



INDIAN AIR FORCE DRONATHON - 2026

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Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit, Vice Chief of the Air Staff, inaugurated the first Indian Air Force Dronathon-2026 at the Pokhran Field Firing Range, Jaisalmer, today. The inaugural ceremony was attended by senior functionaries of MoD, HQ IDS and representatives from Indian Army, and BSF. Dronathon-2026 is an IAF initiative aimed at engaging directly with the Indian unmanned systems industry and assessing emerging technologies under realistic operational conditions. The three-day event, planned from 14 to 16 September 2026, brings together over 20 leading defence companies, start-ups MSMEs, DPSUs and innovators from India's rapidly evolving unmanned systems ecosystem.

The IAF views unmanned systems as an important complement to manned aviation providing commanders with additional options to enhance the reach, persistence responsiveness and flexibility of air operations. During the Dronathon, participating companies and innovators will demonstrate their Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) and associated technologies at the Pokhran range.

The demonstrations will encompass a wide spectrum of operational capabilities including surveillance and reconnaissance, autonomous operations, swarm technologies, electronic warfare and Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems (CUAS). The central focus of Dronathon-2026 is to move from technology demonstration to operational effect. The systems are being assessed for their reliability, and effectiveness in demanding and contested environments, as well as their ability to adapt to evolving operational requirements and emerging threats.

During the event today, the VCAS also released the 'IAF UAS Roadmap', providing greater clarity to Indian industry on capability priorities. The roadmap is intended to facilitate focused innovation and enable the unmanned airborne systems industry, academia and research organisations to align their efforts with the future requirements of the IAF.

On the opening day of Dronathon-2026, the Indian Air Force successfully demonstrated a key capability of "Vayu UTtaM," its indigenously developed multi-mode Unmanned Traffic Management (UTM) system. During its real time demonstration at Pokhran, it detected and tracked both military and civil UAS. The capability is designed to facilitate coordinated management of UAS operations in increasingly congested airspace, while also supporting the identification and timely mitigation of unauthorised or rogue drones. With the increasing proliferation of UAS, Vayu UTtaM has potential applications beyond the military domain, including in areas related to airspace safety, critical infrastructure, civil aviation and public safety.

Dronathon-2026 reinforces the IAF's commitment to Atmanirbharta in unmanned systems, with the focus extending beyond airframes to the complete ecosystem, including propulsion, sensors and payloads, communications, autonomy, electronic warfare, countermeasures and airspace management.



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