**Name of the Project: Safe Zone Project – A multi-sectoral Road Safety Program during Sabarimala Pilgrimage Season in Kerala**

Sabarimala is a renowned temple situated in the high ranges of Pathanamthitta district in Kerala. Millions of pilgrims throng the Lord Ayyappa Shrine during season from mid-Nov to late-January, every year. The roads are very narrow, winding, and pass through forest areas and several urban centres in Pathanamthitta, Kottayam & Idukki districts of Kerala.

Traffic congestion, vehicle pile-up due to road crashes and break-downs become a regular scene on the roads leading to the Base Camps of Sabarimala. This causes a greater challenge for operation of emergency vehicles, rescue & relief work, and servicing of stranded vehicles. An extent of 382km of roads leading to Sabarimala was considered for Safe Zone Project.

Estimates indicated that nearly 4.0 crore pilgrims travelling in 80 lakh vehicles visited Sabarimala during the last season (2017-18). In the previous years, an average of 230 road accidents were reported in the Control centers, causing death of 4 to 6 pilgrims and injuries to over 200 persons during each season. Between 6000-7000 vehicles get stranded due to break-downs in narrow roads.

Safe Zone Project aims at reduction of road accidents and its severity, traffic delay due to parking activity & vehicle break-downs on project roads during pilgrimage season. The specific objectives are:

* Ensure safe mobility to pilgrims who visit Sabarimala during the season;
* 24x7 patrolling of 400 km of roads and monitoring of parking, vehicle pile-ups and crashes on roads;
* Install required sign boards, information boards with Help Line numbers in project roads;
* Operate round the clock Call Centres to alert incidence of accidents, break-downs, and medical emergencies;
* Co-ordinate rescue operations with Government and private agencies and arrange ambulance services;
* Arrange repair facilities to break-down vehicles.

The physical features of the project are

* Setting up three control rooms with communication facilities,
* Deployment of 15 Patrol teams with vehicles fitted with GPS, wireless, fire-extinguisher, safety devices;
* Installation of 550 sign boards, 70 blinker lights, 13 poly-chrome convex mirrors and hundreds of surveillance cameras on project roads
* In collaboration with 30 automobile companies, organized 300 mechanical staff, three mobile repair units with adequate spares, five cranes and 50 recovery vans.
* Arrangement of 4 ambulance service units from Private medical institutions
* Establishing Public Address system & information boards at all parking lots with multi-lingual announcement.
* Arranging drinking water for the needy people, supply of fuel for stranded vehicles on payment basis.

It is a great challenge for MVD and Police personnel to balance the burden of routine duties with additional responsibility of operationalizing Safe Zone Project, especially in the districts of central & southern Kerala.

The Safe Zone Project is considered as one of the biggest traffic management and road safety activities undertaken in the state. The project is successfully implemented for the past 8 years during Sabarimala pilgrimage season. An evaluation of the The project yielded positive results in reduction of accident severity, traffic delay to vehicles, and improved level of service on project roads. Visible presence of uniformed personnel on the roads have resulted in better road discipline, orderly movement of tourist vehicles.