

## **Government to invest Rs 25 lakh crore in inland waterways, ports**

BHUBANESWAR: Announcing the Centre's plans to inject Rs 25 lakh crore to strengthen inland waterways, ports and rail-road links, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari today said these projects will create four crore jobs as the focus of the NDA government is to uplift the poor.

"Our aim is to develop rail-road connectivity, inland waterways and ports. A host of projects are being taken up to achieve this at an investment of Rs 25 lakh crore," said Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari, who was in the state for the celebrations of two years of Modi-led NDA government.

While works involving Rs 2.5 lakh crore have already been taken up, projects worth Rs 5 lakh crore would be kicked off shortly, the minister said adding all these projects undertaken would generate around four crore employment for the youth.

Stating that both road and rail connectivity to ports was the key to speedy economic growth, he said an amount of Rs 8 lakh crore would be invested for development of the port sector to make transportation of goods and raw materials for industries cost effective.

The 12 public ports in the country have made an overall profit of Rs 6,000 crore this year and the government aims to raise the profit up to Rs 35,000-40,000 crore in four years, the minister said.

Describing connectivity between mineral belts and ports important for development, Gadkari said a sum of Rs 4 lakh crore would be spent for the development of port-rail connectivity.

Similarly, an investment of around Rs 15 lakh crore would be made for development of the highway sector, which plays a crucial role for economic growth, the Minister said.

He said the Centre has taken concrete steps to accelerate the pace of road construction, which has been enhanced to 24-25 km per day from the earlier level of 2 km per day. The target is to raise it further to 41 km per day.

Lamenting that inland waterways was yet to be developed properly in India, Gadkari said while over 40 per cent transportation was done through this sector in countries like China, Korea and European nations, in India it stood at a meagre 3.5 per cent and has now gone up to 6 per cent.

Therefore, the government has chalked out an ambitious plan to galvanise the inland waterways involving rivers like Ganga, Brahmaputra and Mahanadi, the minister said adding Rs 4,000 crore was being spent for developing waterway facilities in Ganga.

Stating that logistics cost amounts to 18 per cent and transportation through waterways can cut it down to 12 per cent, Gadkari said high logistics costs impair India's competitive edge in the international market and the country must develop waterways for transportation.

Asserting that the capacity of ports in the country would be enhanced substantially, Gadkari said an amount of Rs 50,000 crore would be invested for development of Paradip port, which occupies an important position.

The target is to increase the capacity of Paradip port threefold to 325 MT by 2025 from 112 MT, he said adding Paradip would be one of the biggest ports in the country.

"Paradip Port is all set to become the growth engine of eastern India," he said.

Gadkari said Paradip port's draft is being increased to 18 metre to enable it to handle huge vessels of 200,000 dwt (dead weight tonnage) and works involving Rs 2,600 crore has already been awarded.

Further, an amount of Rs 8,200 crore would be pumped in to develop a new port at Paradip, which would act as a satellite port adding around 150 MT capacity, he said.

Referring to rail-port connectivity, Gadkari said Rs 7,000 crore is being invested for establishing rail link between the coal belt of Talcher and Paradip port.

Noting that coal production of Mahanadi Coalfields is expected to jump up to 300 MT, the minister said the entire coal from the region can be transported to states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Telangana to cater to needs of power plants by ships.

Transportation through sea route would save around Rs 10,000 crore in a year, he said adding ships after unloading coal can bring back limestone from Rajasthan, which would be used in steel plants.

On projects abroad, he said a port would also be built at Chabahar in Iran in 18 months, which would serve as a gateway for imports and exports.

To a query, Gadkari said there is no illegal toll gates on highways in Odisha and the state's Chief Secretary has also stated this.

To get quality services, one has to pay accordingly, he said adding tolls were collected in advanced countries like Canada.