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THE KOLKATA POLICE FORCE AND DURGA PUJA: MANAGING A MEGA-FESTIVAL IN A METROPOLIS

As the city outside buzzes and beeps with Ambassador cabs filling the streets; and centuries old city trams slither along the curvy tracks amidst the hustle bustle of the City of Joy, humble yet galvanized anticipation fills the air in Lalbazar, the headquarters of the Kolkata Police Force. Inside, in the modest but award adorned office, the Commissioner of Police (CP) and his leadership team of senior officers discuss past achievements and forthcoming challenges for upholding safety, law and order in this year's Durga Puja¹ festival. CP remarks:

"The city swells by more than a million extra people for over a week. It is mind-boggling to think that this year we nearly achieved our goal of zero-accidents and emergencies during the festival."

One of the top ranked officers concurs:

"A job well done indeed but not achieved without overwhelming exertion on our officers. They are working around the clock and though we go to great lengths to relieve them for rest and recuperation, our officer resources are just not enough to meet high demands for constant policing during the festival."

¹The word Puja, derived from Sanskrit, signifies spiritual ritual, celebration, prayer, or festival. In this case, it refers specifically to the festival celebrating the homecoming of the Hindu Goddess Durga.

This case was written by Professor Indranil Bose and Professor Sumanta Basu at the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta and Sumita Ghosh. The case was prepared solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation.

The Additional Commissioner of Police adds:

“On the other hand, our technology resources and the way in which we manage those resources have assisted us immensely, making it possible to make accurate forecasts and prevent traffic and crowd bottlenecks and potential risks. We are getting closer to mastering the ability to control roads and ensure smooth and safe traffic throughout the city during the Puja. There are, of course, occasional hiccups as we experienced last year on Panchami², when enormous crowds formed at the pandals³ caused slow down of traffic in certain areas, but our overall experience with traffic control this past year was by far the most smooth running of all Pujas past.”

The CP becomes thoughtful as he comments:

“Another important balancing act that we have learned to manage is in maintaining religious harmony among communities of diverse and distinct faiths during Durga Puja. This is a sensitive and crucial issue in Kolkata. If you may recall, last year, the Muslim holiday of Id coincided with the nearly week long Hindu holiday of Durga Puja. Communities of various religious practices and beliefs co-exist in Kolkata, sharing neighborhoods and public resources, and our job to ensure tolerance, peace and respect between and among these groups during these festivals is always a challenging task.”

²Panchami, or the ‘fifth day’ signifies the first official day of the Durga Puja festival.

³Pandals are temporarily constructed temples, made of bamboo and cloth, showcasing elaborately designed hand-made idols of Goddess Durga and her family.