

## **54,000 pilgrims seek medical assistance**

The Health Department is making an earnest effort to provide health care to maximum number of pilgrims reaching the hill shrine. A dedicated team led by Health Nodal Officer, Dr.Suresh Babu is providing all facilities, including ventilator and life-saving drugs at the six hospitals in Neelimala, Appachimedu, Charalkunnu and Pamba. Most significant is the off-road ambulance introduced for taking patients who intensive care from Sannidanam to Pamba. When the festival completes 21 days, 3,200 pilgrims have approached the hospitals seeking medical care. About 1,200 patients reach the hospital every day, Dr.Suresh Babu said. The total number of patients who were treated during the period has been pegged at 54,929. Among them 6,000 were for heart ailments. Between Pamba and Sannidanam, 18 emergency medical care centres are functioning for such patients. Nurses and Ayyappa Sanghom volunteers are functioning round the clock. In addition to oxygen parlours, the emergency medical centres as well as 10 stretcher points are equipped with Automated External Defibrillators for giving emergency care for those suffering from heart attack round the clock. All hospitals have intensive care units, two cardiologists and other doctors and para-medical staff, Dr.Suresh Babu said.

Awareness drive through distribution of pamphlets, banners and posters have also been undertaken at places where pilgrims converge. As many as 8 pilgrims died of heart attack, two in road accidents and one by attack of a wild elephant so far.

### **Uniform for serving staff.**

The serving staff of the dining halls wil again sport white T-shirts and blue dhotis. Travancore Devaswom Board president Prayar Gopalakrishnan introduced the new dress code in the wake of complaints made by the pilgrims. Mr.Gopalakrishnan and board member Ajay Tharayil visited the hall, found that there was substance in the complaint and distributed the new uniform.

### **High level probe sought.**

TDB president Prayar Gopalakrishnan has sought a high-level inquiry into the instance of the aerial visuals of Sabarimala captured by drones posted un You tube. The visuals of Sabaripeetom, Sannidanam, the forest paths and holy steps

were posted in You tube in the name of a private agency. The issue was taken up with the police controller and the visual were deleted too. Since it could be easily downloaded, deleting the visuals alone would not be enough, he said. Strong security arrangements have been made in Sabarimala in connection with the Babri Masjid day on December 6. A high-level probe is imperative about the way the visuals were taken dn then posted on the You tube. But there was no reason for any scare, Mr.Gopalakrishnan said.

All arrangements have been made for the Mandalam-Makaravilakku festivals. The board would cooperate with the directions of the security agencies. Al board members would be camping at Sabarimala for monitoring all developments, he said.

### **Security tightened:**

Security has been tightened at Sabarimala in view of the Babri Masjid day observance and forces deployed at pivotal points between Pamba and Sannidanam. Rapid Action Force too has been posted on duty. Pilgrims have not been allowed to put coconut on the Karpoorazhi on December 5 and 6. They can put the coconuts in a box and that would be put into the `aazhi' by designated staff. Identity cards have been issued to all staff members and those do not have ID cards would be found out. Police verification has been made mandatory for everyone, including those working in hotels and also casual employees. Those without ID cards would identified and send out of Sabarimala. Police have also intensified search in this regard.

### **Coconut shells to be removed:**

TDB president, Prayar Gopalakrishnan said that the coconut shells littered near dry coconut store would be removed soon. It was a potential safety hazard and in the event of a fire outbreak, it would be difficult to manage Fire Force officials had informed him at a review meeting oflate, he said.

Mr.Gopalakrishnan said that the board would soon hold a meeting Forest, Police and Fire Force to remove the coconut shell and transport it to Pamba. EOM