

## Kerala

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### Committed to a green cause

Radhakrishnan Kuttoor

*Sabarimala pilgrims being given free tree saplings under reforestation project*



**Conservation efforts: Saplings being given to pilgrims as part of the 'Poonkavana Vandanam' project jointly launched by the Department of Forest and Wildlife and the Mata Amritanandamayi Math at Pampa.**

**PATHANAMTHITTA:** 'Poonkavana Vandanam,' a nature conservation and reforestation scheme jointly launched by the Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department and the Mata Amritanandamayi Math Green Friends, at Pampa on the foothills of Sabarimala has become popular as a 'Care Mother Nature' project.

Under the project, saplings of trees, both timber and non-timber species, including sandalwood, rosewood, teak wood and fruit trees are distributed free to pilgrims returning from Sabarimala.

The scheme is aimed at spreading awareness of nature conservation and protecting trees, says Swami Jnanamruthananda, Green Friends co-ordinator.

Mata Amritanandamayi was instrumental in launching the project in association with the Forest Department a few years ago with a message that "a tree is equivalent to 10 sons." Her mission is to protect the sanctity of the sacred grove of Lord Ayyappa by spreading awareness of the importance of keeping the grove clean.

Forest Minister Benoy Viswom inaugurated the Poonkavana Vandanam stall near the Pampa Ganapati Temple recently. Jaggu, Head of Human Resources Department at the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences (AIMS), N. Prathapan Nair, AIMS Principal, and K.K. Haridas, Head of Cardiology,

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AIMS, were present.

K. Mohanachandran Nair, chief liaison officer, said over 250 saplings of fruit trees, sandalwood, rosewood, teakwood, etc., are distributed through the stall every day. The Math also distributes pamphlets on nature conservation.

Swami Jnanamruthananda said the Math specifically focusses on planting trees on temple grounds, hospitals compounds, near educational institutions, roadsides and select public places. Each Green Friends member also takes a vow to plant and maintain 18 saplings a year, said Swami Jnanamruthananda. The distribution of saplings at Pampa will continue on all days of the Mandaklam-Makaravilakku pilgrim season, he added.

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