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Thrissur Pooram 2026 — Kerala's Grand Festival Held Without Fireworks for First Time

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HISTORY & CULTURE**POLITY**

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WHY IN NEWS

Thrissur Pooram 2026 — celebrated on April 26 — is being conducted in a deeply altered form following the **Mundathikode fireworks explosion of April 21, 2026** that killed **15 people**, including the licensee Mundathikode Satheesh who succumbed to over 80% burns. The Kerala government imposed a complete ban on fireworks, prohibited public entry, and scaled down the festival's signature elements. This is the **first Thrissur Pooram in living memory without the traditional fireworks (vadakkunathan)** — a moment that encapsulates the unresolved tension between cultural heritage, industrial safety, and regulatory accountability.

ABOUT THRISSUR POORAM

Thrissur Pooram is the **largest temple festival in Kerala** and one of India's most spectacular cultural events, held annually at **Thekkinkadu Maidan (Vadakkunnathan Temple ground)** in Thrissur city on the Pooram star in the Malayalam month of Medam (April–May).

FEATURE	DETAIL
Location	Thekkinkadu Maidan, Thrissur city
Frequency	Annual (Malayalam month Medam, Pooram star)
Duration	~36 hours
Participating dewaswoms	Paramekkavu Devaswom + Thiruvambadi Devaswom (two main processions)
Key elements	Caparisoned elephants, percussion ensemble (Panchavadyam, Ilanjithara Melam), ornate parasols (Kudas), Kudamattam (parasol exchange), fireworks (vadakkunathan) — typically post-midnight
Founded	Tradition attributed to the Sakthan Thampuran, Maharaja of Cochin, late 18th century
UNESCO	Not inscribed but recognised as intangible cultural heritage of national significance

WHAT CHANGED IN 2026

ELEMENT	NORMAL	2026
Fireworks (vadakkunathan)	Most spectacular element; 3-4 hour display	Banned
Public entry	Lakhs of spectators	Prohibited
Parasol display (Kudas)	Full traditional display	Drastically curtailed
Chamaya Pradarsanam (tiger imagery)	Multi-day exhibition	Scaled down to one day
Kudamattam (parasol exchange)	Grand competitive display	Restricted, symbolic
Ilanjithara Melam	Full percussion ensemble	Restricted
Madathil Varavu	Main procession with elephants	Low-profile
Mourning period	N/A	Thiruvambadi Devaswom maintained mourning until April 24

THE MUNDATHIKODE EXPLOSION — SUMMARY

DETAIL	FACT
Date	April 21, 2026
Location	Mundathikode, Thrissur district outskirts
Site	Fireworks assembly unit (not the festival ground)
Purpose	Preparing crackers for Thiruvambadi Devaswom's participation
Cause	Excess stock, safety violations, cramped workspace without proper segregation
Death toll	15 (including licensee Mundathikode Satheesh — over 80% burns)
Injured	~40+
Safety violations	Mandatory 12–18m distances not maintained; many more workers than permitted; excess stock

PESO AND EXPLOSIVES REGULATION

The **Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO)** – under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry – issues licences for explosives manufacture, storage, transport, and use under the **Explosives Act, 1884**. The Mundathikode explosion exposed:

- **Licence granted despite inadequate premises** – the assembly unit was reportedly below minimum safety specifications
- **Explosives Act, 1884 (140+ years old)** – maximum penalty of only ₹5,000 (widely criticised as having zero deterrence)
- **Enforcement gap** – PESO’s field inspection capacity is limited relative to thousands of licensed fireworks units across India

What’s needed:

- 1 Amendment to Explosives Act – align penalties with modern risk levels
- 2 Mandatory third-party safety audits for fireworks assembly units
- 3 PESO expansion – more field inspectors
- 4 Compulsory insurance for licensed units

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS1 – Art & Culture	Thrissur Pooram; intangible cultural heritage; temple festivals of India
GS2 – Governance	PESO; regulatory failure; industrial safety; Explosives Act
GS3 – Disaster	Industrial disasters; safety regulation; preventive frameworks

Mains Keywords: Thrissur Pooram, Mundathikode explosion, PESO, Explosives Act 1884, industrial safety, Thiruvambadi Devaswom, fireworks regulation

Facts Corner

ITEM	FACT
Festival held	Thekkinkadu Maidan, Thrissur
Festival day 2026	April 26
Mundathikode explosion	April 21, 2026
Death toll	15 (including licensee Satheesh)
Government decision	Fireworks banned; public entry prohibited
PESO under	Ministry of Commerce and Industry
Explosives Act penalty	Max ₹5,000 (1884 Act; not updated)
Thiruvambadi Devaswom	Temple party preparing crackers at the explosion site
Paramekkavu Devaswom	The other main participating devaswom

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