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PRESS RELEASE

National Tabletop Exercise VAJRA-SAT Strengthens India's Preparedness against Exotic FMD Threat; DAHD to Support Laboratory Capacity and Indigenous Vaccine Preparedness

***Bengaluru, 5 November 2026*:** The two-day National Tabletop Exercise 'VAJRA-SAT', organized by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD), Government of India, in collaboration with ICAR-National Institute of Veterinary Epidemiology and Disease Informatics (ICAR-NIVEDI), Bengaluru, concluded today with important recommendations to strengthen India's preparedness against the potential incursion of the exotic Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) serotype SAT1.

The concluding session was chaired by Shri Rama Shankar Sinha, Additional Secretary (Livestock Health), DAHD, in the presence of Dr. Naveena B.M., Animal Husbandry Commissioner, DAHD; Dr. Baldev R. Gulati, Director, ICAR-NIVEDI; and Dr. J.K. Mohapatra, Director, ICAR-NIFMD, and Brigadier M.M. Ramachandra, Director, National Security Council Secretariat. Addressing the participants, Shri Sinha emphasized the importance of strengthening national and State-level preparedness against emerging transboundary animal diseases. He informed that DAHD would support strengthening of regional FMD laboratories and Regional Disease Diagnostic Laboratories (RDDLs) under the Pandemic Fund, enhancing the country's capacity for early detection and rapid laboratory confirmation of FMD SAT1, with support from ICAR-NIFMD.

The exercise, conducted under the theme "Detect Early, Confirm Fast, Contain Together," brought together 83 participants from 25 States, three Union Territories and national institutions, including veterinary services, diagnostic laboratories, research institutions, vaccine manufacturers and security agencies. Through simulated outbreak scenarios, participants examined the practical challenges of detecting, investigating and containing a possible SAT1 incursion into India.

During the concluding plenary, all seven participating groups presented their key learnings, operational challenges and recommendations from the exercise. The debriefing highlighted the importance of recognizing FMD outbreaks even in vaccinated herds, immediate reporting and sample collection, rapid serotype confirmation through ICAR-NIFMD, timely movement restrictions, epidemiological investigation and coordinated deployment of Rapid Response Teams. Participants also emphasized the need for vaccine preparedness, effective risk communication and stronger inter-State coordination, particularly because existing FMD vaccines used in India do not provide protection against SAT1.

Representatives of the Indian vaccine industry highlighted the need for advance vaccine preparedness and requested Government support in procuring suitable SAT1 virus strains to facilitate indigenous vaccine development and production under the Make-in-India initiative.

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The discussions underscored the importance of strengthening domestic vaccine manufacturing capabilities to ensure timely availability of vaccines in the event of an exotic FMD incursion.

The exercise provided an opportunity to critically assess the operational readiness of veterinary services, identify gaps in existing standard operating procedures and clarify institutional responsibilities during an exotic FMD emergency. These findings will be consolidated into a post-exercise report for DAHD to support improvements in the national FMD contingency plan.

Following the conclusion of Exercise VAJRA-SAT, a separate meeting was held under the chairmanship of Shri Rama Shankar Sinha to review progress towards establishing FMD-free compartments across different States. The initiative aims to strengthen disease prevention, protect valuable livestock genetic resources and facilitate safe livestock trade. The discussions focused on developing semen production centres and semen banks as FMD-free compartments in the first phase, with representatives from Karnataka, Telangana, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat sharing the progress achieved and challenges encountered.

During the interactive discussions, States were advised to identify suitable establishments and constitute State-level committees involving relevant stakeholders, including ICAR-NIFMD, ICAR-NIVEDI and vaccine manufacturers, in accordance with the prescribed standard operating procedures. These committees would assess proposed compartments and recommend measures required to achieve and maintain FMD-free status.