

Will develop 1100 islands for tourism, Nitin Gadkari says

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Road transport and highways minister also said a pact between India and Bangladesh is also likely on transportation of goods through waterways between both nations during the PM Narendra Modi's visit to the country. (PTI photo)

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NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has shown keen interest in developing 1,100 islands and 300 light houses across the nation to tap their huge tourism potential in a bid to bolster water infrastructure, road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari said on Tuesday.

Besides, the government will seek Parliament nod on a bill for converting 101 rivers into waterways, and Rs 50,000 crore will be spent on developing these in the next 2-3 years, he said.

"The Prime Minister has asked us to include the proposal to develop 300 light houses and 1,100 islands in a Cabinet note we sent him in connection with developing waterways," Gadkari said while addressing a national conference on Inland Waterways organized by FICCI here.

He said the move, in turn, will lead to augmentation of water infrastructure in the country, which is set for an overhaul in coming years.

A pact between India and Bangladesh is also likely on transportation of goods through waterways between both nations during the PM's visit to the country, he said.

On waterways, he said, "We intend to invest Rs 50,000 crore in the next 2-3 years in developing 101 waterways for which we will get Parliament nod in the upcoming session.

"The government is planning to develop these waterways through the public-private partnership (PPP) mode, which is picking up after a slump. Bidders have shown enthusiastic response in five road projects, including the one in which Larsen & Toubro has bid 20 per cent below the cost," he said.

Of the 101 rivers to be converted into waterways, detailed project reports (DPRs) for 16 are likely to be completed this month while those for another 40 will be ready by December 2015, the minister said.

Of the existing five waterways, only three could be developed so far while efforts are on to develop the other two, he said, adding that government is setting up four multimodal hubs at Varanasi, Haldia, Sahebganj and Kolkata of the 1,620km Varanasi to Haldia stretch, and the land acquisition for the same is at advanced stage.

Shipbuilding yards and repair hubs in Assam, Andaman and Nicobar, and Kandla in Gujarat are also on the anvil.