

Vision 2031
An International Conference on Development and Democracy
Government of Kerala
February 15 to 17, 2026

Secularism, Democracy, and Consultative Government

This session is situated within *Vision 2031: An International Conference on Development and Democracy*, organised by the Government of Kerala as the State approaches seventy-five years since its formation. Kerala's development experience has long been distinguished not only by its human development achievements, but also by the political and institutional values that have sustained them—most notably secularism, democracy, and a strong tradition of public consultation.

The commitment of the Government of Kerala to democratic rights, civil liberties, the rule of law, and full electoral democracy is central to its development experience, and acquires particular significance at a time when these political values are under threat in India and in many parts of the world. These values are, of course, of intrinsic importance. They are also of instrumental importance, creating the conditions under which welfare policies can be effectively pursued, inequalities confronted, and justice extended to all sections of society. The session will examine this dynamic relationship between democracy and development in the context of contemporary challenges to democratic government.

Society in Kerala is marked by the coexistence of multiple faiths alongside a commitment to modern secularism: that is, equality of all beliefs, tolerance, and a clear separation between religion and the State. This tradition has been integral to Kerala's social stability and inclusive development, and acquires particular urgency in a contemporary context where the foundations of secularism in India face serious challenges. The session will examine the importance of a secular ethos to public policy, social relations, and democratic practice, and why its defence remains central to any progressive development agenda.

Drawing inspiration from the idea of democracy as “government by discussion,” the session will also discuss the role of institutionalised public deliberation in social transformation. By reflecting on both achievements and constraints, this session seeks to generate insights relevant not only to Kerala's future, but to broader debates on democracy and development in India and beyond.