

Governor calls for conserving orchid species found in Manipur

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Imphal, **April 05 2014**: There are about 1,400 species of orchids reported in India mainly in the four orchid distribution areas of Eastern Himalayas, North West Himalayas, Peninsular India and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The richest area is the Eastern Himalayan region which includes the North East, where about 1,000 species have been reported. Manipur has reported about 280 species. This information was revealed by Governor VK Duggal in a symposium in Senapati district of Manipur today. The programme themed as "National Symposium on Gene Conservation of Medicinal and Horticulture Orchids of the North Eastern Region and their Sustainable Use through Community Participation", was held at the orchid research and development centre of FEEDS KVK-Syvan campus at Hembung in Senapati district. According to VK Duggal, orchids are one of the most important flora on earth. About 1,400 species have been reported in India mainly in the 4 orchid distribution areas of Eastern Himalayas, North West Himalayas, Peninsular India and Andaman & Nicobar islands. The richest area is the Eastern Himalayan region, where about 1,000 species have been reported. Manipur has reported about 280 species. The diversity of orchids in the region are mainly due to topography and climate conditions such as large scale forest cover, high rainfall, high humidity, diverse climatic conditions ranging from tropical to alpine, high seismic activity, etc. "As all of you are aware, most of the orchids are epiphytic, while some are terrestrial, but one thing common to all is that they are shade loving plants.

Hence, in the wild they need forest cover for its survival", the Governor pointed out in his speech as the chief guest of the inaugural function of the symposium. He went on to note, "Mankind has been using orchids for medicinal purposes, especially Indian and Chinese systems of medicine. In addition, in several cultures, orchids play an important part in many rituals. Besides, floriculture purposes, orchids are in huge demand, so much so that the market has now been driven by hybrids, of which nearly two lakhs have been registered". "I am glad to learn that Dr..R.KKishore, an orchid breeder from Manipur, has also got some hybrids bred by him registered including a VIP orchid named Shiv Sidhu after the former Governor of Manipur Dr..SSidhu. The cut orchid industry is now a multi million dollar business, even though India's share is rather small. North East India has all the requirements to become a hub for this business, if efforts are made. This region has the potential to compete with Holland, Thailand, Singapore and other countries," he stated. The Governor also took note of the fact that due to growing population, the jhum cycle has been reduced to a few years and the area under jhum also continues to increase. This impacts the natural habitat of the orchids in the region as a result many species of orchids are now either, endangered or rare.

In addition, large quantities of some species of orchids are smuggled across the border for use in Chinese medicine. "I am told that about 10 MT of the orchids from Manipur are smuggled across the Moreh-Tamu sector every year at an average value of Rs 4000 per kg.

The main orchid smuggled is *Dendrobium nobile*, the noble dendrobium, which is used in Chinese medicine. Other species are also smuggled including the blue Vanda ♦ *Vanda coerulea*. With such large smuggling, it is no wonder that these species are becoming rarer and rarer with every passing year," the Governor said. Conserving orchids, according to Duggal, requires a two pronged strategy. The first is to have in situ conservation and the other is to conserve the gene pool. Both these strategies are expensive but there mat not be any other option. The rarer species need to be propagated in vitro and in situ. For the in situ conservation, there is a need to identify proper sites and allow the orchids to grow unhindered. More research needs to be carried out on the behavior of the orchids, their habitats, and methods of conservation, the Governor added. The symposium was participated by Dr..N.KKrishnakumar, Deputy General of ICAR; Prof. .S.NPuri, Vice Chancellor of Central Agricultural University; Prof. Pramod Tandon from NEHU; Dr..L.M.SPalni; Jacinta Lazarus, Deputy Commissioner of Senapati; H.Kipgen, Chairman of FEEDS; Dr..A.NRao, Director of ORDC and Dr..S.KVettivel, Advisor of FEEDS.