

JNTBGRI to lay more stress on orchid breeding

Institute has a rich collection of orchid germplasm amassed over more than 20 years

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The Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) at Palode, near here, is set to become a major orchid research centre in India, as it seeks to step up its breeding programme for development of new hybrids to tap the booming global orchid market.

"We have initiated efforts to impart a fresh impetus to the orchid breeding programme, capitalising on the rich collection of orchid germplasm amassed over

more than 20 years," says R. Prakashkumar, Director, JNTBGRI.

Under the breeding programme initiated in 1995, the institute developed hundreds of crosses, of which 20 were successful and eight registered with the Hybrid Registrar of the Royal Horticultural Society, England, the world's orchid registration authority.

"India has over 1,200 native species of orchids distributed across the country. Several Indian species have great ornamental value, but their potential is yet to be tapped



Dendrobium White Wings, an orchid hybrid developed and registered by JNTBGRI.

fully," Dr. Prakashkumar says. While countries such as Sri Lanka and Singapore

have produced hundreds of hybrids, India has remained a fringe player in the segment with negligible contribution.

The country developed its first hybrid only in 1977. Since then, the sector has attracted very few breeders and growers.

The Dendrobium White Wings, a hybrid developed at JNTBGRI, is now in bloom, captivating researchers and visitors. The new variety is a cross between *Dendrobium macrophyllum* (female parent) and *Dendrobium ovatum* (male parent). D.

macrophyllum is a native of Malaysia and has been under cultivation at the institute since 1995. "We received the plant as a gift from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. It blooms seasonally and there would be about five creamy flowers on a spike," explains Dr. Prakashkumar.

"Though the free flowering nature is considered desirable for a hybrid, we have some way to go to make it an orchid of acceptable quality. The institute has undertaken a project to achieve this," Dr. Prakashkumar said.