



2026:KER:5053

IN THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA AT ERNAKULAM

PRESENT

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE A. BADHARUDEEN

WEDNESDAY, THE 21ST DAY OF JANUARY 2026 / 1ST MAGHA, 1947

BAIL APPL. NO. 14662 OF 2025

CRIME NO.3701/2025 OF CRIME BRANCH, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,

PETITIONER/ACCUSED NO.8:

A. PADMAKUMAR

AGED 67 YEARS

S/O.ACHUTHAN NAIR, KEECHAMPARAMBIL HOUSE, EDASSERIMALA,
ARANMULA VILLAGE, KOZHENCHERRY TALUK, PATHANAMTHITTA, PIN
- 689533

BY ADVS.

SRI.P.VIJAYABHANU (SR.)

SMT.SRUTHY N.BHAT

SRI.P.M.RAFIQ

SRI.M.REVIKRISHNAN

SRI.AJEESH K.SASI

SMT.SRUTHY K.K

SHRI.K.ARAVIND MENON

SHRI.AARON ZACHARIAS BENNY

SMT.NANDITHA S.

SHRI.GOVIND G.NAIR

RESPONDENT/COMPLAINANT:

STATE OF KERALA

REPRESENTED BY PUBLIC PROSECUTOR, HIGH COURT OF KERALA,
ERNAKULAM- 682031

BY ADDL.DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PROSECUTION SRI.GRACIOUS
KURIAKOSE

SR.PUBLIC PROSECUTOR SRI.C.K.SURESH

THIS BAIL APPLICATION HAVING COME UP FOR ADMISSION ON 12.1.2026,
ALONG WITH Bail Appl..148/2026, 149/2026 AND CONNECTED CASES, THE
COURT ON 21.1.2026 PASSED THE FOLLOWING:



B.A.NOS.14662, 14761 & 14762 OF 2025

& 148, 149 & 172 OF 2026 2

2026:KER:5053

N THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA AT ERNAKULAM

PRESENT

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE A. BADHARUDEEN

WEDNESDAY, THE 21ST DAY OF JANUARY 2026 / 1ST MAGHA, 1947

BAIL APPL. NO. 14761 OF 2025

CRIME NO.3700/2025 OF CRIME BRANCH, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

PETITIONER/ACCUSED NO.13:

RODDAM PANDURANGAIAH NAGA GOVARDHAN
AGED 47 YEARS
S/O.PANDURANGAIAH RODDAM, D NO. 67,68,69, OLD
HOSPITAL, PARVATHI NAGAR, BALLARI, KARNATAKA,
PIN - 583101

BY ADVS.

SRI.P.VIJAYABHANU (SR.)
SRI.THOMAS J.ANAKKALLUNKAL
SMT.ANUPA ANNA JOSE KANDOTH
SHRI.JAYARAMAN S.
SMT.DHANYA SUNNY
SMT.ANN MILKA GEORGE

RESPONDENT/STATE:

STATE OF KERALA
REPRESENTED BY PUBLIC PROSECUTOR, HIGH COURT OF
KERALA, ERNAKULAM, PIN - 682031
BY ADDL.DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PROSECUTION
SRI.GRACIOUS KURIAKOSE

THIS BAIL APPLICATION HAVING COME UP FOR ADMISSION
ON 12.1.2026, ALONG WITH Bail Appl..148/2026, 149/2026
AND CONNECTED CASES, THE COURT ON 21.1.2026 PASSED THE
FOLLOWING:



B.A.NOS.14662, 14761 & 14762 OF 2025

& 148, 149 & 172 OF 2026 3

2026:KER:5053

IN THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA AT ERNAKULAM

PRESENT

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE A. BADHARUDEEN

WEDNESDAY, THE 21ST DAY OF JANUARY 2026 / 1ST MAGHA, 1947

BAIL APPL. NO. 14762 OF 2025

CRIME NO.3701/2025 OF CRIME BRANCH, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

PETITIONER/ACCUSED NO.10:

RODDAM PANDURANGAIAH NAGA GOVARDHAN

AGED 47 YEARS

S/O.PANDURANGAIAH RODDAM, D NO. 67,68,69, OLD
HOSPITAL, PARVATHI NAGAR, BALLARI, KARNATAKA,
PIN - 583101

BY ADVS.

SRI.P.VIJAYABHANU (SR.)

SRI.THOMAS J.ANAKKALLUNKAL

SMT.ANUPA ANNA JOSE KANDOTH

SHRI.JAYARAMAN S.

SMT.DHANYA SUNNY

SMT.ANN MILKA GEORGE

RESPONDENT/STATE:

STATE OF KERALA

REPRESENTED BY GOVERNMENT PLEADER, PIN - 682031

BY ADDL.DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PROSECUTION

SRI.GRACIOUS KURIAKOSE

THIS BAIL APPLICATION HAVING COME UP FOR ADMISSION
ON 12.1.2026, ALONG WITH Bail Appl..148/2026, 149/2026
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IN THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA AT ERNAKULAM

PRESENT

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE A. BADHARUDEEN

WEDNESDAY, THE 21ST DAY OF JANUARY 2026 / 1ST MAGHA, 1947

BAIL APPL. NO. 148 OF 2026

CRIME NO.3701/2025 OF CRIME BRANCH, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

AGAINST THE ORDER DATED 19.12.2025 IN Bail Appl.

NO.14395 OF 2025 OF HIGH COURT OF KERALA

PETITIONER/PETITIONER/ACCUSED:

B.MURARI BABU
AGED 53 YEARS
S/O.BALAKRISHNA PILLAI, THEKKEDATH (H) PERUNNA
WEST P.O, CHANGANASSERY, PIN - 686102
BY ADVS.
SRI.S.RAJEEV
SRI.V.VINAY
SRI.M.S.ANEER
SHRI.SARATH K.P.
SHRI.ANILKUMAR C.R.
SHRI.K.S.KIRAN KRISHNAN
SHRI.AZAD SUNIL
SHRI.AKASH CHERIAN THOMAS
SHRI.T.P.ARAVIND
SMT.AKSHARA S.
SHRI.MAHESWAR PADICKAL
SMT.DIPA V.

RESPONDENT/RESPONDENT/STATE:

STATE OF KERALA
REPRESENTED BY PUBLIC PROSECUTOR HIGH COURT OF
KERALA, PIN - 682031



B.A.NOS.14662, 14761 & 14762 OF 2025

& 148, 149 & 172 OF 2026 5

2026:KER:5053

BY ADDL.DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PROSECUTION
SRI.GRACIOUS KURIAKOSE
SR.PUBLIC PROSECUTOR SRI.C.K.SURESH

THIS BAIL APPLICATION HAVING COME UP FOR ADMISSION
ON 12.1.2026, ALONG WITH Bail Appl..148/2026, 149/2026
AND CONNECTED CASES, THE COURT ON 21.1.2026 PASSED THE
FOLLOWING:



B.A.NOS.14662, 14761 & 14762 OF 2025

& 148, 149 & 172 OF 2026 6

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IN THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA AT ERNAKULAM

PRESENT

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE A. BADHARUDEEN

WEDNESDAY, THE 21ST DAY OF JANUARY 2026 / 1ST MAGHA, 1947

BAIL APPL. NO. 149 OF 2026

CRIME NO.3700/2025 OF CRIME BRANCH, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

AGAINST THE ORDER DATED 19.12.2025 IN Bail Appl.

NO.14394 OF 2025 OF HIGH COURT OF KERALA

PETITIONER/PETITIONER/ACCUSED:

B.MURARI BABU

AGED 53 YEARS

S/O.BALAKRISHNA PILLAI, THEKKEDATH (H) PERUNNA WEST

P.O, CHANGANASSERY, PIN - 686102

BY ADVS.

SRI.S.RAJEEV

SRI.V.VINAY

SRI.M.S.ANEER

SHRI.SARATH K.P.

SHRI.K.S.KIRAN KRISHNAN

SHRI.ANILKUMAR C.R.

SHRI.AKASH CHERIAN THOMAS

SHRI.AZAD SUNIL

SMT.AKSHARA S.

SHRI.T.P.ARAVIND

SHRI.MAHESWAR PADICKAL

SMT.DIPA V.

RESPONDENT/RESPONDENT/STATE:

STATE OF KERALA

REPRESENTED BY PUBLIC PROSECUTOR, HIGH COURT OF

KERALA, PIN - 682031

BY ADDL.DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PROSECUTION

SRI.GRACIOUS KURIAKOSE

SR.PUBLIC PROSECUTOR SRI.C.K.SURESH

THIS BAIL APPLICATION HAVING COME UP FOR ADMISSION ON
12.1.2026, ALONG WITH Bail Appl..148/2026, 149/2026 AND
CONNECTED CASES, THE COURT ON 21.1.2026 PASSED THE FOLLOWING:



B.A.NOS.14662, 14761 & 14762 OF 2025

& 148, 149 & 172 OF 2026 7

2026:KER:5053

IN THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA AT ERNAKULAM

PRESENT

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE A. BADHARUDEEN

WEDNESDAY, THE 21ST DAY OF JANUARY 2026 / 1ST MAGHA, 1947

BAIL APPL. NO. 172 OF 2026

CRIME NO.3700/2025 OF CRIME BRANCH, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

PETITIONER/ACCUSED NO.11:

A. PADMAKUMAR
AGED 67 YEARS
S/O.ACHUTHAN NAIR, KEECHAMPARAMBIL HOUSE,
EDASSERIMALA, ARANMULA VILLAGE, KOZHENCHERRY
TALUK, PATHANAMTHITTA, PIN - 689533
BY ADVS.
SRI.P.VIJAYABHANU (SR.)
SRUTHY N.BHAT
SRI.P.M.RAFIQ
SRI.AJEESH K.SASI
SRI.M.REVIKRISHNAN
SMT.SRUTHY K.K
SHRI.AARON ZACHARIAS BENNY
SHRI.K.ARAVIND MENON
SMT.NANDITHA S.
SHRI. GOVIND G. NAIR

RESPONDENT/COMPLAINANT:

STATE OF KERALA
REPRESENTED BY PUBLIC PROSECUTOR, HIGH COURT OF
KERALA, ERNAKULAM, PIN - 682031
BY ADDL.DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PROSECUTION
SRI.GRACIOUS KURIAKOSE
SR.PUBLIC PROSECUTOR SRI.C.K.SURESH

THIS BAIL APPLICATION HAVING COME UP FOR ADMISSION ON
12.1.2026, ALONG WITH Bail Appl..148/2026, 149/2026 AND
CONNECTED CASES, THE COURT ON 21.1.2026 PASSED THE FOLLOWING:



COMMON ORDER

Dated this the 21st day of January, 2026

B.A.No.14761/2025 has been filed by Sri.Roddam Pandurangaiah Naga Govardhan ('Govardhan' for short), the 13th accused in Crime No.3700/2025 of Crime Branch, Thiruvananthapuram, seeking regular bail. B.A.No.14762/2025 is also at the instance of Govardhan, who is the 10th accused in Crime No.3701/2025 of Crime Branch, Thiruvananthapuram. B.A.No.14662/2025 has been filed by Sri.A.Padmakumar, who is the 8th accused in Crime No.3701/2025, and B.A.No.172/2026 also is at the instance of Sri.A.Padmakumar, who is the 11th accused in Crime No.3700/2025 of Crime Branch, Thiruvananthapuram. Sri.B.Murari Babu, who is the 2nd accused in Crime No.3700/2025 and the 6th accused in Crime No.3701/2025, also filed B.A.Nos.149/2026 and 148/2026, respectively, canvasses regular bail for the second time after dismissal of



his initial bail applications on 19.12.2025.

2. Heard the learned senior counsel Sri.P.Vijayabhanu appearing for Sri.Govardhan and Sri.Padmakumar, and Sri.S.Rajeev, the learned counsel appearing for Sri.B.Murari Babu. Also heard the learned Additional Director General of Prosecution (ADGP), in detail.

3. Coming to the prosecution case, Crime No.3700/2025 was initially registered alleging commission of offences punishable under Sections 120B, 403, 406, 409, 466, 467 r/w Section 34 of the Indian Penal Code (hereinafter referred to as 'the IPC'), by the accused.

4. Again Crime No.3701/2025 was registered alleging commission of offences punishable under Sections 120B, 403, 406, 409, 466, 467 r/w 34 of the IPC, by the accused.

5. In both crimes, during investigation, on finding involvement of offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act as amended in 2018 (hereinafter referred to as 'PC



(Amendment) Act, 2018'), offence under Section 13(1)(a) of the PC (Amendment) Act, 2018 was also added. The prosecution case in Crime No.3700/2025 is that, in furtherance of a common intention of all the accused to obtain wrongful gain and to cause wrongful loss to the Travancore Devaswom Board, the 1st accused hatched conspiracy with accused No.2 and others, who are bound to protect Devaswom properties, submitted an application before the Travancore Devaswom Board on 17.6.2019, in consequence of the conspiracy hatched between them for exacting that the Dwarapalaka sculptures made of copper plates in the Sabarimala Sannidhanam Shrine to be enshrouded with gold by process of cladding. The prosecution allegation further is that the 2nd accused, the then Administrative Officer, Sabarimala, and all other accused are fully aware that the Dwarapalaka sculptures were originally gold cladded in 1998, the 2nd accused wrote a letter in the year 2019 that they were



just copper plates, which were intended to be plated with gold, and submitted a false report before the Travancore Devaswom Board in this regard. Then, in the year 2024, the 2nd accused again made an illegal recommendation to the Devaswom Board to allow 'Smart Creations', Chennai, for gold plating the Dwarapalaka sculptures. The 3rd accused, the then Executive Officer of Sabarimala Temple, who also knew that the plates of Dwarapalaka sculptures were enshrouded in gold, prepared a false recommendation letter stating that the golden plates are just copper plates and submitted the said letter to the Travancore Devaswom Board, for the purpose of giving the same to the accused. Thereafter, at the time of handing over the plates to the 1st accused, the 3rd accused prepared mahazars stating that the gold plates are just copper plates and falsely included the names of persons, who were not present at the time of preparing the mahazars, and recorded in the mahazars that the plates were being given to the 1st



accused, and the signatures of the friends of the 1st accused were obtained. Accordingly, the 4th accused, the then Secretary, Travancore Devaswom Board ordered to handover the plates on Dwarapalaka sculptures to the 1st accused, as against the Board Minutes. The 5th and the 6th accused, although they knew that the Dwarapalaka sculptures were enshrouded with gold plates, put their signatures on the mahazars prepared on 19.07.2019 and 20.07.2019 as witnesses and caused the articles to be handed over to the 1st accused, and on 11.09.2019, when the Dwarapalaka sculptures were brought back to Sabarimala, prepared the second mahazar, without checking its actual weight. It is further alleged that, the 7th accused, the then Thiruvabharanam Commissioner of Sabarimala Devaswam, who was duty bound to look after all these matters, did not depute a goldsmith at the time of removing the golden plates from the Dwarapalaka sculptures. Thereafter, on 29.08.2019, the 8th accused, the



then Thiruvabharanam Commissioner of Sabarimala Devaswam, in the Smart Creations in Chennai, handed over the sculpture layers to the 1st accused, without comparing its weight in the mahazars, and thereby gave an opportunity to the 1st accused to perform pooja by illegally displaying the said Dwarapalaka sculptures in various places and houses. After that, on 11.09.2019, when the sculpture layers were restored in the shrine, the 8th accused was not present there and did not depute the Devaswom Smith, though his presence was mandatory at the time of handling the valuable items. On 11.09.2019, while installing the layers on the Dwarapalaka sculptures, accused Nos 9 and 10, the then Executive Officer and Administrative Officer of Sabarimala, prepared a namesake mahazar without correctly measuring its weight and recorded the same in the registers. Furthermore, accused No.10 did not prepare mahazar while attempting to fix the Thangupeedham (താങ്ങുപീഠം) belonged to Sabarimala



Devaswom on the Dwarapalaka sculptures. It is further alleged that, when accused Nos.2 and 3 sent a letter to the Travancore Devaswom Board in 2019, recommending for gold plating the Dwarapalaka sculptures, the 10th accused, who was holding the charge of Devaswom Commissioner at the relevant time, did not inspect the Dwarapalaka sculptures. Thus, the very valuable and sacred Dwarapalaka sculptures of the Sabarimala shrine and the gold plates weighing 42800 grams attached to the northern and southern corners of the said sculptures were given in custody of the 1st accused on 19.07.2019 and 20.07.2019 under the pretext of repair and maintenance to Bangalore and Hyderabad, where they used the sculptures to remove the originally cladded gold therein fraudulently for obtaining undue pecuniary advantage thereof. Then the accused persons entrusted the sculptures to Smart Creations, Chennai on 29.08.2019, where, only 394.900 grams of gold was plated on the sculptures and



misappropriated the remaining gold and thereby caused a huge loss to Travancore Devaswom Board and consequence to the holy Deity Sabarimala.

6. In Crime No.3701/2025 the prosecution allegation as minusculed in the FIR in Crime No.3700/2025 is that the accused in this crime hatched conspiracy with a view to clad gold on the door frames in front of the Sabarimala Sreekovil which were originally clad with gold and thereafter they forged records to show that the door frames were originally made of copper and taken out the same through the 1st accused on the premise of cladding the same with gold and thereby the 1st accused, as part of the conspiracy hatched between the accused persons, produced the same before Smart Creations, Chennai, and during the investigation, 409 gram of gold, which had been misappropriated, was taken into custody by the Investigating Officer from Smart Creations, Chennai, and more gold is awaiting to be recovered. Even though in the FIR



the allegation refers only to door frames, now the prosecution allegation is that apart from the door frames, the Shiva idol on its top, the arch including the Vyali roopam, raashi plates, Dasharadha plates and the upper side of the door frame also, originally cladded with gold, were entrusted to the 1st accused on the premise of gold cladding, describing the entire items as items made of copper.

7. The learned senior counsel Sri.P.Vijayabhanu appearing for Govardhan argued at length to substantiate that Govardhan is innocent and his impleadment in both crimes as on 19.12.2025 and the arrest thereof, are absolutely unwarranted. The prime contention raised by the learned senior counsel for Govardhan is that Govardhan is an ardent devotee and donor of Sabarimala Ayyappan and he had contributed articles to the tune of ₹1,40,05,297.79 to the Sabarimala Deity. According to the learned senior counsel, during the investigation of these crimes, the investigating



agency asked for his presence for interrogation and he fully co-operated with the investigation without hesitation. Accordingly, he also appeared before the Investigating Officer on 19.12.2025, on which date, this Court dismissed the bail applications filed by Sri.Murari Babu as well as Sri.N.Vasu, the co-accused, recording its dissatisfaction with the investigation, which was being proceeded with at a low pitch. Soon after delivery of the order, the petitioner/Govardhan, who was present before the Investigating Officer, as part of interrogation, was arrested and implicated as an accused. According to the learned senior counsel, Govardhan appeared before the Investigating Officer on 20.10.2025, 29.10.2025, 15.12.2025 and 19.12.2025. That apart, when shortage of gold to the tune of 474.957 grams equivalent to the gold extracted from the door frame plates, connected plates and Dwarapalaka plates and pillor plates received from Pankaj Bhandari, accused No.12 in Crime No.3700/2025 through



Sri.Kalpesh, the same also seized as per mahazar prepared on 24.10.2025. According to the learned senior counsel, insofar as Govardhan is concerned, he is in the habit of contributing to the assets of the Sabarimala Devaswom, and he did not have any *mala fide* intention to misappropriate the properties of the Deity. What he did was that he co-operated with the 1st accused, Unnikrishnan Potty, in the matter of getting the door of the Sreekovil repaired, when certain defects were noticed therein due to attack of ants and other insects, in order to have the same rectified. The learned senior counsel submitted that the allegation against Govardhan that he had misappropriated gold belonging to Sabarimala is wholly incorrect and unfounded. It is submitted that after completion of the Dwarapalaka work in September 2019, Govardhan was informed either by Mr.Pankaj, Managing Director of Smart Creations, or by Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (the petitioner being unable to recall precisely), that 474.97 grams of gold extracted



from the gold cladding remained with Smart Creations. Then Govardhan was requested to collect the balance gold from Smart Creations and remit the corresponding amount to the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB). The learned senior counsel submitted that acting in good faith and without any *mala fide* intention, Govardhan arranged for the said gold to be collected from Smart Creations through Mr.Kalpesh, an employee of Mr.Shenky, the owner of Shri.Kalikund Jewellers, Chennai, who handed over the gold to Govardhan in Ballari. It was further submitted that at the relevant time, the value of the said gold was approximately ₹14,97,288, calculated at about ₹3,120 per gram for 22-carat gold. As directed by Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty, the said amount was remitted by way of Demand Drafts in favour of the Executive Officer, Sabarimala, Sree Dharmasastha Annadhana Trust, Sabarimala. Accordingly, five Demand Drafts of ₹1,99,999 each, totalling ₹9,99,995, were obtained on 25th, 28th, 30th and



31st October 2019 and on 2nd November 2019, bearing DD Nos.016773, 016774, 016783, 016786 and 016788, through IDBI Bank. Since Govardhan's bank, namely the Bellary Urban Co-operative Bank, did not provide Demand Draft facilities at the relevant time, Govardhan obtained self-Demand Drafts from his account (A/c No. 3158), which were thereafter arranged through IDBI Bank. True copies of the self-Demand Drafts are produced and marked as Annexure A18 series, and true copies of the Demand Drafts issued in favour of the Trust are produced as Annexure A19 series. The learned senior counsel further submitted that thereafter, Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty informed Govardhan that out of the balance amount of ₹14,97,288, which was not remitted to TDB through Demand Drafts, a Gold Haaram (necklace) for Malikapuram Devi was required to be made for an amount of ₹2,70,000. Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty also instructed Govardhan to pay the said amount to him in cash so that he could



document before the Travancore Devaswom Board that the Gold Haaram had been purchased by him for TDB. It was also conveyed that all ornaments, including the said Gold Haaram, were required to be insured. Acting on these representations, Govardhan paid ₹2,70,000 in cash to Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty for the purpose of documenting the purchase of the Gold Haaram. The said amount was subsequently deposited by Mr.Potty into the account of Govardhan. Thereafter, Govardhan issued an invoice dated 21.11.2019 from his jewellery shop, M/s.Roddam Jewels, for the sale of the Gold Haaram. A copy of the ledger account of M/s.Roddam Jewels for the year 2019–2020, showing debit of ₹2.7 lakhs to Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty and corresponding credit for the purchase of the Gold Haaram, is produced and marked as Annexure A20. A photograph of the Gold Haaram is produced as Annexure A21, and Invoice No.1818C dated 21.11.2019 for an amount of ₹2,70,135 is produced and marked as Annexure



A22. With regard to insurance, it is submitted that Govardhan paid ₹13,000 for the first year and ₹30,000 for the second and third years, and thereafter, continued to pay the insurance premium on his own for the subsequent three years, aggregating to a total of six years. Thus, the total amount incurred by Govardhan towards the Gold Haaram and its insurance comes to ₹3,13,135 (₹2,70,135 towards the Gold Haaram and ₹43,000 towards insurance). True copies of insurance payments made for the period 2019–2024 are produced and marked as Annexure A23 series. **It is further submitted that the balance amount of ₹1,70,000 was deposited into the account of Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty as directed by him.** Thus, out of the total amount of ₹14,83,130 (₹9,99,995 by Demand Drafts + ₹3,13,135 towards Gold Haaram and insurance + ₹1,70,000 deposited in Mr.Potty's account), the entire amount corresponding to the gold received **was remitted to TDB and Mr. Unnikrishnan**



Potty. Therefore, as early as in the year 2019 itself, Govardhan had fully accounted for and transferred the entire amount relating to the gold received by him. The learned senior counsel further submitted that Govardhan appeared before the investigating agency for interrogation on four occasions, namely on 20.10.2025, 29.10.2025, 15.12.2025 and 19.12.2025, and on each occasion fully cooperated with the investigation by producing all documents, records and data in his possession relating to the subject matter of the case. True copies of the to-and-fro flight tickets of Govardhan on 20.10.2025, 21.10.2025 and 22.10.2025 are produced and marked as Annexure A24, those to-and-fro flight tickets of Govardhan for 29.10.2025 and 30.10.2025 are produced and marked as as Annexure A25, to-and-fro flight tickets of Govardhan on 15.12.2025 is produced and marked as Annexure A26, and to-and-fro flight tickets of Govardhan on 19.12.2025 is produced and marked as Annexure A27. It is



further submitted that despite producing all relevant documents before the investigation team on 20.10.2025, police officials visited Govardhan's shop and residence in Ballari, Karnataka, on 24.10.2025. On that occasion also, Govardhan produced all documents and records in his possession and specifically informed the officials about Annexures A16 to A20, including the Demand Drafts issued, the Gold Haaram invoice and the insurance documents. Despite this, the SIT Investigating Officer seized 474.9 grams of gold from Govardhan. The learned senior counsel submitted that even after the said seizure, Govardhan was subjected to interrogation on three further occasions and during this time, he continued to extend full and unconditional cooperation, without demur or reservation, thereby clearly demonstrating his *bona fides* and consistent willingness to assist the investigation. It is lastly submitted that during the course of investigation, Govardhan had reported before the



Special Investigation Team as and when directed, and at the request of the SIT, at his own expense, arranged travel to Thiruvananthapuram for himself, as well as for Mr.Naresh (goldsmith) and Mr.Kalpesh, to facilitate their participation in the investigation. It is pointed out by the learned senior counsel for Govardhan that as per the mahazars prepared, it could be seen that the weight of the gold items received at Smart Creations was recorded as 38258 grams. and when the same was reinstated in Sabarimala, its weight was 38653 grams. and be it so, the weight was increased by 395 grams. and therefore, the allegation of misappropriation of gold could not be believed. Accordingly, the learned counsel pressed for regular bail to Govardhan, who has been in custody from 19.12.2025.

8. The learned ADGP vehemently opposed bail to Govardhan by reading the contention raised by Govardhan in his bail application showing his involvement along with the 1st



accused in the matter of misappropriation. The learned ADGP countered the argument regarding the weight and submitted that, in fact, as per Annexures A6 and A7, the total weight of the articles taken from Sabarimala would come to 42,800 i.e., (25400+17400) and when the same was replaced, its weight was recorded as 38653 and thereby, loss to the tune of 4147 grams. was noticed. This is the gold alleged to have been misappropriated altogether in both crimes, and the argument advanced by the learned senior counsel contending that the weight of the gold at the time when it was kept in the gold caddy as 38258 grams is incorrect. The learned ADGP took this Court through the contentions raised by Govardhan throughout his bail application to show that he, along with the 1st accused, who was not given any specific assignment in Sabarimala, carried out extraction works from the idols, the door frames, and the Dwarapalaka idols in both cases, thereby reducing their weight by 4147 grams. According to the learned



ADGP, it is true that Govardhan as a believer, contributed 184 grams. of gold and other articles during different periods as stated in the bail application. But coming to the misappropriation, the same is more than the said amount and in such a case, what was done by Govardhan was after contributing lesser amounts, he got involved in misappropriation of a gigantic sum along with the other accused and therefore, these contributions could not save his culpability, in any manner. It is submitted that contributions otherwise also would take away misappropriation found otherwise. According to the learned ADGP, it is submitted in the bail application of Sri.Govardhan that, though he is a native of Bellary in Karnataka, he is a strong devotee of Sabarimala. At the same time, it is admitted that when Govardhan reached Sabarimala, since he did not know Malayalam, he was assisted by the 1st accused, Unnikrishnan Potty. On each occasion when he visited Sabarimala,



Unnikrishnan Potty came from the **Thantri room**, assisted Govardhan in completing the booking process, and extended wholehearted help for future assistance at Sabarimala, and the relationship continued thereafter. Thus, the argument of the learned ADGP is that an unholy nexus between the 1st accused, Unnikrishnan Potty and Govardhan, along with Smart Creations belonging to Pankaj Bhandari, resulted in the alleged misappropriation in both cases, strongly with the connivance of the Devaswom Board members and other officials. Therefore, Govardhan could not plead innocence merely on the assertion that he, being a devotee, contributed something to Sabarimala. Accordingly, he does not deserve bail at the initial stage of investigation, as the investigation as regards him required to be continued on getting his custody to get the details of the remaining gold yet to be recovered.

9. The learned counsel Sri.S.Rajeev, appearing for Sri.B. Murari Babu, who moved regular bail applications for



the second time in both crimes, would submit that, in addition to the contentions raised while arguing the earlier bail applications, there has been a change in circumstances warranting grant of regular bail to Sri.B.Murari Babu, since he completed 81 days of custody, starting from 23.10.2025. According to the learned counsel, his custodial interrogation as provided under Section 187(1) and (2) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), could not be possible, since the maximum period of 60 days already over insofar as Sri.B.Murari Babu is concerned. Therefore, he pressed for regular bail to Sri.B.Murari Babu in both crimes.

10. Adv. Sri.P.Vijayabhanu, appearing for Sri.A.Padmakumar, President of the Travancore Devaswom Board, who is arrayed as an accused in both crimes, also pointed out that, even though he had narrated the door frames as well as the Dwarapalaka plates as originally copper-plated instead of gold-plated, the same could be treated only as an



omission and that it was not intentional. It is submitted that he has been in custody from 20.11.2025 and his custody for the purpose of investigation is practically over. Therefore, he deserves bail in both crimes.

11. The learned ADGP strongly opposed regular bail to Sri.B.Murari Babu as well as Sri.A.Padmakumar highlighting the fact that their release would impede the investigation, as they could influence the witnesses, being higher officials. According to the learned ADGP, in a case of this nature, none of the petitioners are entitled to get bail and therefore, all these applications are liable to be dismissed.

12. The specific allegation raised against Govardhan, accused No.10 in Crime No.3701/2025 could be seen from paragraph Nos.3 and 15 of the report filed by the Investigating Officer. The same are reproduced as under:

“3. The specific allegation is that the petitioner Mr. Govardhan Roddom (A10) along with Mr. Pankaj Bhandari (A9), Mr.



Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) and other accused persons, with malicious intention, hatched criminal conspiracy to criminally misappropriate the gold cladded on the two copper plates depicting Dasavatharam symbols, the gold cladded on the two copper plates depicting Rasi symbols, gold cladded on one copper plate of upper door frame and gold cladded on copper plates of Prabhamandalam including Sivaroopam and Vyaliroopam over the door frames (7 plates) installed in front of the Sreekovil of the Sabarimala Temple. In furtherance of common intention and conspiracy, Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1), submitted an application to the Travancore Devaswam Board, offering to gold plate the door frames of the door of the Sreekovil, which includes the above mentioned articles. On the basis of this application, and as part of the conspiracy hatched, the articles (7 plates) were allowed to be inappropriately handed over to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) by the accused Devaswam officials. Subsequently, Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) carried the



articles to Smart Creations at Chennai, being owned by Mr. Pankaj Bhandari (A9), as per the direction of the petitioner herein. The gold originally cladded on the plates was stripped by Mr.Pankaj Bhandari (A9), in Smart Creations. Despite having clear knowledge that the gold belongs to the Travancore Devaswam Board, the petitioner (A10) and other accused persons concealed the fact and misappropriated the gold without considering the immense aesthetic value and religious sanctity of the gold cladded on the above articles and thereby caused unlawful pecuniary loss to the Tranvancore Devaswom Board and pecuniary advantage to the petitioner (A10) and other accused.

15. The Travancore Devasam Board in its meeting held on 19.03.2019 (Annexure III) gave permission vide ROC 9097/18/M to hand over the "Copper Plates" (ചെമ്പ് പാളികൾ) to Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) for gold plating after duly preparing the mahazar and thereafter to reinstall the plates after gold plating done. The board decision specifically



authorizes Mr.K.S Baijoo (A4), the then Thiruvabharanam Commissioner to supervise the gold plating process. Based on this, Mrs. Jayasree, the then Devaswom Board Secretary issued the Board proceedings as ROC 9097/18/M dated: 20.03.2019.(Annexure IV). The 7 pieces of gold cladded door frames were dismantled on 18.05.2019, on the basis of the Board order, by preparing a Mahazar. (Annexure V) The mahazar was prepared by Mr. K. S. Baijoo, (A4) the then Thiruvabharam Commissioner. As per the Mahazar, the total weight of the 7 pieces together, while weighing at Sabarimala (before cleaning) was 42.100 Kg and the 7 pieces were handed over to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1). The Mahazar was attested by Mr. K.S.Baijoo, (A4), Thiruvabharanam Commissioner, Sabarimala, Mr.D.Sudheesh Kumar, (A5), Executive Officer, Sabarimala, Mr. Murari Babu (A6) Administrative Officer, Sabarimala, Mr.V.M. Kumar, Devaswom Smith and Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1). A close scrutiny of the Mahazar, when read in conjunction with



the statement of witnesses indicates that the Mahazar was purposefully prepared inaccurately and in a highly irresponsible manner. The Mahazar is silent about the presence of gold cladding even though the Smith was present during the preparation of the Mahazar. Moreover, Mr.Muari Babu (A6) and Mr.D.Sudheesh Kumar (A5) and others, who are experienced officers of Travancore Devaswom Board and having sufficient experience of having worked at Sabarimala had clear knowledge and understanding that the door frames were originally gold cladded, committed grave official misconduct by willfully and with dishonest intention, wrongfully referred to as copper plates even in the Mahazar. Further investigation revealed that, some of the witnesses who were present at the time of preparing the Mahazar, had indicated the presence of gold on the plates to the others present there, which reiterates the fact that the accused present there were having clear knowledge that the door frame plates of Sreekovil were in fact gold cladded.



Having taken possession of the door frames, Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) took the plates to SMART Creations, Chennai. No officer of Travancore Devaswom Board accompanied Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) to SMART Creations and the gold plating process was not supervised by the Thiruvabharanam Commissioner Mr. K.S. Baijoo (A4) as ordered by the Travancore Devaswom Board. There, the cladded gold was stripped from the copper plates and 184 gms of gold supplied by the sponsor Govardhan Roddam, Bellari was plated on the 7 door frame plates and connected plates as sponsorship. There was neither agreement between the petitioner (A10) and the Devaswam Board nor letter of sponsorship for gold plating on door frames by the petitioner (A10). The gold stripped from the door frame plates was left unaccounted in stripping solution at the SMART CREATIONS till it was recovered from the solution at a later stage.

After gold plating, the 7 pieces were returned to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) on



15.06.2019 with a warranty certificate issued in the name of Mr. Govardhan, the petitioner (A10) by the SMART CREATIONS. Investigation revealed that 409 gms of gold was recovered from the of above mentioned 7 plates by the recovery expert Sankar at Smart Creations. But the plates were plated with the gold given by Govardhan (A10), who was cited as the sponsor in the warranty certificate issued by the Smart Creations. This is the only record showing that the petitioner is the sponsor. As this property belongs to Lord Ayyappa and Travancore Devaswom Board is the custodian of these properties, the warranty certificate had to be issued in the name of Travancore Devaswom Board. But it is not done so. The gold plated door frame plates were brought back to Sabarimala, by Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) and that too without the escort of Travancore Devaswom Board officials and no Mahazar was prepared regarding this either at Smart Creations or Sabarimala and the weight of the plates also was not recorded during the re-installation.



All these acts clearly depict the connivance, conspiracy, involvement of the accused persons in the commission of the offences.

Investigation revealed a series of serious official misconduct and administrative lapses on the part of the Devaswom officials right from the initial correspondence till the handing over of the door frame plates, connected plates and Dwarapalaka plates and pillar plates to Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) without proper authorization. No estimate was taken by the Devaswom smith and no agreement was executed between the Board and the Sponsor. By handing over the sacred door frame plates, connected plates and Dwarapalaka plates and pillar plates to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) and by allowing him to take those plates to Smart Creations Chennai, Devaswom officials had blatantly violated the provisions of the Travancore Devaswom Board Manual which mandates that all temple related works are to be carried out with in the Temple premises itself (Devaswom Manual, Vol-II, Chapter-.IX-23,



Para-4, Page 116 (Annexure VI), and in Thiruvithamcore Devaswom Sub Group Manual Chapter X, Para-26, Page 149, 150 (Annexure VII). Despite having clear knowledge that the plates were gold cladded in 1998, none of the Devaswom officials enquired about the gold that was stripped from these plates at Smart Creations. By not effectively supervising the works at SMART Creations and by not taking the weights of the gold plated door frame plates, connected plates and Dwarapalaka plates and pillar plates on re-installation and by not making prompt entries in the relevant registers, the Devaswom officials had committed grave official malpractice which led to the commission of misappropriation. All these acts and omissions from the part of Devaswom officials tantamount to official misconduct, thereby abetting and aiding Unnikrishnan Potty and others to misappropriate the gold at SMART Creations, causing unlawful pecuniary loss to Travancore Devaswom Board and



corresponding unlawful pecuniary gain to Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) and other accused.

The petitioner (A10) supplied 184 gms of gold for gold plating on the door frames. The gold recovered as per the evidence available at present from the above 7 plates at Smart Creations by Mr.Pankaj Bhandari (A9) is 409 gms and the extraction and recovery was done with the knowledge and connivance of the petitioner (A10) and other accused. After the recovery, the above quantity of gold was received from Mr.Pankaj Bhandari (A9) by the petitioner (A10) through a person named Kalpesh, arranged by the petitioner and committed misappropriation. The petitioner is well aware of the fact that the gold is extracted from the door frames and other connected plates of Sreekovil of Lord Ayyappa. The evidences related to the pooja ceremony conducted at Smart Creations were collected.”

13. Similarly, the specific role of Sri.Govardhan, who is



accused No.13 in Crime No.3700/2025 could be gathered from paragraph Nos.2, 3 and 16 of the report, which are extracted as under:

“2..... The Tranvancore Devasom Board discussed the application dated 17-06-2019 submitted by Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (Annexure-II) to the Executive Officer along with the reports of Devasom Commissioner (Annexure-III) as item No. 77 and accorded permission vide ROC number 9097/18/M Dated 03-07-2019 (Annexure-IV) to get the repair works and gold plating works of the dwarapalaka plates and side plates by Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1), Bangalore. The secretary issued Board proceedings dtd 05.07.2019 to handover the items to Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1). (Annexure-V) In the meantime, on 17.07.2019, Mr. S. Sreekumar, the 6th accused in this case, took charge as Administrative Officer, Sabarimala from Mr. Murari Babu (A2). On 19.07.2019, Mr. D. Sudheesh Kumar (A3), who was the Executive Officer of Sabarimala prepared a



mahazar to hand over the 12 pieces of dwarapalaka plates to Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1), for repair works and gold plating works. (Annexure-VI) In the mahazar the total weight of the plates was shown as 25 Kilograms and 400 grams. In the mahazar, instead of describing the dwarapalaka plates as "gold cladded plates", they were falsely misrepresented as "ചെമ്പ് തകിടുകൾ". Mr.S.Sreekumar, (A6), the then Administrative Officer was a senior official of Travancore Devaswam Board and having clear knowledge that the Dwarapalaka plates were indeed gold plated also signed in the mahazar in which the plates were misrepresented as "ചെമ്പ് തകിടുകൾ". Investigation revealed that the mahazar was not prepared in the presence of some of the attesters and that some of them were not made aware of the contents of the mahazar which is indicative of the fact that the contents were falsified. On 20.07.2019, Mr. D. Sudheesh Kumar (A3), the then Executive Officer prepared another mahazar to hand



over the side plates (2 pieces) weighing 17.400 Kilo grams to Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1). (Annexure-VII) Actually it was Mr. K.S. Baijoo (A7) the then Thiruvabharanam Commissioner who was authorized by the Board to prepare the mahazar, instead he entrusted this task to Mr.D. Sudheesh Kumar (A3), Executive Officer, on his own for which he didn't have any authority to direct so. (Annexure-VIII) Investigations revealed that though some of the witnesses whose presence was mentioned in the mahazar, they were indeed not present when the mahazar was prepared. In both the mahazars, even though it is written that the plates were handed over to Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1), somebody else had in fact signed on behalf of Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1), who are later identified to be the friends of A1. The gold cladded 14 plates were taken first to Bangalore, then to Hyderabad and after a considerable period, the same was transported to Smart Creations, Chennai. At smart Creations the gold cladded on the plates



was stripped and the solution was kept by Mr. Pankaj Bhandari, the owner of Smart Creations, as directed by Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1). The stripping was done by Mr.Balaji and other workers of Pankaj Bhandari (A12). The Dwarapalaka idol plates and side pillar plates were then gold plated after finishing different preparatory works. Actually Mr. R.G. Radhakrishnan, arrayed as A8, the then Thiruvabharanam Commissioner visited "Smart Creations" on 29.08.2019 and 30.08.2019 along with other Devaswom staff, weighed the plates before and after the gold plating, prepared mahazar for it, but failed to notice the considerable reduction in the weight. (Annexure-IX) He left the plates there itself and didn't take any step to bring it back. Later, when the plates were brought back for re-fixing on 11.09.2019, by Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) that too after a lapse of 53 days, weight was not measured and no mahazar was prepared and no entries were made in the relevant registers. All these dubious acts of the accused persons are narrative of the



connivance, conspiracy, etc. in committing the crime.

Investigation revealed a series of serious official misconduct and administrative lapses on the part of the Devaswom officials right from the initial correspondence till the handing over of the door frame plates, connected plates and Dwarapalaka plates and pillar plates to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) without proper authorization. No estimate was taken by the Devaswom smith and no agreement was executed between the Board and the Sponsor. By handing over the sacred door frame plates, connected plates and Dwarapalaka plates and pillar plates to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) and by allowing him to take those plates to Smart Creations Chennai, Devaswom officials had blatantly violated the provisions of the Travancore Devaswom Board Manual which mandates that all temple related works are to be carried out with in the Temple premises itself (Devaswom Manual, Vol-II, Chapter-.IX-23, Para-4, Page 116 (Annexure X), and in



Thiruvithamcore Devaswom Sub Group Manual Chapter X, Para-26, Page 149, 150 (Annexure XI). Despite having clear knowledge that the plates were gold cladded in 1998, none of the Devaswom officials enquired about the gold that was stripped from these plates at Smart Creations. By not effectively supervising the works at SMART Creations and by not taking the weights of the gold plated door frame plates, connected plates and Dwarapalaka plates and pillar plates on re-installation and by not making prompt entries in the relevant registers, the Devaswom officials had committed grave official malpractice which led to the commission of misappropriation. All these acts and omissions from the part of Devaswom officials tantamount to official misconduct, thereby abetting and aiding Unnikrishnan Potty and others to misappropriate the gold at SMART Creations, causing unlawful pecuniary loss to Travancore Devaswom Board and corresponding unlawful pecuniary gain to Mr.



Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) and other accused.

3. Mr.Roddam Pandurangaiah Naga Govardhan @ Govardhan Roddam (A13) along with Mr.Pankaj Bhandari (A12) Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) and other accused persons, with malicious intention, hatched criminal conspiracy to criminally misappropriate the gold cladded on the copper plates of Dwarapalaka idol plates (12 plates) and pillar plates (02 plates) installed in and around the Sreekovil of the Sabarimala Temple. In furtherance of common intention and conspiracy, Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) submitted an application to the Travancore Devaswom Board, offering to gold plate the dwarapalaka idols plates and pillar plates of the Sreekovil, which includes the above mentioned articles. On the basis of this application, and as part of the conspiracy hatched, the articles (14 plates) were allowed to be inappropriately handed over, by the accused Devaswom officials, to Mr. Unnikrishnan potty (A1) who took the articles to Smart Creations Chennai, being owned by



Mr.Pankaj Bhandari (A12) as per the direction of Govardhan Roddam (A13), the gold originally cladded on the plates was stripped by Mr.Pankaj Bhandari (A12). Despite having clear knowledge that the gold belongs to Travancore Devaswom Board, Govardhan Roddam (A13) an other accused persons concealed the fact and misappropriated the gold, thereby causing unlawful pecuniary loss to Travancore Devaswom Board and unlawful pecuniary advantage to the accused.

16. After the completion of the gold plating works of door frames and connected plates and Dwrapalakas and connected pillar plates in September 2019, the gold cladded by UB Group on the above items were recovered at Smart Creations with the knowledge of the petitioner (A13) and other accused. It is revealed from the investigation so far conducted that 409 gms of gold was recovered from door frames and connected frames and 577gms of gold was recovered from Dwrapalakas and connected pillar plates and further 3 gms from the remaining



left out solutions. So the total quantity of gold recovered from these solutions is 989 gms. Pankaj Bhandari (A12) who supplied 394.900gms gold for gold plating Dwrapalakas and connected pillar plates as there were no sponsors for this work and he also supplied 9.900gms for gold plating the Balipeedam of Sabarimala. Pankaj Bhandari (A12) took 109.243gms of gold from the above mentioned extracted quantity of gold as his labor charge as instructed by Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1). So the remaining quantity with Pankaj Bhandari (A12) was 474.957gms and he handed over the same quantity of similar gold, but not the same gold extracted to the petitioner on 12.10.2019 through Mr.Kalpesh, who was arranged by the petitioner (A13). (Annexure-XII)

The contention of the petitioner is that he had paid the amount of Rs.14,97,288/- as the value of the quantity of gold to the Travancore Devaswom Board reflects his culpability in this case. First of all the



misappropriated gold belongs to Lord Ayyappa and the custodian of these assets is none other than Travancore Devaswom Board. The board has not authorized the petitioner (A13) to receive the gold and handover the money in lieu to the Board. The petitioner is well aware of the fact that the gold belongs to Lord Ayyappa and that has immense aesthetic and divine value rather than the material value. If he was innocent and as an Ayyappa devotee as claimed by him, he ought to have informed-the-Devaswom Board officials or any other responsible person instead of receiving this gold recovered from the above items. It is well established fact that the petitioner received the gold from Mr.Pankaj Bhandari (A12) knowing that it was the gold extracted from the door frame and connected plates, Dwrapalakas idol plates and side pillar plates. He stated in the petition that he had handed over 5 demand drafts of Rs.1,99,999 each, totaling Rs.9,99,995 bearing DD Nos.016773,016774,016783,016786 and



016788 through his account in IDBI Bank and remitted in favour of the Executive officer Sabarimala, Sree Dharmasastha Annadhana Trust Sabarimala on 25th, 28th, 30th and 31st October 2019 and on 2nd November 2019. Further the petitioner (A13) claimed that Rs.2,70,135/- was used for purchasing "Gold Haaram" in the name of Mr. Unnikrishanan potty (A1) and Rs.43,000/- for insurance and balance amount of Rs.1,70,000/- was transferred to the account of Mr. Unnikrishanan potty (A1). It is revealed from the evidences that the original gold extracted belonged to the Lord Ayyappa and the petitioner handed over the cost of gold to the annadhanam and to Mr.Unnikrishanan potty (A1) and it is nothing but a clear case of misappropriation originated from the well-organized conspiracy of the accused persons. The petitioner had knowledge and involvement in the transportation of the gold cladded idol plates from Sabarimala to Smart Creations. In the case of transportation of the Dwarapalaka idol plates and side pillar



plates it was the petitioner (A12) who arrange the transportation to Hydrabad and there to Chennai.”

14. The role of Sri.B.Murari Babu in Crime No.3700/2025 is concerned, paragraph Nos.2, 3 & 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 18 of the report filed by the Investigating Officer are relevant. The same are extracted as under:

“2. Mr.Murari Babu (A2), the petitioner herein was inducted into the service of Travancore Devaswam Board in the year 1995. After having worked in various capacities with Travancore Devaswam Board, he served as Administrative Officer of Sabarimala Temple from 17.08.2018 to 17.07.2019 and also served as Executive Officer from 12.07.2024 to 02.08.2025 and is under suspension from 07.10.2025. Being a senior officer and having sufficient experience in Travancore Devaswam Board and at Sabarimala, he was well aware of the fact that several items of the Sabarimala Sreekovil including the Dwarapalaka idol plates and the side plates were indeed gold cladded.

3&4. The petitioner (A2) was arrested on



23.10.2025 at 09.15 hrs and was remanded to judicial custody. He was taken into Police custody from 28.10.2025 to 31.10.2025, from 06.11.2025 to 10.11.2025 and from 15.12.2025 to 16.12.2025 now he is in judicial custody.

6. Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1), submitted a letter dated 17.06.2019 as per the direction of Mr.Murari Babu (A2), the petitioner addressing Mr. Sudheesh Kumar(A3), former Executive Officer, Sabarimala stating that he would repair and gold plate the Dwarapalaka idol plates and the side plates on sponsorship basis (Annexure-I). Mr. Murari Babu (A2), the then Administrative Officer of Sabarimala, forwarded the letter of Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) to Mr. Sudheesh Kumar (A3) along with his own letter wherein he purposefully and with ulterior motives misrepresented the gold cladded plates as just "Chembu Palikal" (Annexure- II). He had also enclosed a letter from Mr. Kandararu Rajeevaru, the Tanthri addressed the Executive Officer in which it was mentioned that permission could be given to gold plate the Dwarapalaka plates and corner plates



"പുശിയിട്ടുള്ള സ്വർണ്ണം കുറഞ്ഞ ചെമ്പ് തെളിഞ്ഞിട്ടുള്ളതിനാൽ" (*Annexure - III*). *It's not possible to enclose the Thanthri's letter dated 18.06.2019 along with his letter dated 17.06.2019. The Travancore Devaswom Board discussed the matter as item no. 77 in the Board meeting held on 03.07.2019 and accorded permission vide ROC. 9097/18/M to get the repair works and gold plating works of the Dwarapalaka plates and side plates done by Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1), Bangalore (Annexure-IV). Subsequent to the above Board order Mrs. Jayasree (A4), the then Secretary issued the proceedings ROC/9097/18/M dated 05.07.2019 adding the words "ശ്രീ ഉണ്ണികൃഷ്ണൻ പോറ്റിക്ക് സ്വർണ്ണം പൂശുന്നതിനായി കൈമാറുന്നതിന് "* that was not mentioned in the Board order (*Annexure- V*). Though the petitioner was not present due to the transfer, while preparing the mahazar on 19.07.2019 (*Annexure- VI*) and 20.07.2019 (*Annexure- VII*), at the time of initiating the proposal the petitioner used the term "copper plates" rather than "gold cladded copper plates" for the first



time with respect to the aforesaid valuables owned by the Travancore Devaswom Board concealing the facts that these artefacts were gold cladded and which resulted in the extraction of the gold cladded on the Dwarapalaka idol plates and side pillar plates at Smart Creations, Chennai and thereby caused misappropriation by Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) and other accused.

The investigation revealed that Mr. Murari Babu (A2), the petitioner herein intentionally used the term "copper plates" rather than "gold cladded copper plates" though it is mentioned in the letter of Tanthri to facilitate the crime as part of criminal conspiracy.

9. As part of investigation all documents pertaining to gold cladding done in 1998 and gold plating works related to Dwarapalaka idol plates and pillar plates in 2019, 2025 and gold plating of door frames in 2019 and all other connected documents were seized and examined and investigation is conducted with respect to the documents, statements of witnesses and other scientific evidences.



10. It is submitted that a mahazar was prepared at the time of gold plating of Dwarapalaka idol plates and side pillar plates at Smart Creations, Chennai on 29.08.2019 and 30.08.2019 by Mr. R.G.Radhakrishnan (A8), the then Thiruvabharanam Commissioner. As per the mahazar 394.900 grams of gold was plated on these items (Annexure- XI).

11. It is submitted that, Mr.Murari Babu (A2), the petitioner was the Administrative Officer of Sabarimala at this time and he obtained the letter from Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1), and forwarded it to Mr.D. Sudheesh Kumar (A3), the then Executive Officer, along with his own letter wherein he purposefully and with ulterior motives misrepresented the gold cladded plates as mere "ചെമ്പു പാളികൾ" . Investigation revealed that it was Mr. Murari Babu (A2), who had in fact prepared the request of Mr.Unnikrishnan Potty (A1), at his office and then got it signed by Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1).

13. It is submitted that Mr. Murari Babu (A2), the petitioner was inducted into the service of Travancore Devaswam Board in the year 1995.



After having worked in various capacities with Travancore Devaswam Board, he served as Administrative Officer of Sabarimala Temple from 17.08.2018 to 17.07.2019. Being a senior officer and having sufficient experience in Travancore Devaswam Board and at Sabarimala, he was well aware of the fact that several items of the Sabarimala Sreekovil including the Dwarapalaka idol plates and the side plates were indeed gold cladded. The petitioner with malafide intention prepared his own letter dated 17.06.2019 in which it was stated as copper plates. Tanthri, in his letter dated 18.06.2019 it is stated that “പുശിയിട്ടുള്ള സ്വർണ്ണം കുറഞ്ഞത് ചെമ്പ് തെളിഞ്ഞിട്ടുള്ളതിനാൽ ” therefore it is clear that there was gold on the copper plates. Mr.Murari Babu (A2), the petitioner with ulterior motive of misappropriation of gold from the Dwarapalakas idol plates and side plates that crucial aspect was excluded from his report.

18. Mr.Murari Babu (A2), the petitioner, in his letter on 17.06.2019 to Mr.Sudheesh Kumar (A3), the then Executive Officer misrepresented the gold cladded dwarapalaka idol plates and the side



plates as mere "ചെമ്പ് പാളികൾ". Despite the fact that the Thanthri, in his letter had clearly the described the plates as "സ്വർണ്ണം കുറഞ്ഞ ചെമ്പ് തെളിഞ്ഞിട്ടുള്ളത്", the petitioner herein, purposefully and with ulterior motives omitted these words and merely represented the plates as "ചെമ്പ് പാളികൾ". As per the Devaswam Board Manual Vol- I, Chapter 10 (b) (4), Chapter XV, Section 14 (e) (9) and Chapter XV Sec 14 (e) (17) it shall be the duty of the Administrative Officer to have the custody of the valuables of the Devaswam. As a responsible officer, it was his duty to mention the contents of the Thanthri's letter in his recommendation letter to Mr. Sudheesh Kumar (A3), the then Executive Officer. Here, the petitioner used the term "copper plates" rather than "gold cladded copper plates" with respect to the valuable artefacts owned by the Travancore Devaswom Board, neglecting the letter of Thanthri, which resulted in the misappropriation of gold by Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) and other accused. Being the Administrative Officer of Sabarimala he had committed similar offences by signing on falsified



mahazers on 18.05.2019 and allowed door frame plates and connected plates to be handed over to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1). Afterwards, on 17.06.2019, the petitioner made A1 signing on the letter dated 17.06.2019 and forwarded it to Mr. D. Sudheesh Kumar (A3) on the same day along with the letter dated 18.06.2019 from the Tanthri addressed to the Executive officer in which it was mentioned that permission could be given to gold plate the dwarapalaka plates "since the gold on it had been faded". Later, on 12.07.2024, he took charge as Executive Officer at Sabarimala and on 17.08.2024, not much later than his taking charge he himself sent a letter to the Commissioner of Thiruvabharanam stating that several portions of the Gold plated Copper plates of the Dwarapalakas were damaged and that the President, Travancore Devaswom Board had instructed to get the repair works done before the Sabarimala season. It is pertinent to note here that, Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) and the petitioner were instrumental in illegally taking the Dwarapalaka and other items to Chennai in 2019, for gold plating, which led to the



misappropriation of gold from those articles by Sri. Unnikrishnan Potty and others. Since they have once again initiated this process, it can be assumed that they had designs to conceal the offences committed in 2019 and also to raise sponsorship in the name of gold plating probably with the intention of illegal financial gain. Moreover, their present act clearly establishes the fact that they had mutually colluded each other for the commission of the offences in the cases that are being investigated.

Suspected financial transactions in respect of Mr.Murari Babu (A2), the petitioner, his associates, relatives are being verified by collecting the Bank transaction details, landed property details, CDRs, etc. Other mode of communications and transactions resorted by the accused is also to be probed thoroughly.”

15. Similarly, in Crime No.3701/2025, the role of Sri.B.Murari Babu could be seen from paragraph Nos.3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of the report of the Investigating Officer and the same are extracted under:

“3). The petitioner (A2) was arrested at 09.45 hrs on 23.10.2025 and was remanded to judicial



custody. He was taken into Police custody for the period from 28.10.2025 to 31.10.2025 and from 06.11.2025 to 10.11.2025, now he is in judicial custody.

4). The allegation in the FIR against Mr. Murari Babu (A6), the petitioner is that in furtherance of the common intention, the accused entered into criminal conspiracy to misappropriate the gold cladded in 1998 by UB Group on the door frames and connected plates of the Sreekovil of the Sabarimala Temple and to obtain wrongful pecuniary gain to the accused and to cause wrongful pecuniary loss to the Travancore Devaswom Board.

On investigation it is revealed that Mr.D.Sudheesh Kumar (A5), the then Executive Officer, Sabarimala sent a letter vide EOP No. 223/19/SAB on 16.02.2019 to Mr. Vasu (A3), the then Devaswom Commissioner seeking orders for permission to dismantle the door-frame copper plates (മുൻപ് സ്വർണ്ണം പൂശിയിട്ടുള്ളത്) and hand over the plates to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1), Bangalore for gold plating and to reinstall the plates on the door frames after gold plating



(Annexure I). The reference shown in the letter is TDB. ROC 9097/18/M dated 06.08.2018 (Annexure-II). Mr.N.Vasu (A3) the then Devaswom Commissioner in his letter vide ROC 6068/18/SAB on 06.03.2019 addressed to the Secretary, Travancore Devaswom Board, committed a criminal misconduct by inaccurately referring the gold cladded copper plates as mere "copper plates", apart from the fact of existing gold cladding cited in the letter of Mr. Sudheesh Kumar (A5). Subsequently, the Travancore Devaswom Board in its Board meeting held on 19.03.2019 in agenda No. 30 also referred to it as "copper plates" and gave permission to hand over the "Copper Plates" (ചെമ്പ് പാളികൾ) to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) for gold plating after duly preparing the mahazar and thereafter to reinstall the plates after the gold plating done, (Annexure-III) Board note). Mrs. Jayasree, the then Devaswom Secretary issued the Board proceedings vide ROC 9097/18/M on 20.03.2019 (Annexure-IV). The 7 pieces of gold cladded door frames were dismantled on 18.05.2019 on the basis of the Board order, by preparing a mahazar. The mahazar was prepared



by Mr.K.S.Baijoo, (A4) the then Thiruvabharanam Commissioner (Annexure-V). As per the mahazar, the total weight of the 7 pieces together, while weighing at Sabarimala (before cleaning) was 42.100 Kg and the 7 pieces were handed over to A1. The mahazar was attested by Mr. Murari Babu (A2), the then Administrative Officer, Sabarimala. A close scrutiny of the mahazar, when read in conjunction with the statement of witnesses indicates that the mahazar was prepared purposefully inaccurately and in a highly irresponsible manner. The mahazar is silent about the presence of gold cladding even though the Smith was present during the preparation of the mahazar. Moreover, Mr.Murari Babu (A6) the petitioner and others, who are experienced officers of Travancore Devaswom Board and having sufficient experience of having worked at Sabarimala had clear knowledge and understanding that the door frames were originally gold cladded, committed grave official misconduct by wilfully and with dishonest intention, wrongfully referred to them as copper plates even in the mahazar. Further investigation



revealed that, some of the witnesses who were present at the time of preparing the mahazar had indicated the presence of gold on the plates to the others present there, which reiterates the fact that the accused present there were having clear knowledge that the door frame plates of Sreekovil were in fact gold cladded.

Having taken possession of the door frames, Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) took the plates to SMART Creations, Chennai. No officer of Travancore Devaswom Board accompanied Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) to SMART Creations and the gold plating process was not supervised by the Thiruvabharanam Commissioner as ordered by the Travancore Devaswom Board. There, the cladded gold was stripped from the copper plates and 184 gms of gold supplied by the sponsor Govardhan Roddam, Bellari was plated on the 7 door frame plates as sponsorship, as told by Govardhan Roddam. The gold stripped from the door frame plates was left unaccounted in the stripping solution at the SMART Creations.

After gold plating, the 7 pieces were brought back to Sabarimala on 15.06.2019 by



Unnikrishnan Potty and that too without the escort of Travancore Devaswom Board officials and no mahazar was prepared regarding this either at Smart Creations or at Sabarimala and the weight of the plates also was not recorded during re-installation. All these acts clearly depict the connivance, conspiracy and involvement of the accused persons in the commission of the offences.

5.Mr.Murari Babu (A6), the petitioner was the Administrative Officer of Sabarimala from 17.08.2018 to 17.07.2019. In this case he was part of preparing the mahazar on 18.05.2019 for handing over the door frames and other connected plates to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1). Mr. Murari Babu (A6), the petitioner herein was inducted into the service of Travancore Devaswom Board in the year 1995. After having worked in various capacities with Travancore Devaswom Board, he took charge as Administrative Officer of Sabarimala Temple on 17.08.2018. Being a senior officer and having sufficient experience in Travancore Devaswom Board and at Sabarimala, he was well aware of the fact that the door-frames were indeed gold cladded. As per the Devaswam



Board Manual Vol- I, Chapter -XV, 10 (b) (Annexure- VI), Chapter XV, Section 14 (e) (9) (Annexure- VII), and Chapter XV Sec 14 (e) (17) (Annexure- VIII), it shall be the duty of the Administrative Officer to keep all the valuables of the Devaswoms entrusted to his care and maintain registers of valuables properly and up to date and have the custody of the valuables of the Devaswom. He has violated the duties entrusted to him as per the Devaswom manual for the execution of the conspiracy by all the accused. He also had blatantly violated the provisions of the Devaswom Manual which mandates that all temple related works are to be carried out within the Temple premises itself (Devaswom Manual, Vol-II, Chapter-IX-23, Para-4, Page 116, (Annexure- IX), and Thiruvithamcore Devaswom Sub Group Manual Chapter X, Para-26, Page 149,150) (Annexure- X). When the door frames and connected plates were brought back after gold plating to Sabarimala, no mahazar was prepared and no entries were made in the registers of valuables. Which is in contravention of the duties entrusted to him by the provisions cited above in



the Travancore Devaswom Board manual. By doing the above criminal activity, he has caused illegal pecuniary gain to the accused and illegal pecuniary loss to the TDB.

6. It is submitted that Crime No. 3701/2025 was registered with respect to the misappropriation of gold from the gold cladded copper plates covered on the door frame and connected prabhamandalam against accused 1 to 8. During investigation 5 more accused were arrayed as accused till 09.01.2026. A report describing the details of 7 plates involved in the case was submitted before the Hon'ble Enquiry Commissioner & Special Judge (Vigilance), Kollam on 22.12.2025 (Annexure - XI)

8. The submission of the petitioner is baseless and his role in the crime is well explained in Para 4.

9. (A to E) The duties and responsibilities of Administrative Officer of Sabarimala as mentioned in Devaswom Board Manual Vol-I, Chapter -XV, 10 (b) is :-

(2). They have to conduct daily, monthly and other ceremonies in Devaswoms under their charge properly and in time as per the



instructions received from the Executive Officer, Sabarimala.

(3). To keep correct accounts and maintain all registers and records up to date and carry out the orders of the superior officers from time to time.

(4). To keep all the valuables of the Devaswoms entrusted to his care and maintain registers of valuables properly and up to date.

As per the Devaswom Board Manual Vol- I, Chapter XV, Section 14 (e) (9) it shall be the duty of the Administrative Officer to check all sorts of wastes, misappropriation and malpractices in the institution and in Devaswom Board Manual Vol- I, Chapter XV, Sec 14 (e)(17) it is again reiterated that it shall be the duty of the Administrative Officer to have the custody of the valuables of the Devaswom. Being the custodian of the valuables of Sabarimala Devaswom, as the Administrative Officer of the Temple, it was the bounden duty of the petitioner to ensure the priceless gold cladded door frame plates and connected plates would not have been subjected to any misappropriation and



misuse. The contention of the petitioner is baseless and devoid of merit due to the fact mentioned above and in Para 4.

F). (i). The petitioner in committing dishonest misappropriation of property by cheating the Devaswom amounts to the offence punishable under sections 403 of the Indian Penal Code. The entire process for the illegal removal of gold and its misappropriation was commenced at the time when the petitioner was the Administrative Officer of the Devaswom. The investigation is going on to find out the monetary benefits and other benefits achieved by him.

(ii & iii). Mr. Murari Babu, the petitioner herein was inducted into the service of Travancore Devaswom Board in the year 1995. As per Sec. 2(c) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, he comes under the purview of Public servant. As per the Devaswom Board Manual Vol-I, Chapter -XV, 10 (b)

(4) the Administrative Officer of Sabarimala has to keep all the valuables of the Devaswom entrusted to his care and maintain registers of valuables properly and up to date. The petitioner,



as the Administrative officer is responsible for protecting and safeguarding all the valuables of the Devaswom, there was in fact entrustment of property. He had also committed the offence of criminal breach of trust and criminal breach of trust by public servant, and is there by liable for the offences under section 406 and 409 of Indian Penal Code. As per the Devaswom Board Manual Vol-I, Chapter -XV, 10 (b) (4) the Administrative Officer of Sabarimala has to keep all the valuables of the Devaswom entrusted to his care and maintain registers of valuables properly and up to date.

(iii & iv). The mahazar dated 18.05.2019 prepared to hand over the door frames and connected plates to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) was attested by Mr. Murari Babu (A2), the then Administrative Officer, Sabarimala and the contents are not fully true and some of the witnesses cited in the mahazar had not put their signature. A close scrutiny of the mahazar, when read in conjunction with the statement of witnesses indicates that the mahazar was prepared purposefully inaccurately and in a highly irresponsible manner. The



mahazar is silent about the presence of gold cladding even though the Smith was present during the preparation of the mahazar.

(v). There are sufficient evidences to prove criminal conspiracy among the accused and clearly established in the above mentioned facts. The malafide intention of the petitioner (6th accused) resulted in the handing over of the door frame plates and connected plates to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1) and thereby caused misappropriation of the gold cladded on the above items. Without a criminal conspiracy among the accused, the above items could not have been taken outside, violating the duties and functions entrusted up on the members of the Devaswom Board and its officials.

(vi) The petitioner had committed criminal misconduct in his capacity as the Devaswom Administrative officer and a public servant. He had the responsibility to look after and protect the assets of the Devaswom. He had also created false and fabricated documents for the purpose of misappropriating the gold belonging to the Devaswom. With his act the accused obtained



illegal pecuniary advantage and Travancore Devaswom Board sustained illegal pecuniary loss. Hence the offence under section 13 (1) (a) r/w 13 (2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act is well established.”

16. As regards the role of Sri.A.Padmakumar in Crime No.3701/2025 is concerned, paragraph Nos.2 to 13 of the report of the Investigating Officer are referred to, which are extracted hereunder:

“2.....A report depicting the details of 7 gold cladded plates with regard to the door- frame plates and connected plates has been submitted before the Hon'ble Court on 22.12.2025 (Annexure -I)

There were 8 accused in the accused list at the time of registration of the case. Later, during the investigation the two Board members of Travancore Devaswom Board namely Mr. K.P. Sankardas and Mr. N. Vijayakumar have also been included into the array of accused and the investigation is being continued. (Annexure -II)

The facts revealed during the investigation of Crime No. 3701/CB/CU-IV/TVPM/D/2025 till date is as follows:- On 16.02.2019, Mr. Sudheesh



Kumar, the then. Executive officer, Sabarimala vide EOP No. 223/19/SAB sent a letter to the Devaswom Commissioner seeking orders for permission to dismantle the door-frame copper plates (മുൻപ് സ്വർണം പൂശിയിട്ടുള്ളത്) (Annexure -III) and hand over the plates to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty (A1), Bangalore for gold plating and to reinstall the plates on the door frames, after gold plating. But the Devaswom Commissioner, Mr.N.Vasu (A3) in his letter ROC 6068/18/SAB dated: 06.03.2019 (Annexure IV) addressed to the Secretary, TDB, purposefully referred the gold clad copper plates as mere "copper plates" omitting reference to the existing gold cladding, subsequent to which the Board in its meeting held on 19.03.2019, presided over by the petitioner, also referred to it as "copper plates" and gave permission to hand over the "Copper Plates" (ചെമ്പ് പാളികൾ) to A1 for gold plating, after duly preparing the mahazar and thereafter to reinstall the plates after gold plating done. The Board decision on 19.03.2019 specifically authorises the Thiruvabharanam Commissioner to supervise the gold plating process. (AnnexureV) Based on this,



the Devaswom Secretary issued the Board proceedings as ROC 9097/18/M dated: 20.03.2019(Annexure VI). The Board decision was taken unanimously by the petitioner herein and A.11 and A.12 (Board members). The 7 pieces of gold cladded door frames were dismantled on 18.05.2019, on the basis of the Board order, by preparing a Mahazar. The mahazar was prepared by Mr. K. S. Baijoo, (A4) the then Thiruvabharam Commissioner. As per the Mahazar, the total weight of the 7 plates together, while weighing at Sabarimala (before cleaning) was 42.100 Kg and the 7 plates were handed over to A1. The Mahazar was attested by Mr. K.S. Baijoo, Thiruvabharanam Commissioner, Sabarimala, Mr. D. Sudheesh Kumar, Executive Officer, Sabarimala, Mr. Murari Babu, Administrative Officer, Sabarimala, Mr. V.M Kumar, Smith. and Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty. A close scrutiny of the Mahazar, when read in conjunction with the statement of witnesses indicates that the Mahazar was purposefully prepared inaccurately and in a highly irresponsible manner. The Mahazar is silent about the presence of gold cladding even though the



Smith was present during the preparation of the Mahazar. Moreover Mr. Muari Babu and Mr. Sudheesh Kumar and others, who are experienced officers of Travancore Devaswom Board and having sufficient experience of having worked at Sabarimala had clear knowledge and understanding that the door frames were originally gold cladded, committed grave official misconduct by wilfully and with dishonest intention, wrongfully referred to as copper plates even on the Mahazar. Further investigation revealed that, some of the witnesses present at the time of preparing the Mahazar, had indicated the presence of gold on the plates to the others present there, which reiterates the fact that the accused present there were having clear knowledge that the door frame plates of Sreekovil were in fact gold cladded.

Having taken possession of the door frames, A1 Unnikrishnan Potty took the plates to SMART Creations, Chennai. No officer of Travancore Devaswom Board accompanied A1 to SMART Creations and the gold plating process was not supervised by the Thiruvabharanam



Commissioner as ordered by the Travancore Devaswom Board. There, the cladded gold was stripped from the copper plates and 184 gms of gold supplied by the sponsor Govardhan Roddam, Bellari was plated on the 7 door frame plates as sponsorship. The gold stripped from the door frame plates was left unaccounted in stripping solution at the SMART Creations.

After gold plating, the 7 plates were returned to A1 with a warranty certificate issued in the name of Mr. Govardhan. Investigation revealed that 409 gms of gold was recovered from the solution of gold taken from the 7 plates by the recovery expert at SMART creations and misappropriated by the accused. (but the plates were plated with the gold as supplied by the sponsor Mr. Govardhan) The gold plated door frame plates were brought back to Sabarimala, by Unnikrishnan Potty, a private person and that too without the escort of Travancore Devaswom Board officials and no Mahazar was prepared regarding this either at Smart Creations or Sabarimala and the weight of the plates also was not recorded during re-installation. All these acts clearly depict



the connivance, conspiracy, involvement of the accused persons in the commission of the offences.

Investigation revealed a series of serious official misconduct and administrative lapses on the part of Devaswom officials right from the initial correspondence till the handing over of the door frame plates to Mr. Unnikrishnan Potty without proper authorisation. No estimate was taken by the Devaswom smith and no agreement was executed between the Board and the Sponsor. By handing over the sacred door frame plates to Unnikrishnan Potty and by allowing him to take the frames to Smart Creations Chennai, Devaswom officials had blatantly violated the provisions of the Travancore Devaswom Board Manual which mandates that all temple related works are to be carried out within the Temple premises itself (Travancore Devaswom Manual, Vol-II, Chapter-IX-23, Para-4, Page 116, (Annexure VII) and in Thiruvithamcore Devaswom Sub Group Manual Chapter 10, Para-26, Page 150). (Annexure VIII). Despite having clear knowledge that the plates were gold cladded in 1998, none of the Devaswom officials enquired



about the gold that was stripped from these plates at Smart Creations. By not effectively supervising the works at Smart Creations and by not taking the weights of the gold plated door frame plates on re-installation and by not making prompt entries in the relevant registers, the Devaswom officials had committed grave official malpractice which led to the commission of misappropriation. All these acts and omissions from the part of Devaswom officials tantamounts to official misconduct, thereby abetting and aiding Unnikrishnan Potty and others to misappropriate the gold at Smart Creations, causing unlawful pecuniary loss to Travancore Devaswom Board and corresponding unlawful gain to Unnikrishnan Potty and others.

PARAWAR REMARKS ON THE STATEMENT OF FACTS

1. Mr. A. Padma Kumar was the President of Travancore Devaswom Board from 15.11.2017 to 14.11.2019. On 06.03.2019, the 3rd accused N.Vasu, based on the recommendation of the 5th accused, sent a letter to the Secretary seeking orders to get the gold plating works of the door frames of the



Sreekovil done by A1 Unnikrishnan Potty. The Board discussed the matter in the meeting held on 19.03.2019. Mr. A Padma Kumar, despite having clear knowledge that the door frames were cladded with gold, made corrections in the Board note in his own handwriting by striking off the word "പിത്തളയിൽ " and wrote the words " ചെമ്പ് പാളികൾ " instead of writing "gold cladded copper plates". He also wrote the word "അനുവദിക്കുന്നു" in his own hand writing. The Board, after discussing the matter, permitted the proposal to be carried out. On the basis of the Board order, the gold cladded copper plates were handed over to A1 Unnikrishnan Potty, who along with others misappropriated the gold at Smart Creations, Chennai. Mr. A.Padma Kumar, being the President of Travancore Devaswom Board and the Administrative head of the Board was duty bound to protect all the properties and funds of Travancore Devaswom Board. The Board, as a body corporate was bound to exercise supervision and control over all the officers and staff of Travancore Devaswom Board. In this case, Mr. Padma Kumar committed grave official



misconduct by deliberately making false entries in official correspondences, which ultimately led to the misappropriation of gold, thereby causing irreparable unlawful financial loss and reputation to Travancore Devaswom Board and corresponding unlawful pecuniary gain to A1 and others. Even after the procedure of sanctioning the work, the Board deliberately abstained from its duties regarding the supervision of implementation of these orders. Hence the contention of the petitioner that he is absolutely innocent of the allegations levelled against him and he has been falsely implicated in this case with ulterior motives and vexatious intentions is baseless.

2. The process of the handing over of the gold cladded door frame plates of the Sreekoil of Sabarimala comprising Prabhamandalam as 7 plates to A1 Unnikrishnan Potty was initiated by A5 Mr. D. Sudheesh Kumar, the then Executive Officer of Sabarimala vide letter EOP No. 223/19/SAB dated 16.02.2019 by referring the Board Order dated 06.08.2018(AnnexureIX). In this letter, he had mentioned that the work of the main door of Sabarimala was nearing completion and that the



new door would be brought to Sabarimala when the temple opens on 11.03.2019, as agreed by the sponsors. He further states that the sponsors had agreed to him that, when the new door is installed at Sabarimala, the sponsors had agreed to gold plate the "old copper plates" covering the door frames of the Sreekovil. In this letter addressed to Devaswom Commissioner, he seeks favourable orders from the Board for gold plating the door-frame plates (മുൻ സ്വർണ്ണം പൂശിയിട്ടുള്ളത്). The Board order No. 9097/18/M dated 06.08.2018 is shown as the reference in this letter. This board order relates to the work of the new door of the Sreekovil. Following this, as detailed above, the Board in its meeting held on 19.03.2019, granted permission to hand over the door frame plates to A1, Unnikrishnan Potty. The Board meeting was presided over by the petitioner and the two members, Mr. Sankaradas (A11) and Mr. Vijayakumar (A12). None of these correspondences, right from the letter of A5 D. Sudheesh Kumar, A3 Mr. N. Vasu and the Board order dated 20.03.2019, mention about the request from the Thanthri for the gold plating works of the



door-frame plates. Moreover, investigation revealed that the opinion of the Thantri was not sought in this case and no Anunja was performed in connection with this work. Hence the contention of the petitioner that the Thanthri of Sabarimala temple himself had requested to conduct the repair works and gold cladding of the door fame plate is devoid of merit.

***3 & 4.** The Board discussed the matter in the meeting held on 19.03.2019. Mr. A Padma Kumar, despite having clear knowledge that the door frames were cladded with gold, made corrections in the Board note in his own handwriting by striking off the word "പിത്തളയിൽ" and wrote the words "ചെമ്പ് പാളികൾ" instead of writing "gold cladded copper plates". He also wrote the word "അനുവദിക്കുന്നു " in his own hand writing. The Board, after discussing the matter, permitted the proposal to be carried out. The petitioner who was the President of Travancore Devaswom Board from 15.11.2017 to 14.11.2019 was the head of the administration of the Board as mandated in the Travancore Cochin Hindu Religious Institution Act 1950. He was duty bound*



to protect all the properties and funds of the Board and as a body corporate, the Board was bound to exercise supervision and control over all the staff and officers of Travancore Devaswom Board. By wilfully suppressing the fact that the door-frame plates were gold cladded in official records and by inserting the word "ഒപ്പം" the petitioner and the other accused aided the handing over of the gold cladded door-frame plates to A1 who took the plates to Smart Creations, Chennai, where the gold from the plates were stripped and misappropriated. By allowing the gold cladded door-frame plates to be transported to Chennai, the petitioner violated the provisions of Travancore Devaswom Manual, Vol-II, Chapter-IX-23, Para-4, Page 116, and in Thiruvithamcore Devaswom Sub Group Manual Chapter 10, Para-26, Page 150, which mandates that works involving the use and handling of valuables belonging to the Devaswom should always be carried out at a place within the Devaswom premises and in the presence of a responsible officer authorized by the Thiruvabharanam Commissioner. Investigation revealed that the false entries and omissions made



in the official correspondences and records as stated above were made intentionally to facilitate the entrustment of the gold cladded frames to A1 as part of the larger conspiracy. Moreover, the petitioner, as the administrative head of the Board made no efforts to ensure that all legal requirements were scrupulously followed by the subordinate officers to protect the sacred plates from being subjected to any misappropriation or misuse. Hence the contention of the petitioner that no malafide intention can be attributed against him is absolutely baseless and devoid of merit. It can be established from the records that the decision of the Board meeting on 19.03.2019 to hand over the gold cladded door-frame plates to A1 for repair and gold plating works, was taken unanimously by the petitioner and the other two board members. This decision taken, with gross disregard for the mandatory provisions of Travancore Devaswom Board Manual led to the misappropriation of gold that was cladded on the door-frame plates at Smart Creations, Chennai. As the administrative head of the Travancore Devaswom Board, it was his primary duty to ensure that all property



belonging to the sacred temple are protected at all costs

5. During the course of investigation Mr.K.P. Sankaradas and Mr. N. Vijaya Kumar have been arrayed as A11 and A12 respectively in this case. Hence the contention of the petitioner that the other Board members are excluded from criminal liability is unfounded.

6. It is clear from the investigation conducted so far that,at the board meeting held on 19.03.2019, the petitioner, who was well aware of the fact that the door frames and other adornments of the Sreekovil of Sabarimala were gold cladded, deliberately scored off the word “പിത്തള” in the Board notes under agenda no. 30 and wrote “ചെമ്പ് പാളികൾ ” in his own handwriting instead of writing “സ്വർണ്ണം പതിച്ച ചെമ്പ് പാളികൾ ” with the malicious intension of entrusting the gold cladded door-frames to A1. Hence the contention of the petitioner that he was merely correcting a typographical error,cannot be accepted.

7. The Travancore Devaswom Board after obtaining necessary orders from Hon. High Court



of Kerala at Ernakulam authorized the then Project Chief Engineer Mr. Ravikumar to execute an agreement with UB Group, Bangalore for traditional gold cladding works of Sabarimala Sreekovil. The agreement was executed on 16.04.1998. As per this agreement UB Group would undertake the gold cladding works of various sacred articles of the Sanctum Sanctorum, including gold covering in 4 layers on new copper sheet of 22 gauge with 24 carat gold and fitting on the roof of the Sreekovil, gold plating the existing 3 Thazhikakudoms and re fixing it, gold plating the inner brass sheet of Sreekovil, gold plating the top of the ceiling above Hundi and the Hundi in front of the Sopanam. Later through a subsequent application and as approved by the Hon'ble High Court of Kerala, the gold cladding of the ornament work of the front door of the Sreekovil of Lord Ayyappa Swamy at Sabarimala, Gold covering the idols of two Dwarapalakas in front of the Sreekovil, Gold covering the wall windows (Ghanadwarams or Karnakudam) and the pillars of the walls of the Sreekovil, gold covering the side beedings around the Sreekovil and gold plating the



Thazhikakudoms of the Subshrine of Kannimoola Ganapathy and Nagaraja were also included in the scheme of work. The work of gold cladding was entrusted to JNR Jewellery, Chennai, by UB Group and the works commenced on 17.05.1998 and was completed on 15.10.1998. From the letter addressed to the Secretary, Travancore Devaswom Board by Mr. S.R Jayakumar, Manager, Finance dated: 15.10.1998 it can clearly be understood that UB group had utilized 30,291 grams of gold for plating 9 items of the Sreekovil of Sabarimala. As per this letter, 1564.190 grams of gold was cladded on the Dwarapalakas in front of the Sreekovil, 2519.760 grams of gold was cladded on the front door of Sreekovil and the art above the door and 4302.660 grams of gold on the side beadings and eight pillars around the Sreekovil. (Annexure X) The investigation conducted so far, by examining and seizing and perusing records, it is reliably learnt that no mahazer was prepared for the gold cladding done in 1998. But the Annexure X clearly specifies and narrates the quantity of gold cladded on each items. The samples collected by the experts from the plates have been sent to VSSC for



scientific examination. When the Scientific examination result is received from VSSC, the quantity of gold cladded on the items can be well established. Although it is mentioned as 'Gold Plating' in this letter, it is revealed during the investigation that, in fact gold cladding of several layers was done on these sacred articles resorting to traditional methods and the entire work was done within the precincts of Sabarimala Temple. As part of collecting evidence the SIT seized several files and records that were maintained at various offices of Travancore Devaswom Board, relating to the gold cladding works undertaken by the UB group in 1998. All these files and records contain sufficient details to establish the fact that the various adornments of the Sreekovil were indeed gold cladded. Several officials including the then project Engineer, the Devaswom Secretary, Assistant Engineers, Overseers, Smith etc were questioned in detail and their statements were recorded. All the officials spoke in consonance with the contents of the files and stated without a shadow of doubt that the adornments were in fact gold cladded. The representatives of the workers



who undertook the gold cladding works in the year 1998 and some of the Police officials who were on duty at that time were also questioned and all of them stated that the above mentioned adornments were in fact gold cladded and some of the witnesses have even described the methodology adopted by the artisans during the gold cladding works. Hence the contention of the petitioner that there is no proof, assertion, evidence or specific allegation that the door-frames were in fact cladded with gold is absolutely baseless and contrary to facts and hence liable to be dismissed.

8. As admitted by the petitioner himself in para 14, page 12 of this bail application, the petitioner and his family have been associated with Sabarimala for decades and that he has been closely associated with the temple since his childhood days. From his very own admission, it is abundantly evident that he has knowledge about all the aspects related to the Sabarimala temple. Moreover, he took charge as Travancore Devaswom Board President on 15.11.2017 and the decision to handover the gold cladded door-frames to A1 was taken only on 19.03.2019, ie after 15



months of his taking charge. Having had sufficient experience in Sabarimala, the petitioner cannot take ignorance of the fact that he had sufficient knowledge that the door-frame plates were originally gold cladded in the year 1998 by UB group

9. It is evident and clearly established from the records seized and witnesses accounts that the various adornments including the door frame plates of Sreekovil of Sabarimala were indeed gold plated by UB group, Bangalore. The photographs collected during investigation also support this fact. In the letter issued by the Manager (Finance), MC Dowell & Company Ltd., United Breweries Group, addressed to the Secretary, Travancore Devaswom Board, Thiruvananthapuram, the details of gold plating work and the specific quantum of gold used for the gold cladding of the Sreekovil of the Sree Ayyappa Swamy Temple at Sabarimala are available. From the said letter, which bears the endorsement of the officers of the Board, a total of 2519.760 grams of gold was used for cladding gold on the front door of Sreekovil of Lord Ayyappa and the art above the door



including door frames. The total quantity of gold utilized for the entire gold cladding project executed through traditional methods, covering (i) the roof of the Sreekovil (including the front and rear arches), (ii) the rain gutter above the Hundi, (iii) the Hundi in front of the Sopanam, (iv) the narrative panels depicting the story of Lord Ayyappa on both sides of the Sreekovil, (v) the front door of the Sreekovil and the arch above it, (vi) the two Dwarapalakas in front of the Sreekovil, (vii) three Ghanadwarams (Karnakudam), (viii) the side beadings and eight surrounding pillars and (ix) five Kalasams, including those Kannimoola Ganapathy and Nagaraja (handed over to the officer in charge at Sabarimala) is recorded as 30,291 grams. This document also conclusively establishes the fact that the door-frame plates had been cladded with gold.

10. In this bail application the petitioner has put forward a claim that during his tenure as President of Travancore Devaswom Board, he had specifically instructed the Secretary as well as the Thiruvabharanam Commissioner to correctly



maintain the register of valuables as per manual and to update the registers. However no records are available to substantiate this claim of the petitioner. Moreover, on perusing the various registers during the course of investigation, it is noticed that most of the registers of Travancore Devaswom Board, most importantly those registers regarding the valuables of Devaswom, are maintained in a highly irresponsible manner and the entries are incomplete and vague. Had the petitioner, as claimed, given any such instructions, the transactions regarding the dismantling and subsequent repair and gold plating works would have found a place in these registers.

11. In the Board meeting held on 19.03.2019, chaired by the petitioner, it was unanimously decided to hand over the door-frames to A1 Unnikrishnan Potty after preparing a mahazar. But, there is no mention in the Board order that the work should be carried out within the Devaswom precincts itself, as mandated in the Travancore Devaswom Board Manual Vol- II, Chapter IX, Page 116. The petitioner had also put forward a contention that the mahazer was attested by



several persons including the Thanthri which would show that only the signatories were aware of the fact that the doors were being removed from the temple premises and the applicant was not present at the alleged place of occurrence. This contention of the petitioner is untenable, because as the President of the Travancore Devaswom Board, the petitioner cannot shirk his prime responsibility of protecting the valuables of the Devaswom from any misappropriation or misuse, instead the petitioner committed grave official misconduct by making false entries in official correspondences and records, and by not effectively supervising the work of the subordinate officers, he aided the entrustment of the sacred gold cladded door-frames to A1, which ultimately led to the misappropriation of gold from the scared plates at Smart Creations, Chennai. Moreover it is noticed that the Thantri, as claimed by the petitioner, has not attested the mahazer.

12. The petitioner, being the President of Travancore Devaswom Board and the Administrative head of the Board was duty bound to protect all the properties and funds of



Travancore Devaswom Board. The Board, as a body corporate was bound to exercise supervision and control over all the officers and staff of Travancore Devaswom Board. In this case, the petitioner committed grave official misconduct by deliberately making false entries in official correspondences, which ultimately led to the misappropriation of gold, thereby causing irreparable unlawful financial loss and reputation to Travancore Devaswom Board and corresponding unlawful pecuniary gain to A1 and others. As the president of the Board, the petitioner also failed to ensure that a proper agreement was entered into between the Board and the alleged sponsor, detailing specific conditions of work before handing over the sacred plates to A1. Moreover, the petitioner did not call for any documents relating to the work either before sanctioning the work or after the process of re-installation of the sacred plates was completed at Sannidhanam. The above facts clearly establishes the guilt of the petitioner and hence the contention that the petitioner is innocent is unfounded and liable to be dismissed.



13. Investigation of the case was conducted by scrupulously perusing several documents and files from various Devaswom offices and by examining more than 150 persons who are acquainted with the facts and circumstances of the case. The investigation conducted so far clearly establishes the fact that the petitioner, despite having clear knowledge that the door-frames of the Sreekovil were indeed gold cladded, misrepresented the gold cladded plates as mere “ചെമ്പ് പാളികൾ ” in the Board order and deliberately aided the entrustment of the plates to A1, without ensuring their safety, which paved the way for A1 and other accused to criminally misappropriate the gold from these plates at Smart Creations, Chennai. Hence the contention that the Board had issued the order dated 20.03.2019 only because of the recommendation forwarded to the Board by A3 is not maintainable and cannot be legally entertained.”

17. Insofar as Crime No.3700/2025 also highlighting the role of Sri.A.Padmakumar, a separate statement has been filed by the Investigating Officer, and the role of



Sri.A.Padmakumar therein is also akin to his role in Crime No.3701/2025, as the President of the Travancore Devaswom Board.

18. Now, the question that arises for consideration is whether the petitioners are entitled to regular bail in both crimes, as argued by the respective counsel for the petitioners?

19. When this Court considered the regular bail application filed by Sri.B.Murari Babu, Sri.K.S.Baiju and Sri.N.Vasu in B.A.No.14361/2025 and connected cases, the role of Sri.B.Murari Babu has been dealt in paragraph No.22 as under:

“22. When considering the role of Murari Babu alone in both these cases, it is well evident that at the time of taking decision to clad gold on Dwarapalaka idols, north and south of the Sreekovil involved in Crime No.3700/2025; and the door and other items also as alleged in Crime No.3701/2025, Murari Babu held the post of Administrative Officer till the 4th accused Sri S.Sreekumar had taken charge as the Administrative Officer on 17.07.2019 and he, in



fact, is responsible for the custody of all the valuables of Sabarimala temple in general in terms of the Travancore Devaswom Manual, as already extracted in the report of the Investigating Officer. It is relevant to note that the Devaswom Board decision placed before this Court would show that the Devaswom Board had not decided to authorise the 1st accused Unnikrishnan Potti to take out the Dwarapalaka idols and by a letter issued by the 4th accused Jayasree, the 1st accused was authorised to take those items outside the Sannidhanam. Thus Jayasree is a prime accused in this case. However, in Crime No.3701/2025 it could be seen that there was decision by the Board members to remove old door and to replace new door, though according to the prosecution, the same includes the door frames, the Shiva idol on its top, the arch including Vyaali Roopam, Raashi plates and Dasharadha plates. Any how, pursuant to the Board decision, orders were issued to entrust the above items to the 1st accused for getting the same cladded with gold by describing that the



same were originally made of copper by falsifying the records. It is pertinent to note that as argued by the learned ADGP, as per letter dated 17.06.2019 on getting a letter from the 1st accused dated 17.06.2019 addressed to the Executive Officer, he immediately recommended the removal of the items describing the same as copper ignoring the description of the items as gold cladded in the letter dated 16.02.2019. In addition to that, in the letter dated 17.06.2019, issued by Murari Babu, he had stated that he had obtained permission from the `Thantri` in this regard in writing. But as on 17.06.2019, Thantri had not given any letter to Murari Babu, though a letter in writing issued by the Thantri was obtained on the next day on 18.06.2019. As rightly pointed out by the learned ADGP this aspect alone would shw the mense rea of Murari Babu in the matter of misappropriation and therefore the contention in contra raised by the learned counsel for Murari Babu is found unacceptable. Thus the role of Murari Babu in both the crimes is well established, prima facie.”



20. Similarly, the role of Sri.N.Vasu has been dealt with in paragraph Nos.23 and 24 of the previous bail order as under:

“23. The next aspect is the role of Sri N.Vasu, who is the 3rd accused in Crime No.3701/2025. It is true that N.Vasu worked as Commissioner, Travancore Devaswom Board from 10.11.2010 to 15.03.2013 and also from 01.02.2018 to 14.03.2019. That apart, he worked as the President of the Travancore Devaswom Board in between 15.11.2019 and 14.11.2021. Even though it is argued by the learned counsel for N.Vasu that the prosecution has no records to show that the door frames were originally gold cladded, the learned ADGP placed the statements of many witnesses, who dealt with the door frames, door and other items of the Sreekovil. In this regard, the statements of witnesses Balakrishnan, S/o.Chinnayya; Nagarajan, S/o.Sankaran; Maniyasan, S/o.Gopalakrishann; Ramanujan, S/o.Sivaraman; Premji M.J, S/o.Janardhanan Pilla; K.Kumaran Nair, S/o.Ravikumar; Bharagvan,S/o.V.Kesavadas; C.R.Rajasekharan, S/o.Chellappan Pilla, showing that the door frames were originally cladded with gold are



available. Apart from that, as pointed out by the learned ADGP in Annexure I letter in the bail application of N.Vasu, it has been specifically stated that the door frames were originally cladded with gold and the prosecution allegation is that the above fact was suppressed by N.Vasu while issuing Annexure III letter in his bail application. Here as regards to the Dwarapalaka idols and other items involved in Crime No.3700/2025, there was decision by the Devaswom Board describing the items therein as copper instead of gold and thus all the Devaswom Board members involved in this decision, viz., Padmakumar, K.P.Sankardas and N.Vijayakumar are criminally liable for describing the original gold cladded items as copper plated, since the same is the starting point of misappropriation. Although the Investigating Officer arrested Padmakumar, others remain not arrested and no effective investigation against them to be noticed from the records available. This shows serious laxity in the investigation of this crime and casts shadow of doubt in the investigation. The Investigating Officer shall



address the same. When looking into the decision taken by the Devaswom Board, as seen from the minutes of the meeting, which relates to Crime No.3701/2025 and the decision was to change the old door of Sreekovil and substitute new door after cladding gold therein in Chennai on 01.03.2019 and 02.03.2019 and it was also decided to entrust the said work to be undertaken by Thiruvabharana commissioner. It was thereafter as alleged by the prosecution the door frames, the Shiva idol on its top, the arch including Vyaali roopam, Raashi plates and Dasharadha plates were taken by the 1st accused to Chennai and alleged to have misappropriated the original gold cladded therein by substituting lesser quantity of gold.

24. Thus it appears that the contention raised by the learned counsel for N.Vasu that, N.Vasu is absolutely innocent and there are no materials to show that the door frames were originally cladded with gold, cannot be found in favour of N.Vasu at this stage, where the available materials would suggest that the door frames, the Shiva idol on its top, the arch including



Vyaali roopam, Raashi plates and Dasharadha plates originally cladded with gold were alleged to be taken away to misappropriate the gold plates. Therefore, the innocence canvassed by the learned counsel for N.Vasu could not be found, at this stage.”

21. That apart, in paragraph No.28 of the earlier bail order, this Court observed as under:

“28. Before adieu, it is worthwhile to mention that, some stagnation in the investigation, after dismissal of the anticipatory bail applications filed by the 4th and 6th accused in Crime No.3700/2025, to be noted, though the anticipatory bail applications dismissed on 04.12.2025 moved by the 4th and 6th accused have been zealously opposed by the prosecution. Anyhow the 6th accused was not arrested till 16.12.2025 though it is learnt that he was arrested on 17.12.2025, twelve days after dismissal of his bail application, even though his role has been dealt in detail in the order dismissing pre arrest bail plea. It is true that the



4th accused was not arrested and her bail application moved on 18.12.2025 is under the consideration of the Hon'ble Apex Court. It is relevant to note that ROC 9097/18/M Board notice dated 05.07.2019 signed on 03.07.2019 as per the decision of the Devaswom Board stating that the Dwarapalaka idols and the north and south corner of Sreekovil cladded with copper were to be entrusted to the 1st accused to take the same outside for the purpose of gold cladding was signed by the Devaswom Board members, who participated in the meeting and S.Jayasree. But whether all the Devaswom Board members arrayed as accused in this case is in serious doubt. That apart, whether K.Sunil Kumar, R.G Radhakrishnan, V.S.Rajendra Prasad and K.Raghavan Nair named in the FIR in Crime No.3700/2025 were arrested also could not be gathered from the prosecution materials. The order permitting the 1st accused to take the door frames, door and other items for gold cladding, describing the same as copper plated in its origin was signed by A.Padmakumar, the President, Travancore Devaswom Board, Advocate



Vijayakumar, Member, Travancore Devaswom Board and K.P.Sankardas, Member, Travancore Devaswom Board, apart from S.Jayasree. It is surprising to note that, when asked as to whether Vijayakumar and K.P. Sankardas, who were either arrayed as accused in Crime No.3701/2025 and were arrested for the purpose of effective investigation, the learned ADGP on instructions from the Investigating Officer, who was also present in open Court, submitted that it was not done so far. This would show serious stagnation in the investigation after 05.12.2025 and the Investigating Officer shall address the same and to effectuate investigation against all erring officers without any discrimination and without segregating the culprit for any reasons. Similarly, while dismissing the anticipatory bail plea of the 4th and 6th accused in Crime No.3700/2025, this Court observed in paragraph No.13 that, "A perusal of prosecution records, with a view to find out the complicity of accused Nos.4 and 6, it could be seen that there has been deliberate intention and largely moulded conspiracy hatched by the accused persons and



certain other persons holding higher positions having connection with the administration of Sabarimala, prima facie. Otherwise, it is not at all possible to take the items outside the Sannidhanam, a holy place, as against the Devaswom Board Manual and also for gold cladding of the Dwarapalaka plates which would not require any gold cladding as its origin itself is gold. That is to say, as submitted by the learned ADGP, the 1st accused, Sri.Unnikrishnan Potty, is neither 'the poojari' nor 'the assistant poojari' of the Sabarimala temple. But he continued in the Sabarimala without any official designation under the grace of some high profile officials and as part of conspiracy hatched between the accused persons, he was authorised to take out the Dwarapalaka plates, originally cladded with gold, on the premise of describing the same as one made of 'copper plates', as against the mandate of Devaswom Board Manual. On perusal of the prosecution records, the allegations are very serious and mind blowing since such a misappropriation happened in a sacred place, viz., Sabarimala Sannidhanam



and this Court is shocked of the events. It appears from the prosecution records prima facie that Sri.Unnikrishnan Potty has not assigned with any duty in particular and if so, why he continued and dealt with the affairs of the Sabarimala Sannidhanam is a serious matter. It could be gathered further that Sri.Unnikrishnan Potty created an aura and enjoyed an unbridled freedom to devour the valuable gold of the holy deity, with connivance of the accused persons and this would not be possible without the involvement of some big guns who had role in the administration of Sabarimala temple of the Devaswam Board. Therefore, the investigation must go on further to elicit and bring all the culprits involved in this crime without leaving any room for escape as the allegations are very serious as already observed. Despite the same, no investigation in that direction to be discernible from the records available, in fact, this is a matter of anxiety and displeasure. I hope that the Investigating Officer shall give his attention in this regard hereafter, without fail.”



22. It is interesting to note that, this Court found laxity in the investigation during the period between 05.12.2025 and 19.12.2025 and the same was pointed out in the earlier bail order. It is noticeable that after delivery of the earlier bail order, the investigation gathered momentum, whereby Govardhan and Pankaj Bhandari were arrested. Thereafter, Sri.Vijayakumar and Sri.K.P.Sankardas were also arrayed as accused in both crimes. That apart, the Thanthri was also arrayed as an accused in both crimes and he was also arrested. But the arrest of Sri.Vijayakumar was delayed though his arrest was recorded after delay. But the arrest of Sri.K.P.Sankardas was not materialised till 04.01.2026 and on 04.01.2026, the same was recorded at the hospital that he has been admitted. What is his disease, is not discernible. Anyhow, now he has been continuing at Medical College Hospital, Thiruvananthapuram under judicial custody after remand.



23. It is discernible from the case records that Sri.K.P.Sankardas participated in the initial stage of investigation and he appeared before the Investigating Officer without complaints of any health issues since he was not arrayed as an accused at the relevant time. Later, his involvement in this crime was noticed by this Court as on par with Sri.A.Padmakumar. Sri.K.P.Sankardas had approached the Hon'ble Apex Court to remove the observations in the earlier bail order passed by this Court and the Hon'ble Apex Court dismissed the said plea. In the meantime, he got impleaded as accused in both crimes and thereafter, he got admitted in a private hospital of his choice complaining of some ailments all on a sudden. Although mere hospitalization of an accused would not by itself is a reason to avoid arrest of the said accused as his arrest could be recorded in the hospital, the said course of action was not opted by the Investigating Officer for the reasons known to him. That is to say, even though the



Investigating Officer can easily record the arrest of Sri.K.P.Sankardas at the hospital much earlier, as done on 04.01.2026, without interrupting the medical treatment if any, and continue the same, if necessary, his arrest was delayed indefinitely till 04.01.2026. It is judicially noticeable that the son of Sri.K.P.Sankardas, has been working as DIG, a higher police official in the State.

24. In the case of Sri.K.P.Sankardas, what is his ailment and whether his hospitalization at the private hospital was required for the treatment of any disease, so also whether he has any present serious ailment to continue his hospitalization are matters to be ascertained. Therefore, there shall be a direction to the Medical Superintendent, Medical College Hospital, Thiruvananthapuram to form a competent Medical Board of expert doctors and to file a comprehensive report based on the opinion of the Medical Board inclusive of the Medical Board report with specific mention whether such an



ailment had been there inasmuch as Sri.K.P.Sankardas is concerned. Further, the report also must contain what is the present ailment of Sri.K.P.Sankardas and the treatment thereof with specific assertion as to whether his hospitalization further more is required and also whether treatment, if any, can be continued inside the jail. The Medical Superintendent is directed to file the report on or before 27.01.2026 in a sealed cover before the Registrar (Judicial) of this Court, to be placed before me for further action, if any.

25. While evaluating the materials available in this case, as per the prosecution allegation itself, 4147 grams of gold were misappropriated altogether in both crimes. But only 474.960 grams of gold alone were recovered from Govardhan and the investigation does not suggest what is the mode of investigation opted to recover the remaining gold. Evidently, the Dwarapalaka plates as well as the door frames involved in both crimes were dealt by the 1st accused, then, Govardhan and



Pankaj Bhandari, strongly assisted by the other accused persons already in the array of accused and other persons, if any, yet to be arrayed as accused after investigating who are the persons otherwise dealt with the gold alleged to be misappropriated. Indubitably, the very basis of the prosecution is centered on the allegation of misappropriation of 4,147 grams of gold and if so, there must be investigation regarding how the misappropriated gold was dealt with and consequential recovery of the same if the recovery is possible. In order to have an effective prosecution of the culprits involved in these crimes, recovery of the misappropriated gold is absolutely essential or the Investigating Officer should give cogent and convincing reasons on the premise of frustration or other means so that the recovery is an impossibility. That means, the investigation shall go on how the misappropriated gold in its entirety was dealt with and where the same is. Thus, when there is failure to recover the misappropriated gold, that will give an edge to the



accused persons to get away from penal consequences and be it so, the entire prosecution becomes meaningless. Therefore, the Investigating Officer shall give his attention in this area to ensure effective and eventful investigation, since according to the Investigating Officer, 1564.190 grams of gold was cladded on the two Dwarapalakas and 4302.660 grams of gold was used for cladding side beadings and eight pillars around the Sreekovil, as per the report dated 15.10.1998 of UB Group, though the quantity of gold in each plate was not specifically mentioned in the report and samples of the same were also collected for obtaining a Forensic Analysis Report from VSSC, Thiruvananthapuram.

26. Coming back, grant of bail is the rule and denial of the same is an exception. That is to say, there are cases, where general rule to liberally grant bail would not apply, because of the seriousness of the particular nature of the case; namely, the seriousness of the offence, the manner in which the



offence was committed, the persons who committed the offence, whose property got misappropriated (coming to misappropriation), the impact of the same in the society, who are the affected persons of the crime and the chance of destroying the investigation and evidence by exercising highly influential position of the accused persons. On reading the prosecution allegations herein, as I have already extracted in the earlier bail orders, the misappropriation herein is one unheard of. That is, here the persons who now got booked as accused, are persons, who are duty bound to protect and preserve the temple property of the holy Deity Sree Sabarimala Ayyappan. Surprisingly, on the premise of protecting the property of the Deity, they jointly looted the property of the holy Deity and the records of the prosecution would *prima facie* show the same. Now, the investigation is on the midway and a major part of the gold alleged to be misappropriated is yet to be recovered or what happened to



the same or how the same was used could not be discernible from the investigation as traceable from the records placed in these matters. No doubt, the Investigating Officer shall ensure that this shortfall would not result in escape of the accused involved in these very serious crimes. Similarly, whether involvement of any other persons other than the accused already arrayed also is a matter where the Investigating Officer shall have to give his attention.

27. Coming to the bail plea at the instance of Govardhan, as I have already pointed out, only 474.960 grams of gold was recovered in this case from Govardhan. The persons who directly dealt with the gold as per the prosecution allegation are the 1st accused Unnikrishnan Potty, Govardhan and Pankaj Bhandari of Smart Creations. If so, Govardhan is to be questioned further in custody, as pointed out by the learned ADGP, to unearth, what happened to the remaining gold? It is true that Govardhan is in the habit of giving



donations to Sabarimala and admittedly he had given donations. But that by itself would not give any rescue to Govardhan when the allegation is that he had involved in misappropriation of a huge quantity of gold, as alleged by the prosecution. Even otherwise, even a small property having less value when submitted to the Deity of Sabarimala, its antique value could not be counted in terms of money and the value of the same is indefinite and may boost upto unimaginable figure, according to the will of the person who wants to procure the same. Be it so, the antique value of the gold misappropriated after removing the same from Dwarapalaka pillars and door frames so close to the holy Deity of Sabarimala Ayyappan could not be quantified in terms of money. No doubt, for these reasons, these crimes have an independent identity and the same separates these crimes from the ordinary crimes where grant of bail has been recognized as a rule. Thus, these crimes are definitely crimes



which would fall under the category of exception. In such a case, pre-mature release of Govardhan would definitely impede the investigation of these crimes. In such view of the matter, the bail plea, at the instance of Govardhan, at this stage could not be considered and therefore, his bail application must fail.

28. Coming to Sri.A.Padmakumar, though he was arrested on 20.11.2025, another member of the Devaswom Board, Sri.Vijayakumar, was arrested only recently. Similarly, the arrest of another member Sri.K.P.Sankardas was recorded at the hospital only on 04.01.2026. Therefore, the option of the Investigating Officer to question all the Devaswom Board members jointly to get more details of the misappropriation and the manner in which the gold was misappropriated would be spoiled, if Sri.A.Padmakumar will be released at this stage. That apart, Sri.A.Padmakumar, who held the post of President of the Travancore Devaswom Board



and a former member of legislative assembly is very influential and if he will be released on bail, he would definitely interfere with the investigation including the recovery of the remaining part of gold alleged to be misappropriated. That apart, the reasons stated hereinabove make this crime as special, also would negate the plea of bail at the instance of Sri.A.Padmakumar. Therefore, his bail application also must fail.

29. Coming to Sri.B.Murari Babu, his bail plea was denied earlier for the reasons stated in paragraph No.22 of the earlier order, which has been extracted in paragraph No.19 of this order. The learned counsel for Sri.Murari Babu argued that there is change in circumstance and circumstance according to him is the progress of investigation and his custody. On reading the observation in paragraph No.19, the role of Sri.Murari Babu in the misappropriation could not be viewed so lightly and in such a case, mere custody and the



progress of investigation would not yield in favour of Sri.Murari Babu, as this Court already observed that these crimes are exception where the general rule that bail is the rule and jail is an exception would not apply. As already observed, Sri.Murai Babu is one among the prime accused in both crimes, and when serious allegations of this nature are raised, that too, misappropriation from a temple by the persons, who were assigned to protect the same become the looters, grant of bail to such an accused could not be considered, particularly when the investigation is on the mid stage, where recovery of a large portion of the gold ornaments is yet to be effected. Therefore, if he would be released on bail, he would stand in the way of investigation including recovery of the gold and in such view of the matter, for the reasons extracted hereinabove and for this reason, his bail application also must fail.

In view of the matter, the bail plea at the instance of the



petitioners, could not be considered.

Before parting with this order, a Malayalam film song fluctuates in my mind, which reads thus:

"പഞ്ചാഗ്നി മദ്ധ്യേ തപസ്സു ചെയ്താലുമീ പാപ കർമ്മത്തിൻ
പ്രതിക്രിയയാകുമൊ
സംക്രമം... ഉദയസംക്രമം...
പ്രണവതാളത്തിലുണരുന്നിതാ...
ഞാനെന്ന ഭാവങ്ങളത്രയുമെരിച്ചു-
കൊണ്ടുയരുന്ന ജാതവേദാഗ്നിയായ്....
അദ്വൈതമന്ത്രങ്ങളഖിലാണധചൈതന്യ-
മേകമെന്നരുളുന്ന പൊരുളായ്
സംക്രമം... ഉദയസംക്രമം...
പ്രണവതാളത്തിലുണരുന്നിതാ..."

In fact, on a reading of the allegations against the accused persons herein in both crimes involving misappropriation of a large quantity of gold from the holy Sabarimala Sannidhanam, everybody, regardless of their caste or creed or stature may be murmuring this song to have a sigh of relief and to express their grief, dissatisfaction, and discontent regarding the nature of allegations involved in these crimes.



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Accordingly, these bail applications stand dismissed. It is made clear that if Sri.Murari Babu is entitled to get statutory bail on failure on the part of the prosecution to file final report in any of the cases, he is set at liberty to move the same and the same shall be considered in accordance with law.

Registry is directed to forward a copy of this order with a covering letter to the Superintendent, Medical College Hospital, Thiruvananthapuram to get the report, as directed in paragraph No.24 of this order without fail and place the report soon after getting the same.

Sd/-
A. BADHARUDEEN
JUDGE

Bb