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## WHEN IT RAINS HOLIDAYS, COLLECTOR TURNS SUPERHERO



Safirulla with schoolchildren

“ WITH THE ADVENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA, THE GAP BETWEEN THE ADMINISTRATORS AND THE PEOPLE HAS REDUCED... WHILE EXPRESSING ONESELF IS IMPORTANT, ONE MUST ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

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**K**ochi saw the rise of a superhero of sorts among schoolchildren in the past few weeks, in the form of the collector K Mohammed Y Safirulla. Every time it rained heavily, the children kept a close watch on the collector's social media page, waiting for those magical words to appear — 'Holiday for schools in Kochi tomorrow', invariably followed by celebrations. 'Collector *muthanu*' (you are a gem) was the general sentiment of the children under his holiday posts, with many quipping that their new God is the collector. But then, Safirulla is not the first to receive such love. It can be recalled at this point that former Kochi Collector Sheikh Pareed, who can rightly be called the forerunner in declaring rain holidays, was fondly nicknamed 'Milk Shake' by the children then for declaring holidays one after the other.

The rains have lessened in intensity now, but Mohammed Safirulla continues to be an online celebrity, and even now kids comment, 'Sir *mazha undu, leave tharamo?*' under his posts, even if they are about his latest initiative. We talk to the Kochi Collector, who dismisses the 'stardom' with a nonchalant smile, though. **You have become a superhero for school kids, after you granted them rain holidays one after the other.** (Laughs) I don't think so. I feel the students should become more serious about studies now. They were granted holidays when it rained heavily or when there were high chances of rain. Keeping in mind the difficulty in travelling, we had taken the decisions. If you look at the last three weeks, we have been receiving heavy rains in the entire State, especially in Kochi. I don't think I need to be praised for taking care of their safety.

**You also got a lot of interesting comments on your social media page.**

The comments I have been getting from students are very light-hearted. If I was a kid and if I suddenly got a holiday, it would feel like a bonus to me too, especially when you

have an assignment the next day. However, it is also important to meet important targets, and we cannot entertain holidays beyond a point. Their syllabus for Onam mid-term exams has to be covered, within the given time. All we want for the kids is the opportunity to study properly.

**Your post, 'Real heroes hate holidays' was trending.** The idea of the post was to not entertain holidays beyond a limit, and not let students slip into inertia. When these students enter college or work life, they would have difficulty coping with the strict schedules. They have to be mental-

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Pic: Ajilal

ly ready for the future. The post was aimed to drive home the message that come what may, they have to achieve the targets, just like how they say in the entertainment industry, 'the show has to go on'. **A lot of trolls also surfaced about you and the rains. What do you think about them?** These trolls were immensely creative. I came across a few made using Malayalam movie situations and found them really funny. **Do you think you were able to create a bond with the youngsters during that episode?** It helps in sending across social messages, when youngsters start following you. With the advent of social media, the gap between the administrators and the people has reduced. I think we are becoming more and more democratic, but at the same time, they should be careful while posting comments and the views on social media. For instance, a fake holiday declaration was circulated once. Such messages can mislead everyone, including the kids. And at times like this, we have to give a clarification on the same. While expressing oneself is important, one must ensure

accountability and responsibility. Before blindly forwarding messages or believing them, verify the information from the primary source.

**You have also kicked off a few student and children-oriented initiatives.**

We have started three initiatives for students in the past two years. Class 12 students, who are economically backward, will be given entrance training for one year. The governor had inaugurated the programme recently, and around 450 students will be provided coaching. Another initiative titled *Roshni* works for the better education of the students of migrant labourers, and around 20 schools are working towards achieving this goal. Then we have *E-Jagradha*, which aims to create awareness among children about cyber security. It focuses on students from around 100 schools.

**As part of the Kochi Transport Day, you recently travelled by bus and ferry to encourage those means of transport. Given that Kochi has incessant rains and waterlogging issues, what was your takeaway from the experience?**

From my conversations with people, I learnt that buses often do not halt at the bus stop, but 50 metres away or behind. Also, when they stop, it would be in muddy spots. Every city in India has its own traffic issues and the only way to tackle it is to have reliable public transport like the Metro. As Kochi is an old city, it is difficult to make new roads, neither can the roads be expanded or widened, though we are constructing flyovers. If not every time, people can make use of public transport whenever possible. They can opt for carpooling as well.