

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 11th day of March 2026 / 20th Phalgun, 1947
SSCR NO. 7 OF 2026

**IN THE MATTER OF TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD - SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER
REPORT - SM.NO.07/2026 - REPORT REGARDING FINANCIAL MALPRACTICES OF CASUAL
LABOURERS AND PERMANENT DUTY STAFFS DURING MANDALA - MAKARAVILAKKU SEASON
2025-26 - SUBMITTING OF - 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 - 695 001
2. **CHIEF POLICE COORDINATOR (ADDITIONAL DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE)**
(POLICE HEADQUARTERS) SABARIMALA, PATHANAMTHITTA, PIN - 689713
3. **TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD**
REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY, NANTHANCOD, KAWDIAR POST,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695 003
4. **DEVASWOM COMMISSIONER**
TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD, DEVASWOM BUILDINGS, NANTHANCOD,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695 003
5. **EXECUTIVE OFFICER**
SABARIMALA, SABARIMALA P.O., PATHANAMTHITTA - 689 662
6. **CHIEF VIGILANCE & SECURITY OFFICER (SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE)**
TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM HEAD QUARTERS, NANTHANCOD, KAWDIAR POST,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695 003

7. DEPUTY DIRECTOR

**LOCAL FUND AUDIT, TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695003**

BY SRI.S.RAJMOHAN, SENIOR GOVERNMENT PLEADER

BY SRI.G.BIJU, STANDING COUNSEL FOR TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD

**BY SMT.SAYUJYA RADHAKRISHNAN, AMICUS CURIAE FOR SABARIMALA
SPECIAL COMMISSIONER**

**THIS SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER REPORT HAVING COME UP FOR
ORDERS AGAIN ON 11/03/2026, UPON PERUSING THE REPORT AND THIS COURT'S
ORDER DATED 11/02/2026, THE COURT ON THE SAME DAY PASSED THE
FOLLOWING:**



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

SSCR No.7 of 2026

Dated this the 11th day of March, 2026

ORDER

Raja Vijayaraghavan V, J.

This matter arises from the report submitted by the Sabarimala Special Commissioner regarding certain alleged financial irregularities involving casual labourers and permanent duty staff during the Mandala–Makaravilakku season 2025–2026. On the basis of confidential information received by the Executive Officer, a discreet enquiry was conducted by the Chief Vigilance and Security Officer (Superintendent of Police). During the course of the enquiry, financial data relating to certain remittances made by daily wage employees was collected from nearby Post Offices and banking institutions operating in and around Sannidhanam.

2. By order dated 11.02.2026, this Court directed the Chief Vigilance and Security Officer (Superintendent of Police) to conduct a comprehensive investigation into all related aspects. The officer was specifically directed to obtain and examine transactional and remittance details from institutions including the State Bank of India, Sannidhanam, Dhanlaxmi Bank, Sannidhanam; the local Post Offices, and other financial establishments functioning in the vicinity.

3. Pursuant to the above directions, a report has been placed before this Court. From the materials contained in the report, the following aspects have

been noted. During the period 17.11.2025 to 31.12.2025, approximately 487 transactions were carried out through the Post Office, involving a total remittance of ₹14,08,880/-. These remittances were made by individuals including daily wage employees engaged by the Travancore Devaswom Board, cleaning and sanitation workers, shop owners operating at Sannidhanam, newspaper agents and certain others. The details of about 16 individuals have been placed before this Court for consideration.

4. The investigation conducted by the Chief Vigilance and Security Officer (Superintendent of Police) indicates that the amounts in question were allegedly obtained by the aforesaid workers during the course of their employment at Sannidhanam. It is reported that while segregating pooja articles and items brought by pilgrims, coins and currency are occasionally found mixed among such materials, and such amounts are sometimes taken away by certain individuals without coming to the notice of the security personnel on duty. It has also been reported that during the opening of the offering boxes, coins and cash that fall aside in the process are sometimes taken away by certain persons present at the location.

5. Further, it has been stated that some employees assist pilgrims in performing Neyyabhishekam and other rituals, for which they receive consideration from devotees. It is also alleged that certain individuals are engaged in the sale of lottery tickets while simultaneously performing their duties as daily wage workers. According to the report, the Travancore Devaswom Board

pays ₹650/- per day to such daily wage employees. However, as appointments were reportedly made without fixing the precise number of personnel required at each duty point, a large number of workers have been deployed, and some among them are allegedly taking advantage of the situation to collect money.

6. With regard to remittances made through the State Bank of India, Sannidhanam Branch, it is reported that during the period 17.11.2025 to 31.12.2025, as many as 1,667 remittances were made across various accounts, involving a total sum of ₹8,08,71,041/-. These remittances were made by individuals running hotels, santhies at Sabarimala, Keezhshanthis and other employees associated with the temple premises.

7. It is also reported that the Melshanthi at Malikapuram remitted an amount of ₹46,51,050/-, whereas the assistant of the Thantri remitted a sum of ₹1,17,030/-. Upon enquiry, it has been stated that these amounts represent Dakshina received by the Thantri and Shanthi in connection with religious services which they have performed.

8. It has further come to light that in the Dhanlaxmi Bank Branch at Sannidhanam, a total sum of ₹11,45,31,757/- was remitted through 942 transactions during the relevant period. These remittances were made by daily wage employees, Shanthis, Melshanthis, Keezhshanthis and various others including persons who had taken kuthaka rights. Details relating to about 18 individuals have been placed before this Court, including certain Shanthis. It is

reported that some of these Shanthis have already been arrayed as accused in the Adiyasishtam Ghee issue.

9. Having regard to the above circumstances, the Chief Vigilance and Security Officer has made certain recommendations. One of the suggestions is that only the required number of personnel should be deployed at each duty point, and unnecessary crowding of employees should be avoided. It is further reported that during the Mandala–Makaravilakku season, in order to prevent pilferage of money during Bhandaram duties, about 40 police officers were deployed. However, such deployment does not presently take place during Masa Pooja periods. It has therefore been recommended that at least five additional police officers be deployed during Masa Pooja as well, so as to maintain effective supervision.

10. The learned Standing Counsel appearing for the Travancore Devaswom Board shall obtain instructions from the Board with regard to the issues highlighted in the report of the Chief Vigilance and Security Officer (Superintendent of Police) and place the same before this Court. It has also been submitted that the Board has formulated a mission plan under which specific duty points are proposed to be identified, and only the required number of personnel will be assigned to each point so as to prevent such irregularities in the future.

11. The learned Amicus Curiae appearing for the Special Commissioner

has drawn the attention of this Court to yet another matter of concern. She submitted that the District Collector, Pathanamthitta, by communication dated 04.03.2026, addressed to the Chief Engineer of the Travancore Devaswom Board, has pointed out that certain amounts remain outstanding to sanitation workers who were deployed through the Sabarimala Sanitation Society under the supervision of the Chairperson of the Society and the District Collector. A copy of the said communication has been produced before this Court.

12. From the said communication, it is seen that the sanitation workers were being paid ₹650/- per day for their services. The said compensation has now been enhanced by Government Order No. G.O.(P) 169/2026 RD dated 21.01.2026 to ₹750/- for the period 2025–2026. The travelling allowance has also been enhanced to ₹1,200/-.

13. However, the report indicates that, pursuant to a request made by the Executive Engineer of the Sabarimala Development Project, sanitation workers were deployed through the Sabarimala Sanitation Society for the period May 2025 to October 2025. For the said deployment, a sum of ₹9,00,000/- remains due from the Travancore Devaswom Board to the Sabarimala Sanitation Society.

14. As the said amount was not disbursed, a decision was reportedly taken not to provide further sanitation workers from September 2025 onwards. Subsequently, on 20.09.2025, another request was made seeking deployment of

sanitation workers with effect from that date, particularly in connection with the Ayyappa Conclave scheduled on 20.09.2025. It is also reported that sanitation workers were deployed in connection with the visit of the Hon'ble President of India.

15. However, the amounts due to the Sanitation Society, namely ₹9,00,000/- up to October 2025 and a further sum of ₹58,60,000/- for the subsequent period, remain unpaid. It is also stated that an additional amount of ₹53,77,629/- due from 20.04.2025 onwards has not yet been disbursed.

16. It is further reported that for the Mandala-Makaravilakku season 2025-2026, only a sum of ₹3 crores has been released by the Travancore Devaswom Board. Approximately 1000 sanitation workers were deployed at the rate of ₹550/- per day for a period of 45 days. However, the wages for 26 days at the rate of ₹550/- per day remain unpaid to the said workers.

17. It is also stated that under the revised Government Order, the daily wages have now been enhanced to ₹700/- and the travelling allowance increased to ₹1,200/-. At this revised rate, the total amount payable to the Sabarimala Sanitation Society is stated to be ₹5,64,00,000/-. It is further indicated that unless the outstanding amounts are released, the Sanitation Society will not be in a position to deploy sanitation workers for the forthcoming Meena Masa Pooja.

18. Having carefully perused the report and the communication issued

by the District Collector, we express our anguish and deep dissatisfaction regarding the prevailing state of affairs. The sanitation workers engaged for these duties perform essential services under extremely demanding conditions and are paid only modest daily wages. If even these modest amounts are not disbursed in a timely manner, it raises grave concerns regarding the ability of such workers to sustain their already meagre livelihood.

19. The learned Standing Counsel for the Travancore Devaswom Board as well as the learned Government Pleader shall obtain instructions and inform this Court regarding the reasons for the non-payment of the amounts due to the sanitation workers. A detailed statement indicating the dates on which sanitation workers were deployed, the amounts already disbursed, and the amounts presently outstanding, as reflected in the accounts maintained by the Travancore Devaswom Board, shall also be placed before this Court.

List the matter on 12.03.2026.

Sd/-

**RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V,
JUDGE**

Sd/-

**K.V. JAYAKUMAR,
JUDGE**

@S/11/03/26