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Shri Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister of Road Transport & Highways, Shipping, Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, has reiterated the Government's commitment for providing world class transport and logistics infrastructure in the country within two years to support the growth of economic activity. He was addressing a session on **Opportunity in Infrastructure, Logistics Technology and Equipment** in the World Food India 2017 conference in New Delhi today.

Shri Gadkari informed that the rate of construction of National Highways has gathered considerable momentum. The country had just 96,000 km of NH three years back, but this has grown to nearly 1.7 lakh km, and will soon reach a length of 2 lakh km. This will provide more farmers in remote areas with access to markets for their produce .

The Minister further said that 44 Economic Corridors and 24 Multi Modal Logistics Parks have been planned under the Government's flagship programme Bharatmala. These are being planned on the hub and spoke model to facilitate efficient movement of freight along routes of economic importance. The Multi Modal Logistics Parks are being planned as centres of freight aggregation with warehousing, cold storage and other such facilities. These parks will be built on NH outside cities, so they will help reduce traffic congestion and also reduce pollution. Shri Gadkari informed that work has already begun for setting up Logistics Parks at Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Surat and Guwahati. The Economic Corridors and Multi Modal Logistics Parks will facilitate faster movement of farm produce to food processing centres and to markets. This will raise the income of farmers, give a boost to the food processing industry and create a large number of jobs.

Shri Gadkari also said that the Sagarmala Programme of the Shipping Ministry will also be contributing to the growth of the country's food economy in a big way. 14 Coastal Economic Zones have been planned under this programme. Two mega food processing parks are being planned at Kakinada and Satara and a cost of Rs 140 Crores. Support is being given to fishermen under the programme to develop their skills and raise their productivity. Facility for processing, grading and packaging of fish will be developed at

Paradeep Port. In addition to this, 111 waterways are being developed as National Waterways. River Ganga, Brahmaputra, Barak are already under development. Water transport will reduce logistics costs, which in turn will benefit the food processing industry. The development of River Ganga and Brahmaputra for transport will also make it easier to move our produce to Bangladesh. Further, the efficiency of the 12 major ports has been growing rapidly, and they have been making profits consistently over the last three years. Dry ports are being developed at Jalna, Vidarbha and Nasik to begin with. The availability of ports will give a boost to movement of goods.

In addition to developing the road and water transport infrastructure, Shri Gadkari informed that the government is also giving priority to developing micro or drip irrigation in the water deficient regions of the country. 13 river linking projects are also on the anvil of which three will be done within three months. All these projects will improve the availability and utilization of water and raise agricultural productivity.

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