

# 50,000 people across Kerala hospitals now rely on DYFI food packs, and ‘politics’ is to thank

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:** On 26 August, 61-year-old Vijayan K. was up at 1 am, cooking for a mass lunch. An agricultural labourer with a Rs 500 daily wage, he had spent the evening buying Rs 1,300 worth of vegetables, which he cleaned and cut with help from his wife and two children. By 8 am, Vijayan and his wife had cooked 25 meal packets, each including a curry, avial, two dry dishes and fish. Wrapped in banana leaves and newspaper, the meals were contributed that day for the mega food parcel initiative by Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) that feeds nearly 50,000 people across Kerala’s hospitals every day. DYFI is the youth wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). “We have spent many days in the Thiruvananthapuram Medical College for different needs. We know how much it costs, and how a free lunch can be a big help,” said 24-year-old Vaidharami, Vijayan’s daughter. On Tuesday, as ThePrint visited the hospital, a long queue of men, women with children, and elderly people was already forming inside the college at 11 am. By 1 pm, the crowd had swelled into thousands, with a few DYFI volunteers stationed to man the queue. “It’s a good initiative. That’s why there are so many takers. The food is also really good,” said 52-year-old Sobha, in line to collect lunch for her pregnant daughter-in-law, admitted at the hospital with diabetes-related complications during her third trimester.



A resident of Nedumangad, Sobha said that she had also collected the meal package Monday after another visitor in the ward recommended it. “We have been admitted here for a week, and it’s expensive to buy medicine and food for three people, three times a day. This has been a great help,” she said. A meal from the medical college canteen costs Rs 90, which can go up to Rs 140 if fish is included. Named “Hridayapoorvam (from the heart)”, the food parcel initiative was launched in January 2017 at the Thiruvananthapuram Medical College by a regional unit of DYFI. The success and mass public participation encouraged other district units of the organisation to adopt the model, and today it provides up to nearly 50,000 home-cooked meals across 70 government hospitals in the state, including all medical colleges, to patients and visitors for free. According to DYFI, the initiative

aims to provide nutritious food to patients and others, who are already reeling under health expenses, through community participation. It is led in every district by the DYFI district committee concerned, which assigns individual area committees the responsibility to collect meals from their localities in rotating turns. Interested households can contribute as many packages as they like. While some like Vijayan’s family offer 25, even one pack is welcome. “There is politics to it. At a time when there are divisions in society based on religion, caste and politics, people are preparing meals for those they don’t even know,” says DYFI state secretary V.K. Sanoj, adding that the organisation has managed to keep it going without a single day’s gap since 2017, even on holidays and festivals like Onam. The idea of Hridayapoorvam was first conceived by DYFI’s Vanchi-

yoor area committee in Thiruvananthapuram on 1 January, 2017. “There were just 100 packages that day distributed at the Thiruvananthapuram Medical College. We didn’t even know people would line up to take these meals,” said advocate M. Nidheesh, DYFI Vanchiyoor block secretary. The organisation slowly ramped up the initiative to its present scale with the overwhelming response from villages willing to cook the meals, he added. The number of receivers of the food parcels also grew over time. Cut to 2025. Nearly 5,000 meal packages are delivered at Thiruvananthapuram Medical College alone every day. For smooth functioning, each district unit prepares the schedule for each area committee well in advance for the entire year, with one committee distributing the parcels once every six months. However, despite its success, the initiative has also faced criticism. In 2023, then state Youth Congress president Rahul Mamkootathil—who stepped down from the post and was suspended from the party earlier this month, following multiple allegations of sexual misconduct—had alleged that “illegal activities” were being undertaken by DYFI under the garb of the initiative. After Rahul’s exit, DYFI responded to the criticism by wrapping the food parcels in newspapers carrying the news of his suspension. “Many Congress leaders themselves have told the Youth Congress to learn from DYFI about

grassroots mobilisation after they lost the last Assembly polls. Rahul’s comments came because of that. But we are going to continue no matter what. It’s not just Left supporters who take part. Everyone knows that if they give us a few meals, they will reach those in need,” Sanoj said. On Tuesday, DYFI’s Kilimanoor block committee in the Thiruvananthapuram district was assigned the task of collecting meal packets. But for Akhil V.S., an executive member of the committee, the process began well before the morning of 26 August. Notices for collection were distributed in the locality two days prior. On Monday night, he and other party members went door to door to remind the residents. On Tuesday morning, Akhil, along with seven others, collected around 5,000 packages from 1,800–2,000 houses, starting 8 am, before setting off at 11 am for Thiruvananthapuram Medical College, nearly 40 km away. “Collection is difficult. Many of us are working and have taken a day’s leave, and even college students have classes. So it’s hard to finish the collection on time with a small team,” said Akhil, who works as an accountant at the local panchayat. The initiative enjoys strong community support, with households contributing as many meal packages as they can, he added. After different teams collect food packets from villages, smooth distribution is ensured by a team of volunteers stationed at the hospital.

## More than 7,000 graft cases probed by CBI pending trial in courts, 379 for over 20 years: CVC

**NEW DELHI:** As many as 7,072 corruption cases probed by the CBI were pending trial in different courts, with 379 of them for over 20 years, according to the latest annual report of the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC). Of the total cases, 1,506 were pending for less than three years, 791 for more than three years and up to five years, and 2,115 for more than five years and up to 10 years, as on December 31, 2024, it said. A total of 2,281 such corruption cases were pending trial for more than 10 years and up to 20 years, and 379 for more than 20 years, said the report made public recently by the anti-corruption watchdog. “It was noted that 7,072 cases were pending for trials as on 31.12.2024. It is a matter of concern that 2,660 cases were pending for more than 10 years at the end of 2024,” it said.

According to the report, as many as 13,100 appeals/revisions, filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and by the accused, were pending in different high courts and the Supreme Court. Of these, 606 were pending for more than 20 years, 1,227 for more than 15 years but less than 20 years, 2,989 for more than 10 years but less than 15 years, 4,059 for more than five years but less than 10 years, 1,778 for more than two years but less than five years and 2,441 for less than two years, it said. During 2024, judgments were secured in 644 cases. Of these, 392 resulted in conviction, 154 in acquittal, 21 in discharge, and 77 “disposed of for other reasons”, the CVC said. The conviction rate last year was 69.14 per cent against 71.47 per cent during 2023. At the end of 2024, as many as 11,384 court cases, including non-corruption cases, were pending under trial in various courts, it said. The CVC report also said that 807 cases were registered by the CBI in 2024, which included 674 regular cases and 133 preliminary enquiries. “As many as 222 traps were laid for the detection of bribery cases during 2024, and 43 regular cases for possession of disproportionate as-

sets were registered during the year,” it said. Out of 807 cases, 111 cases were taken up on the orders of constitutional courts and 61 cases on the references received from state governments and Union Territories, said the report by the CVC, which exercises superintendence over the CBI in connection with the agency’s probe into offences alleged to have been committed under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. During 2024, CBI completed investigations in 1,005 cases, which comprised 856 regular cases and 149 preliminary enquiries. “At the end of 2024, a total of 832 cases were pending, out of which 776 were regular cases, in addition to 56 preliminary inquiries.” According to the CVC report, of the total regular cases, 445 were pending for more than one year, and 42 preliminary enquiries were pending for more than three months, at the end of 2024. The CBI had registered 502 cases under the Prevention of Corruption Act during 2024, involving 859 public servants (221 of them gazetted officers), the report said. As of December 31, 2024, a total of 529 corruption cases registered by the CBI were pending investigation. Of these, 56 were pending for over five years, 60 for more than three years but less than five years, 64 for more than two years but less than three years, 108 for more than one year but less than two years and 241 for less than one year. “It is expected of the CBI to complete the investigation within one year of registration of a case. Completion of investigation would imply filing of charge sheet in a court of law wherever warranted after the receipt of sanction from the competent authority, if required,” the CVC said. It, however, noted “some delay” in the completion of the investigation in certain cases. The reasons for the delay in completion of the investigation include “delay due to excessive work”, “inadequate manpower”, “delay in obtaining responses to Letters Rogatory” and “delay in granting prosecution sanction by the competent authorities.”

## A Rs 33,000 cr ‘banking fraud’: ED’s case against Arvind Dham, Amtek’s web of ‘500 shell companies’

**NEW DELHI:** By June 2006, businessman Arvind Dham’s firm, Amtek Auto, was on a short list of Indian manufacturers of automobile parts. Its revenue reportedly shot up to USD 635 million, bringing the firm within spitting distance of the market leader, Bharat Forge. Amtek Auto made rapid strides in the years preceding 2006, becoming a supplier for global giants General Motors, Ford, and Suzuki, among others. The firm continued to grow in line with the increasing demand for automobiles and subsequent expansion in the components industry. Less than a decade later, this success story came crashing down—in the final quarter of FY 2015-16, Amtek Auto reported a loss of Rs 529 crore. Earlier, Arvind Dham, roused

by gains in Amtek Auto’s export business and anticipating a boom in the domestic market, had gone on an aggressive expansion drive. The boom never came, and Amtek Auto found itself staring down a consolidated debt of nearly Rs 19,000 crore by 2016. Considering the implications for the firm, which by the time had accrued a massive debt, a consortium led by IDBI Bank infused funds to revive Amtek Auto in 2015. Nearly a decade later, all efforts by banks to revive the business turned out to be in vain, as Arvind Dham himself was no longer keen on Amtek Auto. Instead, he allegedly siphoned off nearly Rs 26,000 crore from the banks, in the form of loans, for his personal gain and buying real estate. Now, the Enforcement Di-



rectorate (ED) has charged Arvind Dham with establishing a web of nearly 500 shell companies operating as a layered structure, with up to 15 levels of indirect ownership, to divert funds in excess of Rs 26,000 crore in principal from the banks. Total dues of Amtek Group companies, including inter-

est payable on outstanding amounts, according to ED’s estimates based on claims filed by the IDBI Bank-led consortium, exceed Rs 33,000 crore, making this alleged banking fraud the largest India has ever seen. The ED also identified common directors, shareholders, and registered addresses among the nearly 500 shell companies, which had no actual business operations and primarily held real estate assets in their names. On scrutinising the documents of these firms, obtained from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), the ED found that a small number of Chartered Accountants had been handling the accounting of these firms. Summoned for questioning last May last year, one of the

CAs revealed he signed financial statements prepared by the Amtek Group, without conducting an audit of nearly 151 firms between 2018 and 2022. The first CA summoned by ED claimed he was pulled into this web by another CA, who in turn, confirmed poor auditing of Amtek Group firms, along with handing investigators a list of 109 companies. Two more CAs submitted lists of 55 and 51 separate entities respectively for which they signed financial statements, without verifying stocks and inventories. The ED has alleged that Arvind Dham, to exercise control over these shell companies, opened firms in the names of his drivers, office assistants, and other low-rung employees of his firms.

A Class 12-pass office assistant was made director in as many as 87 firms, followed by a Class 10-pass mechanic named director of 37 firms, and a Class 9-pass driver made the director of 24 companies. The most educated of them all—an accounts manager—was made the director of seven firms, the ED found in its probe. ThePrint reached Dham’s counsels who refused to comment, saying the matter is sub judice. On its part, IDBI bank lodged a fresh complaint against Arvind Dham, Gautam Malhotra, and Sowmya Narayanan Rajagopalan, as well as unidentified public servants, for causing the bank losses amounting to Rs 446.97 crore by allegedly manipulating accounts of Amtek Group firm Metalyst Forgings.

## Plea in SC seeks direction to EC to frame rules for registration, regulation of political parties

**NEW DELHI:** A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking a direction to the Election Commission to frame rules for registration and regulation of political parties to promote secularism, transparency and political justice. The plea alleged that “bogus political parties” were not only posing a serious threat to democracy but also maligning the country by appointing hardcore criminals, kidnappers, drug smugglers and money launderers as national and state office bearers after taking huge amounts of money from them. “There are no rules and regulations for political parties. Therefore, many separatists have formed their political party to collect donations. Some office bearers of these parties have succeeded in getting police protection also,” said the plea, filed by advo-

cate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay. Referring to a recent media report, the plea claimed that the income tax department found a “fake” political party that was “converting black money into white by deducting 20 per cent commission”. “Transparency and accountability in the working of political parties are essential in public interest as they perform public function and, therefore, ECI must frame rules and regulations for them,” the plea, filed through lawyer Ashwani Kumar Dubey, said. It said the apex court has initiated various reforms to bring transparency and probity in public life. “The move to regulate political parties within the ambit of the Constitution would pave the way for robust democratic functioning,” it said. Alternatively, the plea has sought



a direction to the Law Commission of India to examine the best practices of developed democratic countries and prepare a compre-

hensive report on registration and regulation of political parties to reduce corruption and criminalisation in politics.

## Second National Fairtrade Conference to be held in Bengaluru on Sept 9,10

**BENGALURU:** Fairtrade India (Centre for Social Markets), in collaboration with the Fairtrade Network of Asia and Pacific Producers (Fairtrade-NAPP), will host the Second National Fairtrade Conference here on September 9 and 10. The event is supported by the European Union’s SWITCH-Asia Programme and the European Commission’s Funding Framework Partnership Agreement (EC FPPA), which provides strategic funding to promote sustainable and ethical trade practices. Pravakar Meher, Chairman of Fairtrade-NAPP, said the first edition of the conference laid a strong foundation for advancing ethical and sustainable trade

in India. “Building on this momentum, the second edition brings together producer members — including farmers’ cooperatives and plantations — along with businesses, policymakers, and consumers to place fairtrade firmly on the national agenda,” he said in a press release issued on Sunday. According to him, the fairtrade model offers a win-win solution. “For farmers and workers, it translates into fairer prices and stronger livelihoods, and for businesses, it offers transparent and responsible supply chains that meet the rising demand for sustainability,” he said. Abhishek Jani, CEO of the Fairtrade India Project, underlined the urgency of sup-

porting farmers and MSMEs amid volatile global trading conditions and the growing impact of climate change. “This conference is about mainstreaming fairtrade — making sustainability accessible, scalable, and impactful for farmers, businesses, and consumers alike,” he said. The theme for this year’s conference is ‘Sustainable Markets, and Impact’, highlighting the role of fairtrade in promoting ethical trade, strengthening sustainable agriculture, and enabling resilient supply chains in and from India. The two-day programme will include plenary and breakout sessions on pressing issues in sustainable trade, such as fairtrade’s contribution to agriculture and climate resilience.

## Indore-bound Air India flight returns to Delhi after fire indication in engine



**NEW DELHI:** An Air India flight operating from Delhi to Indore on Saturday was forced to return to the national capital shortly after take-off following a fire indication in one of its engines, airline confirmed. Flight AI2913 had departed from

Delhi for Indore when the cockpit crew reportedly received a fire warning for the right engine. Following standard operating procedures, the pilots shut down the affected engine and initiated a return to Delhi.

In a statement issued by Air India, it said, ‘Flight AI2913, operating from Delhi to Indore on 31 August, air-returned to Delhi shortly after take-off, as the cockpit crew received a fire indication for the right engine. Following standard procedure, the cockpit crew elected to shut down the engine and returned to Delhi where the flight landed safely’. The aircraft has been grounded for inspection, and passengers are being transferred to an alternative aircraft which will operate the flight to Indore shortly. The regulator has been duly informed of the incident, airline spokesperson further said in a statement. We regret the inconvenience caused to the passengers. At Air India, the safety of passengers and crew are our top priority, it added. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is expected to look into the matter.

## Toilets, drinking water arranged for Maratha quota protesters: BMC

**MUMBAI:** Nearly 800 sanitation workers have been deployed to maintain cleanliness and arrangements also made for more than 300 toilets for Maratha quota protesters in Mumbai, the city civic body said on Sunday. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has also arranged for drinking water and garbage collection, as the agitation by the Maratha community members for reservation entered the third day on Sunday, the BMC said in a release. Thousands of people from the Maratha community have arrived in Mumbai from various parts of Maharashtra to participate in the quota agitation, spearheaded by Jarange, at Azad Maidan in south Mumbai. On the first day of the protest on Friday, Jarange alleged

that toilets near the protest venue were deliberately locked, and shops selling snacks and water were closed. The civic body had later said the quota protesters have been given free access to all ‘pay-and-use’ toilets in and around Azad Maidan. The activist’s indefinite hunger strike entered the third day on Sunday. The BMC on Sunday said it has made arrangements for more than 300 toilets, including both permanent and mobile facilities, which are available free of cost. These toilets were being cleaned regularly to maintain hygiene amid the ongoing protest, it said. The civic body also deployed nearly 800 sanitation workers to maintain cleanliness at the Azad Maidan and surrounding areas, it said. The BMC has stationed 25



water tankers at key locations, including Azad Maidan, Mahapalika Marg, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT), Hutatma Smarak Chowk and Bombay Gymkhana, to provide uninterrupted drinking water supply, the

release said. The civic body has also distributed garbage collection bags among protesters and appealed to them to hand over the filled bags to its workers for proper disposal and maintaining cleanliness.