CSIR-NEERI wins First Prize at National AI-ML Hackathon 2026

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CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI), Nagpur, has won the First Prize under Problem Statement 2 at the national-level Hackathon on R&D-2026, organised by Central Mine Planning & Design Institute Limited (CMPDI), Ranchi, a subsidiary of Coal India Limited under the Ministry of Coal, Government of India.

Hon'ble Union Minister of State for Coal and Mines, Shri Satish Chandra Dubey, presented the award during the Star Rating Award Ceremony for Coal and Lignite Mines, held at Mayfair Lake, Raipur on 2 November 2026. Dr. Asheesh Sharma, Scientist-F & Head, IT & Digital Infrastructure Unit and Centre of Environmental Intelligence & Digital Systems, and Dr. Kanchan Kumari, Scientist-F, CSIR-NEERI Kolkata Regional Centre received the award.



Shri Sanoj Kumar Jha, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Coal; Shri B. Sairam, Chairman-cum-Managing Director, Coal India Limited; Shri Birendra Kumar Thakur, Director (Technical), Ministry of Coal; and Shri Anand Mohan, Director (Technical), CMPDI, were also present on the occasion.

The First Prize recognises CSIR-NEERI's innovative proposal titled “Development of an AI- and ML-Based GIS Model for Tree Enumeration, Species Identification and Tree Height Estimation.” The hackathon, themed “NextGen AI for Smart Mining,” received 70 proposals from across the country, of which CSIR-NEERI's proposal was shortlisted for presentation and selected for the First Prize for its potential application in the coal sector.

The CSIR-NEERI team was led by Dr. Asheesh Sharma, Lead Principal Investigator and Dr. Kanchan Kumari, Co-Principal Investigator. The team comprised AcSIR PhD student Mandeep Poonia and Project Associates Rohit Nale, Ankush Rai, Arya Wadsamudrakar, Abhishek Dalwi, Neha Nasim, Pooja Sadashiv, Pradyumna Gondane and Rajat. The team was mentored by Dr. Saravana Devi, Scientist G and former AcSIR Coordinator, and Dr. S. Venkata Mohan, Director, CSIR-NEERI.

The award-winning proposal presents an AI-ML and GIS-based approach for automated tree assessment, with applications in biodiversity monitoring, forest assessment and sustainable mining. This national recognition is a significant

achievement for CSIR-NEERI and reflects its efforts to develop technology-driven solutions for environmental protection and sustainable development.

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