

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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TOPIC: ENVIRONMENT

State gets four more Ramsar sites

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI**

Tamil Nadu got to the top position in India for Ramsar site recognition as Vadavoor bird sanctuary in Tiruvarur, Kanjirikulam and Chitrangudi bird sanctuaries in Ramanathapuram and Suchindram Theeror in Kanniyakumari were added to the list.

With this, Tamil Nadu now has 14 wetland tags, said Supriya Sahu, Secretary, Environment, Climate Change and Forests Department.

- ✓ A Ramsar site is a wetland site designated to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, also known as "The Convention on Wetlands", an intergovernmental environmental treaty established in 1971 by UNESCO, which came into force in 1975.
- ✓ It provides for national action and international cooperation regarding the conservation of wetlands, and wise sustainable use of their resources.
- ✓ Ramsar identifies wetlands of international importance, especially those providing waterfowl habitat.

- ✓ **Vaduvoor Bird Sanctuary** is a 128.10-hectare area located in Vaduvoor lake, , Thiruvarur District, Tamil Nadu, India. The sanctuary located on the Thanjavur–Kodiakkarai State Highway 63.
- ✓ **Kanjirankulam Bird Sanctuary** is a Protected area near Mudukulathur Ramanathapuram District, Tamil Nadu. India, declared in 1989. It is adjacent to Chitrangudi Bird Sanctuary. It is notable as a nesting site for several migratory heron species that roost in the prominent growth of babul trees there.
- ✓ **Chitrangudi Bird Sanctuary**, locally known as "Chitrangudi Kanmoli" is located in Ramanathapuram district in Tamil Nadu. The wetland is a protected area since 1989 and declared as Bird Sanctuary.
- ✓ **Suchindrum** Theroor Wetland complex is part of the Suchindrum–Theroor Manakudi Conservation Reserve. It is declared an Important Bird Area and lies at the southern tip of the Central Asian flyway of migratory birds.

TOPIC: STATE EXECUTIVE

‘Governor has sent back Siddha University Bill’

Clarifications have been sought, says Ma. Subramanian

STAFF REPORTER
CHENNAI

Health Minister Ma. Subramanian on Saturday said the Governor's office has sent back the Bill passed by the Assembly in April for setting up a Siddha Medical University, seeking clarifications.

Addressing a function at the National Institute of Siddha, he said the Law department of the State government received communication about the Bill being sent back on July 29, 2022. He said that a detailed reply was being prepared in consultation with legal experts and the same would be sent to the Governor's office within a week.

“We earnestly hope that the Governor, after receiving the reply, will expedite the approval of the Bill and help in promoting Siddha and other Indian systems of medicine in Tamil Nadu,” he said. He added that the un-



Ma. Subramanian

iversity for Indian systems of medicine would be the first-of-its-kind in the country.

According to the Bill, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister would be the Chancellor of the proposed university and not the Governor. When asked if the clarification sought by the Governor's office was about this aspect of the Bill, sources in the Health and Family Welfare Department said it was more to do with admitting students to the university.

Though it is implied that the National Eligibility-cum Entrance Test (NEET) is mandatory for Siddha courses as well, the Governor's office has sought specific clarifications around that, sources added.

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin met Governor R.N. Ravi on June 2, 2022, seeking early assent for 21 Bills. He specifically made a mention about the Siddha Medical University Bill as admissions to medical courses were about to commence.

The State government has earmarked around 20 acres of land in Madhavaram near Chennai for setting up the university. The policy note of the Health and Family Welfare Department for the year 2022-23 said the university would temporarily be located at the annexe campus of the Arignar Anna Government Hospital for Indian Medicine in Arumbakkam.

▪ Article 200 in The Constitution Of India 1949

▪ he assents to the Bill

▪ he withholds assent there

▪ reserves the Bill for the consideration of the President:

▪ Return the Bill if it is not a Money Bill Houses will reconsider the Bill or any specified provisions thereof and, in particular,

will consider the desirability of introducing any such amendments as he may recommend in his message and, when a

Bill is so returned, the House or Houses shall reconsider the Bill accordingly, and if the Bill is passed again by the House or

Houses with or without amendment and presented to the Governor for assent, the Governor shall not withhold assent

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Thousands pray at 'Yaanai Samy' temple to ward off wild jumbos

An elephant statue at the Bhagavathi Amman temple is worshipped by villagers

V.S. PALANIAPPAN
COIMBATORE

Around 5,000 villagers believe that prayers to "Yaanai Samy" (elephant god) before commencing irrigation and post-harvest will prevent wild elephants from raiding the crops.

The Bhagavathi Amman temple at Kandavayal village in Sirumugai near Mettupalayam has an elephant statue, installed in front of the 'Amman Sannidhi'. The statue is worshipped by villagers of Kandavayal, Kandhaiyur, Lingapuram, Uliyur, Aloor and Mokkaimedu, said N. Ranjith, a resident.

According to villagers, the villages lie in the elephant corridor, where elephants from the Nilgiris used to migrate in search of fodder and water during summer. They pass through Thengumarahada and reach the backwaters of Bhavanisagar dam.

"Over 50 years ago, somebody installed an elephant



Protecting figure: The statue of an elephant installed at the Bhagavathy Amman temple. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

statue in the Bhagavathy Amman temple. Earlier, the temple was worshipped only by tribal people, but thanks to this statue, it is now frequented by farmers in the entire region," devotees

said. The belief has attracted people from nearby districts such as Tiruppur, Erode and the Nilgiris. The temple conducts pujas on Tuesdays, Fridays and 'Ammavasai' (new moon days).

J. Kumar, another resident of the area, said there were myths that the statue was only two feet long at the time of installation, but now became five feet long. Though he does not believe in that, Mr. Kumar firmly believes that prayers before commencing irrigation would certainly ward off wild elephant intrusion. The villagers thank the "Yaanai Samy" by offering a part of their first harvest to the temple.

The villagers also pointed out that once prayers had been offered at the temple, even if the wild elephants intrude, they consume only plantains and leave the farm fields without causing any damage to crops.

Another farmer Rathinasamy, in memory of his father who was trampled to death by a wild elephant in September 1991, had set up a small temple in October 1992 with the statue of his father and an elephant.

TOPIC : FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Pune's iconic 'Gadgil Wada' had a pride of place in Freedom Struggle

Built by Congressman and freedom fighter Kakasaheb Gadgil in 1932, the *Wada* was a microcosm of all the excitement and passion of the epic movement

SHOUMJOIT BANERJEE
PUNE

As the country gears up for the 75th anniversary of Independence, the walls of the Gadgil *Wada*, witness to a fascinating period of the freedom struggle, stand tall in the heart of old Pune.

At first glance, the three-storey structure in Shaniwar Peth seems indistinguishable from the 1,200-odd *wadas* that formed the pulsing heart of the Peshwa-era Pune.

Yet, it was in Gadgil *Wada* that Pune had its momentous tryst with the freedom struggle through the towering personality of **Kakasaheb Gadgil**, who had purchased the plot of land where the structure was built in 1932.

In 1942, after Congress Working Committee (CWC) members were released from Ahmednagar Jail, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Maulana Azad and others chose this place to deliberate over the future course of the freedom struggle.

Gadgil *Wada* was where

plans for the reconstitution of the **socialist Rashtra Seva Dal** took place in early 1940s, with socialists like S.M. Joshi, N.G. Gore, Shirubhau Limaye and Kakasaheb in the lead.

Such significant history began with a chance encounter between Kakasaheb and a few thirsty crows. When he came looking for a place to build a house in Shaniwar Peth, the Kahasaheb saw crows drinking water in the northeast corner of the piece of land that now bears the *Wada*.

"According to a belief held by Kakasaheb, this meant that this house on this plot would never be without a visitor. Today, the *Wada* is 90 years old and it is the 75th anniversary of India's Independence. Not a single day passes without a visitor curious to know what happened here and who were the great personages that graced its premises," says senior Congressman Anant Gadgil, Kakasaheb's grandson.

Interestingly, despite being situated at the heart of



Long legacy: Ninety years since it was built, Gadgil *Wada* still receives visitors every day, thirsty for its history.

the right-wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) turf, the *Wada* has been a confluence of competing ideologies – Left, Centre and Right with everyone

from Congress leaders and Prime Ministers to the BJP's Atal Bihari Vajpayee setting foot there.

"The area is dominated by a hard-core RSS Brahmin

population. Yet, Gadgil *Wada*, a beacon of even-tempered political ideology, soon became Pune's nerve-centre of freedom movement as Kakasaheb, influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's ideals, plunged heart and soul in the Independence struggle," he says.

A microcosm of history
A highlight of the *Wada* is a 500-sq-ft courtyard in the centre, which was once always occupied by freedom fighters plotting and planning their next moves, Mr. Gadgil says.

"In 1942, after the Congress Working Committee was released from Ahmednagar Jail, Sardar Patel suggested that before going to Delhi, they must all must deliberate for a while in 'a free atmosphere' at a nearby place. When suggestions were asked as to what would be the most suitable place, Pandit Nehru immediately reacted saying why look for a place when our friend Kakasaheb has a house in Pune," Mr. Gadgil says.

"There was no 'resort cul-

ture' then. And it must be noted that these tall leaders – Pandit Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, Rajendra Prasad and the others – slept on ordinary mattresses," says Mr. Gadgil, alluding to the deterioration of political culture among all parties in the country today.

The *Wada* is a microcosm of all the excitement and passion of the freedom struggle. At one point, the British government had decided to arrest Kakasaheb for making a series of provocative speeches.

SPECIAL

The entire area, known as Mehunpura, was encircled by the police. When the police stormed the house, Anandibai Gadgil (Kakasaheb's wife) stood her ground, demanding reasons for their intrusion.

"Her bold strategy to engage the police in argument for nearly half an hour gave time to the freedom fighters cloistered in the house to put on a variety of disguises

and bolt right under the noses of the British police," Mr. Gadgil says.

Despite Kakasaheb being an ardent believer of Gandhi's ideal of 'non-violence', the *Wada* was often used as a "safe house" by freedom fighters of all hues.

"Once, when the police raided Gadgil *Wada*, they found literature on bomb-making, which actually belonged to other revolutionaries using the *Wada*. This group had planned to kill some English officers during a cultural programme. While this plan fizzled out, it is testament to the *Wada*'s 'accommodative nature' during the freedom struggle," Mr. Gadgil says.

Just how palpable the duelling between competing ideologies was at the time is best illustrated in an interesting anecdote from the early 1940s.

One day, when veteran socialist leaders S.M. Joshi, N.G. Gore and S. Limaye were walking towards the *Wada*, they spotted Kakasaheb's son, a teenaged Vitthal Gadgil (later to be a Con-

gress stalwart in his own right) playing cricket on the road outside Motibaug, which was the main RSS main centre located barely 500 feet from Gadgil *Wada*.

"In a memorable conversation, the Socialists told Kakasaheb that today this generation is playing outside Motibaug, but tomorrow, they should not become part of Motibaug," recalls Anant Gadgil.

That very evening, the socialist leaders met at the *Wada* and decided to reconstitute the Rashtra Seva Dal to counter the RSS ideologically.

Despite many dignitaries visiting this iconic *Wada*, it was Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit that had a touch of humour. Reportedly, when he had asked Vitthal Gadgil for the *Wada*'s address, the latter remarked that his house was the lone oasis in the RSS 'desert' of Shaniwar Peth.

"Vajpayeeji had a hearty laugh about it. But then, such has been the pull of this *Wada* that all those who visited were charmed by it," says Mr. Gadgil.

- ✓ **Narhar Vishnu Gadgil** (10 January 1896 – 12 January 1966) was an Indian freedom fighter and politician from Maharashtra, India. He was also a writer. He wrote in both Marathi and English.
- ✓ During the Civil Disobedience Movement, which began in 1930, Gadgil was listed as a leader for the Maharashtra Civil Disobedience Committee and the Pune War Council

- ✓ The Seva Dal is the grassroots front organization of the Indian National Congress.
- ✓ The organization has a chapter in all the states of India.
- ✓ The members of the organization are known for wearing the Gandhi topi. It is headed by a Chief Organizer, the Founder is Dr. Narayan Subbarao Hardikar
- ✓ present Chief Organizer is Lalji Desai.

TOPIC : HEALTH

What is the threat from zoonotic diseases?

Is there a standard procedure on checks and genome sequencing for pathogens that pass from animals to humans?

RAMYA KANNAN

The story so far: A new zoonotic virus that has evolved to infect humans was identified in China in August. On August 4, the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)* described the virus called **Langya (LayV)**, reported in patients in **Eastern China**.

What is the nature of Langya?

■ In a letter published in *NEJM*, a team of researchers from China and Singapore led by Xiao-Ai Zhang, Hao Li, et al say: “In our study, a newly identified henipavirus of probable animal origin was associated with febrile illness, a finding that warrants further investigation to better understand associated human illness.”

The **pathogen belongs to the henipavirus family**, closely associated with **Nipah and Hendra viruses**, and was noticed to **cause fever, and respiratory symptoms** among 35 people in China since 2018. It was discovered during routine sentinel surveillance of patients who had fever and reported a recent history of exposure to animals in eastern China. It was identified as a phylogenetically distinct henipavirus, indicating its evolution, after being identified in a throat swab sample from a patient. The virus was named after the **town this patient lived in** – Langya in the Shandong province in China.

Subsequent investigations identified 35 patients with **acute LayV infection** in the Shandong and Henan provinc-

es of China, the communique explains. In all except nine patients, LayV was the only pathogen isolated, indicating no other infection was present that could have caused the symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

■ The symptoms were fever, fatigue, cough, anorexia, myalgia, nausea, headache, and vomiting, accompanied by thrombocytopenia or low platelet count, and leukopenia or a low white blood cell count. In some cases, doctors also noticed impaired liver and kidney functions.

What are the animal origins of LayV?

■ To determine the source or animal origin of the infection, since the patients, mostly farmers, revealed close exposure to animals before they fell sick, scientists drew blood from farm animals and small animals. These serosurveys in animals revealed that **shrews, a rat like rodent**, might be a reservoir of the LayV.

The *NEJM* letter says that contact tracing of nine patients with 15 close-contact family members revealed no close-contact LayV transmission, but acknowledges that the sample size was too small to effectively determine the status of human-to-human transmission for LayV. So while concluding, with the available evidence, that the **virus must have been directed transmitted by shrews or any other intermediary animal (goats, dogs, for instance, that test-**

ed positive for LayV in the sero-study), researchers called for further studies to examine all angles thoroughly.

Is there cause for worry in the future?

■ An article in *Nature* quotes evolutionary virologist Edward Holmes, at the University of Sydney, Australia on the way ahead. He says that there is no particular need to worry about this, but constant surveillance would be critical. In general, regularly testing humans and animals for emerging viruses is critical to understand the risk of zoonotic diseases, he adds. The need for surveillance cannot be over stated, certainly not since the COVID-19 pandemic upended the world without warning.

The *Central News Agency*, a government-controlled news outfit in Taiwan, quoted Chuang Jen-hsiang, deputy director of Taiwan’s Centers for Disease Control saying they would soon establish a standardised procedure for domestic laboratories to conduct genome sequencing and strengthen surveillance of LayV.

While LayV **as we know it now does not pose a huge threat**, it is apparent that the nature of a connected world facilitates the easy transmission of viruses globally. While scientific research and pharmacology development have gotten a boost in the arm in the two years since the pandemic, prevention continues to be infinitely better than cure. Constant, unflagging surveillance, and adequate sharing of information between nations is essential, experts underscore.

- ✓ Henipavirus is a genus of negative-strand RNA viruses.
- ✓ Henipaviruses belong to the family of paramyxoviruses. Two species have been identified to be zoonotic, causing disease in animals. These are the Hendra virus (HeV) and the Nipah virus (NiV). They produce severe and often fatal illness in humans and horses.
- ✓ Fruit bats (*Pteropus* species, also called 'flying foxes') are the natural hosts of henipaviruses
- ✓ Henipaviruses are naturally harboured by several species of small mammals, notably pteropid fruit bats (flying foxes), microbats of several species, and shrews.

TOPIC : ENVIRONMENT

Have coastal ecosystem norms been violated?

What has the CAG reported in an audit of the conservation process being followed by Centre and States?

JACOB KOSHY

The story so far: This week, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India tabled a report in Parliament on whether steps taken by the Union Environment Ministry to conserve India's coastal ecosystems have been successful. The CAG frequently undertakes 'performance audits' of government programmes and ministries. This latest report contains the observations from an audit of 'Conservation of Coastal Ecosystems from 2015-20.'

What are the Centre's obligations on conserving the coastline?

■ The government has issued notifications under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, to regulate activities along India's coasts particularly regarding construction. The Coastal Regulation Zone Notification (CRZ) 2019, implemented by the Ministry, classifies the coastal area into different zones to manage infrastructure activities and regulate them. The three institutions responsible for the implementation of the CRZ are the National Coastal Zone Management Authority (NCZMA) at the Centre, the State/Union Territory Coastal Zone Management Authorities (SCZMAs/UTCZMAs) in every coastal State and Union Territory and the District Level Committees (DLCs) in every district that has a coastal stretch and where the CRZ notification is applicable. These bodies examine if CRZ clearances granted by the government are as per procedure, if project developers once given the go-ahead are complying with conditions, and if the project development objectives under the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Programme (ICZMP) are successful. They also evaluate the measures taken up by the government towards achieving the targets under Sustainable Development Goals, a set of United Nations-prescribed targets for countries towards eradicating poverty and becoming sustainable societies.

Why did the CAG undertake this audit?

■ The CAG has a constitutional mandate to investigate and report on publicly funded programmes. The CAG conducted "pre-audit studies" and found that there were



Eroding shores: The CAG has a constitutional mandate to investigate publicly funded programmes. ■ PAUL NORONHA

large-scale CRZ violations in the coastal stretches. Incidences of illegal construction activities (reducing coastal space) and effluent discharges from local bodies, industries and aquaculture farms had been reported by the media and this prompted it to undertake a detailed investigation.

What did the audit find?

■ The audit pointed out various categories of violations. For one, the Environment Ministry hadn't notified NCZMA as a permanent body and it was being reconstituted every few years. In the absence of defined membership, it was functioning as an ad-hoc body. There were instances of the Expert Appraisal Committees – a committee of scientific experts and senior bureaucrats who evaluate the feasibility of an infrastructure project and its environmental consequences – not being present during project deliberations. There were also instances of the members of the EAC being fewer than half of the total strength during the deliberations.

The SCZMA had not been reconstituted in Karnataka and there was delayed reconstitution in the States of Goa, Odisha and West Bengal. The DLCs of Tamil Nadu lacked participation from local traditional communities. In Andhra Pradesh, DLCs were not even established.

There were instances of projects being approved despite inadequacies in the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) reports. These included non-accredited consultants preparing the EIA, using outdated data, not

evaluating environmental impacts of the project, not appraising the disasters which the project area was prone to and so forth.

What problems did the CAG find in the States?

■ Tamil Nadu didn't have a strategy in place to conserve the Gulf of Mannar Islands. In Goa, there was no system for monitoring coral reefs and no management plans to conserve turtle nesting sites. In Gujarat, instruments procured to study the physiochemical parameters of soil and water of the inertial area of the Gulf of Kutch weren't used. Sea patrolling in Gahirmatha Sanctuary, in Kendrapara, Odisha did not happen.

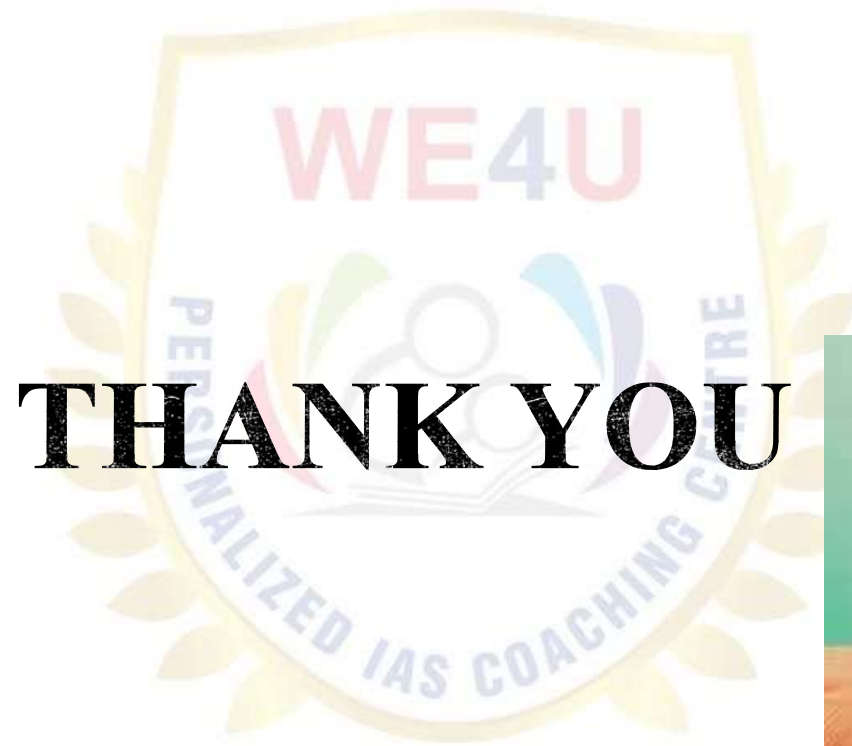
A research laboratory at Dangmal, Kendrapara District, Odisha constructed in 2016 has not yet been made functional. There was no website to disseminate the information related to the NCZMA, the CAG found, which is a clear violation of the mandated requirements of the Authority.

What lies ahead?

■ These reports are placed before the Standing Committees of Parliament, which select those findings and recommendations that they judge to be the most critical to public interest and arrange hearings on them. In this case, the Environment Ministry is expected to explain omissions pointed out by the CAG and make amends.

TOPIC : FREEDOM STRUGGLE

- ✓ The **jugantar party** was established in April 1906 by leaders like Aurobindo Ghosh, his brother Barin Ghosh, Bhupendranath Datta, Raja Subodh Mallik. Barin Ghosh and Bagha Jatin were the main leaders. Along with 21 revolutionaries, they started to collect arms, explosives and manufactured bombs.
- ✓ The **Chuar uprising** was a series of peasant rebellions against the East India Company that took place between 1771 and 1809 in the area around the West Bengali villages of Midnapore, Bankura, and Manbhum. The rebels rose in revolt in response to the East India Company's oppressive land revenue policy, which endangered their economic survival. Chuar Uprising is also called Jungle Mahal Revolt.
- ✓ **Munda Rebellion** is one of the prominent 19th century tribal rebellions in the subcontinent. Birsa Munda led this movement in the region south of Ranchi in 1899-1900. the ulgulan, meaning 'Great Tumult', sought to establish Munda Raj and independence. The Mundas traditionally enjoyed a preferential rent rate as the khuntkattidar or the original clearer of the forest. But in course of the 19th century they had seen this khuntkatti land system being eroded by the jagirdars and thikadars coming as merchants and moneylenders.



THANK YOU

