

# Career crash fear drives Kerala loco pilots to 'breakless' work

No loo in cabins, pilots admit to using bottles, diapers to attend nature's call. A pilot who demanded break after a long shift, was made to take compulsory retirement

## TRAINSPOTTING

Number of trains originating from major stations under T'Puram and Palakkad railway divisions

Kanyakumari: **8 daily, 9 weekly**

Nagercoil: **12 daily, 5 weekly**

T'Puram/T'Puram North: **19 daily, 31 weekly**

Kollam: **10 daily, 5 weekly**

Kayamkulam: **2 daily**

Alappuzha: **6 daily**

Kottayam: **3 daily**

Ernakulam: **22 daily, 18 weekly**  
(Another 20-25 goods train orders are booked daily from Ernakulam depot)

Thrissur: **3 daily**

Guruvayur: **6 daily**



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A loco pilot

JOSE K JOSEPH @T'Puram

AS Kerala gears up for Onam, major trains passing through the state are expected to see a surge in passengers. However, loco pilots – the people working behind the scenes, ensuring that the trains run safely and on time – continue to grapple with a basic problem: the absence of toilets in locomotive cabins.

Although the Railways claims to have fitted toilets in some locomotives, multiple sources and loco pilots told TNIE that no such trains are currently operating in Kerala.

So, as passengers prepare for festive journeys, loco pilots often have to drive for long hours, holding back nature's call. Many admit to using bottles or

adult diapers. Women pilots are especially vulnerable to urinary infections and kidney-related issues.

However, the fear of compulsory retirement, that one of their colleagues went through earlier this year, keeps them going.

"If I stop a train for a toilet break, it gets recorded. Who would want such entries against their name? About two years ago, a woman pilot in Kerala even collapsed at a station due to urinary infection. This is our reality," said a woman loco pilot.

A male loco pilot echoed the frustration: "It is an open secret that we use bottles. The authorities know it, but don't care. Imagine having to run a

train while holding back nature's call. It's hard to stay focused, and this puts passengers at risk."

To a January 29 RTI query by TNIE on whether there was any health-related data of loco pilots working without toilet breaks, the Southern Railway replied: "no such data/information is available in this office."

As per the information accessed by TNIE, the Thiruvananthapuram Division of the Southern Railway has 664 loco pilots, including 24 women, though 130 posts remain vacant.

The Palakkad Division, has 636 loco pilots – 25 of them women – and 104 vacancies. Though hailed as the pride of

Indian Railways, the loco pilots face additional strain during festival seasons, when the introduction of special trains significantly increases their workload.

The anxiety among loco pilots in Kerala deepened when a goods train pilot based in Kollam was handed compulsory retirement earlier this year.

His fault: asking for relief after working eight hours and 40 minutes without a break. The pilot, who was reportedly forced to drive past his depot, had been instructed to continue another 147 km to Ernakulam.

When he demanded relief citing safety and health concerns, the Railway Administration launched what the pilots describe as a "farce enquiry"

and issued a penalty of compulsory retirement from February 2. The matter is now before the Central Administrative Tribunal. "The incident sparked fear among us," said a loco pilot.

Veteran loco pilots voiced their dismay, too.

"I believed the new generation would have a better work environment, but nothing has changed. They still depend on bottles or diapers, and with Onam, the pressure will only get worse," said Elangoan, a retired loco pilot with over 30 years of service.

TNIE raised the pilots' concerns with the Southern Railway's chief public relations officer (CPO) on August 25 via email and WhatsApp, but there was no response even after multiple attempts.

## BRS suspends Kavitha for 'anti-party activities'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
@Hyderabad

BRS supremo K Chandrasekhar Rao on Tuesday cleared the suspension of his daughter and MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha from the party for "anti-party activities." BRS general secretaries Soma Bharat Kumar and T Ravinder Rao issued a statement confirming KCR's decision. "Recent activities of Kavitha are causing damage to the party. The leadership of the party has taken serious note of those activities. With this, party president K Chandrasekhar Rao has decided to suspend Kavitha from the party with immediate effect," the statement said. BRS sources said Kavitha has called a press conference on Wednesday where she is likely to announce her resignation from both the Legislative Council and the primary membership of the party. During

Meanwhile, the state pres-



idents of both the Congress and BJP made it clear that there are no open doors for Kavitha. They described the goings-on in the BRS as an "internal family squabble over distribution of loot from corruption."

Daughter of BRS president KCR, Kavitha has been at odds with the leadership for several months. Following the state government's decision to order a CBI probe into the alleged irregularities in the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme, Kavitha accused former minister T Harish Rao and former MP J Santosh Kumar of indulging in massive corruption which she claimed damaged KCR's image. The fact that Kavitha attacked Harish Rao at the time he was leading the BRS defence against the Congress attack and rebutting allegations of corruption in Kaleshwaram was seen as the last straw by the party. Party leaders said these remarks were a key factor in the suspension.

The poet was part of the poetry with political dimensions, which became widely popular in the 70s. CPM national general secretary M A Baby mourned the loss of his contemporary. "We feel the loss of a brother, a dear comrade," he remarked. He is survived by his wife Beena Jayachandran and daughter Aparna Jayachandran.



## U Jayachandran, Left thinker, passes away at 75

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @T'Puram

LEFT thinker and poet U Jayachandran passed away in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday. He was 75. One of the founding members of the SFI, he was an active worker of the Kerala left wing in the 1970s. He worked alongside senior CPM leaders like K. O. D. Y. E. R. Balakrishnan and M. A. Baby and had participated in the Kerala Party-Adanam conducted by SFI to understand how the Emergency impacted the youth at the time.

The author of the poem collection *Sooryante Mamsam*, Jayachandran was an ally of the parallel cinema movements. He worked with publications like Pambaran and Deshabhimani and moved to South Africa in 1980 to work as a teacher at the Umtata Holy Cross High School. He retired as its deputy principal after 37 years of service.

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## Gold smuggling accused Ranya Rao, 3 others fined ₹270 crore

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

THE Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has imposed a fine of ₹270 crore on Kannada actress Ranya Rao alias Harshavardhini Ranya along with three others arrested on charges of gold smuggling. The DRI has issued show cause notices to Ranya, Tarun Konduru Raju, Sahil Sakariya Jain and Bharat Kumar Jain. Ranya alone has to pay a fine of ₹102.55 crore.

The show cause notices with around 2,500 pages of supporting documents were served to the accused inside the Bengaluru Central Prison where they are lodged.

Ranya was arrested at Kempegowda airport on March 3, after arriving from Dubai and 14.8 kg of gold bars worth around ₹12.56 crore was recovered. Ranya is alleged to have made 34 trips to Dubai between 2023 and 2025, smuggling around 49.6 kg of gold worth over ₹40 crore.

Though she was granted default bail after the DRI failed to file a chargesheet on time, she is in judicial custody as she was booked under Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act (COFEPOSA).

## EXPRESS READ

### Amoebic infection: Two in Kozhikode remain critical

Kozhikode: The condition of two patients undergoing treatment for amoebic meningoencephalitis at Kozhikode Medical College Hospital remains extremely critical. Meanwhile, medical experts confirmed that the two patients who died recently while undergoing treatment at the same hospital had also tested positive for Naegleria fowleri, the rare amoeba responsible for the infection.

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THE Kerala government's latest health data reveals a worrying trend — one in seven babies born last year weighed less than 2.5 kilograms. As many as 51,608 newborns — or 14% of all 3.74 lakh live births — were underweight. These findings are part of the government's 'Health at a Glance 2023-24' report. The findings highlight a steady rise in low birth weight cases over the past five years, despite the state maintaining a 99% institutional delivery rate.

Between 2019 and 2024, Kerala recorded nearly 21.1 lakh live births, of which an increasing share were underweight.

In 2019-20, out of 4.64 lakh babies, 51,471 (11%) were below 2.5 kg. The following year, 49,454 (12%) of 4.25 lakh newborns were underweight. In 2021-22, the number rose to 52,124 (12%) of 4.3 lakh births. By 2022-23, as many as 56,521 (13%) of 4.19 lakh newborns weighed less than 2.5 kg.

Health experts said the upward trend reflects gaps in maternal health. Anaemia, hypertension, and preterm birth are cited as the strongest predictors of low birth weight. The report shows that 1.2 lakh pregnant women were anaemic in 2023-24, while the number of preterm births stood at 26,968.

"Anaemia reduces oxygen supply to the foetus, restricting growth and causing complications like anaemia and hypertension early," Dr. Lee said.

The experts stressed on the need for stronger antenatal screening, nutritional counseling, and community-level support. "Asha workers who go door-to-door have been playing a vital role in identifying maternal women and their health issues. Going forward, we need to strengthen field surveillance to detect conditions like anaemia and hypertension early," Dr. Lee said.

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