



Published Date: 09 Apr 2015

CID to probe irregularities in 3,067 temple trusts

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The state government will order a probe by the criminal investigation department (CID) into the alleged financial mismanagement and land-related irregularities in about 3,067 temple trusts, including the famous Jyotiba temple and Mahalakshmi temple in Kolhapur.

All these shrines are situated in the districts of Kolhapur, Sangli and Sindhudurg and are part of an umbrella body called Pashchim Maharashtra Devasthan Samiti.

This announcement was made in the assembly by chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday. The CM's response came during a discussion initiated by MLAs Rajesh Kshirsagar, Prakash Abitkar, Chandradeep Narake, Sujit Minchekar and Ulhas Patil.

Kshirsagar said the extent of misappropriation of money and property by the temple administrators may run into thousands of crores. "This is a serious issue as it pertains to 7,000 acres of temple land and rare ornaments of deities."

The trusts collectively own 25,000 acres of land, said Kshirsagar, adding that there were also allegations of irregularities with respect to buildings, trees and many other properties.

Admitting that there were instances of embezzlement, the CM said the CID will form a special investigation team (SIT) to probe the anomalies. When Leader of Opposition Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil pointed out that the Kolhapur collector had already sent a report on the scams, Fadnavis said that all inquiry reports on the issue would be given to the SIT.

The CM told the house that court-appointed people at the Charity Commissioner's office were on par with government servants. "They would be asked to comply to citizens if they are approached with any query in this regard."

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