

charge. In the ISRO Karnataka telemedicine programme, 27 district hospitals have linked up to Taluk and Primary Health Centres and offer specialist services. The Yeshaswini Health Insurance for farmers of Karnataka, presently covering 50 lakh farmers and providing operations free of cost is a project that pays for the sustainability of the telemedicine programme. Tanzania, Africa has also received benefits of telemedicine with help from ISRO.

APNet: This is a project based on developmental communication jointly between the Government of Andhra Pradesh, ISRO and Bharat Electronics Limited. This network uses INSAT-3B satellite K-band transponder primarily

for education, health care and e-governance. Begun in 2000, the first phase involved using 400 receive terminals that connected schools, colleges and government organizations. This interconnectivity would help raise the quality of education. The second phase of the project, which is under way, would increase connectivity to 2000 terminals with features such as two-way communication, data broadcast and interactive applications. APNet is also shortly to be used for telemedicine applications.

Biodiversity information system: This project completed in October 2002 involves the use of space technological tools for characterization of biodiversity at a landscape level. Based on intensive

field sampling and mapping using satellite remote sensing and geospatial modelling tools, maps have been made of vegetation cover on a 1 : 250,000 scale. This has been put together in a web-enabled database which links gene-level information of plant species with spatial information in a BIOSPEC database of the ecological hot spot regions, namely northeastern India, Western Ghats, Western Himalays and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. This has been made possible with collaboration between the Department of Biotechnology and ISRO.

Nirupa Sen

Indian Science Congress: Some facts

To bring the 'best of the Congress', it was planned with speakers 'giving quality presentations', not compromising on the science, said K. Kasturirangan while briefing the press. He felt that the Congress could serve a wider purpose of helping the large scientific community in India. There is 'no forum to air aspirations', other than academy meetings which serve about 800 Fellows at the most, he added. Also, it was a place where children could speak and interact with their role models and feel inspired.

When asked about the spin offs for Bangalore University for co-hosting the Congress, Kasturirangan replied that 14 lecture halls had been refurbished and 'the systems would be left behind'. The university has now in place a full-fledged LAN system. Significant and with wide-reaching ramifications is the setting up in Bangalore University campus of the Regional Remote Sensing Service Centre (RRSSC). The RRSSC, functioning presently from temporary premises, has collaborations with user agencies such as Geological Survey of India, Ministry of

Agriculture, Government of Karnataka and several private industries, according to P. P. Nageswara Rao, ISRO. Working on the basis of 'no profit', and handshaking of skills, applications actively pursued with particular reference to Karnataka are the following:

- Inventory for crops and vegetables from Indian remote sensing data.
- An agro-climatic planning information bank operational in three districts of Karnataka – Shimoga, Tumkur and Bijapur.
- Characterization of the biological diversity of the Western Ghats.
- Satellite-based study of the drainage channel of the Vrushbhavathi river flowing alongside the Bangalore University campus.
- Suitability studies of the new airport beyond Devanahalli, Bangalore.
- Fertilizer movement and distribution within Karnataka and other regions in collaboration with IFFCO.

The RRSSC step could usher in closer collaboration between university and

agencies as envisaged in the new scientific policy-2003.

In the valedictory function, Kasturirangan announced setting up, at the earliest, of an ISRO Chair 'for space technology and its applications' in Bangalore University, Bangalore in the memory of Sir M. Visvesvaraya. This would cement and further strengthen agency-academic interaction for national development.

The General President Elect, Asis Datta, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi said the focal theme of the 91st session due to be held in Chandigarh during 3-7 January 2004 would be 'Science and society in the 21st century: quest for excellence', with genomics taking centre stage. Panjab University and the Institute of Microbial Technology, both at Chandigarh, will be the hosts.

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