

STATEMENT OF OBJECTS AND REASONS

The co-operative sector, over the years, has made significant contribution to various sectors of national economy and has achieved voluminous growth. However, it has shown weaknesses in safeguarding the interests of the members and fulfilment of objects for which these institutions were organised. There have been instances where elections have been postponed indefinitely and nominated office bearers or administrators remaining in-charge of these institutions for a long time. This reduces the accountability of the management of co-operative societies to their members. Inadequate professionalism in management in many of the co-operative institutions has led to poor services and low productivity. Co-operatives need to run on well established democratic principles and elections held on time and in a free and fair manner. Therefore, there is a need to initiate fundamental reforms to revitalize these institutions in order to ensure their contribution in the economic development of the country and to serve the interests of members and public at large and also to ensure their autonomy, democratic functioning and professional management.

2. The "co-operative societies" is a subject enumerated in Entry 32 of the State List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution and the State Legislatures have accordingly enacted legislations on co-operative societies. Within the framework of State Acts, growth of co-operatives on large scale was envisaged as part of the efforts for securing social and economic justice and equitable distribution of the fruits of development. It has, however, been experienced that in spite of considerable expansion of co-operatives, their performance in qualitative terms has not been up to the desired level. Considering the need for reforms in the Co-operative Societies Acts of the States, consultations with the State Governments have been held at several occasions and in the conferences of State Co-operative Ministers. A strong need has been felt for amending the Constitution so as to keep the co-operatives free from unnecessary outside interferences and also to ensure their autonomous organisational set up and their democratic functioning.

3. The Central Government is committed to ensure that the co-operative societies in the country function in a democratic, professional, autonomous and economically sound manner. With a view to bring the necessary reforms, it is proposed to incorporate a new Part in the Constitution so as to provide for certain provisions covering the vital aspects of working of co-operative societies like democratic, autonomous and professional functioning. A new article is also proposed to be inserted in Part IV of the Constitution (Directive Principles of State Policy) for the States to endeavour to promote voluntary formation, autonomous functioning, democratic control and professional management of cooperative societies. The proposed new Part in the Constitution, *inter alia*, seeks to empower the Parliament in respect of multi-State co-operative societies and the State Legislatures in case of other co-operative societies to make appropriate law, laying down the following matters, namely:—

(a) provisions for incorporation, regulation and winding up of co-operative societies based on the principles of democratic member-control, member-economic participation and autonomous functioning;

(b) specifying the maximum number of directors of a co-operative society to be not exceeding twenty-one members;

(c) providing for a fixed term of five years from the date of election in respect of the elected members of the board and its office bearers;

(d) providing for a maximum time limit of six months during which a board of directors of co-operative society could be kept under supersession or suspension;

(e) providing for independent professional audit;

(f) providing for right of information to the members of the co-operative societies;

(g) empowering the State Governments to obtain periodic reports of activities and accounts of co-operative societies;

(h) providing for the reservation of one seat for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes and two seats for women on the board of every co-operative society, which have individuals as members from such categories;

(i) providing for offences relating to co-operative societies and penalties in respect of such offences.

4. It is expected that these provisions will not only ensure the autonomous and democratic functioning of co-operatives, but also ensure the accountability of management to the members and other stakeholders and shall provide for deterrence for violation of the provisions of the law.

5. The Bill seeks to achieve the above objectives.

NEW DELHI;

SHARAD PAWAR

The 11th November, 2009.