

DIVERSIFY ETHANOL PRODUCTION, SHAH URGES SUGAR MILLS

NEW DELHI: Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Saturday urged sugar mills to explore alternative to sugarcane for ethanol production pushing for a multi-dimensional approach to biofuel manufacturing.

Speaking at an event organized by the National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories (NFCSF). Shah said India would achieve its 20 per cent ethanol blending target by 2025-26, ahead of the original 2030 deadline.

The minister highlighted that the Government's ethanol blending programme has helped reduce the country's crude oil import bill and address environmental concerns.

"You need to be futuristic and look at opportunities and expand. Ethanol can be made from multiple sources," Shah said, urging cooperative sugar mills to shed their "orthodox" approach and explore alternative feedstock such as maize and bamboo.

Shah said about 1,000 crore litres of ethanol is required for blending, and the necessary infrastructure to achieve this target is in place.

He emphasised the need for sugar mills to modernize and adopt new technologies' citing potential export opportunities once the Global Biofuels Alliance is established.

The Minister challenged NFCSF to expand its operations, suggesting the federation to set up one cooperative sugar mill for every three districts in four states within a year.

Shah also advised NFCSF to hire professionals to guide loss-making cooperatives and set a target of increasing mills' annual turnover by 25 per cent in two years.

"We have a habit of working inefficiently and seeking help from the Government. The Government will be willing to help more if you work efficiently... make a dynamic Federation, not a demand driven Federation," he added. The push for diversification comes as India seeks to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels and promote sustainable energy alternatives.

Shah also gave away the NFCSF awards for best performing cooperative mills under different categories.

NFCSF President Harshvardhan Patil said the sector faces several challenges and demanded an increase in the minimum selling price of sugar. The rates of B-Heavy molasses and sugar syrup used for ethanol making and export of 10-20 lakh tonnes of sugar.

The federation is in the process of preparing a roadmap for the sector for the next ten years and is likely to be ready by September 5.

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