Revised Proposal for Civilian Drones

Why in news?

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- The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has released a revised draft of proposed rules for operating civilian drones.
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- Public comments have been invited and a final draft after incorporating suggestions is expected by the year end.
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What are the highlights?

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- An earlier draft faced criticism for proposing a very complicated and restrictive set of rules that was also difficult to enforce.
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- The new draft has relaxed many of these and is more in line with the ground realities.
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- According to the weight, drones have been divided into five categories, with different specifications for each.
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- **Lightweights -** The lightest two categories - Nano (up to 250 grams) and Micro (up to 2 kgs of takeoff weight), may be operated without the operator possessing an 'Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit' – UAOP.
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- Also, these smaller UAVs don't require a unique identification number (UIN), provided they are operated within 200 metres.
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- **Larger vehicles** – These will have to possess UIN and their operators will need a permit.
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- Flight plans will have to be filed and import licences for larger drones will be granted on merit, depending on the purpose.
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What are the relaxations?

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- Commercial use of drones for photography, doorstep delivery and even passenger transport (large UAVs) could be allowed too.
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- The need to get home ministry’s clearance for flight routes 80 days in advance has been done away with.
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- Restrictions placed on areas where ‘UAVs may not be operated’ have also been relaxed.
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What are the drawbacks?

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- Flights are not going to be permitted within 500 metres of designated sensitive installations, within 50 km of borders or more than 500 metres offshore.
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- As many installations are classified as sensitive, this is still very restrictive and it will make commercial operations difficult.
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- Civilian use of drones for hobby and commercial purposes is already common and multiple types are available.
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- The cheapest ones cost Rs 1,200-1,500 and a smart middle-school student can assemble and programme it.
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- As permissions are still a little tedious, they run the risk of being ignored.
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How does the future look?

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- The civilian use of drones is expected to proliferate and the years with increased commerciality and better regulations.

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- UAV ambulances have been successfully deployed in several countries and its advantages are obvious.
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- UAVs are also used in disaster management, for surveys and mapping, monitoring of power lines, ports and pipelines.
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- Commercial photography, crop spraying and gathering of weather data are also aspects that have potential.
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- **Concerns -** There are indeed multiple associated safety, security and privacy concerns.
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- These must be addressed in a pragmatic and rational fashion by flexible regulations that can adapt to new technologies.
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- The new draft is an improvement but it does not go far enough.
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Source: Business Standard

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