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THE HINDU

Varsities create a trusty farmhand



At a time when farmers are hard-pressed to get labourers to farm their land, scientists of the University of Agricultural Sciences-Dharwad (UAS-D), in collaboration with M.S. Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences of Bengaluru, have come up with a farm helper named 'Agri Robot'.

Vice-chancellor of M.S. Ramaiah University S.R. Shankpal and professor S.R. Desai, head of engineering department of UAS-D, are the principal investigators for the project in which nine farm scientists are involved.

Powered by batteries, the user-friendly robot can spray pesticides on one acre of land in one hour. The unit can be easily operated by farmers and also easily maintained and repaired at the village level.

“After an MoU with M.S. Ramaiah University was signed two years ago, we began the project and the first prototype is ready. The unit resembles a trailer and can move at a speed of 10 km per hour and operated from a distance of 500 metres,” said Prof. Desai.

“Our concept has been proved. And now it has to be fine-tuned to carry out different operations,” said A.C. Lokesh, professor at M.S. Ramaiah University.

The machine has been developed at a cost of Rs. 2 lakh, but the plan is to bring down the cost to a price range of Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 1.5 lakh. For details, contact Prof. Desai (7022330353) or Prof. Lokesh (9448596295)

Mega rose garden all set to bloom

A mega rose garden is being developed here at an estimated cost of Rs. 9 crore to attract more tourists to the hill station. Sprawling over 13 acres of land near Kodaikanal Observatory, the garden will have one lakh plants. A demonstration plot will also be developed on one acre in the garden.

In the first phase, the Department of Horticulture has spent over Rs. 4 crore for developing basic infrastructure such as a compound wall and ticket counters, and basic amenities like toilets. A walkers’ path has been created to enable tourists to go round the garden and enjoy its beauty. Paver blocks have been laid on the path. Besides, a spacious parking lot has been created near the garden. Preparation of land is under way, and after the completion of the work, different varieties of rose plants, collected from across the country, would be planted in the garden in the second phase, according to Deputy Director of Horticulture M.C. Mohan Ram. Equal importance is being given to developing Bryant Park, the prime tourists attraction of the hill station. Computerised ticketing system will be introduced at the park soon and the rose garden on the campus will be renovated. The small gardens within the park will also be developed before the next summer festival. Efforts are also on to operate the artificial fountain in the tank. The parking area of the park will also be expanded.

Bryant Park has started attracting tourists throughout the year. Improving facilities there will help the park maintain a steady flow of tourists throughout year and also ensure livelihood activities of small vendors and shopkeepers in Kodaikanal, say residents.

Three-day fruit and flower show in Hubballi from tomorrow

The Horticulture and Agriculture departments along with the Hubballi-Dharwad Fruit and Flower Exhibition Committee will jointly organise a three-day fruit and flower exhibition at Indira Glass House here from Saturday.

Horticulture Department Joint Director S.P. Diddimane told reporters on Thursday that District in-charge Minister Vinay Kulkarni will inaugurate the event. Labour and Employment Minister Santosh Lad, BJP leader Jagadish Shettar and others are expected to be present.

The major attraction at the event will be a 40x12 ft miniature of Karnatak University and floral statues of Jnanpith awardee Da. Ra. Bendre and Sadhanakere.

The event is being organised to raise awareness on terrace and backyard gardening. The organisers are also hoping to encourage amateur florists, bonsai cultivators, vegetable designers and others, he said.

Dog show

Meanwhile, about 50 dogs are expected to participate in the dog show to be organised by the Animal Husbandry Department on Sunday. It will organise a pet fancy dress competition on the same day. The department will also be taking out an anti-rabies drive at the exhibition, where more than 200 dogs are expected to be immunised. The drive will be taken up in other parts of the district as well, Mr. Diddimane said.

Various other departments will set up stalls at the exhibition. The district administration will be distributing awards for garden maintenance in 23 categories.

Two lakh roses to recreate iconic Gateway of India



The Kuppanna Park, also called Nishad Bagh, near Sri Jayachamaraja Wadiyar Circle, is all decked up to host this year's Dasara Flower Show, which will be open for visitors from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. from October 1 to 12.

The park will take visitors into a world of flowers with the organisers — the District Horticulture Society and the Department of Horticulture — putting up new concepts to capture visitors' attention.

The prime attraction — a replica of Mumbai's pride 'Gateway of India' crafted with two lakh roses — is getting ready to greet visitors.

The 28-ft long, 10-ft wide, and 20-ft tall flowery structure is coming up in the middle of the park beneath a temporary shelter. The flowers used for this replica will be replaced after six days to maintain freshness.

Another attraction is the model of India's pride Tejas, the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), which is being created with over one lakh flowers, including roses, orchids and chrysanthemum. The 20-ft long, 12-ft wide and 4-ft tall model will surely attract visitors, say horticulture authorities.

A garden for children with models of cartoon characters such as chota bheem, mickey mouse and donald duck created in roses and orchids are also getting ready.

More than 14 new concepts had been introduced to add novelty to the show. More than 48 flower varieties are being used at the show.

Zilla panchayat CEO Shivashankar, who is the president of District Horticulture Society, said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will inaugurate the show at 4 p.m. on October 1.

He said the entry ticket had been reasonably priced at Rs. 20 per person and parking provision has been made at two places — Kuppanna Park and People's Park.

Mr. Shivashankar said flowers for the show are also being sourced from Ooty and Hosur in Tamil Nadu. "About two lakh flowers are coming from these places," he said.

Musical Fountain

Visitors will get to see the musical fountain, which dances to 12 songs in the evenings. The show will be held from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., according to Deputy Director of Horticulture D. Manjunath.

He said generator arrangement had been made to ensure non-stop power availability for the show and the musical fountain.

Senior Assistant Director of Horticulture G.D. Dinesh Kumar said a new concept has been introduced to educate people on terrace gardening and urban gardening ideas.

Horticulture Society vice-president Prabha Mandal and other members of the society were present.

Mysuru hosted first-ever flower show in State

A surprising slice from history has revealed that the first flower show in the State was started in Mysuru.

Thanks to Chamaraja Wadiyar X, the then king of Mysuru, the first show was held in 1880 at Wellington Garden near Wellington Lodge here. Later, the show spread to three more places — the Town Hall Park; Gordon park (next to DC office), and at the Lalitha Mahal Garden of the Lalitha Mahal Palace on the foothills of the Chamundi, according to the Horticulture Department here.

The department gathered this information from the historians here.

During the reign of Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar, the flower shows used to be organised in many parks of the city in a organised manner.

“I was not aware of this interesting history behind the flower show in Mysuru. This tradition of holding flower shows has continued from generations,” said Mysuru Zilla Panchayat CEO Shivashankar.

Successful shows

Inspired over the success of holding flower shows in Mysuru under the patronage of the Mysuru kings, G.H. Krumbiegel and H.C. Javarayappa, during the British rule, launched ‘Mysuru Garden Kala Sangha’ in Bengaluru in 1912 and successfully conducted the flower show in Lalbagh, Bengaluru. This same flower show in Lalbagh has turned into a major tourist attraction.

In 1956, the Horticulture Department came into existence in nine districts of the State, according to a note from the department, which narrates the history.

The department came into existence in Mysuru under M.H. Mari Gowda (1951-1977), who is described as ‘Father of Horticulture’, on the premises of Curzon Park here and organised the flower show there successfully, which now coincides with Mysuru Dasara.

The flower show moved to Kuppanna Park from Curzon Park since the last two years.

Agri VCs call for modern farming techniques, promoting start-ups

HYDERABAD, SEPT 30:

With agriculture becoming unviable and youth shying away from the sector, Vice-Chancellors of various agriculture universities in the country have called for heavy deployment of investments, information technology and gadgets in order to make agriculture attractive for the youth.

The VCs, who met here for two days here, discussed on a variety issues that dogged agriculture in the country and came out with a set of recommendations on Thursday.

Modern farming techniques

They felt that young farmers must be given training in modern farming techniques and help agriculture graduates set up start-ups.

“In order to make young entrepreneurs successful in their agriculture ventures, we must equip the university teachers with entrepreneurship and IT skills. We must invest heavily on gadgets and on developing sensor-based technical solutions. This will go a long way in promoting smart agriculture,” they said.

“While encouraging private investments in public sector agricultural research, there is a need to introduce e-courses in graduation programmes,” a spokesperson from Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University (PJTSAU) said.

The VCs felt that it was time to make effective use of expertise in remote sensing, GIS (spatial information system), drones, mobile technologies, Internet and bio-informatics to improve prospects in the primary sector.

“We must introduce topics on agriculture and allied sectors in the text books of primary school. This will make them appreciate the importance of the primary sector,” they felt.

Tobacco control: Indian farmers want to be heard at WHO meet

New Delhi, September 29:

Over one lakh farmers have signed an appeal, addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, requesting representation at the World Health Organisation's (WHO) seventh Conference of Parties of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) that will be held in India between November 7 and 12.

The tobacco industry has been alleging that the strict regulations proposed by the WHO on tobacco are not "evidence based".

They have been appealing with the government to be included in the official delegation to the FCTC "to promote balanced regulations to safeguard the interests and livelihood of millions of small farmers and rural workers and their families," according to the Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA), an umbrella organisation that represents farmers of commercial crops in States such as Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Gujarat.

"Ad hoc decisions on tobacco control at this conference, as in previous such meetings, will affect the livelihood of millions of tobacco farmers and farm labourers involved in tobacco cultivation in the country," FAIFA said in a statement.

The appeal has also been submitted to the Health, Agriculture, Commerce, Labour and Finance ministries.

BV Javare Gowda, President, FAIFA, said: "A democratic and participative approach in the formation of the Indian delegation to COP7 will ensure that the farmers and the industry viewpoint on various proposals arising out of the COP7 agenda is taken cognizance of and no unilateral and discriminatory one-sided decision is taken by the Parties to the Conference that is hostile to the livelihood of millions dependent on tobacco."

Rubber Board chairman stresses on improving quality of planting materials

KOCHI, SEPT 29:

The Rubber Board Chairman, A Ajith Kumar, has stressed the need for improving the quality of planting materials to enhance productivity.

In the changing scenario, he said there is a need to increase production and quality of planting materials which is an important factor in determining the productivity. This would make rubber production remunerative, the Chairman said, while launching a scheme for registration of rubber nurseries and certification of planting materials at the Rubber Research Institute of India.

Initially the registration and certification of planting materials will be given to rubber nurseries who voluntarily apply for it. However, the cooperation of rubber nursery owners and growers are essential for the success of the scheme which is important in increasing production, productivity and profitability from rubber cultivation, he said.

Meanwhile the board's initiatives to enhance production are showing results with a 4.47 per cent increase in the first four months of the current fiscal.

This indicates that the efforts implemented during this year through better agricultural practices to achieve a production target of 654,000 tonnes and productivity of 1,500 kg/ha is yielding results.

Production in 2015-16 was 563,000 tonnes with a productivity of 1437 kg per ha, senior officials told *BusinessLine*.

Icrisat develops new watershed management method

HYDERABAD, SEPT 30:

The International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (Icrisat) has claimed that a new method for watershed management developed by it proves to be a paradigm shift in water conservation programmes in the country. Using the method in a Bellary village over a period of three years, the village could capture an additional 18,500 cubic meters.

“Within three years, water harvesting structures captured an additional 18,500 cubic meters with a gross conservation of 25,000 cubic meters rainwater during the rainy season,” Suhas P Wani, Director of Icrisat Development Centre (IDC), has said.

He said the novel approach helped ground water level go up by 1.5-2.0 meters. “With soil test-based fertiliser application, the overuse of fertilisers was reduced, which meant lower cost of cultivation by 10-15%,” he said.

Icrisat has taken up the initiative with the help of JSW group, an arm of OP Jindal group.

Some of the interventions included building soil and water conservation structures, improved variety of seeds of sorghum, green gram (mung bean), pearl millet, pigeonpea and groundnut; soil analysis and micronutrient applications, avenue plantation (to improve green cover and to trap the dust) and agroforestry.

The initiative covered 7,000 hectares with over 2,000 households in which 1,200 belonged to the farming community. About 3,500 farmers were benefited by the interventions.

“The yield of groundnut and maize increased by 19 per cent and 27 per cent, respectively. And many new livelihood options led to an increase in the income of households by ₹1,500-₹2,500 a month,” Wani said.

Changing tastes: how Indian tea lost steam in the global market

Quantity sold at world auction centres (million kg)					
	1980	1985	1995	2005	2015
All India	307	505	428	497	590
Srilanka	178	197	229	273	317
Kenya	NA	NA	174	307	359
China	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Indonesia	46	39	13	36	20
Other countries	175	188	82	64	72
Total	706	929	926	1,177	1,358

Source: J Thomas & Co (P) Ltd

September 29, 2016:

Tea has been one of India’s finest agro-assets for a long time and the final quarter of the 20th century turned out to be reasonably prosperous for the tea producers of India.

Although our exports of tea had stabilised at around 200 million kg (mkg) per year, there was a steady upsurge in domestic consumption, which contributed to healthy prices in the auction centres.

But in the new millennium, the situation seems to have taken a turn for the worse due to a combination of factors.

World production of tea has gone up by nearly 250 per cent from 1,527 mkg to 5,200 mkg between 1975 and 2015. It is clear that British investors switched their interest from India and Sri Lanka to African countries, mainly Kenya, Malawi and Tanzania, in the 1970s.

In China, there was a phenomenal expansion in the area under tea, especially after the collapse of the USSR and emergence of the CIS countries, which led to an increase in the number of buyers in the world market.

Vietnam also brought in a larger area under tea to cash in on the boom.

Exports stagnant

India has been exporting approximately 200 mkg of the beverage per year for over 50 years and we have not been able to increase the quantity, mainly because of our own domestic demand.

For the period under review, Kenya's shipments have gone up by leaps and bounds and its exports are currently around 350 mkg per year.

Sri Lanka's shipments have also gone up from 200 mkg to 280 mkg per year.

China has also registered a healthy growth to 300 mkg, mostly of green tea, catering to a certain extent to the Chinese diaspora.

Indian exports to the USSR, after hitting a peak of 100 mkg per year in the 1980s, have halved in the new millennium to be replaced by Sri Lanka for orthodox, Kenya for CTC and China for green tea and, to a small extent, for orthodox tea.

It is important to note that from 1970 to 1992, 90 per cent of imports of tea into the USSR were from India!

Auction centres

But there has been a steady increase in auction offerings in India, Sri Lanka and Kenya, proving the effectiveness of this system of marketing for a product like tea, which is plucked and processed on a daily basis, and where quality variations are immense.

Nearly 50 per cent of the Indian production is channelled through the auctions. London, which functioned as a terminal auction centre for tea from 1839, closed down in 1998 due to its shift to coffee.

Losing credibility

There has been a rise in preference for Kenyan and Sri Lankan teas over the years. India seems to be losing its credibility as a dependable supplier to the world market, partly because of its burgeoning internal market and partly because of uncertain government policies. Indian tea is averaging below \$2/kg at the auctions, whereas Sri Lanka is well above \$2 and Kenya is over \$3.

Higher yields

Also to be kept in mind is the fact that African yields are higher, they have a more even distribution of the crop because of the equatorial climate and labour wages are much lower.

What is very disturbing, however, is the disparity in the prices realised for North Indian teas and South Indian teas, which stood at ₹70.34 and ₹44.64, respectively, in 2000 and has now widened further to ₹142.05 and ₹84.37, due to quality and consumer preferences. The cost of production of tea in India has gone up steadily and substantially and is now approaching ₹100/kg. South Indian teas, in particular, are languishing at uneconomic levels.

Apart from the time tested effects of supply and demand, a few special events of the last 50 years have had an impact on the tea market.

Key events

The oil boom of 1973 gave a fillip to the tea market in the form of a substantial increase in the purchasing power of West Asian countries.

The extensive frost damage to coffee in Brazil in 1977 resulted in an escalation in coffee prices and a switch to tea in the US and Europe and led to a boom in tea prices globally. The shortage of sugar in India in 1980 to 1982 had an effect on tea consumption in India. The ethnic riots in Sri Lanka, which started in mid 1983, affected the running of tea plantations and led to an acute shortage of orthodox teas and a resultant spurt in prices.

From then on, world production of tea proved to be far in excess of demand and a protracted period of unremunerative prices set in, especially for high-cost producers, such as India.

This is the first of a two-part series on the Indian tea industry. The writer has worked in the tea industry for over 40 years. He has been a Director of Parry Agro Industries, Chennai, since 2006. Views are personal.

Spot rubber rules steady

KOTTAYAM, SEPTEMBER 29:

Spot rubber was almost steady in a comparatively inactive trading session on Thursday. RSS 4 finished unchanged at ₹119 a kg according to traders and the Rubber Board. The grade was flat at ₹116 as quoted by the dealers.

October futures closed at ₹117.20 (₹116.84), November at ₹117.10 (₹117.22), December at ₹117.90 (₹117.42), January at ₹117.50 (₹118.73) and February at ₹120.50 (₹119.92) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) slid to ₹108.82 (₹108.92) at Bangkok. October futures improved to ¥169.1 (₹111.51) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates ₹/kg were: RSS-4: 119 (119); RSS-5: 115 (115); Ungraded: 101 (101); ISNR 20: 97.50 (98) and Latex (60% drc): 75 (76).

Haryana to set up centre for research on Saraswati river



The Haryana government approved Rs 20 lakh to set up a centre for research on Saraswati river in Kurukshetra University.

The decision was taken after the Haryana Saraswati Heritage Development Board, which met under the chairmanship of chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar in Chandigarh.

Khattar said that extensive research on both scientific and cultural aspect of this river should be conducted at the centre.

This centre would help in increasing the knowledge of students and will also promote research among the scholars, he said, according to an official release.

It was also decided in the meeting that sewerage treatment plants(STPs) would be set up at Saraswati Nagar and Bilaspur in district Yamunanagar “to check pollution in river Saraswati.”

There are about 19 villages in Saraswati Nagar and Bilaspur and polluted water of these villages fall in this “sacred river,” the release said.

Similarly, STPs would also be set up at Pehowa in district Kurukshetra and Kurukshetra town by Public Health Engineering Department to prevent river Saraswati from getting polluted, it said.

Khattar directed the offices concerned to prepare estimates for the same so that these STPs could be set up at the earliest.

He also directed to explore other measures through which the excess water in the villages could be distributed to the agriculture fields instead of running down into the Saraswati

river, it said. It was suggested that recycling of waste water should be done at the places where STPs were set up by Public health engineering department.



Census of horticulture crop varieties in Karnataka

Karnataka is embarking on the census of horticulture crops across the State soon. The purpose of this census is to build a databank of the horticulture crops in all the districts.

Karnataka is one of the leading states with a large variety of horticulture crops. With no exact data of any crop, the Horticulture Department has been finding it difficult to work out plans and programmes to boost horticulture. Understanding this, the department has now decided to undertake a detailed census of all fruits and vegetables at a cost of `11 crore.

Horticulture Department Principal Secretary M K Shankarlinge Gowda told Express that correct statistics of the crops are not available in the state records.

“It is our ambition to create an information bank which helps us promote horticulture,” he added.

The department has records of plantation crops like coffee, thanks to the Coffee Board. But the statistics on areca, coconut, mango and other crops are not correct due to crop migration. A farmer, who has been growing one crop may have switched over to another.

“We say onion is grown on 1.9 lakh hectares in Karnataka. But it may not be correct. In order to have a reliable data, we are taking up the census,” he added.