

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 19th day of January 2026 / 29th Pousha, 1947

WP(C) NO. 40608 OF 2025(A)

PETITIONER:

1. SUO MOTU AS PER THE ORDER DATED 21.10.2025 IN SSCR 23/2025 REGARDING THE HEIST AND PLUNDERING OF GOLD FROM THE GOLD-CLADDED DWARAPALAKAS PLACED ON EITHER SIDE OF THE SREEKOVIL, SABARIMALA, PIN - 682031

RESPONDENTS:

1. THE STATE OF KERALA, REPRESENTED BY THE PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT, REVENUE (DEVASWOM) DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM , PIN - 695001
2. THE TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD, REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY, NANTHANCOD, KAWDIAR POST, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695003
3. THE CHIEF VIGILANCE AND SECURITY OFFICER (SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE), TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM HEAD HEADQUARTERS, NANTHANCOD, KAWDIAR POST, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695003
4. THE STATE POLICE CHIEF, POLICE HEAD HEADQUARTERS, VAZHUTHACAUD, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695010
5. THE SENIOR DEPUTY DIRECTOR, KERALA STATE AUDIT DEPARTMENT, TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695003.

BY GOVERNMENT PLEADER FOR R1 & R4

S.SREEKUMAR (SR.) along with SHRI.G.BIJU,STANDING COUNSEL FOR R2, R3 & R5

This petition again coming on for orders upon perusing the petition and the affidavit filed in support of WP(C) and this court's order dated 05/01/2026, the court passed the following:

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

W.P.(C) No. 40608 OF 2025

Dated this the 19th day of January, 2026

ORDER

Raja Vijayaraghavan V, J.

This order shall be read in continuation of the previous orders passed by this Court in the above proceedings.

2. When the matter was taken up for consideration, Sri. H. Venkatesh, ADGP (Law and Order & Crimes), who is heading the Special Investigation Team constituted pursuant to the express directions of this Court, Sri. S. Sasidharan, IPS, the Investigating Officer, and the Chief Vigilance and Security Officer (Superintendent of Police) appeared before us in person.

3. The SIT has placed before this Court a comprehensive progress report relating to Crime No.3700/CB/CU-IV/TVPM/D/2025 and Crime No. 3701/CB/CU-IV/TVPM/D/2025 and explained the present stage of investigation, the steps already undertaken and the course of action proposed in the immediate future.

4. From the report, it is evident that in Crime No. 3700 of 2025, 11 persons have already been arrested out of a total of 16 accused arrayed in the case. It has been further submitted that the possible involvement of three

additional persons is under active scrutiny based on a careful assessment of witness statements, documentary materials and other corroborative evidence collected thus far. In Crime No.3701 of 2025, out of a total of 13 accused, 11 persons have been arrested, and the role of two more suspects is presently being examined.

5. It has been brought to our notice that, in strict compliance with the directions issued by this Court, the Special Investigation Team collected samples from various gold plates on 17.11.2025 and 18.11.2025 and the same was forwarded for analysis to the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC). The scientific examination report prepared by the VSSC was submitted before the jurisdictional court on 14.01.2026 and a certified copy thereof was made available to the Special Investigation Team on 16.01.2026.

6. We have carefully perused the analysis report submitted by the investigating agency. The central focus of the investigation at this stage is to ascertain the precise quantum of gold originally cladded in the year 1998, the quantity of gold used for subsequent plating during the year 2019, and whether the original gold-cladded plates were removed and substituted with freshly plated components. Scientific tests were also conducted to verify whether copper plates were swapped or tampered with. It has been submitted that the report is highly technical in nature and that detailed statements will have to be recorded from the Scientists and technical experts of the Vikram Sarabhai

Space Centre and other expert agencies in order to scientifically decode, interpret and correlate the findings with the material evidence collected during investigation.

7. On examining the summary of the chemical analysis, we find that the apprehensions earlier expressed by this Court stand prima facie reinforced. The absence of nickel and acrylic polymer layers in the original gold-clad plates, the presence of nickel, the absence of mercury and the presence of acrylic polymer layers in the subsequently plated copper plates, together with the comparative thickness of the gold and nickel layers, clearly indicate a systematic and methodical process by which the alleged offence appears to have been executed. These analysis reports not only disclose the manner and modus operandi of the alleged tampering and substitution, but also provide critical evidentiary pointers for correlating past transactions with subsequent activities. The analysis report, therefore, assumes central importance in the investigation as it sheds light on multiple technical and material aspects and furnishes a scientific basis for evaluating the transactions carried out during the years 2024 and 2025, identifying the chain of decision-making, fixing individual responsibility and criminal liability, and examining the existence of any organised or concerted action amounting to criminal conspiracy. However, having regard to the sensitive nature of the investigation and the possibility of

further arrests and recoveries, this Court would refrain from disclosing additional technical particulars at this stage.

8. We direct the Special Investigation Team to expeditiously record detailed statements of the scientific experts, analysts and technical personnel of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre and to comprehensively decode and correlate the analytical findings with the physical and documentary evidence already seized. The analysis report received from the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre has shed considerable light on various technical and material aspects of the alleged offence and has provided crucial scientific indicators which would guide the course of investigation relating to the transactions carried out during the years 2024 and 2025. The findings contained in the report would also enable the investigating agency to evaluate the role played by individual accused, fix responsibility and criminal liability on the persons involved, and examine the possible existence of a larger conspiracy underlying the transactions.

9. It is further reported that, as on date, statements of approximately 202 witnesses have been recorded. Recording of statements of certain key witnesses under Section 183 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, is also in progress. The bank accounts of certain accused persons have been frozen, and the landed assets of some of the principal accused have been identified for the purpose of tracing the proceeds of crime.

10. During the course of investigation, it has also emerged that in the year 2017, a new flag post (Kodimaram) was installed at the Sabarimala Sreekovil by replacing the existing structure, ostensibly on the ground that the old Kodimaram had deteriorated due to wear and tear and termite infestation. An Advocate Commissioner had been appointed by this Court to supervise the erection process. Subsequent to the replacement, the 'Vajivahanam' affixed to the old Kodimaram was handed over to Mr. Kandararu Rajeevaru, the then Thantri, by the President and a member of the Travancore Devaswom Board. It has been reported that during the search conducted at the residence of the said Thantri, the 'Vajivahanam' was recovered and seized under a duly prepared search list with the assistance of a certified goldsmith. Prima facie inspection indicates that the said article was manufactured using 'Panchaloha' with a substantial presence of gold on the outer surface and has an approximate weight of 10.68 kilograms. The seized article has been produced before the jurisdictional court on 13.01.2026.

11. In view of these developments, a detailed enquiry into the Ashtadikpalaka idols at Sabarimala has become inevitable and additional witnesses are required to be examined. The Special Investigation Team has further informed this Court that the circumstances surrounding the dismantling of the earlier Kodimaram and the erection of the new one are being subjected to close scrutiny and that the connected files, administrative records and

related documents are being systematically seized and examined in order to trace the decision-making chain, fix accountability and determine potential criminal liability.

12. The materials placed before this Court disclose suspicious and disturbing circumstances surrounding the transactions under scrutiny, warranting a deeper, more comprehensive and exhaustive investigation in the light of the scientific findings and other consequential revelations that have emerged. What initially appeared to be routine administrative actions undertaken in purported good faith and in the ostensible interest of the deity has, upon closer scrutiny, opened a Pandora's box and revealed prima facie indicators of organised pilferage and misappropriation of sacred temple valuables, allegedly facilitated with the active connivance and encouragement of individuals who were entrusted with the solemn duty of safeguarding the assets and valuables of the deity. Though, on the surface, owing to the ingenious modus operandi adopted and the laxity in administrative oversight, the procedures appeared to have been carried out in conformity with established norms, a more careful and critical examination has brought to light serious institutional lapses, gross mismanagement and possible complicity, which may have enabled the systematic and sustained siphoning of temple assets.

13. We note that the investigation was initially confined to issues relating to the Dwarapalaka idols. However, as the enquiry progressed and scientific, documentary and material evidence were systematically collected and analysed, the scope of investigation expanded substantially, necessitating a detailed examination of multiple aspects of temple administration and related transactions spanning more than two decades. What commenced as a limited probe has, in the course of investigation, uncovered multiple layers of irregularities and revealed a chain of transactions and administrative decisions which, prima facie, indicate that the matter is not confined to isolated or sporadic acts, but points towards a wider and more entrenched pattern of misconduct. The investigation has, in effect, opened a hornet's nest, bringing to light serious irregularities which had hitherto remained concealed and exposing several disturbing aspects that call for comprehensive and methodical scrutiny. Having regard to the gravity of the allegations, the scale and complexity of the suspected offence, and the public trust reposed in temple administration and custodianship of sacred assets, we reiterate our direction to the Investigating Officer and the Special Investigation Team to proceed with utmost diligence, professionalism and investigative rigour, and to conduct a thorough, impartial and comprehensive investigation, leaving no stone unturned in unearthing all facets of the alleged criminal acts.

14. With respect to the transactions pertaining to the years 2024 and 2025, it has been submitted that after decoding the scientific analysis report and after completing substantial progress in relation to the transactions of the years 1998 and 2019, the Special Investigation Team shall proceed to investigate the later transactions in a phased and structured manner so as to ensure continuity and evidentiary coherence.

15. Insofar as the remaining aspects of the investigation are concerned, detailed reference has already been made in earlier orders of this Court. It has also been submitted that the Special Investigation Team proposes to visit Sabarimala on 20.01.2026 to measure the surface area of two doors presently kept in the storeroom for the purpose of calculating the quantum of gold cladded on the door frames and Prabhamandalam plates. As the temple remains closed after the pilgrimage season, permission is hereby granted to the Special Investigation Team to collect samples from the gold-cladded plates of the doors and to carry out necessary measurements and assessments for quantifying the gold content. The Special Investigation Team is also permitted to record detailed statements of the Scientific Officers of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre who conducted the analysis, officers of the Forensic Science Laboratory, Thiruvananthapuram who participated in the seizure proceedings, and the technical team from Kochi which carried out surface measurements, so as to scientifically determine the extent of gold allegedly misappropriated.

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16. We further take note that, pursuant to the request of the Head of the Special Investigation Team, the State Police Chief has issued orders deputing Sri. Sreekanth, Deputy Superintendent of Police, NRI Cell, Police Headquarters, Thiruvananthapuram, and Sri. Sethunath, Inspector of Police, Chombala Police Station, Kozhikode Rural, to assist the Special Investigation Team. The State Police Chief shall ensure that all personnel and logistical support sought by the Head of the Special Investigation Team are promptly provided without administrative delay.

17. Having carefully examined the progress report and the submissions made, we are satisfied with the investigation carried out thus far. The matter shall be posted on 09.02.2026, on which date a further comprehensive status report detailing subsequent developments shall be placed before this Court.

Post on 09.02.2026.

sd/-
RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V,
JUDGE

sd/-
K.V. JAYAKUMAR,
JUDGE

@S/19/01/26