

Major landslide breaks out at Sokpay, 18 families evacuated, NS highway disrupted

DICHEN ONGMU

GANGTOK, March 26: A massive landslide broke out at Sokpay village under Dikchu-Jang GPU on the wee hours of Sunday. Fortunately no human casualties were reported but about four houses were damaged while 18 families were evacuated to safer locations by the concerned authorities.

Agricultural lands, standing crops, properties and livestock have also been extensively damaged when the almost two kilometre slide ran through the village. Drinking water supply and power lines along with the area's tourism spot 'Selfie Dara' were also washed away by the slide.

The national highway connecting North Sikkim has also been cut-off following the slide.

Gangtok DC Tushar Nikhare reached the spot and surveyed the slide along with other concerned district administration officials.

Gangtok zilla adhyaksha Balaram Adhikari and his team also took stock of the damage caused by the slide. He informed that immediate relief packages of Rs. 1.30



lakh were provided to the two families who have lost their homes in the slide. Relief amount of Rs. 40,500 was handed over to a cow owner while Rs. 25,000 was provided as relief to a tenant.

"There would have been major human casualties had the landslide occurred during the day since there is a good flow of vehicles along highway plus tourists also often stop at Selfie Dara to take the pictures", said

Adhikari.

Asked about the possible reasons of the landslide, Adhikari mentioned that local residents are blaming the NHPC dam at the base of the hill and the powerline tower situated at the hill top.

"We cannot simply blame the projects situated here as the core reason behind the slide is still unknown. However, the directions are given to the Mines & Geology department who will conduct

the study and research about the root cause of the devastation," said the Gangtok zilla adhyaksha.

Assuring complete assistance from the government, Adhikari informed that the affected families were evacuated to the nearby guest houses and villages for their safety.

Local villager Manju Sharma shared that such slides have occurred earlier as well in the area followed by

several surveys by the officials with suggestions of evacuating everyone, which never really developed into the execution stage. "Every monsoon we have to evacuate and stay somewhere else. The authorities tell us that we will be shifted but it never happens. We feel that the government can give us an area, set up a colony and shift us there", she shared.

Sunita Subba lost her shop and house at Selfie Dara

during the landslide.

"I do not own this property but I have invested all my savings in this shop to run my family. As per the authorities, only the land owners will be compensated and not the tenants like us and this is worrisome for us. All I had was this shop and three pigs which I lost to the slide. I have no means of earnings now", lamented Subba seeking help from the government.