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**News » Drone, a major draw at Mumbai's engineering expo** 

**Mumbai, Dec 17 (IANS):** A drone, an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), built by Thane-based Idea Forge Technologies (IFT), is the star attraction at the ongoing 4th India Engineering Sourcing Show, officials said here Wednesday.

The expo, which started Tuesday with over 400 engineering companies participating, has fascinated huge crowds, including students who are enjoying viewing the technological products and innovations displayed here.

However, the biggest draw is the IFT's drone which, in a cameo in Aamir Khan's 2010 national award winning movie "3 Idiots", detects a student's suicide in the movie.

Last May, Mumbai buzzed with excitement when Francesco's Pizzeria restaurant claimed to have delivered a pizza by a drone. But it later proved to be a mere publicity stunt.

The IFT's completely autonomous UAV, named NETRA, developed in collaboration with the Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO), is being used extensively by the Indian armed forces, paramilitary and security forces, besides helping the National Disaster Response Force, the National Security Guard, and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), among others.

Fitted with GPS and powerful sensors, NETRA can be launched from any small open place, commanded to overfly an interest area of up to 400 metres independently and return after completing its mission.

It also boasts of the smallest auto-pilot in the world, can send continuous real-time videos of every ground movement, and has a vertical take off and landing, making it extremely user-friendly.

IFT was launched in 2008 by five IIT-Bombay graduates -- Ankit Mehta, Vipul Joshi, Ashish Bhat, Amardeep Singh and Rahul Singh -- all driven by the passion for robotics.

Initially, it got \$one million funding from the Technology Development Board of India and later an angel investor pumped in another \$100,000.

"We are still away from commercial usage of drones, although pizza delivery etc. serve as great marketing gimmicks," one of the partners commented.

As per market estimates, the drone price tag starts at around Rs.2.5 million and they are mostly working for the government.

Presently, there are barely six or seven drone manufacturers in India, compared to around 900 in China, some low-end ones available for less than Rs.100,000, and 200 manufacturers in the US.

Drones have varied and multi-faceted applications, including surveillance and rescue missions, aerial photography and cinematography vis-a-vis the expensive helicopter shooting, crowd management during mega-festivals like Kumbh Mela or public fairs, event supervision and recently even wildlife management.