

## Trade bodies praise Modi govt decision

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**NEW DELHI:** Indian Industry and farmers' bodies on Tuesday appreciated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision not to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) grouping, a move that addresses concerns raised by micro and small units and the dairy industry.

Modi announced on Monday that India wouldn't join the free trade agreement, telling leaders of the 15 other participating countries that the deal doesn't address the country's "outstanding issues and concerns".

The deal was opposed by several sectors, including dairy farmers who were apprehensive about cheaper imports from Australia and New Zealand.

"On behalf of 36 lakh milk producers of Gujarat, Amul has thanked the Prime Minister for his exemplary leadership in protecting 10 crore milk producer families of India. It has appreciated the vision and resolve of the Prime Minister for supporting the domestic milk producers against the flood of imports of dairy products from New Zealand and Australia under the proposed RCEP," Indian dairy major AMUL said in a statement.

The Confederation of All India Traders said Indian exporters wouldn't be able to get the right value for their products under the deal as most manufacturers "would have been ignored, citing low quality or high price by the RCEP nations". It said, "Overall, the entire vision of the Prime Minister's Make in India would have been rendered futile and ineffective had India signed the RCEP in its present form..."

The All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) claimed victory for "forcing the government" to back out of the deal in its statement. It said it was "happy that good

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sense has prevailed on this government and its decision to barter away the life and livelihood of crores of farmers, workers and small businesses has been averted". "AIKSCC reminds this government that agriculture should never be brought into the ambit of free trade agreements as it involves livelihoods of more than half the nation's population and has the potential of harming the nation's food sovereignty."

Apex industry body Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said India's decision to pull out of RCEP reflects the views of its stakeholders. "India never wanted to remain out of the 16-member RCEP trading block. The government has had extensive consultations with the wide spectrum of stakeholders. The objective was to get first-hand inputs from industry stakeholders and... India articulated its position in the last round of negotiations and ministerial meetings thereafter," said CII president Vikram Kirloskar. "The decision taken by India... to pull out from RCEP reflects the views of a majority of Indian stakeholders."

BK Goenka, president of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of India, said: "India opting out of RCEP, for now, is a well thought out call by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as a trade agreement of such far-reaching consequences would need deeper study of our comparative advantage and whether our concerns are properly addressed in the proposed framework."