

Greening of 1 lakh km of NH to employ 10 lakh youth: Gadkari

NEW DELHI, July 1: Plantation drive on 1 lakh km of highways under the National Green Highways Mission will create jobs for 10 lakh youth and prove to be a game-changer for the rural economy, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari today said.

Kick-starting the initial plantation drive on 1,500 km of National Highways at a cost of about Rs 300 crore, the Road Transport and Highways Minister said it is a unique venture and the government welcomed “start-ups” to join it unlike other programmes where prior experience is a must.

Under the mission, the government plans to provide ‘green canopy’ on NHs at an estimated cost of Rs 5,000 crore, which is 1 per cent of the road construction cost of Rs 5 lakh crore till 2019, and may link it with NREGA to boost the rural economy.

“We will soon take up the length of National Highways to 2 lakh km from about 1 lakh km and plantation along these is our responsibility. Converting one km of highway into green provides employment to 10 people and today, we launched scheme for 1,500 km which will employ 15,000 people,” the minister said at an event here to mark the launch of the plantation drive.

Ten states are already on board with the Centre in the initial phase, besides NGOs and other bodies, including four start-ups which will be given the job of greening highways of 10 km each initially. Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) has adopted NH 31 for plantation and maintenance of trees. Besides, Coal India and other such bodies have shown willingness.

Gadkari said plantation will be accomplished on 3,000 km of national highways by the end of July.

“Highways aside from environmental and aesthetic aspects have a huge potential to generate jobs and can prove to be a game-changer for agriculture and rural economy. It may even be linked with the NREGA scheme,” the highways minister said.

Under the framework, the government has made it mandatory to set aside 1 per cent of the total project cost of any NH contract to a Green Fund corpus for plantation.

Calling upon government and private agencies to join hands under the initiative, Gadkari also said only serious players need to come forward as the projects will be monitored through satellite technology with payments to be made only after successful implementation.

An app to monitor real-time progress of the plantation drive and plants was also launched on the occasion. Yes Bank was the knowledge partner for the project.

Of the 10 states that joined hands for plantation, Haryana signed agreement for 415 km, Jammu & Kashmir for 100 km, Telangana for 150 km, Andhra Pradesh for 360 km, Madhya Pradesh for 150 km, and Assam for 50 km. (PTI)

So far, the government has roped in 22 agencies and will scale up the drive soon.

Talking about environmental benefits that will flow from greening of highways, the minister said, “The afforestation will help in sequestering approximately 12 lakh mt carbon annually.” (PTI)