

Vice Chancellors Interaction Conclave, 20 June

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mandi organized a Vice Chancellors Interaction Conclave on Friday, 20th June, 2014 at its permanent campus in Kamand. The objective of this conclave was to foster cooperation and collaboration among educational institutions in Himachal Pradesh (HP) and Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). The conclave involved Vice Chancellors (VCs) and Directors of several science and technology universities and institutes in HP and J&K. The Chief Guest on the occasion was Mr. Ashok Thakur, Secretary Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). Prof. Timothy A. Gonsalves, Director, IIT Mandi, kicked-off the event with a welcome address to the attendees. In his address, Prof. Gonsalves urged the participating institutions to work together to foster and lead collaborations and cooperation in order to overcome the limitations of their remote location. He emphasized the opportunity for the local institutions to make an impact by attending to regional problems of HP and J&K states. Prof. Gonsalves' address was reciprocated by an address by Mr. Ashok Thakur. Mr. Thakur, in his address, stressed the need for an institution geared towards "Himalayan technologies," whereby regional challenges could be addressed in meaningful ways. He mentioned about the accreditation of science and technology institutions in India that would help them achieve higher visibility and rankings in the world. Mr. Ashok Thakur also emphasized the role of National Knowledge Network (NKN) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) that could help make science and technology education accessible to many; and, the need to develop technical skills among students. Mr. Thakur's address was followed by presentations from different schools at IIT Mandi, where each school showcased its current strengths and potential. A presentation was made on the Advanced Material Research Centre, IIT Mandi, and this presentation showcased a number of material-science research facilities that existed at IIT Mandi like the synthesis lab, Powder X-ray Diffractometer, and High Resolution Transmission Electron Microscope.



Participants at the Vice Chancellors Interaction Conclave at IIT Mandi (Kamand Campus)

The later part of the day saw a number of panel discussions on different themes that included: Sciences & Technology (S&T) education in the region; needs of the region in S&T; and, fostering linkages to strengthen S&T education in the region. Under the S&T education theme, the first panel discussed the current trends in engineering and science education, and it was moderated by Prof. B. D. Chaudhary, Visiting Professor, IIT Mandi. The panel highlighted the need to maintain quality of engineering and science education and the need to enrich and motivate students in the classroom. The panelists mentioned that resources like equipment, library, web-sources, and databases should be shared among institutions in the HP and J&K states. A second panel discussion under the S&T education theme was moderated by Prof. R. L. Sharma, Vice Chancellor, Himachal Pradesh Technical University, Hamirpur. This panel stressed on the mechanisms for collaboration among institutions in the region. The panel brought forth an idea to setup an "edu-cloud" that could serve the educational needs of all participating institutions. The panelists emphasized the need for inter-university collaborative projects, joint-research proposals, and private-public partnerships. The discussion also touched upon the need for faculty development through "training the trainer" programmes in the HP and J&K states.



A Panel Discussion on Fostering Linkages to Strengthen S&T Education in the Region

Furthermore, under the fostering linkages to strengthen S&T theme, a panel discussion took place on developing mechanisms for collaboration in both research and teaching between institutions of HP and J&K states. This panel was moderated by Prof. P. K. Khosla, Vice Chancellor, Shoolini University and it emphasized collaboration to be the critical need of the hour, where all concerned parties benefit equally. The discussion highlighted the importance of faculty and student exchange programmes, creating better pool of resources, and utilizing generated revenues in an efficient manner. It was discussed that IIT Mandi had already taken the first step of setting-up of a programme whereby faculty applicants from HP and J&K could enroll into a part-time M.S. and Ph.D. at the Institute. Similarly, it was discussed that IIT Mandi had also started collaborating with the Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dharamsala, on course exchanges, where 1 to 2 courses at an institution would be opened for students of the other institution.



Mr. Ashok Thakur, Secretary Higher Education, MHRD and Prof. Timothy A. Gonsalves, Director, IIT Mandi (5th and 6th in the first row from left to right), with other VCs at the Vice Chancellors Interaction Conclave

The event drew to a close with a round table discussion on the future courses of action, moderated by Mr. Thakur. A direct outcome of this discussion was the decision taken by all participants to create a consortium of private and public institutions in HP and J&K. The conclave ended with a vote of thanks from IIT Mandi to all participating institutions. The conclave was attended by a large number of institutions from HP and J&K represented by their VCs or Directors. The participants included: IIT Mandi; Kashmir University, Srinagar; ICFAI Group Universities, Baddi; APG University, Shimla; NIT, Hamirpur; Islamic University of Science and Technology, Pulwana; Indian Education Centre University, Baddi; Indus International University, Una; Eternal University, Baru Sahib; Himachal Pradesh Technical University, Hamirpur; Jaypee University of Information Technology, Wakna Ghat; Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, Jammu; Sri Sai University, Palampur; Mahraja Agrasen University, Solan; Shoolini University, Solan; Central University of Kashmir, Srinagar; Career Point University, Hamirpur; Baddi University of Emerging Sciences & Technology, Baddi; and, Central University of Jammu, Jammu.

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