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## New strategy to control Parthenium weed

NEW DELHI (UNI): As the ravaging weed, Parthenium, also known as Congress grass or Gaazar (carrot) grass, spreads to a menacing level in all places of the country, agricultural scientists said they have found out a novel biological control method for managing it — through imported insects.

Special insects, imported from Mexico are left to be fed on Parthenium leading to a weakening of the plants effectively, to be suppressed by the competitive plants like *Cassia tora*, *C. Serecia*.

This strategy has been developed by the National Research Centre for Weed Sciences (NRCWS).

Jabalpur under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). But it is a time-consuming and slow solution to the weed menace.

Parthenium is also poisonous and allergic posing serious threat to human beings and livestock in India and Australia. It is considered as one of the greatest sources of dermatitis, asthma, nasal-dermal and nasal bronchial types of diseases.

The weed entered Indian soil with a consignment of wheat stocks imported from USA under PL-480 and was noticed in 1956 for the first time in Pune. Parthenium with enormous capacity to germinate and withstand all

seasons, is no longer non-crop weed in wastelands and urban habitats. It has now virtually colonised the Indian ecosystem resulting in loss in biodiversity with its predominant growth in pastures and grasslands, open forests and orchards and the crop fields as well.

The Central government has already launched a campaign to control the weed and has supplied thousands of Mexican beetles (*Zygogramma bicolorata*) free of cost to various states, NGOs and farmers. And, it has successfully established in many sites, NRCWS director N. T. Yaduraju told mediapersons here on Sunday.

This biological remedy is being applied as the management of Parthenium though manual removal and application of herbicides is not a practical option, since it can not be done successfully and economically on a large area, he said.

Off-white and reddish colour Mexican beetles are released on Parthenium and they voraciously eat and defoliate the plants. The insects, fed on the weed, multiply on a large scale from June to October during their 27-32 days life cycle. But this cost-effective and eco-friendly method has to be combined with locally well adopted competitive plants.