



Publication	Hindustan Times	Language	English
Edition	Chandigarh	Journalist	
Date	09/12/2024	Page no	2
CCM	N/A		

PROMOTE COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES TO TAKE INDIA TO NEW HEIGHTS: GADKARI



Nitin Gadkari

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HT Correspondent

letterschd@hindustantimes.com

**AMRITSAR:** Union road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari on Sunday addressed the 8th National Conference of Sahakar Bharati attended by many as 2,500 representatives who came from across the country. Gadkari said he is also working in the cooperative field and is associated with this organisation. "If we want to take India to new heights, we will have to promote cooperative societies. Being an agrarian state, Punjab is playing a vital role in this field," he added.

During the event, a group of farmers owing allegiance to Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee (KMSC) staged a protest against the union minister. Police resorted to mild lathi-charge to stop the farmers led by Jarmanjit Singh Bandala, Sakattar Singh Kotla, Jarnail Singh Noordi, Baaj Singh Sarangra, Harpal Sidhwan and Pakhar Singh Lalpura from reaching the venue. They were detained and taken to the Chheharta police station. The protesters were released later.



Publication	Deccan Herald	Language	English
Edition	Bangalore	Journalist	Sanjay Verma
Date	09/12/2024	Page no	7
CCM	23.82		

Driving growth, the cooperative way

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SANJAY VERMA

India has reached a defining moment in its cooperative transformation, hosting the prestigious International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) Conference for the first time on its soil. Nearly 128 years after the ICA held its inaugural conference in London in 1895, this global event underscores India's emergence as a leader in cooperative innovation. Representatives from over 105 countries and 306 organisations attended, marking a milestone that acknowledges India's unparalleled success in leveraging the power of cooperatives.

The conference coincided with the launch of the United Nations International Year of Cooperatives 2025 (IYC2025) under the theme, "Cooperatives Build a Better World". For India, this platform is more than symbolic—it is a testament to the transformative role of its cooperative sector in driving community-led development and inclusive economic growth.

Long seen as the backbone of rural empowerment, India's cooperative sector has faced decades of inefficiency, limited scalability, and lack of modernisation. Historically instrumental in areas such as agricultural credit, dairy production, and fertiliser distribution, cooperatives struggled to evolve into robust economic engines. The turning point came in 2021 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi established the Ministry of Cooperation, which is now headed by Amit Shah. Guided by the vision of *Sahkar Se Samriddhi* (prosperity through cooperation), the government initiated sweeping reforms to revitalise the sector.

The creation of the ministry enabled structural changes that empowered cooperatives to become instruments of economic inclusion and sustainability. A key focus has been the digitisation of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), the backbone of India's rural economy. These entities now provide over 300 e-services, including financial products, agricultural tools, and digital connectivity. The government aims to digitise all PACS and establish two lakh new societies by 2024, ensuring their presence in every panchayat.

Amit Shah has also introduced model bye-laws to diversify PACS activities, allowing them to engage in activities such as solar irrigation, organic farming, and retailing LPG and generic medicines. These reforms not only enhance their

economic viability but also address critical rural needs to accelerate India's journey to attain prosperity for all. Additionally, the inclusion of women and marginalised communities has made cooperatives more equitable and representative, contributing to global sustainability goals.

Today, with over 8.55 lakh cooperative societies—representing 27% of the world's total—India boasts the largest cooperative sector globally, directly engaging nearly 290 million people. This modernisation has significantly bolstered India's rural economy. For instance, the dairy sector, led by cooperatives such as Amul, contributes 4.5% to GDP, the highest globally. Agricultural cooperatives now manage 35% of the nation's credit needs and play pivotal roles in sugar production and food grain procurement, transforming grassroots businesses into engines of economic growth.

India's cooperatives are also pioneering innovations in sustainability. Initiatives such as the Gobardhan Yojana have positioned India as a leader in renewable energy, with bioCNG projects exemplifying cleaner fuel alternatives. National-level, multistate cooperatives for seeds, organic products, and exports reflect a commitment to empowering farmers with fair prices and access to the global markets. Meanwhile, the promotion of natural farming, projected to unlock a Rs 10 lakh crore global market, demonstrates the sector's potential to address economic and environmental challenges alike.

As the host of the ICA conference and the global launchpad for IYC2025, India is no longer just a participant in the global cooperative movement—it is leading it. The reforms and initiatives have transformed cooperatives into powerful tools for inclusive growth, offering a model for nations grappling with economic disparities and sustainability challenges.

This moment is an opportunity to celebrate the transformative potential of cooperatives—not just for India, but for the global community. In a world confronting economic crises and social inequities, the cooperative model stands as a testament to the power of collective action. It is a vision of prosperity that leaves no one behind, setting the stage for a better, more equitable future.

(The writer is an advisor, NCUI)

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