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Eye in the sky to scan puja crowd

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KOLKATA: Don't get scared if you find an unidentified object hovering over your head during Durga Puja. It won't harm you. In fact, it'll be there to protect you. It'll be Kolkata Police's latest acquisition - unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) - to keep the city under constant surveillance.

Just two months after the Union home minister shortlisted seven cities - Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Ahmedabad - to have their own individual air surveillance systems where helicopters with gun-toting commandos, balloons fitted with cameras and sophisticated sensors and UAVs will keep round-the-clock vigil, Kolkata is set to become the second city after Delhi to have its own UAV.

However, what makes this even more interesting is the fact that it is an acquisition that has come independent of the Union home ministry's own Safe City Project. "We have tested the UAV and it is working fine. We will use it to monitor crowd movement during pujas and control traffic across the city. We will be deploying it extensively during the immersions. The UAV has been approved by the Defensive Research and Development Organization," said police chief Surajit Kar Purkayastha.

Kolkata Police's control room in Lalbazar will access the data gathered by the UAV. "Its brilliance lies in the fact that it can even track the movement of a suspicious object or a person over a diameter of 5 km. We generally use it for about two-and-a-half hours each but with technology improving each day, we hope to increase its working time," a top officer of the STF said.

The system, which was successfully used in Delhi during the 2010 Commonwealth Games for the first time in the country, will now be replicated in other cities under the 'Safe City Project' of the home ministry.

In its latest guidelines on the UAV, the ministry said, "Air surveillance can be obtained by positioning various equipment - balloons, UAVs and helicopters fitted with gadgets like cameras and sensors - to cater to specialized requirements." The data collected would be fed to the command control centre (CCC) for necessary action.

It said the CCC - having a network of computer systems - would be the heart of the Safe City Project. Such centres - one each in every city - will have the capacity to store, analyze and disseminate data, wherever required, though a 'fusion centre'. The fusion centre will keep comprehensive database from various fields like vehicle registration numbers, UID numbers of citizens, residential addresses, PAN card details and crime-related details. It will, eventually, be linked with the Centre's NATGRID - National Intelligence Grid - project.

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