

## **Speech by The President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee on the occasion of the presentation of Sixth Biennial Excellence Awards to The Cooperative Societies**

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It gives me great pleasure to present National Cooperative Development Corporation Biennial Cooperative Excellence Awards 2012 to the cooperative societies in the International Year of Cooperatives, 2012. At the initial stage, I would like to congratulate all the award winners for their achievements which have been recognized both at the State and National level. These awards, initiated in 2002, promote the spirit of competition amongst the grass-root level cooperatives and recognize their distinct role in socio-economic development. I note that this year the NCDC has instituted three new National Level Awards for Cooperative Excellence.

I congratulate the societies selected for NCDC Biennial Awards for Cooperative Excellence. I am sure that these awards would inspire other cooperative societies in the country in instilling a new sense of hope and bringing renewed vitality and vibrancy in these cooperatives enabling them to perform even better in the days ahead.

The history of cooperative movement in India is more than a hundred years old. Even before formal cooperative structures came into being, the practice of cooperation and cooperative activities were prevalent in India. Village communities collectively created common assets like village tanks or village forests, pooled seeds and shared their collective harvest. It was in the latter part of the 19th century that agricultural conditions combined with the absence of institutional financing arrangements led to the deep indebtedness of the Indian farmer. In response to this, various Government initiatives were taken - including the Cooperative Credit Societies Act of 1904. But it was in October 1946, that history was made when two Primary Village Milk Producer Societies were registered. This was followed by the registration, the same year, of the Khera District Cooperative Milk Producers Union known as Amul. After India attained Independence in 1947, cooperative development received due recognition and cooperatives were given a central role in the Five Year Plans formulated by the Planning Commission of India particularly for the transformation of the rural economy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Cooperatives in our country are pivotal institutions for bringing socio-economic development for inclusive growth in rural areas. The co-operative movement helped our founding fathers who gave it a prime place in the process of economic development of the country. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru envisioned India vibrant "with the cooperative movement to make it, broadly speaking, the basic activity of India in every village as well as elsewhere, and finally, indeed, to make the cooperative approach the common thinking of India. Therefore the whole future of India really depends on the success of this approach of ours to these vast members of hundreds of millions of

people". He visualized an India in which each village would have a Panchayat, a cooperative and a school.

Today, with a net-work of six lakh cooperatives and a membership base of 24 crores, the Indian cooperative movement has proved to be an effective economic instrument for ensuring growth with equity and inclusiveness. Cooperatives in India have made a visible and significant contribution to the overall economic growth of our economy. This is especially so in the sectors of agricultural credit, sugar, dairy, textiles, fisheries, distribution of fertilizers and agricultural inputs, storage and marketing. They have ensured the accrual of a fair share of the benefits of development and growth to our small and marginal farmers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Recognizing the advantages and its importance world over, United Nations declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives, to increase public awareness about cooperatives and their contributions to socio-economic development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and also to promote the formation and growth of co-operatives. This year is also coinciding with the Golden Jubilee year of the NCDC and therefore this award function assumes special significance for the growth of co-operatives. During these 50 illustrious years, NCDC basically a financing institution for providing financial assistance exclusively to the cooperatives, achieved new milestones and undertook many initiatives with the ultimate goal of developing the rural economy and removing the incidence of backwardness from the rural hinterland of the country.

The Cooperatives in our country face many challenges and problems; their performance across sectors, activities, and regions is variable; they need to re-orient themselves by improving their efficiency, and have to develop themselves professionally to meet the requirements of their core clientele - farmers, growers, artisans, producers and women. However, the cooperatives are perhaps still best way of reaching out into the vast hinterland of this country where the poor and the marginalized sections.

Recently, the Government has taken a big initiative for the cooperatives by enacting the 97th Constitutional Amendment thereby creating an enabling environment for the development of the Cooperatives. This would enable democratic, autonomous and professional functioning of the cooperatives. By this amendment the right to form cooperative society has now become a fundamental right. The act has paved the way for development of a stronger cooperative movement. To take this initiative further to the grass root level respective State Governments also need to create enabling environment by amending State laws etc as and when it is necessary.

In conclusion I once again congratulate the award winners. I compliment Shri Sharad Pawar, Union Minister of Agriculture & Food Processing Industries and his Ministries for their continuous efforts for sustained economic development of our economy through the cooperatives.

I would like to conclude my observations by quoting from the last Sookta of Rig-Veda, which so aptly captures the spirit of 'cooperation' in its truest sense:

It means,

May we all have common purpose

May our hearts be in unison

May we all be of the same mind

So that we can do our work efficiently and well.

THANK YOU