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Produced in a factory, a Ganpati mandal that's one of a kind



■ The 16-foot idol at the Pepsico factory at Chembur.

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MUMBAI: At the Pepsico factory in Chembur, there are Muslim workers, Christian workers and Jain workers. Some are atheists, others are agnostics. But all of them are getting a lesson in the Ramayana, because a story from the Hindu epic is the theme for the Ganeshotsav they have been organising together for the past 39 years.

Among the largest mandals in the Govandi-Chembur area, the factory houses the 16-foot idol, popularly known as the 'Dukes ka Raja'. More than 10 lakh devotees walk through the gates every year, drawn by sto-

KNOW YOUR MANDAL			
HISTORY: The Pepsico Vyavasthapan Kamgar Sri Ganeshotsav Mandal, started with a four-foot idol in 1974. Over the years, it has become a symbol of goodwill and hope for all the employees in the factory	WHAT'S SPECIAL: The organisers will host street plays and demonstrations as part of an AIDS awareness campaign	THEME: A scene from the Ramayana, at the Ashok Vatika	BEST TIME TO VISIT: The morning aarti takes place at 8am, the evening aarti at 8pm
NUMBER OF VISITORS: More than 10 lakh over 10 days		HOW TO GET THERE: Walking distance from Govandi station on the harbour line.	

ries of various mannat (boons) that have been granted to its visitors in the past.

"I had been part of the organising team for ten years when I asked for a mannat for the first time. The next year, I was blessed with a baby boy," said

Ravindra Tavade, a mandal committee member. "Former chief minister Narayan Rane has visited the mandal every year since 1986, and often says his political success is because of the prayers he offers here." Sponsored by the company

and donations from employees, the Pepsico mandal has security arrangements that include close circuit television cameras, metal detectors at gates, workers who double up as security volunteers, policemen stationed nearby, and a private

security firm that oversees the proceedings.

Musical programmes featuring devotional songs will be organised. Students in the area will be felicitated for doing well in their exams. As part of a social initiative, the workers will also organise an AIDS awareness campaign, in the form of demonstrations and street plays.

"When the mandal first started, there were 1,200 workers; today, there are 200. But we still organise it with as much enthusiasm, and celebrate it with as much joy. It is the highlight of our year and makes toiling everyday worth it," said Vijay Dhamane, head of the organising committee.