IN THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA AT ERNAKULAM

PRESENT

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V

&

THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE K. V. JAYAKUMAR

Wednesday, the 18th day of February 2026 / 29th Magha, 1947

SSCR NO. 3 OF 2026

IN THE MATTER OF TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD-SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER REPORT-SM.NO.3/2026- REPORT SUBMITTED BY THE SPECIAL COMMISSIONER, SABARIMALA REGARDING MISAPPROPRIATION OF MONEY IN GHEE SALE COUNTER - SUO MOTU PROCEEDINGS INITIATED-REG:

PETITIONER:

SUO MOTU

RESPONDENTS:

1. STATE OF KERALA
   REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT,
   REVENUE (DEVAWOM) DEPARTMENT, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695001
2. THE CHIEF POLICE CO-ORDINATOR,
   (ADDITIONAL DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE (POLICE HEADQUARTERS),
   SANNIDHANAM, SABARIMALA, PATHANAMTHITTA - 689713
3. THE TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD
   REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY, NANTHANCODE, KAWDIAR POST,
   THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695 003
4. DEVASWOM COMMISSIONER
   TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD, NANTHANCODE, KAWDIAR POST,
   THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN-695 003
5. EXECUTIVE OFFICER
   SABARIMALA, SABARIMALA P.O., PATHANAMTHITTA-689 662

6. THE CHIEF VIGILANCE AND SECURITY OFFICER (SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE)
TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM HEAD QUARTERS, NANTHANCODE, KAWDIAR POST,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695003
*ADDL.R7 IMPLEADED

7. THE DIRECTOR
VIGILANCE & ANTI-CORRUPTION BUREAU, OPPOSITE KSRTC DEPOT,
VIKAS BHAVAN, PMG, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM – 33
*IS SUO MOTU IMPLEADED AS ADDL.R7 AS PER ORDER DATED 13.01.2026
IN SSCR 3/2026

BY SRI.S.RAJMOHAN, SENIOR GOVERNMENT PLEADER
BY STANDING COUNSEL FOR TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD
BY SMT.SAYUJYA RADHAKRISHNAN, AMICUS CURIAE FOR SABARIMALA
SPECIAL COMMISSIONER
BY SRI.A.RAJESH, SPECIAL PUBLIC PROSECUTOR, VIGILANCE &
SMT.REKHA S., SENIOR PUBLIC PROSECUTOR (BY ORDER) FOR R7

THIS SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER REPORT HAVING COME UP FOR ORDERS AGAIN ON 18/02/2026, UPON PERUSING THE REPORT AND THIS COURT'S ORDER DATED 13/01/2026, THE COURT ON THE SAME DAY PASSED THE FOLLOWING:

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

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SSCR No. 3 of 2026

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Dated this the 18th day of February, 2026

ORDER

Raja Vijayaraghavan V, J.

This report has been submitted by the Special Commissioner, Sabarimala, bringing to notice the alleged misappropriation of funds at the Ghee Sale Counter at Sannidhanam.

2. By order dated 13.01.2026, this Court had directed the Director, Vigilance & Anti-Corruption Bureau, to conduct a comprehensive investigation by competent officers to ascertain the full extent of the financial irregularities allegedly committed by employees of the Travancore Devaswom Board in connection with the sale of "Adiya Sishtam Neyy" (Adiya Sishtam Ghee) at Sannidhanam.

3. In compliance with the aforesaid directions, the Director, Vigilance & Anti-Corruption Bureau, has constituted a Special Investigation Team.

4. The officers who have appeared before us in person have filed a report detailing the investigation that has been carried out. From the report, it appears that Vigilance Case No. VC 02/2026/PTA has been registered under Section 13(2) read with Section 13(1)(a) of the Prevention of Corruption Act,

1988 (as amended in 2018), as well as under Sections 316(5), 314, 61(2), 3(5), and 344 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023. As many as 33 persons, which include Temple Special Officers and approximately 30 counter staff, have been arrayed as accused in the said crime.

5. The report details the progress achieved thus far. It records that call data records and bank account statements of the accused persons have been collected and are presently under detailed scrutiny. It is further stated that statements of some more witnesses acquainted with the relevant facts and circumstances are to be recorded. The report also indicates that some official records are yet to be seized and that specimen signatures and handwriting samples of certain witnesses and accused are to be obtained for the purpose of forensic examination. They have carried out a very comprehensive investigation as regards the manner in which the Adiya Sishtam Ghee is obtained, stored, packed and sold.

6. The Investigation Team has, in this backdrop, sought an extension of three months' time to complete the investigation and to determine the precise extent of the alleged misappropriation and conspiracy.

7. Having perused the report and taken note of the investigative steps already undertaken, we permit the Special Investigation Team to proceed with the investigation with due diligence. The team is, however, directed to

endeavour and conclude the investigation within a period of 45 days from today.

8. Having gone through the detailed investigation report, we find the existence of several anomalies which are symptomatic of deep-rooted systemic deficiencies. These deficiencies, in our considered view, require to be addressed by the Board on an emergent footing. It is indeed shocking to note the callous and casual manner in which records are maintained, and the income generated from the sale of sacred offerings is accounted for. Even a person running a modest petty shop would be expected to maintain far better accounting discipline to ensure that income and stock are properly reconciled. The situation revealed before us is, therefore, wholly unacceptable. We shall now detail the reasons which have compelled us to make these observations.

9. The Adiya Sishtam Ghee, packed in 100 ml packets, is prepared using ghee donated by devotees. The donated ghee is stored in tanks under the custody and control of the Main Store Superintendent. Based on assessed requirements, the Main Store Superintendent issues the requisite quantity to the Temple Special Officer, who is entrusted with the responsibility of selling prasadam items including ghee, vibhoothi, kumkum, and other offerings.

10. The system presently in place indicates that the ghee is pumped from storage tanks to the packing room through pipelines using an electric motor. In the packing unit, the contractor, along with his employees, fills the

ghee into 100 ml pouches using a mechanised process. Inspection reveals that a steel tank with a capacity of approximately 700 litres has been installed in the packing room for temporary storage of ghee prior to packing.

11. The contractor is paid ₹0.20 (twenty paise) per packet for packing the ghee supplied by the Devaswom Board. After packing, the ghee packets are handed over to the Temple Special Officer. Records are stated to be maintained, and a mahazar is prepared acknowledging receipt, with the contractor cited as a witness. However, it has come to light that there is no physical verification or stock movement audit conducted at the time of such handover. The packets are thereafter issued to various sale counters without any independent verification.

12. The investigation reveals that four counters are designated for prasadam sales, namely:

a) Maramathu Vibhoothi (Maramathu-I)

b) Maramathu-II (Adiya Sishtam Neyy Counter)

c) Sopanam Counter.

d) Padinjarenada Counter.

13. At the Maramathu-II and Padinjarenada counters, only Adiya Sishtam Ghee is sold. Temporary labourers and daily wage workers are

engaged to transport the packets directly from the packing unit to the respective counters.

14. Shockingly, no formal proceedings or authenticated records exist detailing staff deployment at each counter. Instead, a list is merely prepared and displayed at the office of the Temple Special Officer, indicating postings. The investigation further reveals that employees with as little as one week of service in the Board have been deputed to handle these sensitive assignments involving substantial cash and stock.

15. The manner in which the packeted ghee is issued for sale makes equally disturbing reading. The Temple Special Officer issues packets to counters after recording quantities in a notebook, colloquially referred to as a "Kutti Book." Separate notebooks are maintained for each counter and kept in the Temple Office. These notebooks record the number of packets issued along with the signatures of receiving counter staff.

16. The Investigating Officers have produced before this Court one such school-series notebook of about 200 pages relating to the Maramathu-II Counter. We have perused the notebook and are constrained to record our strong disapproval regarding the careless and casual manner in which records have been maintained. Entries span the period from 17.11.2025 to 30.12.2025, yet only about 20 pages have been utilised. The notebook contains multiple corrections, overwritings, and interlineations. The Board and its officials are

expected to exercise far greater oversight in matters which generate several lakhs of rupees daily by way of income.

17. The investigation further reveals that pending stock is not properly handed over between duty shifts. Under the standard system, two persons are required at each counter — one to collect cash and another to issue packets upon receipt of tickets, with tickets being torn upon issuance. However, the investigation indicates that this system has been diluted. Deployment has been reduced from two persons working eight-hour shifts to a single individual working four hours. The lone staff member now handles both cash collection and packet issuance. This altered arrangement has created opportunities for misuse. Tickets are handled and utilised by unauthorised persons, thereby bypassing established accountability safeguards. It is also noted that the Travancore Devaswom Board has issued no formal guidelines regulating these practices. Tickets allotted to specific staff members are frequently exchanged during duty hours.

18. Further, ghee packets received from the Temple Special Officer are not physically verified by Devaswom staff. They are delivered in plastic sacks by daily wage workers, who obtain acknowledgements in the notebook — itself, maintained in a negligent manner. Counter staff also fail to verify stock at the commencement or conclusion of their duty periods.

19. Audit authorities were also consulted by the Investigating Officers. Their review concludes that the above anomalies, coupled with a quantified short remittance of ₹21,39,190/-, constitute clear financial irregularities and misappropriation in the sale and remittance of Adiya Sishtam Neyy during the Sabarimala Mandala-Makaravilakku season.

20. We are constrained to make these observations in light of the prima facie findings now recorded by the Vigilance & Anti-Corruption Bureau. The materials placed before this Court, coupled with the investigation conducted thus far, disclose several disturbing and disquieting features. These are not isolated irregularities but point to systemic deficiencies in procedure, supervision, stock accounting, and financial control.

21. Having considered the entirety of the facts and circumstances placed before us — particularly the grave and systemic issues plaguing the sale and accounting of Adiya Sishtam Ghee, Vibhoothi, and Kumkum — we are of the considered and firm view that the time has come for the Travancore Devaswom Board to put in place a comprehensive, transparent, and accountable framework, strictly adhering to established accounting and audit practices, so as to ensure that the legitimate income of the Board is duly safeguarded and not allowed to be drained away through leakage, pilferage, or mismanagement.

22. In such circumstances, this Court cannot remain a passive spectator. Bearing in mind that the institutions in question administer offerings made by countless devotees in faith and reverence and in exercise of the "Parens Patriae" jurisdiction of this Court, we deem it necessary to issue appropriate directions to the Travancore Devaswom Board to remedy the structural and procedural deficiencies that have been brought to the fore and to ensure that immediate corrective measures are undertaken to put the administrative and financial house of the Board in proper order.

23. The Travancore Devaswom Board shall ensure that all income generated through the sale of prasadam items — including but not limited to Appam, Adiya Sishtam Ghee, Aravana, Vibhoothi, Kumkum, and other sacred offerings — is brought under a fully accountable and transparent financial and administrative framework.

24. It is imperative that a standardised, end-to-end procedure is put in place governing every stage of the process. This shall include:

a) The quantity of offerings such as Ghee made by devotees on a daily and seasonal basis;

b) The source, procurement, and accounting of raw materials and ingredients used in the preparation of prasadams, appam, etc.;

c) Manufacturing practices, including supervision, quality control, and custody of materials;

d) Mechanisms for storage, transportation, and counter-wise distribution;

e) The procedure for sale to devotees, including ticketing, cash handling, and digital recording where feasible; and

f) Systems for accounting, reconciliation, and remittance of sale proceeds.

25. Such a comprehensive framework is indispensable to ensure that offerings made in faith by countless devotees are treated with the sanctity and fiduciary responsibility they command, and that the revenue legitimately accruing to the Board is duly protected and accounted for. Monthly poojas are presently ongoing, and it is therefore incumbent upon the Board to ensure that the cash and valuables are not pilfered, diverted, nor misused at any stage.

26. The measures outlined above shall be put in place forthwith, and, if necessary, by seeking professional and technical assistance without any delay. We have consciously adverted to the need for professional assistance, as the materials placed before us reveal that the Board presently lacks the institutional capacity, technical expertise, and systemic machinery required to independently put its administrative and accounting processes in proper order. The Board shall

therefore place before this Court a detailed action plan indicating the manner in which the above directions are proposed to be implemented, together with a clear and time-bound schedule for compliance.

Post on 27.02.2026

Sd/-

RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V,
JUDGE

Sd/-
K.V. JAYAKUMAR,
JUDGE

APM