

DRONE RULES AIM TO HELP START-UPS, SMES

Relevant for: Economy | Topic: Issues relating to Growth & Development - Industry & Services Sector incl. MSMEs and PSUs

Up in the air:Drones are now being increasingly used for security and in sectors such as e-commerce.AFPABID BHAT

The Civil Aviation Ministry has notified the Drone Rules, 2021, under which the weight of a fully loaded unmanned aircraft system has been increased from 300 kg to 500 kg to include heavy payload-carrying craft for use in the logistics and transportation sectors. The rules will also cover drone taxis.

The key features of these rules include the development of drone corridors for cargo deliveries. An unmanned aircraft systems promotion council will be set up to facilitate a business-friendly regulatory regime.

PM hails rules

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the rules would usher in a landmark moment for the sector. He tweeted, "The new Drone Rules will tremendously help start-ups and our youth working in this sector. It will open up new possibilities for innovation & business. It will help leverage India's strengths in innovation, technology & engineering to make India a drone hub."

Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said the rules were aimed at simplifying the procedures and reducing compliance burden for drone operation.

The IT sector body, NASSCOM, welcomed the move, stating that it would enable start-ups and small and medium enterprises to create innovative-use cases and applications in various sectors such as e-commerce, agriculture, mining, healthcare, emergency response and logistics.

No security clearance

Under the new rules, no security clearance will be required before any registration or licence issuance for drones. The number of forms or permissions has been reduced from 25 to just five. No pilot licence will be required for operating nano drones and micro drones for non-commercial use.

The Director General or an entity authorised by it, on the recommendation of the Quality Council of India or an authorised testing entity, will issue a type certificate for drones. No type certificate, unique identification number, prior permission and remote pilot licence will be needed for research and development entities.

The import of drones will be regulated by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade. There will be no restriction on foreign ownership in Indian drone companies.

Digital Sky Platform

Importing and manufacturing drones purely for exports are now exempt from type certification and unique identification number. Manufacturers and importers will be able to generate their drones' unique identification number on the Digital Sky Platform through the self-certification route.

The online registration of all drones will happen through the Digital Sky Platform.

An interactive airspace map with green, yellow, and red zones will be displayed on the Digital Sky Platform. The yellow zone has been reduced from 45 km to 12 km from the airport perimeter. No permission will be required for operating a drone in the green zones and up to 200 feet in the area between eight and 12 km from the airport perimeter.

Safety features like 'no permission-no take-off', real-time tracking beacon, geo-fencing, etc., will have to be notified soon. A minimum six-month lead time will be given for compliance.

A remote pilot licence holder enlisted on the Digital Sky Platform will only be allowed to operate a drone covered under the Rules. The training and examination will be conducted by an authorised drone school. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation will prescribe the training requirements, oversee the schools and provide pilot licences online.

Carriage of arms, ammunition, explosives and military stores and so on on drones has been prohibited.

"No person shall carry dangerous goods on unmanned aircraft unless such operation is in compliance with the Aircraft (Carriage of Dangerous Goods) Rules, 2003," said the notification.

Any accident involving drones should be reported within 48 hours. The maximum penalty for violations had been reduced to Rs. 1 lakh.

Vipul Singh, Co-founder and CEO at drone firm Aarav Unmanned Systems, told *The Hindu* that the new rules were a major breakthrough for the Indian drone industry, and would make India an over \$5 billion drone market in the next three years.

(With input from Mini

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