

IN THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA AT ERNAKULAM
PRESENT
THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V
&
THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE K. V. JAYAKUMAR
Monday, the 5th day of January 2026 / 15th Pousha, 1947

WP(C) NO. 40608 OF 2025(A)

PETITIONER:

1. SUO MOTU AS PER THE ORDER DATED 21.10.2025 IN SSCR 23/2025 REGARDING THE HEIST AND PLUNDERING OF GOLD FROM THE GOLD-CLADDED DWARAPALAKAS PLACED ON EITHER SIDE OF THE SREEKOVIL, SABARIMALA, PIN - 682031

RESPONDENTS:

1. THE STATE OF KERALA, REPRESENTED BY THE PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT, REVENUE (DEVASWOM) DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM , PIN - 695001
2. THE TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD, REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY, NANTHANCOD, KAWDIAR POST, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695003
3. THE CHIEF VIGILANCE AND SECURITY OFFICER (SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE), TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM HEAD QUARTERS, NANTHANCOD, KAWDIAR POST, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695003
4. THE STATE POLICE CHIEF, POLICE HEAD QUARTERS, VAZHUTHACAUD, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695010
5. THE SENIOR DEPUTY DIRECTOR, KERALA STATE AUDIT DEPARTMENT, TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695003.

BY GOVERNMENT PLEADER FOR R1 & R4

S.SREEKUMAR (SR.) along with SHRI.G.BIJU,STANDING COUNSEL FOR R2, R3 & R5

This petition coming on for orders upon perusing the petition and the affidavit filed in support of WP(C) and this court's order dated 30/12/2025, the court passed the following:

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

WP(C) No. 40608 of 2025

Dated this the 05th day of January, 2026

ORDER

Raja Vijayaraghavan V, J.

Today, when the matter was taken up, Sri H. Venkatesh, ADGP (Law & Order), the Head of the Special Investigation Team constituted by this Court, Sri S. Sasidharan, IPS, the Investigating Officer, as well as the Chief Vigilance and Security Officer (Superintendent of Police), appeared before us in person.

2. They have placed before this Court a comprehensive report detailing the investigation carried out by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) till date.

3. Crime No. 3700 of 2025 was registered in connection with offences relating to the removal of gold from the Dwarapalaka idol plates and the side pillar plates. From the report, we find that, as on date, 15 persons have been arrayed as accused in Crime No. 3700 of 2025, out of whom 9 accused have been arrested. Insofar as Crime No. 3701 of 2025 is concerned, the same was registered in connection with offences relating to the removal of cladded gold from the side frames of the doors and connected plates of the Sreekovil. In the said crime, out of a total of 12

accused, 9 accused have been arrested.

4. We have perused the report detailing the investigation carried out by the team in the above crimes. We find that, as on date, 181 witnesses have been examined and their statements recorded. The team has concluded that the events leading to the registration of the two crimes span a period commencing from the year 1998—when gold cladding was initially carried out by the UB Group—up to September 2025, when the Dwarapalakas were sent to Smart Creations for gold plating. The investigation has been classified into four distinct phases. The first phase relates to the gold cladding of various adornments and artefacts in and around the Sreekovil of Sabarimala. The second phase concerns the replacement of the old gold-clad door of the Sreekovil with a new gold-plated door in the year 2019. The third phase pertains to the removal of the gold-clad Dwarapalaka idol plates, side plates, and door frame plates in the year 2019. The fourth phase covers all transactions relating to the gold plating of the Dwarapalaka idol plates in the year 2025.

5. We find that the team has carried out an extensive analysis of call data records and has collected tower dump details relating to the accused. Mobile phones of the accused have been seized and forwarded for forensic examination. Bank account details pertaining to suspicious financial transactions have been collected and analysed. Steps have also been taken to compare handwriting and signatures in the questioned documents with admitted specimens. Serious efforts have been undertaken to identify the manner in which, and the locations from where, the gold-clad plates were removed. Clinching records pertaining to the gold cladding

carried out in the year 1998 by the UB Group have been obtained. Further, documents have been collected to ascertain the assets of the accused, with a view to examining whether any assets disproportionate to their known sources of income exist. Applications have been filed before the jurisdictional Magistrate for recording the statements of crucial witnesses under Section 183 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Suraksha Sanhita. In terms of the directions issued by this Court to conduct a scientific investigation to arrive at a definitive conclusion regarding the quantity of gold clad in 1998 and to ascertain whether the original gold-clad plates were replaced with newly gold-plated ones, samples have been collected from the original plates at Sannidhanam, and scientific tests are being conducted at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC). Since the nature of examination is very sensitive and complex, all efforts are being carried out by the scientists to carry out the tests in the most comprehensive manner. The results have not yet been obtained. The outcome of these tests is of considerable significance, as it is likely to shed ample light on the manner in which the gold was surreptitiously removed, replaced, or misappropriated pursuant to a pre-meditated and concerted design by individuals who were entrusted with the custody and protection of the valuables of the deity.

6. Having gone through the detailed report placed before this Court, we are satisfied that the investigation is being carried out in a professional and thorough manner, leaving no stone unturned. We also note that the accused who have been arrested have approached the jurisdictional courts seeking bail, raising multiple contentions, and that the SIT is devoting considerable time and effort to place the necessary records before

the Courts, including the production of the accused and the preparation of all relevant documents relating to the crimes.

7. The report further discloses that members of the Special Investigation Team have undertaken investigations outside the State in order to secure all possible and relevant evidence. Though attempts were made by certain persons to conceal records pertaining to the transactions under scrutiny, the team has been able to trace and recover vital documentary evidence.

8. This Court had, in its earlier order, made it abundantly clear that the officers constituting the SIT shall be directly answerable to this Court and that the investigation shall be conducted with the highest degree of discretion, integrity, and confidentiality, without divulging any information to the public or the media. We are informed that no information is being passed by the SIT to any outsider and the investigation is kept highly confidential. Despite such clear directions, it is reported that the SIT is presently being subjected to unwarranted pressure by way of misleading, speculative, and unfounded reports aired through sections of the mainstream media as well as social media platforms. Certain narratives appear to have been deliberately crafted, making baseless imputations against the investigating officers, evidently for the sake of sensationalism and optics, without any regard to the factual matrix or the progress of the investigation. We deem it necessary to observe that such reportage, particularly in matters under active judicial supervision, has the potential to undermine the integrity of the investigation, erode public confidence in institutions, and interfere with the fair administration of criminal justice. Investigations of

this nature, involving serious allegations and matters of public faith, cannot be conducted under the shadow of trial by media.

9. We would like to observe and reiterate that the Court has undertaken the monitoring of the investigation in this case involving the pilferage of the sacred valuables of Lord Ayyappa in view of its extraordinary nature and the pelf and heft of the persons likely to be involved. This exercise was not initiated with the intent to direct or dictate the mode, manner, or course of investigation, which squarely lies within the domain of the investigating agency, but solely to ensure that the investigation proceeds in a proper, effective, impartial, and lawful manner. The underlying objective of such monitoring has been to sustain, reinforce, and restore public confidence in the fairness, credibility, and integrity of the investigative process. We had ordered that every allegation be examined on an objective basis, uninfluenced by the position, power, status, or perceived influence of any individual involved. The intent has also been to lend credibility and transparency to the process undertaken by the Special Investigation Team (SIT), which comprises officers of unimpeachable integrity hand-picked by this Court, thereby eliminating any apprehension or perception of bias, lack of fairness, or absence of objectivity in the conduct of the investigation. As held by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in numerous cases, constitutional courts are vested with the jurisdiction to monitor investigations in exceptional cases, to ensure that the investigating agency functions in a free, fair, independent, and time-bound manner, insulated from external pressure, interference, or extraneous considerations.

10. We would like to observe that the investigation of a case such

as the instant one is a scientific and methodical exercise, requiring patience, precision, and adherence to established legal and forensic principles. It involves the collection, verification, and analysis of evidence, questioning of witnesses, and correlation of multiple strands of information and scientific reports, all of which necessarily consume time. To belittle or trivialise such a process is to undermine the very foundations of fair investigation and the rule of law. It would be worthwhile to bear in mind that truth can only be unearthed through diligence, objectivity, and lawful procedure rather than haste or sensationalism. Such an investigation cannot be reduced to conjecture, speculation, or public perception shaped by incomplete facts.

11. Having examined the investigation carried out thus far, which has been undertaken in a structured, phased, and comprehensive manner, we are firmly of the view that the investigation is proceeding strictly in accordance with law and along the correct lines. Merely because the SIT has, at this stage, focused on the transactions forming the subject matter of Crime Nos. 3700 of 2025 and 3701 of 2025, it cannot be inferred that the remaining phases will escape scrutiny. We, therefore, reiterate our direction to the SIT and its officers to continue the investigation meticulously and fearlessly, uninfluenced by any external pressures or extraneous considerations.

12. By order dated 30.12.2025, this Court, based on a request made by the SIT, had permitted the inclusion of two additional officers in the team. It is stated that objections were raised from certain quarters, casting aspersions on the integrity of the said officers. It is, however, reported that the officers concerned are competent, trustworthy, and industrious, and that

without strengthening the team, it may not be possible to carry out an effective and timely investigation.

13. Having regard to the nature and magnitude of the work being undertaken by the Special Investigation Team, as reflected in the report, we are of the considered view that permission can be granted to the Head of the Investigation Team, Sri H. Venkatesh, ADGP (Law & Order), to co-opt officers of the highest integrity as and when required, so as to ensure that all facets of the crime are investigated and brought to light expeditiously. A report to that effect shall, however, be filed before the Court as and when any officer is included in the team.

14. In view of the voluminous nature of the records involved and the complexity of the investigation, we deem it appropriate to grant further time to the Investigation Team to conclude the investigation. Accordingly, the time for completion of the investigation is extended by a further period of six weeks.

Post the matter on 19.01.2026 for further report.

Sd/-
RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V,
JUDGE

Sd/-
K.V. JAYAKUMAR,
JUDGE

APM