PRESS NOTE

India to Strengthen Preparedness against Emerging Foot-and-Mouth Disease Threat Through National Exercise 'VAJRA-SAT' at ICAR-NIVEDI

***Bengaluru, 4 November 2026*:** In a significant step towards safeguarding India's livestock sector against emerging transboundary animal disease threats, the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD), Government of India, in collaboration with the ICAR-National Institute of Veterinary Epidemiology and Disease Informatics (ICAR-NIVEDI), Bengaluru, launched two-day 'Exercise VAJRA-SAT', a National Tabletop Exercise on preparedness against the potential incursion of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) serotype SAT-1, on 4 November 2026.

Organized under the theme "Detect Early, Confirm Fast, Contain Together," the exercise brings together policymakers, veterinary epidemiologists, disease control experts, diagnostic laboratories, security agencies and vaccine manufacturers to strengthen India's capacity for early detection, rapid response and coordinated containment of this emerging disease threat.

The exercise assumes particular significance in view of the recent geographical spread of FMD serotype SAT-1 beyond its traditional African distribution into 17 countries across West Asia, raising concerns about its potential introduction into India. Although SAT-1 has not been reported in India, its possible incursion poses a serious threat to the country's livestock population of over 530 million, dairy-based livelihoods, livestock trade and the gains achieved under the National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP). The absence of domestic SAT-1 vaccine production further underscores the importance of advance preparedness.

Inaugurating the exercise, Dr. Naveena B.M., Animal Husbandry Commissioner, DAHD, emphasized the need for a coordinated, practical and implementable national strategy to address the potential introduction of exotic FMD serotypes. He highlighted the importance of identifying preparedness gaps, strengthening institutional coordination and ensuring that Central and State agencies can respond swiftly and collectively. He also stressed the relevance of the existing Crisis Management Plan for animal diseases in protecting India's livestock sector.

Dr. Baldev R. Gulati, Director, ICAR-NIVEDI, highlighted the changing global epidemiological landscape of FMD SAT-1 and the growing importance of risk-based surveillance, epidemiological intelligence and early warning systems. He outlined ICAR-NIVEDI's role in assessing the potential risk of introduction into India and developing a coordinated exercise framework involving multiple national and State-level stakeholders to test the country's preparedness before an actual emergency arises.

Dr. J.K. Mohapatra, Director, ICAR-National Institute of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (ICAR-NIFMD), emphasized the critical importance of laboratory preparedness, rapid diagnosis and vaccine development capabilities to address the challenges posed by an exotic FMD serotype.

Brigadier M.M. Ramachandra, Director, National Security Council Secretariat, highlighted the strategic importance of protecting livestock-dependent rural economies, particularly in border

regions, and underscored the role of security agencies in monitoring and regulating animal movements to minimize the risk of transboundary disease introduction.

Reflecting a strong national commitment to livestock disease preparedness, the exercise has brought together 83 participants from 25 States, three Union Territories and key national institutions. Participants represent State Animal Husbandry Departments, veterinary diagnostic laboratories, ICAR institutions, the National Dairy Development Board, veterinary universities, vaccine manufacturers, the National Security Council Secretariat and the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser. Importantly, the participation of the Indian Army, Indian Air Force, Border Security Force, Indo-Tibetan Border Police, Assam Rifles and Sashastra Seema Bal brings a vital border-security dimension to the national preparedness effort.

Dr Jagadish Hiremath, Organizing Secretary informed that unlike conventional scientific meetings, Exercise VAJRA-SAT simulates a potential FMD SAT-1 incursion through realistic outbreak scenarios, requiring participating agencies to assess information, make time-sensitive decisions and coordinate responses as they would during an actual disease emergency. The exercise covers three interconnected stages: initial suspicion and reporting; laboratory confirmation, epidemiological investigation and containment; and coordinated disease control and recovery.

The exercise will critically examine the entire emergency response chain, from detection by a field veterinarian and reporting to State and Central authorities to laboratory confirmation, tracing of infection, movement restrictions, vaccination preparedness and communication with livestock farmers and other stakeholders. Particular emphasis is being placed on identifying operational gaps, clarifying institutional responsibilities and strengthening coordination across administrative and geographical boundaries.

The deliberations are expected to contribute to a national contingency plan for FMD SAT-1, recommendations for strengthening existing standard operating procedures, improved vaccine preparedness and a replicable tabletop exercise framework for State Animal Husbandry Departments. A consolidated report identifying preparedness gaps and priority actions will be submitted to DAHD for further consideration.