NEW RULES MAKE IT EASIER AND CHEAPER TO OPERATE DRONES

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: Indigenization of technology and developing new technology

The Drone Rules 2021 have also done away with the requirement of possessing a certificate of airworthiness, unique identification number, prior permission and remote pilot licence for entities engaged in research and development (R&D) on drones

NEW DELHI : Individuals and companies will find it easier and cheaper to own and operate drones in India, under a new national policy notified on Thursday.

The policy, a liberalized version of rules first announced in March, will exempt a drone operator from seeking security clearance before registering a drone or applying for a licence. Also, foreign companies registered in India will be allowed to import and operate drones and their parts and will be regulated by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade.

The Drone Rules 2021 have also done away with the requirement of possessing a certificate of airworthiness, unique identification number, prior permission and remote pilot licence for entities engaged in research and development (R&D) on drones.

This comes less than a fortnight after the ministry of civil aviation (MoCA) and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) permitted 10 organizations, including state governments such as Karnataka and private companies like Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd, Bayer Crop Science, Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune and National Health Mission (Mumbai), to use drones for a year.

The rules will replace the UAS (unmanned aircraft system) Rules 2021 issued on 12 March, the aviation ministry said in a statement.

"The new Drone Rules will tremendously help startups and youth working in the sector. It will open up possibilities for innovation & business. It will help leverage India's strengths in innovation, technology & engineering to make India a drone hub," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a tweet.

He said the rules will "usher in a landmark moment for this sector in India. The rules are based on the premise of trust and self-certification. Approvals, compliance requirements and entry barriers have been significantly reduced".

According to the Drone Rules 2021, the requirement for several approvals have been abolished, including that for unique authorization number, a prototype identification number, certificate of manufacturing and airworthiness, certificate of conformance, certificate of maintenance, import clearance, acceptance of existing drones, operator permits, authorization of R&D organization, student remote pilot licence, remote pilot instructor authorization and drone port authorization.

Also, no pilot licence will be required to operate micro drones used for non-commercial use, nano drones and for R&D organizations using such drones. The number of forms has also been reduced from 25 to 5 and types of fee sharply reduced from 72 to 4.

"Quantum of fee reduced to nominal levels and delinked with the size of the drone. For instance, remote pilot licence fee has been reduced from 3,000 (for large drones) to 100 for all categories

of drones; and is valid for 10 years," according to the ministry statement.

"Digital sky platform shall be developed as a user-friendly, single-window system. There will be minimal human interface, and most permissions will be self-generated," it added.

Digital sky platform is an initiative by the aviation ministry to provide a secure and scalable platform that supports drone technology frameworks such as NPNT (no permission, no take-off), designed to enable flight permissions digitally and managing unmanned aircraft operations and traffic efficiently.

The liberalized rules also have safety features such as real-time tracking beacon and geo-fencing, which are expected to be notified in the future. A six-month lead time will be provided for compliance.

A copy of the new rules has been reviewed by Mint.

Meanwhile, coverage of drones under Drone Rules 2021 has been increased from 300kg to 500kg and will cover drone taxis, while the Issuance of certificate of airworthiness has been delegated to the Quality Council of India and certification entities authorized by it.

MoCA will also facilitate the development of drone corridors for cargo deliveries, and a drone promotion council will be set up to facilitate a business-friendly regulatory regime.

"This drone policy is historic. We want to create a strong drone ecosystem in India. This policy will eliminate all unnecessary operational and entry barriers," civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said at a news conference. "We aim to make India a hub for drones by 2030," Scindia added.

"The drone policy will help generate employment opportunities as there are over 200 startups in this field," he said.

"Given that drones are increasingly carving a niche among authorities, content creators and hobbyists alike, the government's move to ease the process is a welcome move. Abolishing of approvals, reduction in the number of permissions, etc., would instil confidence among users and boost the market of drones," said Siddharth Jain, a founding partner at New Delhi-based PSL Advocates and Solicitors.

Separately, Scindia said air taxis that will traverse the airspace instead of roads will be very much possible in the coming days under the drone rules, PTI reported. "Air taxis are being researched and invented globally, and many startups are coming up," the minister told a press conference. "That time is not far when taxis, like the ones of Uber, etc., that you see on roads, you will see in the air under the drone policy. I believe this is very much possible," he added.

please check the spam folder.

END