

City a role model for Eco Ganeshotsav : MPCB

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WITH the environment friendly mode of celebrating Ganeshotsav spearheaded by non governmental organisations (NGOs) and environment activists gaining more ground nowadays, it is no surprise that the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) has joined hands with a couple of NGOs to give a thrust to this eco-friendly cause. And, what is noteworthy is that MPCB has chosen Navi Mumbai to be a model for other cities to follow in celebrating this festival in an eco-friendly way.

"We have chosen Navi Mumbai to be a role model, because it is an eco-friendly area. Besides, the infrastructure here is good. Our efforts are to give a thrust to the eco-friendly cause. Moreover, last year the Government of Maharashtra bestowed the Vasundhara Award to Navi Mumbai. The Vasundhara Awards have been instituted to recognize exemplary work car-

ried out by industries, urban local bodies, schools and environmental NGOs towards protection of environment in the state," says MPCB Navi Mumbai Regional Officer Bharat Nimbarte.



Spelling out the reasons for selecting Navi Mumbai as an example for others, Nimbarte informed, "The lakes here are well controlled by the civic authorities by compartmentalising them so that the entire lake / pond doesn't get polluted during and after the immersion of idols. Even the disposal of *nirmalya* generated during the festivities

here is systematic."

"MPCB has thus decided to have Navi Mumbai as a model town for the interstate demo-project to give a thrust to the eco-friendly way of celebrating Ganeshotsav", explains Nimbarte.

With a growing concern of environmental degradation, the work on the project started five to six years ago to curtail the effects of immersions of idols made of Plaster of Paris (PoP) and chemical colors that pollute the water bodies and destroy aquatic life.

In the initial years, MPCB conducted media campaigns, environment awareness programmes, advertisements, etc. In July this year, MPCB also conducted a workshop for making eco-friendly idols, which was attended by around twenty people who are into idol making. "The workshop was initiated because the people were not aware of the eco-idols, so there were no demand and supplies. We wanted to create an awareness, and therefore, we

held the workshop to teach them how to make Ganesh idols in an eco-friendly manner," stated Nimbarte.

The participants were artists from handicraft centers, inmates of Taloja jail, women self-help groups and differently abled people. The training consisted of three phases - idol making, decorations and paper bags for collection of *nirmalya*. The eco-friendly idols, ranging in sizes of 6 to 24 inches were made available for buyers at eight different places across Navi Mumbai. Nimbarte hoped that in the coming years more people will

evince interest in eco-friendly idols thus creating more opportunities for the idol makers to use eco-friendly materials only.

MPCB has joined hands with three NGOs, namely E-Ganesh Foundation, Nav Samvedana Foundation and Shaswat Eco-Solutions to conduct awareness campaigns and workshops, taking its message to the schools, self-help groups and prisons. Together they also organize competitions amongst household Ganesh celebrations and *sarvajanic mandals*. Everyone can contribute by using special materials. "We recommend using natural materials like shadumal clay, paper pulp and gum. Furthermore, these idols should be painted with natural colors, which do not contain poisonous chemical substances and are not harmful for the environment,"

says Nimbarte. The Board is also prospective. "The workshop is a continuous process. The visual aids are also created to help people understand the importance of an eco-friendly mode of celebrating the festival. The Board is also planning to build good habits among the people. We want to see how to make the festival eco-friendly for one's own benefit and for the benefit of friends and family. We want to see people contributing to the various activities of the festival. The cost of the festival is also being reduced. (The author is a resident of Navi Mumbai.)"

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