

Forest dept gears up for pilgrimage to Velliangiri

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Coimbatore: The forest department, which has been allowing people to trek the Velliangiri Hills from March 1, is gearing up to receive more than 20,000 people on Maha Shivaratri on Thursday.

“Considering that 10,000 people climbed the seven hills on Sunday and 4,000 people on Saturday, we are expecting 20,000 to arrive from Wednesday morning,” said Boluvampatti range officer Saravanan.

The department has roped in 30 volunteers from NGOs and frontline staff from other ranges for crowd management and to ensure that no plastic or inflammable products enter the forest.

“We have stationed four rangers and 30 volunteers at the base of the mountains to check pilgrims. Six rangers and some volunteers have been stationed at the seventh hill to ensure that pilgrims are following rules and regulations and to provide them assistance. The devotees will be checked to ensure they do not carry any form of plastic or materials like matchstick, candle, wick,” the official said. “However, there will be no staff along the six-kilometre route that the pilgrims take.”

Thousands of pilgrims visit the Shiva Temple during Maha Shivaratri, Chitra Pournami, and Karthigai Deepam. They offer prayers at the Poondi temple at the base of the hills before climbing.

The Velliangiri trek has been classified as difficult because pilgrims have to cross seven hills though rocky terrains that are steep. They take four to six hours to complete the trek.