

Don't regulate us with stringent drone rules: Aero-modellers

The 32,000-strong collective of Aero-Modellers in the country just got an assurance from the Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jayant Sinha: The government will consider formulating exclusive Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) to govern the sport, far less stringent than the rules drafted for Unmanned Aerial Vehicles classified as drones.

The Aero-modellers had their demands clear at an Open House consultation process arranged here on Tuesday by the Director General Civil Aviation (DGCA): Fixed wing model aircraft (model planes, gliders and model / scale helicopters) used for hobby and recreational flying should not be restricted to a weight below 2 kgs and a height not exceeding 200 ft.

Worldwide, the established standard weight for aero-modelling aircraft is 35 to 40 kg. The height (Above Ground Level) restriction is 400 ft. These are currently the practice in the United States, Canada, Europe and Australia, the hobby flyers told DGCA.

Unlike aero-modelling aircraft, the quadcopters and drones have a highly accurate and precise flight path. Besides, their ability for autonomous flight raises concerns of privacy, safety and security. "Such concerns do not apply in any manner whatsoever to the conventional model aircraft used for hobby, recreation and sports."

To regulate commercial drone operations, DGCA's draft rule has mandated that all types of modern aircraft weighing more than 2 kgs (including those for recreational use) should be subject to Unique Identification Number (UIN) and Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit (UAOP) requirements. Registration and training will be mandatory.

These stringent conditions besides the weight and height restriction will affect about 12,000 model aircraft currently in operation countrywide. "These are being flown by more than 8,000 enthusiasts from various walks of life, of all age groups, including students and educational institutes," an aero-modeller elaborated at the Open House.

Bulk of the aero-modelling aircraft used for sport / recreation weight from 3 kgs to 30 kgs. The smaller models of 2 kgs are generally flown only in parks or indoors. "In the case of motorised fixed-wing and glider models, it is impractical to manoeuvre the aircraft within a height of 200 ft," says Umesh More, chairman, Wings India Radio controlled Model Flyers Club.

The current import restrictions on aero modelling equipment should also be lifted, contended Bengaluru-based aero-modeller Adarsh Nagarajiah. "We can make in India, but the raw materials are just not available. The spares are seized by the Customs the moment they land in India," he noted.

KEY DEMANDS:

* DGCA should lift blanket ban on flying all types of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS); exclude aero-modelling aircraft from restrictions.

* Allow model aircraft up to a maximum weight of 30 kgs as per global standards.

Permit a maximum altitude of 400 ft above ground level.

* Exempt design, building, assembly of model aircraft from DGCA regulations.

* Create a separate category in Draft Policy for model aircraft strictly for sports, recreation and educational purposes.

* Exempt this category from UIN registration, UAOP conditions.