

Don't declare Sabarimala a city: Gurukkal

Historian and member of the National Tiger Conservation Authority of India Rajan Gurukkal has appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi not to declare Sabarimala a city. "Sabarimala is legally an enclave right inside the Periyar Tiger Reserve, foremost among the best protected wildlife sanctuaries in the country," he says in his appeal. The Travancore Devaswom Board's (TDB) plan "to convert Sabarimala into a city and an international pilgrimage centre will have far-reaching ecological as well as legal consequences," he says.

He has made several human ecological studies of Sabarimala and impact assessments of development activities there and that "the TDB has no respect for the national laws of nature conservation and that it never understands Sabarimala as an eco-sensitive hotspot in the low-altitude wet evergreen forests in the Western Ghats, rather than a money-spinning site for exploiting the pilgrims."

Any move to declare Sabarimala a city is against the national laws and in gross violation of Supreme Court orders. It is also against the Supreme Court order I.A.No.1373 in WP (C) No.202 of 1995 banning the diversion of the forestland. "The new scheme to urbanise Sabarimala involves massive deforestation all in the name of pilgrims' welfare, but truly for urbanisation and commercialisation," the appeal said.