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Title: Need to widen and strengthen the hill tracks from Pampa to Sannidhanam for better management of heavy rush to devotees to Sabarimala Temple in Kerala and also provide adequate facilities for the devotees.

SHRI S.S. RAMASUBBU (TIRUNELVELI): Sabarimala is an important pilgrimage centre located in the Western Ghat mountain ranges in Kerala. It is the largest annual pilgrimage in the world with an estimated 30-40 million devotees of all faiths visiting the shrine and the number of pilgrims had registered a steady rise of 20% every year. This temple opens for a very few days in a year. Most of the devotees visit during Mandala and Makaravilakku Pooja celebrations which falls in the months of December-January.

However, the devotees are facing lot of difficulties due to inadequate and improper infrastructural and other facilities like road, lighting, toilet, clean water, food, medical emergency, etc. They can use their vehicles only upto Pampa. Thereafter, all the pilgrims have to follow a mountainous forest trekking path upto hill temple (Sannidhanam), a distance of about 7 kms. which is not sufficient for the movement of huge crowd. During season, pilgrims rest, sleep on the footpath and stampede occurs frequently.

A stampede occurred at Sabarimala in January 1999 in which 53 devotees died at the Pampa base camp. Again in one of the worst pilgrim tragedies recently in January 2011, 104 devotees were killed and 50 injured, seven of them were seriously injured in the stampede that occurred at Pullumedu about 7 kms. from Sannidhanam. Once Makara Jyothi completed, people move back to their homes. There is only single path to go down towards parking. There are no adequate police personnel to control the crowd.

Recently Kerala High Court has also passed an order for better management of Sabarimala pilgrimage.

I, therefore, urge upon the Union Government to direct the authorities to take necessary steps to widen and strengthen the hill tracks from Pampa to Sannidhanam urgently and new tracks should also be constructed along with the existing tracks to decongest the traffic. Also, adequate financial assistance may be provided urgently to those who have lost their lives and sustained minor and major injuries in the recent stampede.