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## Pulmedu to be made safe zone

MK Sunil Kumar, TNN | Nov 26, 2011, 04.32AM IST

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**SANNIDHANAM, SABARIMALA:** Fighting against time, the authorities here are making an all-out effort to ensure the safety of pilgrims who trek the traditional Pulmedu route and to provide them all basic amenities.

A meeting of top officials of various departments, convened by additional chief secretary K Jayakumar, has decided to introduce a slew of measures, including proper lighting, medical aid and adequate number of security personnel at Pulmedu, from December 15 to January 14.

Keeping in mind last year's stampede at Pulmedu, which claimed 102 lives, the meeting has also decided to restrict taxis as well as private vehicles on the route. Though the Justice Hariharan Nair Commission, which is looking into the tragedy, had submitted its interim report which focused on measures to check such incidents in future, the government did not act.

The eleventh hour rush is to take immediate measures to provide adequate facilities. "Safety is our prime concern. We are unable to compromise on the safety of the pilgrims. So, elaborate measures will be taken to ensure safety and basic facilities at Pulmedu," Jayakumar told TOI.

Only **KSRTC buses** will be allowed to conduct service from Vandiperiyar to Kozhikkanam. As many as 10 KSRTC buses will ply between Kumaly and Kozhikkanam from December 10. During Makaravilakku on January 14 70 to 80 KSRTC buses will conduct service along the route. All other vehicles will have to halt at Sathram, 10km off Pulmedu. These vehicles should take the **Vallakkadavu** route from Spencer junction, Vandiperiyar, to halt in the Sathram area. Taxis should return after dropping pilgrims in the Sathram area. Parking facilities will be arranged at Vandiperiyar as well.

There are also plans to start pre-paid taxi service. "The pre-paid system will be helpful in checking overload, besides avoiding exploitation by taxi operators," Jayakumar said. All vehicles should take special permits for conducting service along the Pulmedu route. Old vehicles will not be allowed to use the route.

The police and motor vehicles department will set up check posts to monitor the fitness of vehicles. All vehicles will be checked before allowing entry to Pulmedu.

The government has directed the Pathanamthitta district collector to ensure that all safety measures as well as basic facilities are in place from December 15 to January 15. The state government will sanction special funds to the Pathanamthitta district administration to meet the expenses. Cell phone providers will be asked to provide temporary coverage at Pulmedu, especially on the Makaravilakku day.

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