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## Gadkari inaugurates rebuilt MG setu, promises to catapult Bihar, UP economy through waterways

The inauguration of one flank of the important bridge between north and south Bihar comes in the election year.

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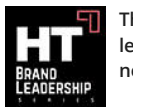
ht Subhash Pathak | Edited by Abhinav Sahay



Nitin Gadkari promised to that road projects in the state will not suffer due to need of funds.(ANI Photo)

Union minister for road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari on Friday inaugurated one side of the reconstructed Mahatma Gandhi (MG) Setu on river Ganga—the communication lifeline between north and south Bihar—and said when completed it would be a technological feat for civil engineering students to study.

Gadkari inaugurated the long-awaited bridge through video conferencing from New Delhi, while chief minister Nitish Kumar, deputy CM Sushil Kumar Modi and state road construction department minister Nand Kishore Yadav joined the proceedings from Patna.



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The opening of one of the two flanks of the bridge, connecting Patna with Hajipur, assumes considerable significance before the impending assembly elections. Roads, power and potable water to every household are the main issues, which the ruling JD(U)-led NDA dispensation is banking on for return to power in the state.

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Gadkari, who also holds the shipping portfolio, said the waterways through Ganga would revolutionise the economy of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. “While the waterway from Varanasi to Haldia through river Ganga is almost complete, a Rs 12,000 crore proposal to develop waterways connecting Delhi to Prayagraj via Mathura, Agra and Itawa has been submitted to the World Bank,” said the minister, adding that once it is finished, Delhi could be connected through waterways from the rest of the world.

The minister said that dredging of Ganga up to Bangladesh has been completed. “Forty river ports, including one at Varanasi, Sahebganj and Patna, are being built along the river. We have carried out dredging in Hooghly at the cost of Rs 250 crore to ensure ships movement to the international port in the Bay of Bengal,” said the minister, adding that litchi and other micro, medium and small enterprises products from Bihar can be transported to other countries through waterways.

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Underlining the need for holistic development of Bihar, the Union minister urged Bihar CM Nitish Kumar to emphasize on development of industrial clusters along the roads. He said he was working on a plan to increase the turnover of village industries to Rs 5 lakh crore from the current Rs 88,000 crore in the next two years.

“Handicrafts and handlooms could be the thrust areas to work on in Bihar. Proposals to develop cottage industries in Bihar are always welcome,” said Gadkari, adding that the fund would not be any issue for development of road and cottage industries in the state.

The minister also listed various bridge projects sanctioned in the state and said work on a four-lane bridge parallel to the MG Setu would begin in the next couple of months.

CM Nitish Kumar urged Gadkari to build a direct road between Buxar and Varanasi, as people have to make a detour to get to an important religious and trade centre in UP.

He also requested the minister to widen some of the busy stretches of National Highways, including from Mokama to Munger, Barauni to Khagaria and NH 77 from Muzaffapur to Nepal border, which is likely to see substantially increased traffic after construction of various bridges on Ganga in the coming years.

The CM also urged Gadkari to arrange for additional funds for the MSME sector in Bihar while terming the existing allocation of Rs 25,000 crore as too little, compared to the population density of the state.

Officials said that reconstruction of eastern flank of the bridge would start in the next couple of months. The superstructure of the bridge, which was originally built in the eighties on cantilever technology, has been replaced with superstructure made of steel trusses.

Inaugurated as the longest bridge on the river in India by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi Setu went into repair mode in 1999 and it remained so till 2016, until the Central government approved its reconstruction plan.

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About Rs 250 crore is said to have been spent on its repair as against the original estimated construction cost of Rs 87 crore.

Union ministers Ram Vilas Paswan, who represents Hajipur constituency in Lok Sabha, and Patna MP Ravi Shankar Prasad, also attended the function through video conferencing. RCD minister Nand Kishore Yadav and additional chief secretary, RCD, Amrit Lal Meena were also present at the programme, besides almost all local MPs and MLAs.

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