

Prof. V. V. Sivarajan Gold Medal award to V. S. Raju

The Indian Association of Angiosperm Taxonomy in its 17th Annual Conference held at the Department of Botany, Shivaji University, Kolhapur, has felicitated Vatsavaya S. Raju, Department of Botany, Kakatiya University, Warangal, with the Prof. V. V. Sivarajan Gold Medal, a memento and a certificate of merit for his 25 years of invaluable contributions to the field of taxonomy of angiosperms in India, taxonomy teaching and service to society as a taxonomist. He is the first botanist (taxonomist) to receive this honour from Andhra Pradesh (AP).

Raju delivered the Sivarajan medal lecture on 'Plant taxonomy in India: Retrospect and prospect', where he brought to light the history of taxonomy in India

in general and that of AP, and recent changes in the scenario. He made special reference to Willaim Roxburgh (1751–1815), Father of Indian Botany, who worked at Garrison Station, Samalkote (now Samarlakota) in 1781 and studied the flora of the region before he moved to Calcutta (now Kolkata) as Superintendent of the Botanical Garden of East India Company in 1793. Raju also mentioned about Walter Elliot (1803–87), Tahsildar of Muslipatnam in 1848, who brought out the first flora, *Flora Andhrica*, published in 1859 with Telugu vernaculars available with a sowkar in Bandar.

Raju is currently working on the *Plant Book of Telangana*, covering its biodiversity and economic potential. His immedi-

ate concern is to bring to the attention of the Government of AP, how exotic plants like 'mabheera' (*Hyptis suaveolens*), *Senna uniflora*, 'vayyari bhama' (*Parthenium hysterophrus*), etc. are invading our wildlife sanctuaries, forests, grazing grounds and causing economic loss to our upland crops. Aquatic habitats in the state are now gradually being invaded by the *Alternanthera philoxeroides*, the alligator weed from America. Raju was the first to report it in 1987 from Warangal.

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Earth Science Olympiad, South Korea

Two Indian students of class XI won Silver Medals at the first ever International Earth Science Olympiad (IESO) held in Daegu, South Korea last month. The two Mumbai students are Ritesh Singh (K. V. Pendharkar College, Dombivli) and Vijay Suralkar (Kendriya Vidyalaya, Bhandup). R. Shankar, Mangalore University, who is the National Co-ordinator for Earth Science Olympiad, led the Indian delegation of students. K. S. Jayappa, Mangalore University and H. S. M. Prakash, Geological Survey of India, Bangalore along with Shankar were the resource persons at a camp organized to train the students at the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, Mumbai, which is the nodal agency for conducting Science Olympiads in India.

Olympiads are competitions conducted for secondary school students every year in different branches of science like Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Astronomy, etc. The International Geoscience Education Organization (IGEO) adopted IESO as one of its major activities at its Council Meeting held in Calgary, Canada, during August 2003. The objective of IESO is to promote Earth Science Education worldwide and forge friendship among students from different parts of the globe. In a subsequent meeting held in Seoul, South Korea during November 2004 representatives of 10 countries examined the Earth Science curriculum of each country and discussed the modalities of conducting the IESO.

The statutes and syllabus for IESO were developed by the IESO committees and commissions, and an Organizing Committee was established to conduct the first IESO in South Korea, 2007. Further details of IESO can be obtained from <http://ieso.or.kr>.

Twenty four participants from seven countries (India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan and USA) participated in the IESO which consisted of written and practical tests with questions on Geology, Oceanography, Meteorology and Astronomy. Team leaders of different countries acted as members of the International Jury which discussed and finalized the question papers and evaluated the answer sheets. Gold medals were awarded to students from Taiwan and South Korea, Silver medals to students from South Korea, Taiwan and USA besides India, and Bronze medals to students from other countries. Field investigations near Yeongwol by the participating students was a unique feature which set aside the Earth Science Olympiad from other Science Olympiads. Students got an opportunity to examine and study various rock types (conglomerate, sandstone, limestone, etc.), structures (unconformity, fold, fault, graded and cross bedding, mud cracks, ripple marks, etc.) and fossils belonging to the Cambrian-Ordovician Choson Supergroup and the Carboniferous-Triassic Pyongan Supergroup. Students (in four batches) were guided by Korean

geoscientists and team leaders of different countries in understanding and interpreting the structures and fossils in terms of depositional environments. Each group prepared and presented its own report of the field work. There was a one-day tour to the World Cultural Expo and to the Pohang Steel Company, the fourth largest in the world.

It is hoped that over the years, earth science education, particularly at the school level, would get highlighted, and there will be better social and public awareness of the importance of earth sciences in view of the changing climate (the recent Nobel Peace Prize going to the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change), depletion of natural resources, the rising oil prices (hovering around US \$100 per barrel), natural disasters like tsunami (that struck the Indian Ocean region recently), etc. The launch of the first Earth Science Olympiad in 2007 is in line with the United Nations' declaration of 2008 as the International Year of Planet Earth (www.yearofplanetearth.org) when programmes would be launched the worldover both in terms of research and public understanding of earth sciences.

The second IESO would be held in the Philippines (September 2008) and the third in Thaiwan (August 2009).

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