

Chandmari loses landslide-alert system

SE Report

GANGTOK, May 3: A landslide-warning system being installed by researchers of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham at Chandmari near Gangtok has been severely vandalised, with cut wires and broken equipment strewn at the site. The incident has severely hampered the two years of field work by team members from Amrita who have been travelling from its Kerala campus to install a network of sensors that would help provide early warning to villagers if a rainfall-induced landslide was deemed imminent.

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, which had been working in the project co-funded with the Union Earth Sciences ministry, in a press release today said they will now have to start all over again, as the system at all the four deployment sites in the village has been damaged beyond repair by miscreants.

Over the past four years, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham has worked to design, develop and deploy an integrated wireless-communication system for the detection and monitoring of rainfall-induced landslides in Chandmari. Frequent vandalism and theft of system parts has halted the entire project in the village, hindering its goal of saving lives. Amrita researchers have urged the State government to organize community-engagement programmes to create awareness among the villagers about the benefit of the early warning system.

Commenting on the incident, project lead and director of Amrita Centre for Wireless Networks & Applications Maneesha Sudheer said, "Our team's goal here is only to save the lives of Chandmari residents, as this area is prone to rainfall-



induced landslides. However, vandalism is affecting the project's on-time delivery to those who need it the most—the residents of the community. Due to these multiple thefts and vandalism cases, we have lost more than Rs. 40 lakh of project funds, along with non-reproducible meteorological, geological and hydrological data, and all the equipment integrated with our scientific and engineering outputs. We need the support and cooperation of the people in the community to stop the vandalism and theft immediately. Otherwise, we will not be able to progress with our work, which is for the benefit of the people. We are working for the people and we need their support to make this project a success."

The vandalism came to light when researchers visited the village for final deployment of the complete system. "The system represented years of research work, continuous long-

distance travel and time spent away from family, months of data collected and now lost, funding gone to waste, and over 7,000 hours of manual fieldwork carried out by the team, which faced challenges with varying climate patterns, treacherous terrain, and even attacks by local wildlife to make the system operational. Despite facing and overcoming these seemingly insurmountable obstacles, the biggest impediment to our success seems to be man-made. This is the second time in the last one year that the system has been vandalized in Sikkim," Maneesha Sudheer added.

The researchers have reported the incident to the local councillor of Chandmari, Land Revenue department officials and east district collector and also urged the State government to initiate community-engagement programs to create awareness among the citizens about this system.