

Cops introduce bird-in-the-sky surveillance for Raj's mega-rally

The UAV idea, first mooted in the aftermath of 26/11, was shot down by Arup Patnaik. Change of heart came after CST violence

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Raj Thackeray's rally on Tuesday saw possibly the biggest surveillance exercise launched in the city for any single event. While on the ground there were 15,000 cops keeping a watch on every move his supporters made, for the first time there was an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) keeping an eye on the gathering Thackeray addressed at Azad Maidan.

The UAV, the kind that US forces use to hunt for the Taliban in Afghanistan, relayed real-time images to a control room set up at the BMC headquarters. The control room was manned by technicians from the manufacturer and two top police officials.

The Mumbai police had proposed to buy a UAV in the aftermath of the 2008 terrorist attack on Mumbai that left over 160 people dead and close to 300 injured. However, when Arup Patnaik took over as police commissioner in 2011, he shot down the idea.

The communal violence that rocked Mumbai on August 11, when the cops failed to spot violent mobs moving towards Azad Maidan where some Muslim groups had organised a rally to condemn violence in Assam, seems to have changed his mind. Till late on Tuesday, there was no information about how the dry run

for Netra, as the UAV is called, went or whether Patnaik was impressed enough to allow its deployment with Mumbai police's surveillance unit.

Vice president of Idea Forge, the manufacturer of Netra, Amardeep Singh told Mumbai Mirror that the UAV carried out two flights during the rally and covered the perimeter of the ground. "It provided real-time video inputs about the crowd movement to Mumbai Police. Senior police officers monitored the input," he said

Netra, designed in cooperation with the Defence Research and Development Organisation, has a range of 2 km and can fly for 30 minutes at a stretch before requiring a battery re-charge.

The demonstration of Netra was organised by Deputy Commissioner of Police, zone-I, Ravindra Shiswe. Mumbai Police spokesman, DCP Nisar Tamboli, confirmed the demonstration, but refused to elaborate on the results.

Each Netra unit costs around Rs15-20 lakh and is currently used extensively in anti-insurgency operations.



Netra, the UAV, hovers over Azad Maidan as Raj Thackeray delivers his diatribe

