Concerns on drone regulations

Click here to know more on the guidelines for drone operations.

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What is the issue?

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Lack of clarity on the recently published drone regulations might affect competitiveness on this nascent field.

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What are the concerns?

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- India’s regulations separate drones into five categories — nano, micro, small, medium and large.
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- There is very little regulation for flying a nano up to 50 metres height, except for not flying near airports, military sites or in segregated airspace.
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- From the micro category, every drone must obtain a unique identification number (UIN) from the aviation regulator.
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- It will be followed by a long list of documentation including security clearances from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in several cases.
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- Once the UIN is obtained, drone operators have to apply for an Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit (UAOP) which includes more forms, more annexures and more submissions.
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- Even for the micro drones that climb only up to a height of 200 feet, users have to intimate the local police station 24 hours prior to the flight.
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- Manufacturers of drones, technologists and researchers making applications using drones have to test fly drones frequently, often several times a day.
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- This makes the structure of these regulations paving the way for possibility of red tapism.
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- With so many government authorities involved in allowing permission, it is inevitable that operators could be slapped easily with real and perceived violations.
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- To avoid this, the regulation provides a list of identified areas for testing and demonstration so that flying drones in these areas comes with less paperwork.
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- However, the locations provided are far from technology and development hubs that further complicates practical testing of these drones.
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- For example, in Karnataka, the identified areas are Chitradurga, Coorg and Ganimangala village, all of which are around 200 km from Bengaluru entailing nearly four hours of travel one way.
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What is the case with other countries?

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- According to Global Market Insights, China’s drone economy, including manufacturing and development, will be worth $9 billion in 2020.
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- The commercial drone market of US is also expected to be $2.05 billion by 2023.
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- Switzerland has an enormous number of people interested in flying drones and developing drone-based applications.
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- One of their drones helps analyse which plants are deficient in nitrogen, enabling farmers to add corrective fertilizer only where necessary.
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- This has resulted in higher yield and significantly lower usage of fertilizers and herbicides, which attracts customers all around the world.
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What should be done?

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- The security and privacy risks of allowing drones to fly in an unregulated manner are high.
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- However, if India is to reach even the fraction of the $1 trillion potential, it needs to figure out a more balanced manner of regulation.
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- India made a good start by freeing all drones from their previous illegality.
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- However, the real impact of drones will only be seen in the many applications they will be put to.
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- They are likely to be used in agriculture, disaster prevention systems, rescue operation leaders, and even public transport providers in the distant future.
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- This should not be affected by filing a series of applications in multiple copies and waiting for various government departments to respond.
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- Hence any hectic regulations will create serious repercussions and affects India’s future competitiveness in the field.
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Source: The Hindu

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