

Eye in the sky can keep watch on action on ground

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: On Thursday morning, a number of motorists on Sirsi Circle flyover on Mysuru Road stopped to peer into KSRP police grounds at a huge white balloon, which was being launched. The balloon was carrying a 6kg camera that could capture videos across an area of two to three sqkm.

Though they enjoyed the sight, not many knew they were watching the Mistral-RT1000, an aerostat-based aerial surveillance system, developed by Bengaluru-based Mistral Solutions in association with Israeli firm RT. It was being demonstrated in India for the first time.

All eyes were on the balloon hundreds of feet above, but the real action was on the ground where the balloon was anchored to a station. Operators there were receiving real-time videos from Majestic area.

The operators controlled the camera attached to the balloon and zoomed in to see the movement of people and buses at the bus station there. The balloon can go 1,000ft high and monitor the surroundings.

"This has many uses in defence applications. BSF and NSG were at the demonstration and expressed interest in it," said Amanullah Khan, delivery manager, homeland security, Mistral Solutions. "The system is widely used by the Israeli army and was recently purchased by the US Army. It is a helium-inflatable device equipped with a long-range, day-and-night thermal camera that provides good aerial surveillance. The police forces of Karnataka and other states along with BSF and NSG have shown interest," he added. The system costs Rs 3 to Rs 5 crore.

Alexander Morozov, an operator with Israeli firm RT, re-

What is RT1000?



It is designed for surveillance over fixed sites, such as military bases, temporary camps, strategic facilities and border checkpoints. It can also be used for civilian purposes to monitor large rallies, rescue operations and mega events. The system is operated by two persons. It can operate under different wind conditions and remain airborne for up to 72 hours. It provides 360-degree video coverage with high zoom for two to three sqkm. About 40 aerostat systems are in operation in 10 countries, including Israel, Canada, the US, Russia, Thailand and Afghanistan.

Trouble for ATC

A few hours after the launch of the surveillance balloon, the air traffic control at HAL asked Mistral to bring it down as it was disturbing flight movement. Company representatives said the height of the balloon could be lowered or used with special permission when huge events or rescue operations are under way.

called using the system in a rescue operation. "A terrorist group had kidnapped three Jewish boys. Using the aerostat surveillance, we were able to find the culprits and rescue the boys. Similar set-ups are in action round the clock at the Gaza Strip," he said.