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### **Need to execute ropeway project at Sabarimala on a priority basis**

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*The Hindu* Pack-donkeys carrying materials for prasadam preparation from Pampa to Sabarimala along the Chandranandan Road. Photo: Leju Kamal

Pack-donkey's transporting articles for prasadam preparation from the devaswom stores at Pampa to Sabarimala, coupled with the frequenting of heavily loaded tractors, have been a major cause of inconvenience to the pilgrims undertaking their annual pilgrimage to the holy hillock of Sabarimala during the Mandalam-Makaravilakku season.

Transportation of goods, especially materials for prasadam preparation, during the rush days of the pilgrim season has always been a major problem facing the festival managers at Sabarimala.

Though the much talked about Sabarimala Master Plan prepared by the Delhi-based Ecosmart India attached to IL & FS Limited has emphasized the need to construct a ropeway for goods transport between Pampa and Sabarimala Sannidhanam, its execution has been inordinately delayed for reasons best known to the authorities concerned.

Experts as well as various devotees' organisations too have stressed the need to execute the proposed ropeway project for goods transportation between Pampa and Sannidhanam on a priority basis.

According to Travancore Devaswom Board sources, the temple authorities have to transport as much as 45 lakh kg of jiggery and 4.5 lakh kg rice for preparing the Appam, Aravana and other offerings to the presiding deity at the Lord Ayyappa Temple during the two-month long pilgrim season. The contractors who supply the materials have been transporting the materials in tractors and on the back of pack-donkeys since the past several years.

"Frequenting of tractors through the crowded Pampa-Sannidhanam path is a risky and difficult job," says Vijayan a driver at Pampa. He said the risk increases manifold in taking the heavily loaded vehicles through the badly damaged Swami Ayyappan Road and two drivers were killed in an accident that occurred on the same road during the previous pilgrim season.

Using pack-donkeys brought from the bordering areas of Theni and Kambom in Tamil Nadu for transportation of goods in gunny bags tied on the animal's back has been posing threat to the pilgrims on the traditional path leading to Sabarimala. And not to speak of the respiratory problems caused by the dry dung of the donkeys at the pilgrim centre.

There were also reports of cruelty against the animal at the hands of the contractors.

### **Ropeway project**

Mr K.Jayakumar, Additional Chief Secretary and chairman of the High Power Committee (HPC) for implementation of the Sabarimala Master Plan, told the Hindu that the RITES has already prepared the design and alignment of the proposed ropeway linking Pampa with the Malikappuram at Sabarimala Sannidhanam.

He said RITES would also conduct an environment impact study soon before the HPC issuing notification inviting expression of interests from competent firms for executing the project.

Mr Jayakumar says HPC would make every possible effort to execute the project through sponsorship.

However, various experts talked to The Hindu on the issue were of the opinion that the project should be executed on a 'build, operate and transfer' (BOT) basis as it required technical expertise and professionalism for operating the ropeway in future too.

The authorities may also think of stopping the practice of men carrying sick and aged pilgrims in planquin-like 'dollies' along the Pampa-Sannidhanam trekking path, once the ropeway project is materialised.

The Akhila Bharatha Ayyappa Seva Sanghom national vice-president, D.Vijayakumar, is of the opinion that the TDB and HPC should construct the ropeway on a priority basis and that too in a time-bound fashion with out any further delay.

According to him, half of Sabarimala problems in connection with pilgrim facility could be solved with the completion of the proposed double-storey Valiya Nadappanthal, sewage treatment plant at the Sannidhanam, ropeway and a new Appam-Aravana complex near Malikappuram.

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