

MEDIA COMMUNIQUE

Solar lights installed in HEC-hit West Garo Hills villages to facilitate coexistence

Guwahati, July 1: Unwarranted face-offs between wild elephants and human beings, which may turn fatal, often occur in hotspots of human elephant conflicts (HEC) in the darkness of the night. Such face-offs contribute to worsening of the HEC situation in a particular area. Solar street lights provide an effective way to prevent such human-elephant confrontations and thereby help mitigating the conflict. One of India's foremost research-driven biodiversity conservation organisations, Aaranyak (www.aaranyak.org), has installed 10 solar street lights in seven villages - Borogobal, Photamati, Kharsengdap, Bondukmali, Darengsigre, Bordubi and Jamdangre - identified as HEC areas in West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya due to the raging HEC recorded in the district.

Aaranyak's assigned team conducted a survey to identify the areas based on elephant movement patterns and installed these solar street lights in these villages inhabited by indigenous communities such as Garo, Rabha, Bodo and other local people.

Senior conservation scientist from Aaranyak Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar said, "Solar Street lights are crucial to mitigating HEC by enhancing visibility and safety at night. These lights illuminate the paths and roadways, reducing the chances of unexpected confrontations between human beings and elephants during night hours. The illumination helps early detection of elephant movements, allowing residents and drivers to take necessary precautions and avoid accidental encounters with the elephant. By creating well-lit environments, solar street lights contribute to minimizing the risk of conflicts, protecting lives of both humans and elephants while fostering coexistence and harmony between communities and wildlife."

"A number of the Village Champions - local community members who actively participate in raising community awareness and cultivating cooperation to promote peaceful coexistence with elephants at the village level - were actively involved in the street light installation process", said Anjan Baruah, a senior Aaranyak official who coordinated the installation.

The HEC has severely affected the West Garo Hills district in Meghalaya. A growing human population has caused human settlements to expand to elephant habitats, resulting in more incidents of HEC. This conflict poses a threat to both human lives and elephant populations. The importance of conservation efforts and community engagement in promoting coexistence between elephants and humans cannot be overstated, as they are crucial for ensuring the protection of these delicate animals.

Aaranyak has taken a multi-pronged approach to ensure human elephant coexistence in Meghalaya as part of its intense efforts to promote coexistence in Northeast India. These solar lights were installed by the organisation on June 28 under Darwin Initiative support and in partnership with Meghalaya Forest Department and the British Asian Trust.

Solar street lights installation was facilitated by Aaranyak's team comprising Anjan Baruah, Vendo Theodore, Subhas Rabha, Nipul Chakma, and Rupam Gayari, along with technicians from the company that manufactured these street lights.

*Press statement issued by Dr Alolika Sinha, Publicity Secretary, Aaranyak.
Contact No. 9435021312, Email ID: alolika@aaranyak.org*