

## **Regarding the development of projects for Sabarimala Temple**

**SHRI KODIKUNNIL SURESH (MAVELIKKARA):** Sir, I am very happy to raise a very important issue. The hon. Finance Minister is sitting in the House.

The Sabarimala temple in Kerala, where Lord Ayyappa is worshipped, is a world-famous pilgrim destination. The Dharmasastha form of the lord is worshipped there. The unique way of worship and rituals mark Sabarimala different from other temples, as a very tough and rigorous 41 days of *vratha* that a pilgrim must undertake to proceed to the Sabarimala temple.

The temple is the spiritual home and abode for crores and crores of Ayyappa devotees and yet, the State and the Central Government are ignoring the temple and its increasing developmental needs and infrastructural requirements. The Sabarimala temple is located in the Pathanamthitta District and is surrounded by 18 hills of the Periyar Tiger Reserve, making it the most administratively complex and spiritually significant destination.

Despite realising the situation, both the Central and the State Governments are ignoring the development and logistical needs of the shrine complex where nothing less than a lakh of devotees visit every day, and annually the figure goes up to 10 to 15 million devotees.

Sir, through you, let me invite their attention to the immediate issue happening now at Sabarimala. Lakhs of devotees or Ayyappa *swamis* are made to wait in long queues for 4-5 hours from Pampa to Sannidhanam. Sometimes, they are made to wait up to 8-10 hours or 10-15 hours. Recently, in the last few days, it took 20-25 hours. So, nothing is being done to scientifically manage the crowd at all. This shocking attitude by the State Government is a sure sign of carelessness and total lack of planning and demand forecasting to control the inflow and exit of devotees.

The fundamental reason for this current situation is the complete lack of development projects for Sabarimala. All the projects rest in paper alone. ?  
(Interruptions) Sir, I am concluding. This is a very important issue.

In this regard, I would also point out that there is a lack of attention to the Sabarimala masterplan wherein projects like Edathavalams announced by the

Government are stuck as only 25-30 per cent of the work has progressed even after years.

The masterplan projects, including construction of Pampa rescue bridge which is very important, development of core area, vehicle parking area at Nilackal and laying of a drinking water pipeline from Kunnar dam, are nowhere completed, let alone be conceptualized.

Let me also state that the physical progress of various projects in the masterplan is not at all being rapidly executed.

It is this total lack of commitment and dedication towards completing the masterplan and pilgrim management system that defeats the idea of a relaxed pilgrimage for devotees who come from all States, including Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and other parts of India, and also from other parts of the world.

In the present scenario, I would also invite their attention, through you, Sir, to the fact that an 11-year old girl died as she was unable to withstand the huge crowd and a lengthy queue. I must warn the Government that anytime a disastrous stampede could happen and there is hardly any police force or adequate health services present to manage the huge crowd.

Sir, I would ask the Government to further take steps in deploying the ITBP battalion that is stationed in nearby Nooranad camp in Alleppey district for the security of the devotees.

In conclusion, I would urge the Government to immediately consult with the State Government to assess the situation and offer all support for managing the situation. I would also request the Government to fast-track all the development projects, sanction permissions and allocate forest land so that better facilities are provided to the pilgrims for making their journey more comfortable. Thank you, Sir.