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Pawar's LatAm visit to boost agri ties

New Delhi: To step up international ties in the farm sector, agriculture minister Sharad Pawar is leaving for LatAm countries next month.

Accompanied by a high-level delegation, Pawar is scheduled to visit Brazil, Mexico and Argentina and discuss agricultural research with officials. "LatAm will reopen the area of cooperation and research in agriculture. Discussions on contractual farming are also likely to feature in the talks. Deputy chief minister of Punjab, agriculture ministers of Maharashtra and Haryana and other government officials will accompany Pawar," senior officials in the ministry of external affairs told FE.

"Agricultural production in South America is steadily increasing, thanks to the growing global demand and high prices. This means more scope for exports of inputs for agribusiness such as agrochemicals," explained senior officials.

India has a strong history of the agriculture sector, which accounts for 17% of the GDP, employing around 52% of the total Indian workforce. On the other hand, LatAm and Caribbean region, with its varied topography and vast natural resources, has a diverse agriculture background. "The land in LatAm is fertile and rainfall pattern easily allows one a choice of crop. The soybean boom makes it much more competitive as far as working capital requirement and risk mitigation is concerned," officials said.

Mexicans are keen on reviving research in agriculture with India. Apart from bilateral discussions with his counterpart, Pawar will visit Symet, an important agriculture institute in Mexico. In Argentina, talks will center around export of soya oil, pulses and food processing technologies," senior MEA officials said.

India's food crisis can surely be lessened by growing some relevant crops like wheat, rice, pulses and oilseeds in Argentina. "Argentina has developed an efficient infrastructure, logistics and network for transportation and shipping. The food processing industries of Argentina are one of the most advanced in the world and globally competitive," R Vishwanathan, Indian ambassador in Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay told FE.

Vishwanathan who has been specialising in Latin America since 1996 pointed out, "The oil crushing capacity of Argentina is the third highest in the world with the latest technology and plants. The Argentines have innovated a new system of storage of grains in open air instead of expensive concrete and steel silos."

Argentina is the world's largest exporter of sunflower oil, soybean oil; world's second largest exporter of corn; and world's third largest producer soybeans. Argentina has high agricultural productivity. For India, Argentina is one of the major sources...