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'Tap export mkts, create economic Zones for co-ops'

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NEW DELHI: A high-level experts' panel set up by the Amit Shah-headed cooperation ministry to frame a new policy for cooperatives has recommended special economic zones for the bodies and tapping of export markets to boost the sector, according to excerpts of a draft report reviewed by HT.

The panel, headed by former Union minister Suresh Prabhu, in draft report to be made final within a month has recommended setting up of so-called cooperative economic zones pivoted towards export-oriented enterprises.

Cooperatives are collective businesses jointly owned by participating members who share profits and losses. The popular milk brand Amul, for instance, is

THE DRAFT REPORT ALSO WANTS MORE MULTI-STATE COOPERATIVE BANKS TO BE SET UP, TO BOOST 'INTERNAL FINANCIAL SECURITY' OF INDIA

owned by a cooperative; the largest fertilizer maker, IFFCO is one too. Aside from being a large provider of employment, the cooperative sector also has nearly 38000 viable primary agricultural cooperative societies (PACS), which are now being digitized in broad push to modernise the sector.

Some of the recommendations, such as priority for export-oriented cooperatives, are already under implementation,

an official with knowledge of the matter, said, separately.

In August, Shah, the minister for cooperation and home affairs, launched the country's first multi-state cooperative society for exports to provide a global platform for the country's organic products. The enterprise, The National Cooperative Export Limited (NCEL), is one among three national cooperatives being planned by the Modi government.

The draft report also wants more multi-state cooperative banks to be set up, which will boost "internal financial security" of the country. It has also sought a review and "handholding" of all sick units to revive them, with a focus on creating a level-playing field for the cooperation sector.

Positioned as a premier enterprise, the NCEL will extend a range of services to ramp up

overseas shipments of organic produce. In January, the Cabinet had given its approval for the launch of the NCEL.

The government is also in the process of setting up two more multi-state cooperatives for promoting seed businesses and organic farming.

NCEL will connect the ministries of commerce and industry, external affairs and Indian embassies to boost market linkages and supply chains for export of farm produce, Shah said.

It will develop into a "complete export ecosystem", covering procurement, storage, processing, marketing, branding, labeling, packaging and certification, the ministry said in a statement.

According to its proposed business model, at least 50% of profits will go to farmers.

In its monsoon session in July, Parliament passed The Multi-

States Cooperative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2022, as part of reforms by the Modi government to modernize the country's 115-year-old cooperative sector.

The law seeks to bring transparency in the governance of cooperatives, paves the way for a "cooperative election authority" to bring electoral reforms and prevent malpractices in the cooperative sector, measures which will be recommended by the Prabhu-led panel in its final report, according to a person aware of the development.

Under the Constitution's Seventh Schedule, which divides responsibilities between the Centre and states, state governments have jurisdiction over cooperatives.

However, the Centre has control over policy-making for cooperatives that operate in more than one state, known as multi-state cooperatives.



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India may export broken rice to Mali

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The government is likely to permit export of 100,000 tonnes of broken rice to Mali that relies on India to meet its food grain needs, an official said.

This is not the first time that India is expected to supply broken rice to Mali. Earlier, it cleared some quantity to export to the West African nation. Recently, the Union government approved exports of nearly 50,000 tonnes of broken rice to Bhutan. The Indian government has also cleared exports of 2.77 million tonnes (mt) of non-basmati white rice to nine key Asian and African nations, including Singapore, Nepal, Malaysia and the Philippines.

India has been supplying rice to its strategic partners in Asia and West African countries since the export ban on broken variety and non-basmati white garb rice in September 2022 and July 2023, respectively, to keep inflation



Despite ban on exports of broken rice, India exported 498,000 tonnes during April-October as compared to 2.4 mt last year. MINT

in check. This is despite the ban in place, and the exports are taking place at the government-to-government level and those are being facilitated by National Cooperative Exports Ltd, a government export body which was set up under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act, 2002 to export agriculture produce and allied items.

In the case of broken rice exports, the Indian government in May allowed exports of broken rice based on per-

mission given by the government for shipments to other countries to meet their food security needs.

African countries rely on India for rice supply.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation all rice price index averaged 138.9 points in October, 2% lower than its September level. But, it remained 24% higher year-on-year. Rice export increased tenfold to 21.8 mmt from 2.6 mmt between FY 2002 and FY 2023 making India the largest

rice exporting country in the world, accounting for 40% share of the 55.6 mt global rice trade.

Despite the ban on exports of broken rice, India exported 498,000 tonnes during April-October as compared to 2.4 mt in the corresponding period of last year. In 2022-23 financial year, the country exported 3 mt of this rice variety. Experts recommend a policy mix instead of a complete prohibition that leaves a far-fetched impact on the global market as well as India's trade.

Queries sent to the food department and spokesperson of the Mali embassy in New Delhi remained unanswered at press time. As a result of India's rice export ban, global rice markets went into turmoil and impacted India's competitiveness in the global market that was built over the decades, said Ashok Gulati, a distinguished professor at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations. This is not in line with the spirit of G20 proposals.
