

## Kalam memorial emerges as major tourist attraction

*For thousands, pilgrimage to Rameswaram is incomplete sans a visit to Pei Karumbu*

For hundreds of thousands of people who visited the historic Rameswaram island, their pilgrimage or tour to the island would not complete without a visit to Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam National Memorial at Pei Karumbu, where the mortal remains of the former president were laid to rest.

The memorial, an iconic structure, built by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and declared open by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on July 27 has emerged as the major tourist attraction as people of all ages and all walks of life make it a point to pay homage to the late leader before leaving the island.

The memorial figured on top, probably next to the Sri Ramanathaswamy temple in the itinerary of the pilgrims and tourists if the visitors' record maintained at the memorial was any indication. The memorial recorded the millionth visitor in just four months on November 21 and an average of 8,722 people visited it every day, Col R Ravindran, Scientist-G, Chief construction engineer, DRDO, said.

"It has been very encouraging and we are happy about the huge turnout day in and day out," the scientist, who was one of the architects of the memorial, built in a record nine months time, told *The Hindu*. In five days in July after Mr. Modi declared open the memorial, 39,900 people had visited, he said.

A record 46,500 people visited the memorial on a single day on October 1, a Sunday on the eve of Gandhi Jayanthi, he said. A maximum of 2.92 lakh people visited the memorial in the month of October, followed by 2.85 lakh in August, 2.52 lakh in September and 2.26 lakh in November, he said.

Till December 15, 1.45 lakh people have visited the memorial, he added. During the Sabarimala festival season in November and December, the visitors included a large number of Ayappa devotees, officials said.

Visitors were banned from taking pictures inside the memorial, using mobile phones or cameras, but they were free to take pictures and selfies at the outer precincts, they said. The visitors paid homage to the 'people's President' before taking a glimpse of the host of acrylic paintings, portraying the life of Mr Kalam in different stages, right from school days to his stint in DRDO.

B.K. Singh, Additional Chief Engineer, DRDO, said all the pending works in the six display halls inside the memorial, and courtyards have been completed.

Construction of toilet blocks for men, women and differently abled persons and sewage treatment plant to utilise the recycled water for gardening would be completed by the middle of January, he said.