

Curb misuse of drones or UAVs

AN aerial drone photograph of an aircraft approaching the KL International Airport (KLIA), which was uploaded on social media sites recently and then went viral, has raised fears and concerns among the public that it could lead to another aviation tragedy.

As the country is in the process of recovery from last year's two major aviation disasters, it is crucial that the matter be taken seriously.

The Malaysian Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) said that the flying of unauthorised drones or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) within the area of airports is strictly prohibited under existing laws.

According to the department, doing so constitutes an offence under the Civil Aviation Act 1969 (Act 3) and its regulations.

However, with the development of new technologies, the time is right for the relevant authorities to relook at these laws.

It has to make changes so that it is in line with the current developments, especially in the aviation industry.

Beyond the military applications of UAVs, numerous civil aviation uses have been developed, including aerial surveying of crops, acrobatic aerial footage in filmmaking, search and rescue operations, inspecting power lines and pipelines, counting wildlife and delivering medical supplies to remote or otherwise inaccessible regions.

Further uses of the drones include reconnaissance operations, border patrol missions, forest fire detection, surveillance, coordinating humanitarian aid, search and rescue missions, detection of illegal hunting, land surveying, fire and large accident investigation, landslide measurement, illegal landfill detection, crowd monitoring, and others.

Sadly, there also are a few irresponsible people who use this new technology for insidious reasons like violating individuals privacy or worse as a weapon to carry out acts of terrorism.

To avoid these incidents from happening, the relevant agencies, the DCA and the Transportation

Ministry, must come up with a good plan through existing legislation to prevent any misuse of UAVs or drones.

Such preemptive action is also in line with Article 8 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation, also known as the Chicago Convention 1944, which Malaysia signed many years ago, requiring each country which follows the convention to ensure the safety of its airspace from the unauthorised flying of drones or UAVs.

Further, the Malaysian Civil Aviation Act 1969 (Act 3), in particular Section 3, also states that the Transport Minister has the power to make rulings he considers necessary in regulating civil aviation.

As such, action must be taken to ensure the safety of our aviation industries as well as to protect Malaysian airspace from being abused.

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