



City centre gives Assam extra eye to spy on quakes

BANGALORE: In a significant technology-sharing initiative, Bangalore-based Centre for Mathematical Modelling and Computer Simulation (C-MMACS) has established a Global Positioning System (GPS) station in Assam to measure tectonic motion during earthquakes.

Data from this centre, set up at the Guwahati University, will help in computing earthquake hazards in the north-east, one of the most quake-prone regions in the country, said senior C-MMACS scientist Dr Sridevi Jade. The Guwahati outfit is part of the Department of Science and Technology's (DST) efforts to draw a nation-wide network of GPS stations.

The project, taken up after the Gujarat earthquake last year, envisages an extensive network of GPS stations across the country, five of which have been assigned to C-MMACS, which is a centre of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

Besides Guwahati, the slated C-MMACS tie-ups are at Imphal, Shillong, Mokakchung in Nagaland and Aizwal. C-MMACS had already set up the first such station at Bangalore.

C-MMACS has also established GPS stations at Almora, Leh, Hanleh and Kodaikanal in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA, Kodai, Leh and Hanleh) and the Almora-based G B Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development, said Jade.

??These GPS stations will provide a high-precision database on the relative motion of all these sites and advance our understanding of global plate motions and dynamics of the earth,?? Sridevi said.

??This is significant as the Indian plate, moving at a rate of 55mm/yr north-eastward, collides with the Eurasian plate, leading to a significant strain accumulation in the Indian plate and its boundaries -- the main cause of earthquakes in India.??

Scientists note that Delhi and parts of Uttar Pradesh are sitting on a virtual landmine due to their proximity to the Himalayan mountains where the slip potential is too high.

??Projecting this to just one of the possibly several overdue Himalayan earthquakes will have dangerous repercussions on surrounding areas like the capital,?? Jade added.

North East will give a clue to the rate of deformation in the Indo-Burman fold belt and its seismogenic potentials, critical to evaluating seismic hazard in the region,?? Sridevi pointed out. ??We already know that Himalayan earthquakes and the Bhuj event occurred in an identified zone of heightened seismic hazard.?? Under the circumstances, the southernmost peninsula of India (the Deccan) is a safer zone, as it does not appear to have significantly deformed either in dilation or in ??shear

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strain.??

Apart from earthquake monitoring, the GPS can be used for city planning, weather forecasting and climate studies as well as in outdoor recreational activities like hiking, fishing and kayaking.

Information gathered from the GPS database could be used in estimating seismic hazard of the region, which helps town-planners frame and enforce building codes to ensure stable construction even in the event of a major earthquake.

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