

Hi-tech season for farming, kisan drones set for takeoff

TEAM TOI

New Delhi: The Budget has given a big technology push to the farm sector, proposing delivery of hi-tech services to farmers in PPP (public-private partnership) mode and use of 'kisan drones' to aid them in various activities.

"Use of kisan drones will be promoted for crop assessment, digitisation of land records, spraying of insecticides, and nutrients," finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said while presenting the Budget. The government has recently issued standard operating procedures (SOPs) for use of drones in the farm sector.

Though the Centre has increased agricultural credit target to Rs 18 lakh crore for the 2022-23 fiscal from Rs 16.5 lakh crore in the current fiscal, the budget for the agriculture ministry as a share of the total Budget has declined from 3.7% in 2021-22 to 3.3% in 2022-23. If the allied ministry of fisheries, animal husbandry and dairy is included, the share fell from 3.8% to 3.5%.

Promoting chemical-free natural farming starting with farmers' lands close to the Ganga, post-harvest value addition, consumption and branding of millet products, funds with blended capital to finance agriculture startups and rural enterprises, and implementation of Ken-Betwa river interlinking project are the other thrust areas of the Budget for the farm sector.

The Ken-Betwa project will be implemented at an es-



AIR SUPPORT FOR GROUND CREW

No increase in funds for NREGA

The budget for MGNREGA has remained frozen at Rs 73,000 crore, which was the initial allocation for 2021-22, even though the actual expenditure in the current fiscal has gone up to around Rs 1 lakh crore. While the allocation is set to be seen as a reduction in the budget of the job guarantee programme, which has been a major safety net for the poor and migrant labour during the pandemic, it also indicates the government is hopeful that demand under the programme will come down in the coming months. Expenditure under the scheme this year overshot its allocation midway through the implementation period, forcing the government to make additional funds available. TNN

timated cost of Rs 44,605 crore in the water-starved Bundelkhand region of Mad-

hya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The government has allocated Rs 1,400 crore in 2022-23 for the project.

The FM also proposed working on five more such river inter-linking projects. "Draft DPRs (detailed project reports) of five river links, namely Damanganga-Pinjal, Par-Tapi-Narmada, Godavari-Krishna, Krishna-Pennar and Pennar-Cauvery, have been finalised. Once a consensus is reached among beneficiary states, the Centre will provide support for implementation," said Sitharaman.

Though chemical-free farming will be promoted throughout the country, the focus will be on farmers' lands in 5km wide corridors along the Ganga initially.

Since 2023 is the International Year of Millets, the Centre has proposed post-harvest value addition, enhancing domestic consumption, and branding of millet products nationally and internationally.