National Drones Policy - Drone Regulations 1.0

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

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Why in news?

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

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What is the policy on?

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

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- A few businesses have managed to manufacture or operate drones in India, without attracting hostile government attention.
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- They provided products and services primarily for the cinematography, agriculture, and infrastructure sectors.
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- However, there were no regulations in place that guarantee the legality of

their products and services.
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- So it has been difficult for these businesses to attract investors, limiting their ability to grow.
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- It is also to be noted that India has no indigenous drone manufacturer capable of competing on the global stage.
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- So the national policy on drone would go a long way in addressing these concerns.
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What are the highlights of the policy?

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- **Categories** - The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has designed five different categories of drones as Nano, Micro, Small, Medium, and Large.
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- Under the new policy, Nano drones which weigh less than 250 grams or equal does not need a registration or license.
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- However, drones that belong to remaining categories will need to be registered on the Digital Sky portal.
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- **Digital Sky portal** - It is an online platform as part of an enforcement system designated as No Permission No Takeoff (NPNT).
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- Here, a drone operator can obtain all the necessary paperwork required.
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- It includes procedures to conduct a drone operation, including final flight permission immediately before the operation.
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- **Permission** - Following registration, DGCA will issue a Unique Identification Number (UIN) or Unmanned Aircraft Operator’s Permit (UAOP).
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- The fee for a fresh UIN is Rs 1,000. The fee for a fresh UAOP is Rs 25,000 and is valid for 5 years.
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- To get permissions to fly, RPAS (Remotely Piloted Air System) operators or remote pilots will have to file a flight plan.
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- **Zones** - Flying in the 'green zones' will require only intimation of the time and location of the flights via the portal or the app.
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- But permissions will be required for flying in 'yellow zones', and flights will not be allowed in the 'red zones'.
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- The location of these zones will be announced soon. Permission, if granted, will be available digitally on the portal.
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- DGCA has also designated a set of test sites for drone manufacturers and operators to innovate in a safe and secure environment.
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- **Drone Policy 2.0** - The ministry has constituted a task-force on the recommendation of Drone Policy 2.0.
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- This task-force is expected to release their final report by the end of this year.
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- Drone 2.0 framework for RPAS are expected to include
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i. regulatory architecture for autonomous flying
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ii. delivery via drones
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iii. beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) flights
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What are the concerns?

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- The current regulations make it legal for non-governmental agencies, organisations and individuals to use UAVs.
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- But the high costs put them beyond the reach of NGOs and rural communities.
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- The processes and fees render it difficult for them to conduct drone operations without hiring companies, which again would increase the costs.
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- Besides this, some activities with the potential for market transformation are not currently permitted.
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- E.g. functional drone-based delivery is not allowed
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- It's because it requires the operator to conduct BVLOS operations and for the drone itself to release payloads while in flight.
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- But this is considered to be a major growth area for the drone industry.
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- It is also a focus for research and development as it will have a significant impact in online retail and healthcare.
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What lies ahead?

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- Drone applications are extremely relevant to India’s large rural population.
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- 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
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- So the necessary infrastructure must be put in place for the implementation of regulations without delay.
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- Aside from technical issues, the societal concern of making drone operation inclusive should be addressed.
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- More representatives from outside the drone industry including civil society organisations and advocacy groups should be involved in framing the subsequent versions of regulations.
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Source: Indian Express, BusinessLine

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