National Drones Policy - Drone Regulations 1.0

Click here to know more on DGCA's guidelines on drone operations.

Why in news?

The National Drones Policy drafted by the Ministry of Civil Aviation came into effect from December 1, 2018.

What is the policy on?

- The new policy called “Drone Regulations 1.0” clarifies where, when and how drones can operate within India.
- With the policy coming into effect, flying drones or remotely-piloted aircraft have become legal in India.
- Also, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has kick-started the online registration of drones in India through its Digital Sky portal.

What was the need?

- A few businesses have managed to manufacture or operate drones in India, without attracting hostile government attention.
- They provided products and services primarily for the cinematography, agriculture, and infrastructure sectors.
- However, there were no regulations in place that guarantee the legality of their products and services.
So it has been difficult for these businesses to attract investors, limiting their ability to grow.

It is also to be noted that India has no indigenous drone manufacturer capable of competing on the global stage.

So the national policy on drone would go a long way in addressing these concerns.

What are the highlights of the policy?

- **Categories** - The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has designed five different categories of drones as Nano, Micro, Small, Medium, and Large.

- Under the new policy, Nano drones which weigh less than 250 grams or equal does not need a registration or license.

- However, drones that belong to remaining categories will need to be registered on the Digital Sky portal.

- **Digital Sky portal** - It is an online platform as part of an enforcement system designated as No Permission No Takeoff (NPNT).

- Here, a drone operator can obtain all the necessary paperwork required.

- It includes procedures to conduct a drone operation, including final flight permission immediately before the operation.

- **Permission** - Following registration, DGCA will issue a Unique Identification Number (UIN) or Unmanned Aircraft Operator’s Permit (UAOP).

- The fee for a fresh UIN is Rs 1,000. The fee for a fresh UAOP is Rs 25,000
To get permissions to fly, RPAS (Remotely Piloted Air System) operators or remote pilots will have to file a flight plan.

- **Zones** - Flying in the ‘green zones’ will require only intimation of the time and location of the flights via the portal or the app.
- But permissions will be required for flying in ‘yellow zones’, and flights will not be allowed in the ‘red zones’.
- The location of these zones will be announced soon. Permission, if granted, will be available digitally on the portal.
- DGCA has also designated a set of test sites for drone manufacturers and operators to innovate in a safe and secure environment.

**Drone Policy 2.0** - The ministry has constituted a task-force on the recommendation of Drone Policy 2.0.
- This task-force is expected to release their final report by the end of this year.
- Drone 2.0 framework for RPAS are expected to include

  - regulatory architecture for autonomous flying
  - delivery via drones
  - beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) flights

What are the concerns?

- The current regulations make it legal for non-governmental agencies, organisations and individuals to use UAVs.
- But the high costs put them beyond the reach of NGOs and rural
The processes and fees render it difficult for them to conduct drone operations without hiring companies, which again would increase the costs.

Besides this, some activities with the potential for market transformation are not currently permitted.

E.g. functional drone-based delivery is not allowed

It's because it requires the operator to conduct BVLOS operations and for the drone itself to release payloads while in flight.

But this is considered to be a major growth area for the drone industry.

It is also a focus for research and development as it will have a significant impact in online retail and healthcare.

What lies ahead?

Drone applications are extremely relevant to India’s large rural population.

E.g. farming communities could cooperatively use drones to map vegetation stress, prevent crop-raiding by wild animals, conduct precise spraying of fertilisers and pesticides

So the necessary infrastructure must be put in place for the implementation of regulations without delay.

Aside from technical issues, the societal concern of making drone operation inclusive should be addressed.

More representatives from outside the drone industry including civil society organisations and advocacy groups should be involved in framing the subsequent versions of regulations.
Source: Indian Express, BusinessLine