairs, maintenance, and all other allied activities. These activities will have to be planned sufficiently in advance through joint planning conferences and implemented in accordance with clearly defined, time-bound execution schedules. If all preparatory measures are completed at least two months prior to the commencement of the

Mandala–Makaravilakku Season 2026–2027, the pilgrimage can be conducted in a safe, orderly, environmentally responsible, and pilgrim-centric manner.

3. With a view to ensuring continuous oversight and effective monitoring of these critical aspects, the Registry was directed to register a suo motu Writ Petition on the basis of the said order, after obtaining appropriate directions from the Hon'ble Chief Justice.

4. In terms of the directions issued by this Court, a detailed and comprehensive statement has been placed on record by the 7th respondent, namely the Travancore Devaswom Board, outlining the steps taken and the measures proposed in furtherance of the mandate of this Court. We also note, with a degree of satisfaction, that the Board has approached the directions issued by this Court not as a mere formality, but with an open and constructive mindset, and with a clear intent to bring about meaningful and lasting improvements in the facilities and overall management at Sannidhanam, especially in the context of steadily increasing pilgrim inflow.

5. The Additional Director General of Police and the Chief Police Coordinator, Sabarimala, have also placed before this Court detailed inputs, responses, and requirements aimed at improving the overall management of the pilgrimage during the 2026–2027 season. It is stated that a comprehensive and multi-dimensional study has been undertaken, with particular reference to the deficiencies, operational challenges, security concerns, and infrastructural limitations noticed during the previous pilgrimage seasons. The statement further indicates that

these inputs are the result of detailed field-level assessments, stakeholder consultations, and a data-driven analysis of pilgrim inflow patterns. From the standpoint of security, crowd control, and traffic management, it is emphasised that a comprehensive and systematic restructuring is imperative, supported by appropriate technological interventions. It is also brought to our notice that the deployment of manpower for Sabarimala pilgrimage duties has been increasing progressively year after year. However, notwithstanding the deployment of personnel in numbers exceeding the estimated requirement, significant operational challenges continue to persist, particularly during peak periods. These challenges, it is pointed out, arise largely due to the inherent infrastructural constraints at and around the temple premises.

6. The 2nd respondent has also filed a statement stating that, as in previous years, the Government shall make all necessary efforts to ensure that the pilgrimage season 2026–2027 is conducted in a smooth, safe, and orderly manner.

7. Having carefully perused the statements filed by the respondents, we find them to be both exhaustive and thoughtfully structured. They reflect a conscious and coordinated effort on the part of the Board, in particular, as well as the Chief Coordinator and the State, to address the concerns highlighted by this Court.

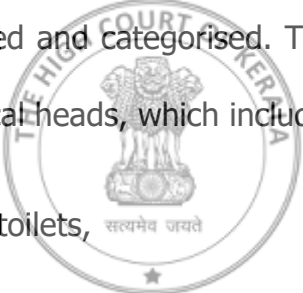
8. The statement filed by the Board reveals that one of the most significant and tangible outcomes of this exercise is the progress made in initiating a comprehensive digitisation project for the Travancore Devaswom Board. This, in our view, marks a crucial shift towards modernising the administration of pilgrimage

management. It is stated that the modalities of the arrangement with Kerala State Information Technology Infrastructure Limited (KITFRA) are in the process of being finalised. Recognising the scale and importance of the Sabarimala Festival, the Board has accorded it the highest priority and proposes to commence the digitisation of all festival-related activities by November 2026. A clear and time-bound roadmap has been worked out with KITFRA, whereby the actual programming and technical implementation are to commence by the last week of April, with the systems expected to be ready for trial runs by the first week of October. Training of employees is also proposed to be undertaken simultaneously, ensuring that the transition is both smooth and effective. By embracing technology, the Board aims to enhance efficiency, ensure greater transparency, minimise delays, and provide a more seamless experience for pilgrims. We exhort the Board to set up an IT directorate by employing skilled and competent personnel to man the system, which is expected to be put in place before the end of this year.

9. As per the data consolidated during the Mandala–Makaravilakku Season 2025–2026, an unprecedented total of 78,68,272 devotees visited Sabarimala. This figure, by itself, underscores the magnitude of the challenge faced in managing the pilgrimage. The Board has rightly recognised that the amenities and facilities available for devotees are not limitless, but are measurable and finite, and must therefore be aligned with realistic carrying capacity. It has been emphasised that the number of devotees permitted to enter the sanctum sanctorum must have a rational nexus with the number who can be safely accommodated for darshan without

compromising on safety, order, or dignity. On this basis, and taking into account the existing infrastructure and logistical constraints, the Board has arrived at a considered conclusion that the maximum number of devotees permitted per day—from Pamba to Sannidhanam and from Nilakkal to Pamba—should be restricted to 75,000. This determination appears to be an attempt to strike a balance between facilitating pilgrimage and ensuring safety and manageability.

10. The Board has also undertaken a detailed and systematic assessment of the amenities that can be extended to devotees visiting Sabarimala for darshan. In particular, the infrastructural facilities available at Nilakkal, Pamba, and Sannidhanam have been carefully evaluated and categorised. The Board has tabulated the existing facilities under multiple critical heads, which include:

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- (i) total number of toilets,
 - (ii) drinking water facilities,
 - (iii) free food/snacks/food stalls,
 - (iv) medical facilities,
 - (v) waste disposal mechanisms,
 - (vi) sewage treatment plants,
 - (vii) sign boards/LED display boards,
 - (viii) information/reception counters,
 - (ix) resting places, and
 - (x) holding areas.

11. This classification, in our considered view, lays down a clear and structured foundation for identifying existing gaps, prioritising areas requiring immediate attention, and ensuring that future planning is both data-driven and responsive to the actual needs and comfort of the pilgrims.

12. It is evident from the statement that the Board has undertaken a comprehensive, data-backed, and location-specific assessment by clearly tabulating the requirements at all three critical nodes of the pilgrimage, namely Nilakkal, Pamba, and Sannidhanam. This exercise, in our view, reflects a conscious attempt to move away from ad hoc arrangements towards a more structured and need-based planning framework. The materials placed before us indicate that the assessment is not merely descriptive, but is intended to serve as a working document for identifying gaps, prioritising interventions, and aligning available resources with the actual demands arising out of large-scale pilgrim movement. The statement further discloses that the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) has formulated a Vision Document aimed at holistically improving the conduct, coordination, and overall management of the pilgrimage, with due emphasis on safety, sanitation, service delivery, and systematic administration.

13. For the sake of clarity and effective implementation, we deem it appropriate to consolidate the views and proposals put forth by the respondents and to prescribe a clear and time-bound framework for execution. Such an approach is necessary to ensure that the measures proposed do not remain at the level of intent, but are translated into tangible outcomes within a defined schedule. By fixing specific

timelines and milestones, this Court will be in a position to undertake continuous and meaningful monitoring of the progress, and to ensure accountability at every stage of implementation.

14. The Vision, as placed before us, is extracted hereunder:

"Sabarimala Festival

A New Vision

The entire spectrum of preparatory and operational activities has been grouped under five core verticals:

- Safety
- Cleanliness
- Services
- Appearance and ambience
- Communication & PR

The guiding principles underlying the proposed changes are:

- A greater and sustained focus on services to devotees
- Sanitation and cleanliness to be accorded the highest priority
- Ensuring that all arrangements reflect a professional standard of execution
- Minimising, to the extent possible, the scope for middlemen and intermediaries
- Recognising Sabarimala as a Temple of national importance, drawing devotees from across South India"

15. Having carefully gone through the Vision Statement, as detailed in the materials placed before us, we are broadly satisfied with the approach adopted and the measures proposed by the Board. The Vision reflects a conscious shift towards structured, accountable, and pilgrim-centric management, while also addressing long-standing concerns relating to safety, sanitation, and coordination.

16. We propose to advert to these aspects in greater detail after taking note of the stand adopted by the Chief Coordinator, whose role assumes significance in ensuring on-ground coordination and effective implementation of the measures proposed. A holistic consideration of the statements placed before us by the Board, the Chief Coordinator, as well as the State, reveals certain critical and recurring aspects which merit closer scrutiny. These aspects, in our view, are central to the effective management of the pilgrimage and call for focused attention. We therefore proceed to highlight the same hereunder for detailed consideration.

I. Institutional Framework and Governance:

(a) Expert Committee:

i) As directed by this Court, the Travancore Devaswom Board shall constitute a Sabarimala Infrastructure & Crowd Management Expert Committee at the earliest, so as to ensure a structured and scientific approach to pilgrimage management. The Committee shall comprise specialists drawn from diverse but relevant fields, including Transport Engineering, Urban and Regional Planning, Civil Engineering, Disaster and Crowd Science, Environmental Science, Public Health, and IT/Data Analytics, so as to bring a multidisciplinary perspective to the issues involved.

ii) The Committee shall be entrusted with the responsibility of preparing a comprehensive and scientific plan for the Mandala–Makaravilakku Season 2026–27, taking into account the carrying capacity, safety parameters, environmental concerns, and pilgrim convenience. The Committee shall also

undertake both pre-season preparedness reviews and post-season assessments, so that lessons learnt are institutionalised and continuously refined for future seasons.

iii) For the purpose of constituting such a Committee with the requisite expertise and credibility, the State Government shall place before this Court a panel of the most competent and experienced officers and domain experts who are capable of providing meaningful and practical inputs for the above exercise. It is also open to the Board to suggest names of suitable experts for consideration, so as to enable this Court to identify and finalise an appropriate composition of the Committee. The panel shall be placed before this Court on or before 08.04.2026.

(b) Coordination & Monitoring Task Force:

A dedicated Coordination and Monitoring Task Force shall be created to oversee the timely execution of all decisions taken by the Expert Committee. Primary implementing agencies shall be TDB, Police, KWA, KSRTC, KSEB, Forest Department, and District Administration.

(c) Sabarimala ADM:

As has been done in the past seasons, the State Government shall appoint an officer from the All India Service cadre as Sabarimala ADM to ensure effective inter-departmental coordination during the season, and to supervise all sanitation related work during the festival season.

(d) Sabarimala Festival Office at Pamba:

A new dedicated Festival Office at Pamba shall be made functional from 15 April 2026. Board meetings on Sabarimala matters shall be held in the festival office for ensuring better monitoring and supervision year-round, ending the practice of last-minute arrivals for monthly poojas.

(e) Separate Budget for Sabarimala Festival:

A standalone Sabarimala Festival Budget shall be created within the overall TDB budget. All payments and receipts shall be shifted to online mode. A designated Chartered Accountant shall be appointed to concurrently audit the accounts. Audited accounts must be published within three weeks of Makaravilakku. This will facilitate prioritisation of maramath (repair/maintenance) works and their early commencement and completion by October.

(f) Tender & Contract Reforms:

All existing tender documents and agreements must be reviewed and revised within one month. New contracts must incorporate obligations on green protocol, food safety health cards for food handlers, cleanliness standards, and safety norms. This would apply to toilet maintenance contracts, hotel/food stall kuthakas, and all commercial establishments. New administrative systems will be created to avoid procedural delays, and an independent Quality Checking Unit with outside experts will be set up to ensure quality of materials and construction. The Board will also carry out a transparency audit.

(g) High-Level Review Mechanism:

The State Government shall convene comprehensive review meetings both prior to and during the commencement of the pilgrimage season, directly under the chairmanship of the Minister for Devaswom and other concerned Ministers. Dedicated meetings will be held to review arrangements at major Idathavalams, including Chengannur, Erumeli, Pandalam, and Ettumanoor.

(h) Funds to District Administrations:

We direct the Government to ensure that contingency funds are released expeditiously to District Administrations of Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, and Idukki for maintenance, cleaning, and infrastructural readiness of forest trekking paths within their jurisdiction. The TDB Commissioner will be instructed to release routine funds speedily to District Administrations.

II. Crowd Management & Virtual Queue System:

(a) Carrying Capacity & Daily Cap:

The scientifically determined maximum daily pilgrim inflow from Pamba to Sannidhanam is 75,000 devotees. The assessed optimal carrying capacity at Sannidhanam is approximately 80,000 per day. The Virtual-Q booking cap is to remain fixed accordingly. The Expert Committee will formally determine node-specific carrying capacities for Nilakkal, Pamba, trekking segments, and

Sannidhanam, with density-based safety thresholds: Green Zone ≤ 2 persons/sq.m; Amber Zone 2–4 persons/sq.m; Red Zone > 4 persons/sq.m (high-risk).

(b) Virtual Queue System — Restructuring:

The existing Virtual Queue system is to be upgraded to a highly professional platform with real-time updates and cancellation options. We are of the view that a nominal, fixed, refundable security deposit be introduced for each reservation slot. This amount will be refunded upon arrival within the allotted time window or adjusted against prasadam of equivalent value. If the devotee fails to arrive within the scheduled window, the booking amount may be forfeited, which would act as a deterrent against speculative bookings, slot-blocking, and last-minute crowd surges. This is required to improve the predictability of inflow and reduce peak-hour pressure in the holy shrine, which is located in the heart of the Periyar Tiger Reserve.

(c) Spot Booking Regulation:

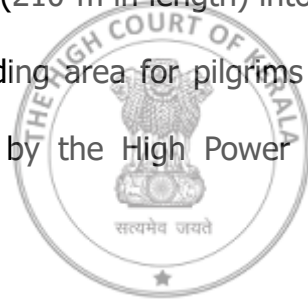
Spot booking must be strictly capped and regulated at all existing counters (Erumeli, Nilakkal, Pamba, Vandiperiyar, Chengannur Railway Station). The aggregate across all counters must not exceed the fixed daily limit. Spot booking counters for real-time bookings shall be at Nilakkal, where adequate space exists to manage the incoming flow, rather than at Pamba.

(d) Hold and Release Mechanism:

The existing hold-and-release mechanism will continue, but must be supported by scientifically designed holding infrastructure. The pilgrims are to be held at check points — Laha, Pathanamthitta, Pandalam, Erumeli, Elavunkal, and Nilakkal — to regulate and stagger inflow. Adequate holding areas with facilities (shade, water, announcements on queue movement) are mandatory at every holding point.

(e) Queue Management at Sannidhanam:

The Q Complex from Marakkoottam to Sannidhanam must have a minimum total holding capacity of 24,000 pilgrims. The Board shall consider converting the existing Valiya Nadapandal (210 m in length) into a two-storey structure, with the first floor serving as a holding area for pilgrims awaiting darshan. This decision shall, inevitably, be taken by the High Power Committee after considering all relevant aspects.



(f) Kanana Patha (Erumeli Forest Route) Regulation:

Pilgrims taking the traditional Kananpatha forest route from Erumeli must be capped at 5,000 per day and permitted to trek only after registering through Virtual-Q or real-time registration at Erumeli.

(g) Buffer Zone Around Sanctum:

No permanent or temporary structure shall be permitted within a minimum radial distance of 100 metres from the sanctum sanctorum, except those strictly essential for ritualistic purposes. This zone should be exclusively earmarked for

pilgrim movement, structured queue systems, and Viri/holding facilities. This will significantly enhance crowd circulation, reduce congestion at critical points, and strengthen emergency response in the vicinity of the sanctum.

(h) Separate Queue for Malikappuram Pilgrims:

A separate queue complex must be developed at Malikappuram for pilgrims without Irumudi and for second-time darshan, to reduce congestion in the main queue. The Board shall consider the construction of a dedicated staircase from the landing side of Vadakkenada for pilgrims seeking Neyyabhishekam, to allow them to reach closer to the Sreekovil without delay.

(i) Pathways and Approach Routes:

Pathways between Marakkoottam and Saramkuthi — especially in front of queue complexes — must be levelled and made walkable before commencement of the season.

III. Technology & Integrated Command Systems:

(a) AI-Based Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC):

As suggested by the Chief Police Coordinator, the Board shall endeavour to establish an AI-based Integrated Command and Control Centre for effective inter-departmental coordination and scientific crowd management. Nilakkal can be identified as the ideal location for the Master Command Centre, with sub-control units at Pamba and Sannidhanam. The system will incorporate:

- AI-enabled CCTV surveillance with facial recognition for real-time monitoring
- 3D crowd analytics enabling predictive crowd management
- Live density dashboards covering all nodes
- Automated alerts and real-time inter-departmental communication

The Chief Police Coordinator has also estimated the cost of the Integrated Security, Surveillance, and Crowd Management System for which Administrative sanction and fund allocation are required. The Board as well as the Government, shall coordinate and decide on the issue as the same is of utmost importance for pilgrim safety and a trouble free pilgrimage.

(b) CCTV Overhaul:



The existing CCTV network consists of only 99 cameras across Nilakkal, Pamba, and Sannidhanam. This is grossly inadequate, with critical blind spots, outdated equipment, expiring warranties, weak servers, poor storage, and vulnerable cabling. It is also reported that the Pamba control room is undersized with limited capacity and poor power backup. We direct the respondents to overhaul the entire CCTV infrastructure and expand the same substantially.

(c) AI-Based Drone Surveillance:

The Board shall also consider employing AI-based drones for real-time monitoring of crowd density, hazard detection (including thermal imaging), anthropogenic hazard identification, and emergency response.

(d) Anti-Drone Systems:

Anti-drone systems must also be deployed as part of the Integrated Security System.

(e) ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) System:

ANPR-based vehicle management must be implemented at key locations to automate vehicle movement tracking and improve traffic management. This will work in conjunction with the Digital Parking Management System.

(f) RFID Pilgrim Tracking:

We also direct the Board to incorporate and put in place RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) technology for tracking pilgrim movement across nodes to provide real-time data on crowd density, waiting periods, and congestion points, enabling dynamic decision-making.

(g) Digital Parking Management System

A comprehensive Digital Parking Management System is to be designed and implemented for Nilakkal and Pamba. This integrated, technology-driven platform will incorporate:

- Geo-referenced and real-time parking allocation mechanisms
- A dedicated mobile application for advance registration by pilgrims and vehicle drivers

- Automatic GPS-based parking allocation upon entry into the Elavunkal–Nilakkal zone
- Handheld devices for on-site police personnel to scan vehicles and issue QR code-enabled parking passes via portable Bluetooth printers for vehicles not registered through the mobile app
- Real-time occupancy tracking of each of the 21 parking grounds, with automated entry/exit logging
- App-based checkout for efficient turnover
- Data insights on vehicle inflow patterns, peak load timings, parking utilisation, and shuttle service requirements between Nilakkal and Pamba

(h) LED Display Systems:



Large LED display boards must be installed at the following locations:

- Marakkoottam and other key points — for real-time visuals of movement at the 18 Holy Steps
 - Entry points of all queue complexes — for crowd awareness and regulation
 - Nilakkal — for live updates on Sannidhanam movement
 - All parking lots and important locations in Nilakkal Base Camp — for systematic parking guidance
 - Pamba: U-turn, KSRTC pick-up point, near the Nadapanthal, near Ganapathy Temple, and along the route to Sannidhanam
- (i) Smart Communication & Upgrade of Police Control Room:

The existing Police Control Room at Nilakkal requires substantial upgradation in terms of infrastructure, communication systems, and technological integration. Upgraded communication networks and smart signage are also part of the ICCC proposal.

(j) Sabarimala Website:

A new, user-friendly, and comprehensive website for Sabarimala is to be ready before the onset of the Festival in November. KITFRA will develop it as part of the overall digital architecture of TDB.

(k) Accommodation Booking — Online:

We are given to understand that a substantial number of rooms are presently occupied by officials of various departments, and that such occupation has continued for extended periods without adequate justification. This practice, if allowed to persist, would seriously prejudice the availability of accommodation to genuine pilgrims. The Board shall, therefore, take immediate and effective steps to have all such rooms vacated, except where occupation is strictly necessary and duly authorised for official purposes. Upon such vacation, the Board shall ensure that the rooms are properly refurbished and furnished so as to make them fit for pilgrim use. The allocation and booking of all rooms at Sabarimala intended for pilgrims shall be fully computerised and integrated into a transparent online booking system. The system shall be designed to ensure fairness, accessibility, and accountability, while effectively preventing bulk bookings or any form of

misuse. The existing practice of collecting deposits in a non-transparent manner shall be discontinued forthwith and replaced by a secure and streamlined online payment mechanism, thereby minimising scope for irregularities and ensuring greater convenience to devotees.

(l) Vazhipadu Counters — Digital Payments:

All digital payment modes must be operational at vazhipadu counters. Counter space must be improved. Vazhipadu counters currently within the EO's office must be shifted out.

(m) Pre-booking of Aravana and Postal Dispatch:

Pre-booking of Aravana (prasadam) shall be explored as an option for pilgrims. The option to send Aravana through India Post must also be encouraged to ease access.

IV. Traffic Management & Road Infrastructure:

(a) Road Widening & Emergency Routes — Pamba:

The Pamba–Triveni–KSRTC Depot road area must be widened to the maximum feasible extent to ensure smooth vehicular movement, efficient KSRTC bus boarding, and a dedicated emergency evacuation corridor. At present there is no designated exit route at Pamba, which is a serious safety deficiency.

(b) Kochu Palam Bridge:

The Kochu Palam bridge requires urgent widening to ease severe congestion caused by bi-directional pedestrian movement between Pamba Manappuram and the U-turn area. Its present width is dangerously inadequate at peak pilgrim flow. The Board shall take necessary measures in conjunction with the State Government and the PWD Roads division to effectuate the same.

(c) Chalakkayam–Pamba Road Reconstruction:

The 3.80 km, 10-m-wide Chalakkayam–Pamba Road (owned by TDB) is in a severely damaged condition. Necessary works include: scarification and relaying of road surface with WMM and BC; construction of a full-length drainage system for rainwater; walkways on both sides for safe pilgrim movement; road markings; and installation of required signboards.

(d) Nilakkal Parking Ground Access Roads:

Access roads leading to the parking grounds at Nilakkal are in dilapidated condition. Urgent re-tarring and strengthening is required. All 21 parking grounds must be tarred or interlocked to maintain consistent usability in both dry and wet conditions (currently wet-season capacity drops from 10,250 to 8,000 vehicles).

(e) New Bridge at Nilakkal:

Construction of a small bridge connecting Parking Ground No. 12A towards the side of Parking Ground No. 19 is essential to divert vehicular traffic away from the congested KSRTC junction. This will significantly reduce traffic congestion

near the KSRTC stand caused by vehicles proceeding to parking grounds 18, 18A, 18B, 19, and 20.

(f) Parking Development at Pamba

Chakkupalam-I (which is currently sand-covered) must be urgently cleared and levelled for use as a functional parking facility. The Board shall consider the scope of constructing a multi-level (multi-storeyed) parking complex at Chakkupalam-II as a long-term measure, subject to ecological considerations and after obtaining permits from the Forest Department.

(g) Emergency Evacuation Routes

Dedicated emergency exit corridors are to be developed at all three nodes — Nilakkal, Pamba, and Sannidhanam — none of which presently has one. The AI-enabled rapid evacuation system (as part of the ICCC) should be capable of facilitating swift pilgrim movement, generating automated distress alerts, and identifying hazards in real time.

(h) Tractor and Ambulance Dedicated Path

Currently, tractors and ambulances ply along the same roads and paths used by pilgrims, which is a serious risk. The Board shall consider the setting up of an alternate tractor route to Sannidhanam for electricity and water line maintenance. This will also prevent electrical accidents and enable easy pipe/cable repairs.

V. Infrastructure at Nilakkal (Base Camp)**(a) Toilets:**

Additional toilet blocks are required at newly developed parking grounds 8A, 18A, and 20A. Existing container toilet units and toilet blocks must be maintained.

(b) Drinking Water:

Additional water kiosks shall be installed at newly developed parking grounds 8A, 4A, 18A, and 20A.

(c) Food & Snacks:

The seating capacity of the Annadhanam Mandapam shall be increased from 50 to at least 150 persons at a time. Snack and drinking water distribution sheds must be arranged at all 21 parking grounds.

(d) Resting Places (Viri Sheds):

Two additional Viri Sheds must be constructed near the Mahadeva Temple at Nilakkal Base Camp. Seven KIIFB-funded Viri buildings (each with 120-person capacity) are presently under construction. Total Viri capacity at Nilakkal must be enhanced to accommodate at least 2,500 pilgrims, with basic amenities including sanitation, drinking water, and medical aid.

(e) Holding Facilities:

Additional German sheds should be erected near the KSRTC stand to accommodate approximately 5,000 pilgrims during peak inflow. Temporary resting facilities must also be arranged near the Nilakkal temple for pilgrims awaiting spot booking.

(f) Waste Management

An additional incinerator with a capacity of 300 kg/hr capable of round-the-clock operation shall be set up as the present capacity is insufficient. The existing capacity is inadequate to handle waste generated at Nilakkal.

(g) Sewage Treatment

The current 200 KLD modular STP at Nilakkal is significantly inadequate. A minimum 1 MLD STP (upgradable) is required to meet current sewage load.

(h) Information & Reception

A permanent information centre must be established near the KSRTC stand at Nilakkal, with multilingual personnel. Currently only a temporary centre functions during the season.

(i) Digital Signboards

Digital/LED signboards must be installed at all parking lots and important locations to guide pilgrims and ensure systematic parking.

(j) Police Facilities at Nilakkal

Accommodation for approximately 1,250 police personnel is required at Nilakkal. The Police Control Room at Nilakkal needs substantial infrastructure and technology upgradation. The Board shall consider sprucing up the infrastructure for the police as their presence and intervention is indispensable for the smooth conduct of the pilgrimage.

VI. Infrastructure at Pamba

(a) Toilets:

An additional toilet block with a minimum 20-toilet capacity will have to be constructed behind the Annadhanam Mandapam (for use as a ladies' block, converting the existing ladies' block to a common block). The shortage of toilets currently compels devotees to defecate in surrounding areas.

(b) Drinking Water

Additional water kiosks must be installed at Hill Top and near the KSRTC pick-up point. Kiosks must also be provided along the sides of the Nadapanthal. Drinking water and light refreshments must be available at all holding areas.

(c) Resting/Viri Facilities

A permanent semi-permanent structure in Kerala architectural style must replace the existing temporary German hangar pandal (70×25 m) that is erected annually at Manalppuram. Existing buildings are structurally weak and require urgent maintenance and renovation in accordance with Kerala architectural principles. A

multi-facilitation centre accommodating (Viri) 10,000 pilgrims must be established at Pamba.

(d) Holding Sheds

Existing sheds from Pamba to Sabaripet along the trekking route require urgent maintenance. Continuous shelters along the trek route should be provided to protect pilgrims from sun and rain, designed so as not to obstruct wildlife crossing.

(e) Waste Management

The existing 3.5 MLD chemical treatment plant at Pamba should be converted into a Biological STP for better long-term performance and reduced recurring costs. The incinerator arrangement (2×200 kg/hr) is stated to be sufficient but must be maintained.

(f) Signboards & LED Boards

LED signboards must be installed at the U-turn, KSRTC pick-up point, near the Nadapanthal, near the Ganapathy Temple, and along the route to Sannidhanam. Additional signboards are required along the Chalakkayam–Pamba Road.

(g) Landscaping & Aesthetics

Development of gardens, construction of arches at Kochu Palam and Thriveni, and portrayal of pictures of deities on the sides of retaining walls and

compound walls will enhance the aesthetic appearance. Buildings must be constructed and renovated with attention to architectural elements.

(h) Police Facilities at Pamba

Mess capacity at Pamba must be enhanced from the present 150 to at least 400 personnel at a time. Accommodation for approximately 1,000 police personnel is required at Pamba.

VII. Infrastructure at Sannidhanam:

(a) Toilets

No permanent toilet blocks exist along the Saramkuthy-to-Valiyanadapandal stretch. Along Chandranandan Road, only temporary bio-toilets are available due to space constraints. Permanent solutions must be found. Adequate bio-toilet facilities must be installed at regular intervals along queue lines.

(b) Drinking Water

Chukkuvellam tap points presently extend only up to the front portion of Valiyanadapandal. They must be extended to the remaining half of Valiyanadapandal and up to the Thirumuttam area. Modern drinking water kiosks must be installed at all queue complexes and at regular intervals between Saramkuthi and U-turn areas.

(c) Q Complex Capacity

Sufficient Q complexes are required from Marakkoottam to Sannidhanam with a minimum aggregate capacity of 24,000 pilgrims (based on darshan throughput of approximately 4,000 persons/hour).

(d) Resting Places

Additional resting places must be set up from Appachimedu to Saramkuthi stretch. Large number of stone benches/seats must be provided on both sides of the trek route (existing ones are broken and unclean). Water kiosks must be located near these benches.

(e) Roofing — Saramkuthi to U-Turn

The existing transparent net roofing between Saramkuthi and U-turn must be replaced with heat-resistant and weather-protective roofing systems.

(f) Resting at Vavaru & Vadakkenada

Semi-permanent resting areas with roofing must be arranged at Vavaru Nada and Vadakkenada for pilgrims.

(g) LED Display at Sannidhanam

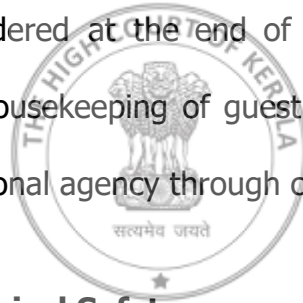
Large LED display boards must be installed at Marakkoottam and other key points to provide real-time visuals of movement at the 18 Holy Steps. Display systems must also be installed at entry points of queue complexes.

(h) STP Optimisation

The utility of the 5 MLD biological STP at Sannidhanam must be optimised urgently by checking and fixing the pipe network issues. Incinerator capacity (currently 700 kg/hr total) must be properly serviced and maintained.

(i) Accommodation — Room Takeover

Rooms at Sabarimala in unauthorised custody of individuals, traders, officials, organisations, employees, and contractors must be taken over by TDB. A Task Force has been constituted for this. Rooms will be allotted with conditions that they must be surrendered at the end of Makaravilakku season. All room allocation will be online. Housekeeping of guest houses and rented rooms must be outsourced to a professional agency through competitive tenders.



VIII. Safety, Fire & Electrical Safety

(a) Structural Safety Audit

A comprehensive structural safety audit of all walkways, barricades, railings, stairways, and holding areas must be conducted. The present barricades on walkways are mostly weak, twisted, and ineffective and must all be identified and rectified.

(b) Fire Safety Audit

No proper fire audit has been done on permanent buildings, the Aravana Plant, or temporary structures of commercial establishments at Nilakkal, Pamba, or Sannidhanam. No built-in fire-fighting equipment is available in any of the buildings. A thorough fire audit must be conducted and fire-fighting infrastructure installed before the season.

(c) Electrical Safety

All electrical installations must obtain electrical safety clearance. Electrical safety has not been properly addressed. Service ducts must be provided at Sannidhanam for electricity and water lines to facilitate safe maintenance and avoid electrical accidents.

(d) Security Screening — Equipment

At present, pilgrim screening at DFMDs/HHMDs is slow and impractical during peak inflow. DFMD points at Valiya Nadapanthal are insufficient, baggage scanning is limited, detectors are obsolete, there is a lack of sniffer dogs, and there is a shortage of trained female officers. Vehicle cargo screening (tractors) is ineffective. All security screening equipment must be upgraded.

(e) Disaster Preparedness

Dedicated emergency exit corridors, supplemented by AI-enabled rapid evacuation systems, must be developed at all three nodes. Historical disasters

(1952, 1999, 2011, and the 2018–19 floods) are specifically cited as underscoring the inadequacy of existing disaster response infrastructure.

IX. Sanitation, Cleanliness & Waste Management:

(a) Deep Cleaning

An initial deep cleaning of all major spots — including buried or hidden garbage dumps at Sannidhanam, Pamba, and Nilakkal — must be undertaken before the season. Regular sweeping addresses only surface waste; buried waste at dark spots requires dedicated deep-cleaning exercises.

(b) Standardised Bins

Three-coloured bins of standard dimensions and approved design must be finalised and exclusively used throughout Sabarimala. No non-standard bins to be permitted.



(c) Incinerator Servicing

All incinerators must be properly serviced and maintained early. Capacity enhancement at Nilakkal (additional 300 kg/hr) is required for round-the-clock operation.

(d) Waste Segregation Protocol

A proper segregation protocol must be developed. Shops and hotels must be contractually obligated to comply with stringent garbage collection protocols, with provision for stringent punishment for violations.

(e) New Sanitation Protocol

TDB will draw up a detailed cleaning and sanitation protocol with the help of the Suchitwa Mission and the Expert Committee. This protocol will address mechanisation, optimisation of incinerators and STPs, and green protocol compliance.

(f) Vishudhi Sena Review

The role and utility of the Vishudhi Sena (cleaning volunteer service) must be reviewed. The present arrangement of hiring cleaning labourers through the District Administration must be evaluated on merit, and a TDB-owned checking mechanism must be created to ensure continuous compliance.

(g) Green Protocol

Use of plastic, shampoo sachets, and synthetic kumkum would remain banned. Drug Inspectors will continue monitoring. Pilgrims undertaking the pilgrimage must be educated against dumping clothes or any waste into the River Pamba. Coordinators and staff must be stationed to prevent such practices.

(h) Incineration at Nilakkal and Pamba

The feasibility of establishing incinerators at Nilakkal and Pamba (where they do not currently exist) must be examined.

X. Medical & Health Services:

(a) Existing vs Required

Medical facilities are considered adequate at Pamba (Government Hospital Allopathy, Ayurveda, Homeo; two cardiology centres; six EMCs on traditional route; two EMCs on Swami Ayyappan Road) and at Sannidhanam (multiple Government hospitals and EMCs). However, Nilakkal lacks required medical support and this must be addressed.

(b) Review of Medical Booths

Existing booths for Emergency Medical Care, Oxygen Parlours, and Physiotherapy Centres are stated to be of no proven utility with inadequately trained staff. These facilities must be critically reviewed, with unnecessary ones discontinued. Only evidence-based, professionally staffed facilities must continue.

(c) Trek Route Medical Coverage

Cardiac arrests and suffocation incidents are common while trekking. Dedicated safe waiting/resting areas with medical aid at regular intervals along the trek route are required. Absence of these is one of the reasons devotees rush forward without adequate rest.

XI. Services to Pilgrims - Amenities & Welfare:**(a) Drinking Water & Refreshment (Queue Areas)**

Water booths must be redesigned — the surroundings of existing booths are wet and unhygienic. Mechanised self-service drinking water kiosks are to be explored as an alternative. Reaching water to those in queues is currently almost impossible; wider service areas with greater accessibility are needed.

(b) Toilet Cleanliness

A paradigm shift is needed in the design, upkeep, and contracting of both regular and bio-toilets. The decision on contracting out toilets and charging pilgrims must be taken. Contractor indifference to high cleanliness standards must be addressed through revised contractual obligations.

(c) Annadhanam (Free Meals)

As long as an Annadhanam Fund exists, it must be used to feed as many pilgrims as possible. Clear decisions and guidelines on Annadhanam must be taken early enough to avoid last-minute confusion.

(d) Dolly Services

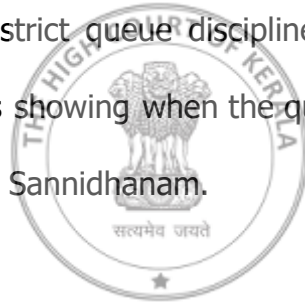
A prepaid counter system for dolly services must be established. Periodic inspection and maintenance of dolly equipment is required, along with a proper database to prevent exploitation of aged, sick, and disabled devotees.

(e) Trek Route Facilities

A large number of stone benches/seats must be provided on both sides of the trek route (existing ones are broken). Continuous shelters must be built along the trek route from Pamba to Sabaripet to protect pilgrims from sun and rain, designed to allow wildlife to cross. Trekking pilgrims from Erumeli must register before undertaking the route.

(f) Queue Regulation

Queue regulation must prevent bypassing by devotees. Necessary sign boards and indicators for strict queue discipline must be provided. All holding places must have indicators showing when the queue will next move and updates on conditions at Pamba and Sannidhanam.



(g) Multilingual Facilities

All important boards and announcements must be in Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and English, and occasionally in Hindi. Multi-language help desks must be created. The permanent information centre at Nilakkal must have multilingual personnel.

(h) Free Mobile Charging Points

Standardised free mobile charging centres must be provided at all key points. Currently pilgrims pay for charging at hotels and shops.

(i) Announcements

The current system of non-stop announcements at Sannidhanam and Pamba must be overhauled. Announcements should be limited to once every 30–60 minutes. South Indian language music should be played in between. Announcement duties must be entrusted to trained, language-proficient persons.

(j) Cultural Programmes

A calendar of suitable cultural programmes — whether by devotee artists or on a payment basis — must be finalised by a committee for Sannidhanam and Nilakkal.

XII. Environmental Compliance:

(a) Ecological Constraints

All planning must strictly conform to the ecological sensitivities, statutory restrictions, and conservation norms of the Periyar Tiger Reserve, a UNESCO-recognised biodiversity hotspot.

(b) Wildlife-Friendly Structures

Continuous shelters on the trek route must be designed to allow wildlife to cross unhindered.

(c) Pamba River Protection

Dumping of clothes and waste into the Pamba River must be actively prevented. Coordinators must be stationed to enforce this. Post-season cleaning



and restoration of the riverbank must be ensured. No shampoo sachets in plastic packaging are permitted at or around Erumeli.

(d) Synthetic Kumkum Ban

The ban on chemically manufactured synthetic kumkum remains in force. Drug Inspectors must conduct continuous monitoring and initiate legal action against violations. Natural alternatives must be actively promoted.

(e) GIS-Based Amenity Audit

All toilets, drinking water points, shelters, and medical kiosks must be geo-tagged in a GIS-based audit to identify blind zones and assess overall adequacy.



XIII. Appearance, Ambience & Communications:

(a) Standard Design for Shops

Hotels, shops, and kiosks must follow a predetermined design, colour scheme, and lettering style.

(b) No Unauthorised Banners

No unauthorised banner or board may be permitted anywhere within the pilgrimage zone.

(c) Devaswom Building Colour Scheme

All Devaswom buildings must follow an approved colour scheme. All information boards must follow a standardised colour and lettering style approved by a designated committee.

(d) Professional Lighting

Shabby and cheap lighting must be replaced. The Sreekovil must be properly flood-lit with professional-quality illumination.

(e) Entry Points Aesthetic

Improved aesthetics, welcoming messages, and a sense of orderliness must be created at the entry points at Nilakkal and Pamba.

(f) Outreach Programme

TDB will undertake outreach programmes in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka (states that generate the bulk of devotees). Multilingual publications and help desks will be created. These State Governments and devotee organisations are to be engaged as stakeholders throughout the year in adopting green protocol practices.

(g) Email & Communication Response

A special team under the EO and PRO must ensure all emails are replied within one day. Letters must also be responded to promptly.

XIV. Personnel Training & Staffing:**(a) Training Programme**

All TDB employees and officers assigned to Sabarimala duty must undergo a mandatory training programme covering required skills and proper attitudes toward devotees. Training must begin from August and be completed by October.

(b) Daily Wage Staff Reduction

The number of daily wage staff must be drastically reduced, with professionalisation of the permanent workforce.

(c) Police Manning

Police personnel at the Pathinettampadi (18 Holy Steps) undergo extreme physical stress, with duty rotations as short as 15 minutes during peak inflow. Short-duration rotation systems must continue and be supported by adequate accommodation and mess facilities at both Nilakkal and Pamba (as detailed under infrastructure sections).

XV. Timeline for completion:

All preparatory measures — contractual grants, infrastructure augmentation, Edathavalam management, route temple facilities, transport planning, and inter-departmental safety audits — must be completed at least two

months before the commencement of the Mandala–Makaravilakku Season 2026–27. Key internal TDB deadlines include:

- KITFRA digitisation programming: Last week of April 2026
- Digitised systems for trial: First week of October 2026
- Tender documents reviewed and revised: Within one month
- Tendering for civil works completed: By 30 April 2026 (leaving 6 months for completion)
- All Sabarimala preparations complete: By 31 October 2026
- Employee and officer training: August to October 2026
- New website ready: Before November 2026 (onset of Festival)
- New Festival Office at Pamba: Functional from 15 April 2026

The Board shall appoint a team of senior officers to ensure the prompt implementation of the directions above.

Post on 08.04.2026 for submission of the list of panel members by the State Government and the Travancore Devaswom Board, as directed in paragraph 16 I(a) above, for the purpose of constituting the Sabarimala Infrastructure & Crowd Management Expert Committee.

Sd/-
**RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V,
JUDGE**

Sd/-
**K.V. JAYAKUMAR,
JUDGE**

