



NEWSLETTER

Vol. 4, No. 2

July - December, 2002

The New Chief of ICAR



Dr. Mangala Rai, a well-known Plant Breeder has taken over as the Secretary, DARE and Director General, ICAR on

January 9, 2003. Dr. Rai was born on June 30, 1947 in a farming family. He did his graduation in agriculture in 1967, Master degree in Genetics and Plant Breeding in 1969 and Ph. D. from B H U in 1973. The other landmarks in his professional career are Junior Plant Breeder; Plant Breeder-cum-Reader in OUA&T; Project Coordinator (Linseed); Assistant Director General (Seeds); Assistant Director General (Policy & Perspective Planning) and Deputy Director General (CS). He also shouldered additional responsibilities such as Director (Oilseeds Technology, TMO), National Director (NATP) and Agricultural Commissioner, GOI.

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Inauguration of Laboratory Building of NRCMAP



On 23rd December 2002 the first phase of laboratory-cum-office building of the NRCMAP was inaugurated. The function was presided over by Dr. M. H. Mehta, Vice Chancellor, Gujarat Agricultural University. Dr. G. Kalloo, Deputy Director General (Horticulture), ICAR, New Delhi was chief guest of this function. More than 150 dignitaries from different universities and institutes attended the ceremony.

In the welcome address, Dr. Satyabrata Maiti, Director, NRCMAP presented a brief report of the activities of the institute. He highlighted that the centre was in the process of signing MOU with international Institute – IPGRI, Rome.

Chief guest of the function, Dr. Kalloo inaugurated the building and lighted the ceremonial lamp. He appreciated the growth and development of the institute and congratulated the staff members of NRCMAP on this occasion. He also mentioned that the teeming millions of this country living in the remote

villages mostly relied on the herbal medicines. He urged that our research should benefit them and advised that the plants having life saving capabilities against snakebite, rabies, etc. should be taken up for work. He wished that this centre would prove its importance by doing very good basic research.

Mr. K. S. Mittal, Superintending Engineer, CPWD, Gandhinagar presented an account of the project completed by them.

In the presidential address, Dr. M. H. Mehta emphasised about the purification and value addition of the medicinal plant produce. He ensured all support from GAU for the future development of the institute.

On this occasion, before the main function was started the dignitaries visited the herbal garden of the centre. They appreciated the richness of collections of the garden. The DDG also inaugurated digital herbarium of medicinal plants developed by the centre.

EDITORIAL

Basic health care in most of the developing countries is unfortunately lacking even at the most elementary level. This is the situation in both the rapidly growing metropolis and in the rural areas. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that more than half of the world's population does not have access to adequate health care services and innovative alternate approaches that are needed to address the growing problem.

Medicinal plants provide an opportunity to millions to have access to low cost primary health care. Past and even recent experiences indicate that many traditionally known healing herbs and plant parts have astonishing medicinal value and these can be successfully used to prevent and cure several human diseases. The WHO estimated that more than 80% of the world's population rely solely or largely on traditional remedies for health care. Rural communities continue to depend on plant-based medicines, many-a-time prepared locally from plants present in home gardens, but usually from collection of forests, non-agricultural lands and other multiple-use habitats. Recently, renewed interest has been created to commercially extract medicine from plants for the cure of many devastating diseases such as cancer, AIDS, etc.

Medicinal and aromatic plants also play an important role in the subsistence economy of the tribal and rural people, especially those living in hills, mountains and remote interiors. The collection, simple processing such as drying and grading and trading contribute appreciably to their cash income and livelihood. This dependence also created a problem. Several of these medicinal and aromatic plants species have been over-exploited to fulfill the growing demand. Hence, wild plant species are constantly being threatened causing some of the species endangered and extinct resulting in serious erosion of genetic diversity.

Himalayan mountain region and western ghat, for example, have in abundance, a

diverse range of herbs, shrubs, trees and vines that have immense medicinal value whose healing power are known to the traditional doctors and healers for centuries but are currently threatened due to lack of concerted conservation strategies and efforts. The sustainable management of these traditionally used plant species is now a great challenge to all of us. Management strategies must not only help conserve nationally and globally important biodiversity but also must provide critical resources to sustain livelihoods.

The export what we are looking for or targeting will remain as figure until unless we act upon with speed. We need to start immediately with creating awareness campaign about the ayurveda to remove the ignorance prevailing among millions in abroad to achieve the export target. The Chinese who is our role model and most often talked about has done this successfully. China is having a vast reservoir of its own traditional medicines. At present it has the largest export of herbal products in the world, starting from the pain-relieving "Tiger Balm" to aphrodisiacs that can compete with the modern viagra pill. The powerful Chinese traditional medicine lobby with able support from Beijing, has successfully persuaded the British authorities to include many of their native medicines in the UK-approved list. India's presence in the list is conspicuously absent.

It is the time now we realize the vast prospect and potential of medicinal and aromatic plants in terms of primary health care, conservation and to boost our economy. Some real soul-searching and serious home-work are needed to sustain the smile in the face of millions of our country men and also to match the competition with other neighboring countries in the international market.

Jai Hind !

Satyabrata Maiti