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Botanical Gardens to get 'Thai Corner'

Thai delegation brings glass jars with beautiful orchids

By J. RIGBY TODAY

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Mr. Prasartjul, First Secretary



Dr. Suksathan



Mr. Brioche

The northern area at the Botanical Gardens is set to really bloom this year with the addition of a "Thai Corner" featuring beautiful orchids and other plants from Thailand.

The plans for this garden, which is set to occupy $\frac{1}{4}$ of an acre, were announced yesterday morning when Mr. Brioche, CEO of the Botanical Gardens signed a fertile new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Dr. Suksathan from the Queen Sirikit Gardens in Thailand.

The agreement, which is a dream come true for the green-fingered in Seychelles, marks the 25th anniversary of flowering diplomatic relations between the two countries.

As part of the occasion, three Thai botanists and horticulturalists flew down to Mahé to see how the countries could cooperate further. They included, Mr. Thorut, an orchid expert, Mr. Supanantananont, a horticulturalist and botanical writer and Dr. Suksathan.

"The seeds of this garden were planted in 1988. At the time, little was known about this exotic Asian country, but today that has changed as many roots have grown between them," said Mr. Brioche.

He also said that the site of the "Thai Corner" was itself very symbolic, as it will be based in a valley where two rivers merge to become one.

However, the Botanical Garden's new partnership with Queen Sirikit Gardens, which were set up in the natural reserves of Chiang Mai in 1992, will see much more than just a few flowers being planted.

Speaking to the press, Dr. Suksathan said that the anniversary was a good time to conserve the biodiversity of Seychelles in every way possible.

"Since our garden has been up for 20 years, we want to share the knowledge we've acquired over the last 2 decades to help the Seychellois preserve their own treasured plant life," he said.

As such, the two centres are set to exchange expertise, plant

specimens and seedlings, as well as cooperate in fields such as bio-technology, horticulture and *ex-situ* conservation.

After introducing the new agreement, the Thai delegation brought out three bottled specimens of two orchid species; the *Rhy Gigantea Alba*, a large white orchid, and the *Tiger Orchid*, a spotted, orange orchid. The latter is one of the biggest in the world and grows up to 3 metres tall.

More orchids for the "Thai Corner" are set to be imported in 2 to 3 months time, although the exact number is not known at this stage.

The Thai delegation then proceeded to give a demonstra-

tion of how to grow *in vitro* orchids, which are grown inside glass containers. Orchid seeds that germinate in a sterile medium such as a glass jar or flask take up to three months to take root.

Speaking to the guests, Mr. Supanantananont explained that *in vitro* cultures have many advantages – such as being sterile, easier to propagate and free from disease. He then broke them open with a hammer to show how to pot orchids.

The Thai delegation said that they hoped to make the technique more well-known across Seychelles by opening the first tissue culture laboratory on the



The Thai delegation demonstrates 'in vitro' propagation of orchids



The team brought two bottled species of orchids for the Thai Garden

isles.

Dr. Suksathan said that plans were underway to bring in Thai experts and laboratory equipment to lead workshops at the University of Seychelles that teach micro propagation, which would be helpful to not only grow orchids but other endemic plants.

Apart from this laboratory, the team want to lead a series of research expeditions to discover more orchid species in Seychelles, and are planning, at a later stage, to "breed" a Thai orchid with a Seychelles flower to create a hybrid.

There are over 30,000 orchid species in the world, with roughly 30 species native to Seychelles. In fact, the "Tropic-bird Orchid" (known as *Orkid Payanke* in Kreol) is the national flower and is featured on the SCR 25 banknote.

The Thai delegation was also accompanied by Mr. Prasartjul, First Secretary at the Royal Thai Embassy and Ms. Nivesratana, Second Secretary.



The white Rhy Gigantea Alba orchid



The Tiger Orchid, which can grow up to 3 metres tall



A plant tissue culture laboratory