

Thumbs up for focus on rural roads

TEAM TOI

Dehradun: The Union Budget's provision of allocating almost Rs 19,000 crore for rural roads nationally has been greeted with enthusiasm by connectivity experts in Uttarakhand which has more than 1,900 habitations connected with a road network 6,541 km in length. Since roads are the lifeline of the hill state's economy, experts said that the funds if properly utilized would be a big help to rural citizens.

"In Uttarakhand there have been many instances of villagers taking to building roads themselves after waiting endlessly for the government to intervene. If the pace of road construction work is increased, it will get a positive response from local industries, including health, wellness and religious tourism. These are the mainstays of the state's economy but the state has not yet begun reaping the optimum



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benefits from them because of infrastructure problems," said SP Goel, executive officer, Kumaon Garhwal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, talking to TOI.

In the last 15 years, despite geographical challenges, more than 6,000 km of roads have been built across Uttarakhand. "Due to the damage inflicted by the Ke-

darnath calamity and seasonal issues such as rain and snow as well as terrain, road construction in Uttarakhand is a time-consuming process in comparison to plain states," said Aditya Kumar Dinkar, chief engineer, Uttarakhand Rural Roads Development Agency (URRDA). "However, in the next three years, our focus will be on in-

creasing the road network as far as possible in order to help the economy of the state," he added.

Local residents involved in agri business have also got reason to cheer from the Budget's focus on rural road networks. "Due to poor connectivity, a sizeable volume of agri products rot before they could be transported to the market. This causes losses to farmers of several lakh rupees every year. If the government pursues road construction work at a faster pace it will actually help address the issue of farmers giving up agriculture and migrating," said Ravinder Singh, chairperson of Niranjanpur Mandi at Dehradun. Interestingly, under Pradhan Mantri Grameen Sadak Vikas Yojna (PMGSY), Uttarakhand has completed 771 out of total 1,125 sanctioned works. Under PMGSY roads are to be at least 3 metres wide and at least 1.5 km long.