CURRENT AFFAIRS

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TOPIC : UNION EXECUTIVE

Alva condemns Opposition leaders who backed him

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

National Democratic Alliance candidate and former West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar will be the 14th Vice-President of the country. He secured 528 votes out of the 710 valid votes in the 16th Vice-Presidential election held in Parliament on Saturday.

The Opposition candidate and Congress leader, Margaret Alva, got 182 votes. Ms. Alva said by supporting Mr. Dhankhar "directly or indirectly", some Opposition parties and their leaders had damaged their own credibility.

Lok Sabha Secretary-General Utpal Kumar Singh, who was the Returning Officer of the election, told presspersons that of the 780 electors comprising elected and nominated members of the Rajya Sabha and elected members of the Lok Sabha, 725 MPs voted. "The total elector turnout was 92.94%," Mr. Singh said.

The voting began at 10 a.m. and was closed at 5 p.m. The counting started at 6 p.m. and ended around 7.45 p.m.

Out of the 725 votes, 15 were invalid and the total valid votes were 710, which is 97.93% of the total votes. The Opposition was expecting close to 200 votes based on the support announced by various Opposition parties. Just two out of the 36 Trinamool Congress MPs turned up for voting. The Opposition party had announced that it would boycott the poll as it was not consulted before announcing Ms. Alva's candidature.

Senior leaders congratulated Mr. Dhankhar over his victory. President Droupadi Murmu said the nation would benefit from his long and rich experience in public life. "My best wishes for a productive and successful tenure," she said. Outgoing Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu said the nation would greatly benefit from Mr. Dhankhar's vast experience and legal expertise. "My best wishes for a successful and fruitful tenure," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh met Mr. Dhankhar and congratulated him. "I am confident he will be an outstanding Vice-President. Our nation will gain tremendously from his intellect and wisdom," Mr. Modi said.

Big moment: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Vice-President-elect Jagdeep Dhankhar in New Delhi on Saturday. BJP president J.P. Nadda is seen. ▪PTI

✓ The **Vice President** is the second highest constitutional office in India.

Qualification:

✓ Should be a citizen of India.

✓ Should have completed 35 years of age.

✓ Should be qualified for election as a member of the Rajya Sabha.

✓ Should not hold any office of profit under the Union government or any state government or any local authority or any other public authority

Article:Election

✓ As per Article 66 of the Constitution of India, the Vice-President is elected by the members of the Electoral College.

✓ Article 68 :before the expiration of the term

Stalin calls for SC Bench in Chennai, use of Tamil in HC

'Safeguarding human rights a priority... vacancies at the SHRC will be filled'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Saturday reiterated his request for opening a Bench of the Supreme Court in Chennai and allowing Tamil to be used in the Madras High Court.

He was speaking at an event to mark the silver jubilee of the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) here.

Other dignitaries

Supreme Court Judge Sanjay Kisan Kaul, National Human Rights Commission Chairperson Justice (retd.) Arun Mishra and Madras High Court Chief Justice Munishwar Nath Bhandari were present.

Mr. Stalin recalled that he had urged for a Bench of the Supreme Court in Chennai and the use of Tamil in the Madras High Court a few months ago at an event in which Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana had participated.

"I am making the requests again at this event in the presence of judges who have come as guests to ensure that they are fulfilled," he said.

Mr. Stalin said the va-

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>
> **M.K. STALIN**
> Tamil Nadu CM

cancies at the SHRC would be filled and the point made about the lack of adequate police personnel on the enquiry committee would be studied and a decision would be taken soon.

Tamil version of website

He said a Tamil version of the SHRC website would be created and all information about human rights would be translated into Tamil.

The Chief Minister recalled that though the demand for establishing the SHRC had been made since 1993, it was not fulfilled. It was established only when the DMK came to power in 1996 and a government order was issued on December 20, 1996. The then Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi, made the announcement in the Assembly, he said.

Mr. Stalin said that safeguarding human rights had always been a priority, as envisaged by the Constitution, and his government would not fail in its duty in this regard. "Our government's focus is on social justice," he said.

Seat of Supreme Court

✓ The Constitution declares Delhi as the seat of the Supreme Court.

✓ It also authorises the CJI to appoint other place or places as seat of the Supreme Court.

✓ He can take decision in this regard only with the approval of the President.

✓ This provision is only optional and not compulsory. This means that no court can give any direction either to the President or to the Chief Justice to appoint any other place as the seat of the Supreme Court.

Language used:

✓ Article 348(1)(a) states that unless Parliament by law provides otherwise, all proceedings before the Supreme Court and in every High Court shall be conducted in English.

✓ Article 348(2) provides further that notwithstanding the provisions of Article 348(1), the Governor of a state may, with the previous consent of the President, authorise the use of Hindi or any other language used for any official purpose, in proceedings in the High Court.

TOPIC : CITIZENSHIP

Manipur House gives nod to NRC

Bowing to demands from tribal groups, the Manipur Assembly has resolved to implement the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and establish a State Population Commission (SPC).

To date, Assam is the only northeastern State to have implemented the NRC. The exercise has been in limbo since the complete draft was published in August 2019, leaving out 19.06 lakh out of 3.3 crore applicants.

✓ **National Register of Citizens, 1951** is a register prepared after the conduct of the Census of 1951 in respect of each village, showing the houses or holdings in a serial order and indicating against each house or holding the number and names of persons staying therein.

✓ The NRC was published only once in 1951.

Assam : Illegal Migrants Issue

✓ It set March 25, 1971, as the cut-off date for the deportation of illegal migrants.

✓ The NRC of 1951 and the Electoral Roll of 1971 (up to midnight of 24 March 1971) are together called Legacy Data. Persons and their descendants whose names appeared in these documents are certified as Indian citizens.

Indian Virtual Herbarium, biggest database of country's flora, is a global hit

The portal, with nearly one lakh images of specimens, recorded two lakh hits from 55 countries since its July 1 launch; site to host all of India's herbaria by 2024

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

With details of about one lakh plant specimens, the Indian Virtual Herbarium, the biggest virtual database of flora in the country, is generating a lot of interest and turning out to be an eye-catching endeavour. While herbarium specimens are considered important tools for plant taxonomy, conservation, habitat loss and even climate change, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has recently described the Indian Virtual Herbarium as an example of how digital tools can help us connect to our roots.

In the *Mann Ki Baat* episode on July 31, Mr. Modi spoke about the novel initiative, and said that the herbarium was an interesting collection of plants and preserved parts of plants. "The virtual herbarium also presents a rich botanical diversity of the country. I am convinced that the Indian Virtual Herbarium will turn out to be an important resource for research on plants in the country," he said.

Developed by scientists of the Botanical Survey of India (BSI), the herbarium was inaugurated by Union Minister of Environment Forest and Climate Change Bhupendra Yadav in Kolkata on July 1. Since then, the portal ivh.bsi.gov.in has had nearly two lakh hits from 55 countries.

Flora files: Plant specimens on display at the Indian Virtual Herbarium. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Each record in the digital herbarium includes an image of the preserved plant specimen, scientific name, collection locality, and collection date, collector name, and barcode number. The digital herbarium includes features to extract the data State-wise, and users can search plants of their own States, which will help them identify regional plants and in building regional checklists.

The portal includes about one lakh images of herbarium specimens. BSI Director A.A. Mao said that by 2022-end, the number of digitised species will increase to two lakh.

"By 2024, we plan to provide a platform to all the herbaria in the country so that they can display their herbarium collection on the platform," Dr. Mao said.

Scientists say that there are approximately three million plant specimens in

SPECIAL

the country which are with different herbaria located at zonal centres of the BSI and at the Central National Herbarium at Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden at Howrah in West Bengal.

"Work on the digitisation of the specimens started in 2019, and most of the digitisation has been done by the BSI. About 52% of our type specimens are from foreign nations and collected from 82 countries of the world during the British-era," Kumar Avinash Bharati, scientist, BSI said.

The Indian Virtual Herbarium is also deeply linked with the botanical history of the country. The portal provides most valuable historical collections of botanists like William Roxburgh, Nathaniel Wallich and Joseph Dalton Hooker, considered the founding fathers

of botany in India.

The digital herbarium has some of the oldest botanical specimens dating as early as 1696. *Cyperus procerus* was collected between June 15 and 20, 1696, near Chennai. The oldest type specimen *Lepidagathis scariosa* was collected in 1817 by Robert Wight. Type specimens are those collections that help in new discoveries and are considered of great significance by botanists and taxonomists. Researchers need to examine the types of the names in order to confirm their identities. As a priority, the Indian Virtual Herbarium has digitised information with images of 29,615 type specimens on its platform.

Botanical Survey of India

✓The East India Company (EIC) established the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) in 1890, during the pre-independence era. Kolkata, West Bengal, is the location.

✓The Ministry of Environment, Forestry, and Climate Change is its parent institution.

✓It conducts surveys, research, and conservation of India's plant riches.

Study of rock agama gives insights into urbanisation, conservation

The presence of these ectotherms indicates warmer patches in the city, presence of insects
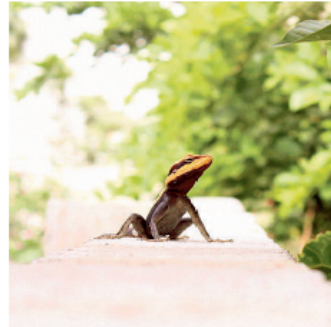
SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

The Peninsular Rock Agama (*Psammophilus dorsalis*) which is a type of garden lizard has a strong presence in southern India. Habitat loss and other such features of urbanisation have affected the presence of the animal in urban centres. A study carried out by researchers from Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, undertook to characterise urbanisation in the region and also to understand where the rock agama reside in and around Bengaluru specifically.

The study, published in *Frontiers in Conservation Science,* examined several environmental factors that could affect the presence of the lizard and revealed that they are found mainly in rocky places and warm spots. Thus, the inference is that conservation efforts must point towards retaining rocky patches even while reviving landscapes by planting trees.

Seek warmth

This lizard is a large animal, strikingly coloured in orange and black. They do not generate their own body heat, so they need to seek warmth from external sources like a warm rock or a sunny spot on the wall. They are important in ecology from diffe-

Marker: Peninsular rock agama can indicate which parts of the city are warming. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

rent aspects – they can indicate which parts of the city are warming, and their numbers show how the food web is changing.

Maria Thaker from the Centre for Ecological Sciences, IISc, Bengaluru, who is an author of the paper, says that since these lizards eat insects and are in turn eaten by raptors, snakes and dogs, they cannot live in places where there are no insects.

"Insects are critical components of a healthy ecosystem as they provide so many services, including pollination. So, while rock agamas are interesting in themselves, they are also a good model system to understand other aspects of the ecosystem," she says, in an email to *The Hindu.*

Dr. Thaker's PhD students Madhura Amdekar and Abhijit Nageskumar along with student volunteers systematically surveyed Bengaluru and the surrounding area. "We counted the number of lizards in over a hundred 20 by 20 metre plots and collected fine-scale habitat information that is not available from satellite data using photographs taken by drones," says Dr. Thaker.

Insights on urbanisation

The research threw interesting insights in the case of urbanisation of Bengaluru. "Distance to city centre and proportion of built-up area are commonly used to understand urbanisation," says Nitya Prakash Mohanty, a post-doctoral fellow at the centre and an author of the paper.

"After approximately 20 km from the general post office, Bengaluru is a heterogenous matrix of crops, plantations, and rocky habitats," says Dr. Thaker. Artificial light at night was closely linked with built-up areas in the city, but other ecological conditions such as the number of bird predators or the connectivity of habitats showed large variation and no clear patterns from city centre, she explains.

Small animals matter

Usually, biodiversity conservation brings to mind large animals like tigers or ele-

phants or even birds, but organisms like the rock agama play an equally important role in the ecosystem. "In cities such as Bengaluru, there is a lot of flora and fauna that is rapidly disappearing. The rock agama is one such species which is dependent on rocky scrub habitats which are being converted into buildings and plantations," says K.S. Seshadri, another author of the paper.

The study apart from characterising the way Bengaluru has grown, further underlines that smaller fauna and flora could be key indicators of the health of the ecosystem and need to be preserved, too.

✓ The peninsular rock agama or South Indian rock agama (Psammophilus dorsalis) is a common species of agama found on rocky hills in south India.

✓ IUCN: Least Concern

THANK YOU