

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 25th day of February 2026 / 6th Phalguna, 1947

SSCR NO. 8 OF 2026

IN THE MATTER OF TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD - SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER
REPORT - SM.NO.08/2026 - MONTHLY REPORT SUBMITTED BY THE SPECIAL COMMISSIONER,
SABARIMALA REGARDING THE VARIOUS ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN DURING KUMBHAM MASA POOJA
FROM FEBRUARY 12, 2026 TO FEBRUARY 17, 2026 (1201 ME KUMABHAM MASAM) AT
SABARIMALA SREE DHARMA SASTHA TEMPLE - SUO MOTU PROCEEDINGS INITIATED - REG:

PETITIONER:

SUO MOTU

RESPONDENTS:



1. STATE OF KERALA

REPRESENTED BY THE SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT,
REVENUE (DEVASWOM) DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695001

2. CHIEF POLICE COORDINATOR

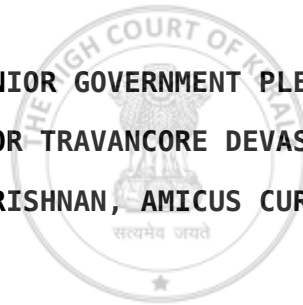
(ADDITIONAL DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE), POLICE HEADQUARTERS,
SABARIMALA, PATHANAMTHITTA, PIN - 689713

3. DEPUTY DIRECTOR

LOCAL FUND AUDIT, TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695 003

4. **TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD**
REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY, NANTHANCODE, KAWDIAR POST,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695 003
5. **DEVASWOM COMMISSIONER**
TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD, DEVASWOM BUILDINGS, NANTHANCODE,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695 003
6. **EXECUTIVE OFFICER**
SABARIMALA, SABARIMALA P.O., PATHANAMTHITTA - 689 662
7. **CHIEF VIGILANCE & SECURITY OFFICER (SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE)**
TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM HEAD QUARTERS, NANTHANCODE, KAWDIAR POST,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695 003

BY SRI.S.RAJMOHAN, SENIOR GOVERNMENT PLEADER
BY STANDING COUNSEL FOR TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD
BY SMT.SAYUKYA RADHAKRISHNAN, AMICUS CURIAE FOR SABARIMALA
SPECIAL COMMISSIONER



THIS SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER REPORT HAVING COME UP FOR
ADMISSION ON 25/02/2026, UPON PERUSING THE PETITION, THE COURT ON THE SAME
DAY PASSED THE FOLLOWING:

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

SSCR No. 8 of 2026

Dated this the 25th day of February, 2026

ORDER

Raja Vijayaraghavan V, J.

The instant report has been submitted by the Sabarimala Special Commissioner, detailing the various activities undertaken during the Kumbha Masa Pooja held from 12.02.2026 to 17.02.2026.

2. In the report, the Special Commissioner has flagged several issues that, in his assessment, require immediate attention.

3. The first issue concerns the inadequate deployment of cleaning staff. It is reported that sanitation at Sannidhanam suffered on account of this shortfall. The learned Standing Counsel appearing for the Travancore Devaswom Board submitted that sanitation workers at Sabarimala–Sannidhanam are allotted by the Revenue Divisional Officer/Additional District Magistrate based on requisitions made by the Devaswom. During the relevant month, the number of personnel requested was comparatively low, which, according to the Board, led to a marginal decline in sanitation standards. It is assured that necessary steps have been taken and that this lapse will not recur in the ensuing month.

4. The next issue relates to the accumulation of coins in the Bhandaram. It is reported that only 13 employees were deployed for counting during the current month, resulting in delay and accumulation. In response, the learned Standing Counsel submitted that the Shivaratri festival was being conducted simultaneously in several temples under the Board and also referred to the Vellayani Kaliyoottu festival, a triennial event requiring substantial manpower. It was explained that regular staff had to be deputed to those locations and that daily wage workers cannot be assigned to Bhandaram duties due to the sensitive nature of the work. It is submitted that the counting process has now been expedited and that no pendency presently remains.

5. The next concern raised pertains to the deployment of police personnel during the Kumbha Masa Poojas. It is noted that only 336 personnel, including the Bomb Squad, were deployed at Sannidhanam, whereas the requirement is stated to be 450. The learned Government Pleader submitted that specific instructions would be obtained from the Coordinator and clarified that deployment is carried out in accordance with the Bandobast Scheme applicable to Sabarimala, Pamba, and Nilakkal.

6. Another issue that has been highlighted regarding the removal of rice sacks. By order dated 17.12.2025 in SSCR No. 45 of 2025, this Court had directed the Devaswom Authorities to act with promptness and ensure that the contractors removed the rice and sacks without delay. However, the contractors

failed to comply, leading to substantial accumulation. The learned Amicus Curiae submitted that such accumulation could affect the structural stability of the building. It is also reported that the rice has been damaged and is no longer saleable. In response, the learned Standing Counsel submitted that the Vigilance Officer had instructed the Special Officer not to remove the sacks pending investigation into allegations that cash and other valuables were concealed within them. The delay, it is stated, occurred for this reason. We are informed that steps have now been initiated to remove the sacks and that the accumulated stock will be cleared at the earliest, without causing further inconvenience. We have perused the photographs appended to the report. They do not present a satisfactory picture, and the concerns raised cannot be lightly brushed aside.

7. A matter of considerable seriousness has been brought to our notice with respect to the conduct and booking of Padi Pooja at the Sabarimala Sree Ayyappa Temple. Padi Pooja is the pooja of the 18 holy steps 'pathinettampadi', held on select days after the floral bathing of the idol called 'pushpabhisheham'. The pooja is conducted in the evenings and is performed by the Thantri, in the presence of the Melsanthi (priest). The hour-long ritual by decorating the Holy Steps with flowers and silk cloths after lighting traditional lamps on each step, concludes by performing 'aarathi' by the Thantri.

8. It is beyond dispute that Padi Pooja is one of the most sacred and spiritually significant rituals performed at the temple, symbolically associated with the sanctity of the holy steps (Pathinettampadi). Five such poojas are conducted

every month, and participation in the ritual carries immense religious value for devotees. It is stated by the Executive Officer that bookings for Padi Pooja have already been made up to the year 2045. The very fact that bookings extend nearly two decades into the future underscores both the demand for the ritual and the need for a transparent and strictly regulated system.

9. The report further discloses that a Vigilance enquiry unearthed disturbing instances where certain individuals had secured bookings by furnishing false or fictitious addresses and were allegedly transferring such bookings to third parties for higher consideration. If true, such conduct is abhorrent and is to be deprecated. The learned Amicus Curiae submitted that, when the Vigilance Officer insisted on proper identity verification, two individuals who had made bookings failed to appear to solemnise the Padi Pooja. This circumstance lends credence to the apprehension that the booking system may have been misused. In this backdrop, a prayer has been made to direct the Executive Officer to publish, at least one year in advance, the names and details of devotees who have booked Padi Poojas, so as to ensure transparency and public scrutiny. A further direction is sought to the Chief Vigilance Officer to ensure that only those genuine devotees who have lawfully secured bookings are permitted to perform the ritual, and that no unauthorised transfer or substitution is allowed.

10. We have given anxious and serious consideration to these submissions. The issue raised is not merely administrative in nature but concerns the sanctity of temple rituals and the credibility of the booking process. The

Executive Officer has already been directed to appear before this Court on 04.03.2026 pursuant to the orders passed in DBP No. 20 of 2026. In that view of the matter, we direct the Chief Vigilance and Security Officer (Superintendent of Police) to forthwith take possession and secure custody of all registers and connected records relating to Padi Pooja bookings, including the manner in which bookings up to the year 2045 have been effected. The said records shall be produced before this Court in a sealed cover to ensure their integrity and to facilitate proper judicial scrutiny.

11. The final issue concerns the alleged violation of the Kuthaka agreement in relation to the supply of Pulpaya. The learned Standing Counsel submitted that, despite certain personal grievances expressed by the contractor, the supply was not disrupted and that alternate arrangements were put in place to ensure continuity.

Post on 04.03.2026.

Sd/-
RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V,
JUDGE

Sd/-
K.V. JAYAKUMAR,
JUDGE

APM