

How a hotline from PMO to NE set stage for S Asia sat

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Bengaluru: Months before India put PM Modi's space diplomacy into the orbit connecting South Asian countries, scientists had set up a hotline between Umsaw, a remote village in Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, and the PMO to demonstrate certain features that are similar to those built into the South Asia Satellite. These features include tele-medicine, tele-education, disaster management, resources mapping and so on.

Umsaw, a medium-sized village in Ri Bhoi district, has 79 families with a population of 416 — 213 males, 203 females; 65 of them children — as per Census 2011. The quiet project launched here in 2016 did not get any pre-launch publicity but it was part of the Centre's larger development plan for the ignored Northeast region.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) is spearheading the initiative, along with Isro's Northeast Space Application Centre (NESAC) and two other organisations. The equipment and installations have since been dismantled as it was only an experimental project.

"We are right now in the process of integrating all the states in the region — to form one group of eight states — so as to improve delivery of applications of geospatial services, remote sensing, among other things," Isro chairman AS Kiran Kumar said. As part of the Centre's space-based connectivity specific to the Northeast, Isro has already commissioned more than 25 nodes for telemedicine, and there are more than 300 Satellite Interactive Terminals active in the region. The NESAC has also established a network of 118 automatic weather stations.

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