

'My ministry has created 60 lakh jobs in 3 years'

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Union minister for road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari said he was confident that by 8 March next year the government would be able to meet the target of constructing 40km of roads per day. In an interview, Gadkari said the centre needed cooperation from the state governments, be it for land acquisition, forest department clearance, or clearing encroachments. "What we need is coordination between economy and environment for overall development," he added. Speaking about road accidents, Gadkari said, "One of the biggest failures of my ministry is that road accidents have increased by 4%. We are trying to rectify it." Edited excerpts from an interview:

Your government has built an average of 23 km of roads every day. You had, however, set a target of constructing 40 km/day. Do you think you were too ambitious when you set the target?

The target is ambitious but I am confident that by 8 March 8 next year, we will be able to construct 40km per day. We have done good work so far. Last year, we awarded road contracts for 16,800km and that is a world record. We are going to send it for Guinness World Records. It is a great achievement for our government.

Why do you think there has been a delay in achieving the 40km/day target? Is it because of problems related to land acquisition or are there some states which are not cooperating with the Centre?

We need cooperation from the state governments. Be it for land acquisition, forest department clearance, or clearing encroachments. We need to do this collectively for the greater good of the country. John F Kennedy had once said that 'America is rich because American roads are good'. For a country to grow, political parties, administration and bureaucracy need to



Union minister for road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari.

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work in tandem with each other. Corruption is the biggest problem in India. There are times when we are also fed up with people; some people don't know how to work and hence delay projects without any reason. When I joined, there were projects worth Rs3,85,000 crore pending, but today we have no such problem.

You were recently at the London Stock Exchange where you talked about masala bonds. Do you think investment remains a big challenge?

It's not a big challenge at all. Under Narendra Modi, the credibility of our government, and of the country in general, has been

strengthened. When I met with bankers and fund owners, they had huge expectations for India, which is the fastest growing economy in the world. We have the money and we have the technology. My problem is with the system. The system is not ambitious. There are delays and there are many people who are just out to spread negativity.

Are you trying to say that the bureaucracy is not cooperative?

There are good people, and there are bad people too. The problem here is that everyone has varied principles they live and work by. Take for instance, I want to start an inland waterway system in Yamuna. But now a committee

set up by the National Green Tribunal is saying that running boats will add to water pollution. Because of this, my project might not see the light of the day.

What we need is coordination between economy and environment for overall development.

You have pitched the Motor Vehicles Bill as Save the Life law, and you were lauded for a very comprehensive Bill by your colleagues. But the linking of Aadhaar is being considered as an intrusion of privacy.

Not at all. We have almost 30% bogus licenses. Is it good for the country? Getting a driving licence is the easiest thing to do in India, unlike other countries where the system is foolproof. In India, we are dealing with around 5 lakh accidents and 150,000 deaths a year. There is an immediate need to improve the system. We have to identify the grey areas and also work to improve automobile technology. I, myself, was in a severe road accident. I was in the hospital for one full year; I still have a rod in my leg as a stark reminder to that gruelling time in my life. The Bill also stems from personal experience. I would not wish that for anyone.

As the highways minister, what have been the hits and misses in the past three years?

One of the biggest failures of

my ministry is that road accidents have increased by 4%. We are trying to rectify it and have identified 786 spots on the national highways and sanctioned an amount of Rs11,000 crore for structural changes. I am trying to save as many lives as possible. We are improving traffic signals, road markings and installing crash barriers.

If we look at job creation, only two lakh jobs have been created this year as compared to the 2 crore that you had promised. What happened to that?

We are the fastest growing economy and there are some sectors which are doing well. However, situation in sectors like IT, real estate, and steel isn't that good. So, now we are focusing on foreign investment, without which jobs can't be created. We will invite capital investments and try to create as many jobs as possible. My ministry has created 60 lakh jobs in three years.

You have been appreciated for doing away with beacons. But how to end the sense of entitlement engrained in Indian polity?

As far as beacon lights are concerned, let me tell you that our revenue from tolls has increased by 5%, which means there were many people who were misusing the 'red light'. These privileges that are misused by certain people are the reason why politicians are typecast in a certain way.