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Mandals steer clear of tobacco companies

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Mandals **steer clear** of tobacco companies

NO SMOKING More than 12,000 city pandals refuse their sponsorship for the first time this year

RESHA GANDHI.

ANSHUMAN POYREKAR/HT



HEMANT PADALKAR/ HT PHOTO



RESHA GANDHI



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MUMBAI: This year for the first time pandals in the city do not host any banners of companies that sell tobacco products, said the Ganeshotsav organising committee.

The Ganeshotsav Samanvay Samiti said that this means that the pandals have refused any sort of sponsorship from these companies.

While the Tobacco Control

■ (Top and below right) Lord Ganesh in a 24-foot high wooden Shivling, at Sewri's Madhyavibhag Sarvajanik Ganeshotsav Mandal. The pandal has been inspired by a planetarium and screens footage of the stars and planets onto the inner roof of the Shivling.

Act of 2003 bans direct advertising of tobacco products in public places, the advertising of surrogate products by tobacco companies is not yet illegal.

"This is the first year that we have registered a complete success in our efforts to curb these ads," said Naresh Dahibawkar, president of the Samiti, which had 50 of its volunteers touring the city to inspect the sponsor banners of more than 12,000 city pandals. Dahibawkar and his team held special meetings with representatives from all pandals

before the start of the festival this year.

"We appealed to them not to advertise any surrogate tobacco companies, and so far have received only positive reports."

Smoke-Free Mumbai Campaign has organised a 'Smoke Free Ganesh Mandal' competition to boost the cause this year.

Dr Surendra Shastri, chairperson of the organisation said, "Ganesh mandals are steering clear of sponsorships from these companies, so the achievement

is commendable."

Though registrations for the contest are not very high, at least 50 pandals have agreed to participate by putting up detailed Marathi banners about the law banning smoking in public places. "Mandals taking up anti-tobacco activities such as local drawing competitions will be judged by our health educators," said Mayuri Sawant, communications manager for Smoke-Free Mumbai.

Registrations for the competition are still open.



■ (Top) Devotees wait in queues to seek blessings of Lalbaugcha Raja.
■ (Middle) Gauri idols were displayed for sale at a shop at Girgaum.

