

FESTIVAL SEASON: SECURITY GUARDING CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

Introduction

The quarter August to October is generally festival season in India. Starting with the beginning of the month of Sawan (Shrawan) in the local calendar there are a series of festivals till Diwali which generally is in the last week of October. This also includes the celebration of Eid. Independence Day on 15 August adds to the festive mood in the country. The combination of religiosity and festivity however provides an opportunity for anti social elements, terrorist and extremist organizations to carry out their nefarious activities with a view to achieve their agenda of creating rift in society, inciting communal violence and destroying peace and harmony. In addition heavy rush at religious places and shopping centres poses a challenge of crowd management and disasters as stampede. Security guarding agencies are at the forefront at most venues and thus need to be sensitized for effective response during the festival period.

Aim

The aim of the Paper is to outline security guarding challenges during the festival season in India in the current year and suggest suitable responses.

Important periods during Festival Season 2016

As celebrations in India are generally spread over a number of days, various periods of significance during the festival season 2016 span the main dates of events which are as given below:-

- Independence Day – 15 August
- Raksha Bandhan – 18 August
- Janmashtami – 25 August
- Dahi Handi – 26 August (In Mumbai and suburbs)
- Ganesh Chaturthi – 05 September (10 days festival mainly in Maharashtra)
- Id-ul-Zuha(Bakrid) – 12 September
- Onam – 13 September
- Dussehra – 11 October
- Muharram – 12 October
- Diwali – 30 October

In addition to these there are a large number of local festivals, fairs and celebrations held during this period which should be noted from the local calendar and included in the list.

Characteristics of Festival Season Impacting Security Guarding

Some of the peculiar characteristics of the festival season that impact security guarding in general are as follows:-

- Intense public involvement is seen through formation local committees which set up huge pandals with idols
- Some celebrations are carried out over a number of days generally 8 to 10
- Large congregations at temples and mosques as relevant and also for visiting of pandals during Ganesh Chaturthi and Durga Pooja.
- Ceremonial processions are carried out as during Ganesh Chaturthi and mourning procession during Muharram.
- Local fairs result in large congregations frequently putting great stress on existing infrastructure.
- Eve teasing and assault on women.
- Heavy rush for shopping with large number of festival sales.

Challenges Posed to Security and Safety

Large crowds and high foot falls as well as religious import of the festivals are used by anti social elements for disruption thereby achieving their agenda of gaining publicity, creating communal discord and disturbing peace. Towards this end the following activities could be anticipated:-

- Use of Improvised explosives devices (IEDs) and bombs with timer devices in religious places and during events. This could also be used in shopping places and bazaars with large congregations.
- Lone Ranger armed or suicide attack has emerged as a new threat for the current year.
- Desecration of religious places to incite violence.
- Attacks on religious processions particularly where these pass through localities of other communities.
- Actions and reactions to cow vigilante groups is a new threat.
- Increase in thefts and crime particularly at high value establishments – jewelry and electronic goods, residential areas and petty thieves operating in shopping malls and bazaars.
- Disasters such as fire accidents and stampedes.

Responses by Security Guarding Agencies

While government law enforcement agencies are on high alert and increase their deployments during the period these are invariably deficient in numbers given multiplicity of events, large crowd and also a commitment for VIP security. This leads to heavy reliance on private security agencies (PSA) for a variety of tasks apart from normal guarding which may vary from protection of sanctum sanctorum to management of mass gatherings and disasters. Countering a terrorist attack is not within the purview of

PSA; however effective checks will ensure prevention and deterrence. The suggested responses by PSA for the purpose ensuring security and safety during the period are as per succeeding paragraphs.

Planning and Deployment

→ Detailed security plan – location and event based should be prepared well in advance factoring in likely contingencies based on past experience and including new threats that have emerged such as Lone Ranger attacks or violence by cow vigilante groups. The plan should be integrated with that of the local police and government agencies.

→ Communal sensitivity of the location should be factored in while preparing the plan.

→ 24/7 security should be planned at religious places to prevent miscreants from desecration during the night or off duty hours.

→ Integrated deployment to include personnel, sniffer dogs and electronic aids such as CCTV networks be carried out based on threat assessment.

→ Additional personnel be catered for at critical locations. This is necessary to provide relief in rotation so that guards can carry out their religious obligations.

→ Women security guards should be available in adequate number at all locations.

→ QRT for reinforcing and catering for unforeseen be planned and suitably place for immediate response.

Electronic Surveillance

→ CCTV network should provide full spectrum visibility of critical areas and record all personnel on entry and exit. Central control room should be established 24/7 and trained staff to identify unusual personnel and activity should be earmarked for preemptive actions as well as post incident investigations.

→ In large congregations drones are a suitable aid to provide panoramic visibility of the location.

Checks

→ 100 percent check of personnel (pat down) and baggage screening has to be enforced. This should be carried out at a suitable standoff distance from the main event/location so that any premature action by the miscreant does not cause heavy casualties.

→ Vehicle Park should be at a distance from the main venue with adequate security both from the point of view of containing any terrorist activity as well as thefts.

Crime Control

→ Profile including photographs of known history sheeters should be pasted at the entrance as well as at other prominent locations to act as deterrence and to warn the public

→ Special spotters should be earmarked for identifying likely individuals indulging in thefts, eve teasing or other activity.

Prevention of Stampedes and other Safety Drills

→ Where large congregations are expected lanes should be marked and visitors regulated in such a manner that at any one time rush at the main site is avoided while allowing easy exit in case of an emergency. Additional personnel should be deployed for guidance of crowd and control.

→ Emergency plan in the case of a stampede be prepared in advance and rehearsed to cater for all contingencies.

→ Fire fighting arrangement should be ensured in conjunction with the organisers and local fire safety officials and drills should be rehearsed in combination with that for stampedes.

→ Public address system should be catered for and used extensively.

Coordination

→ A control room should be established for coordinating all activities and manned 24/7.

→ Communication should be provided preferably on radio duplicated by mobile to cater for redundancy.

→ Coordination should be carried out with the local government, police and fire fighting squads and communications maintained at all times

→ Coordination be also carried out with local medical authorities and casualty evacuation processes identified as PSA personnel may get invariably get roped in for the same on humanitarian grounds. This should be done without compromising on primary tasks.

Conclusion

Festival season poses additional challenges to PSA thus adequate planning and preparations are required for provision of effective and efficient security guarding and allied arrangements. Preventive measures undertaken will avoid a security incident as well as a disaster thus maximum emphasis should be laid on the same.