

Press Release

Himalayan Startup Trek 2018



IIT Mandi Catalyst, the first Technology Business Incubator (TBI) in the state of Himachal Pradesh, inaugurated its annual flagship event **“Himalayan Startup Trek (HST)”** on April 28th, 2018 at its scenic campus at Kamand. The HST 2018 aims to bring together stakeholders of Indian startup ecosystem. The major focus of this year’s event is towards enabling face-to-face contact between startups and investors, and even those who are still idealising their startup plans with the right mentors.

The HST 2018 event was kicked-off with the lighting of the lamp amidst a gathering of more than 100 people from different industries and startups. The program started with an address from Prof. Timothy A. Gonsalves, Director, IIT Mandi. In his speech, Prof. Gonsalves welcomed all the guest and quoted Mahatma Gandhi that “the customer is king and he is the whole reason for our existence.” Prof. Gonsalves thanked Mr. H. K. Mittal (Adviser, Member Secretary, National Science & Technology Entrepreneurship Development Board, DST (GoI)) and DST for their contribution to IIT Mandi Catalyst and in helping organize the 2018 HST.



Figure 1. Mr. Sonam Wangchuk being felicitated at HST 2018 by Prof. Timothy A. Gonsalves, Director, IIT Mandi and Dr. Prem Felix Siril, Dean (Sponsored Research and Industrial Consultancy)

Prof. Gonsalves also compared IIT Mandi to a startup and how the Institute had been converted to a world class Institute with the “IIT tag,” where thousands of students were getting employed in companies like Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and Flipkart. He stressed that the research that is being done in IIT Mandi is comparable to research anywhere in the world. He also mentioned that IIT Mandi’s USP was the embedding of the Institute in the local society and its problems.

The Director's speech was followed by the keynote address by Mr. Hemant Kanakia, entrepreneur, startup investor, and advisor to young entrepreneurs. Mr. Kanakia in his address stressed on the question, "to be or not to be an entrepreneur." The talk mainly focused on how to be a successful entrepreneur. He mentioned that the distinction between product and service companies is a thin line. He said that by his experience, a startup's focus should be based on new technologies.



Figure 2. Mr. H. K. Mittal, Adviser, Member Secretary, National Science & Technology Entrepreneurship Development Board, DST (GoI), speaking on HST 2018

Mr. Kanakia's address was followed-up by a special address by Mr. H.K. Mittal. Mr. Mittal mentioned that knowledge is important but action is more important. "You can have all the knowledge but if you don't act than it is useless," he said. He also mentioned that using simple technology and innovative thinking process one can make a lot difference. He urged entrepreneurs to not promote their startups for a particular state or country, but as trying to solve the problem of 6 billion people in the world. He said that India is the biggest test market and if one's model is successful here, it would be successful anywhere in the world.



Figure 3. A house-full gathering at the HST 2018 inaugural

The limelight of the inaugural event was the keynote address by Mr. Sonam Wangchuk, awardee of Global Award for Sustainable Architecture. In his keynote address, Mr. Wangchuk mentioned the need to change the way students are picked for top Institutes like the IITs. Mr. Wangchuk gave the example of Ladakh (Kashmir), where till 1990's only 5% of students could clear the high-school exam. Due to his efforts over the past 20-years, the proportion of students clearing the high-school exam has increased from 5% in 1996 to 75% in 2016. Mr. Wangchuk gave several examples of solar-powered building innovations in dessert areas of Ladakh, where these mud-buildings were able to keep +15 degree centigrade temperature without heating when the outside temperature was -15 degree centigrade. Mr. Wangchuk also spoke about the "ice-stupa" and how it could help alleviate the problem of water scarcity in dessert area like Ladakh.

In this year's HST, 30-35 startups participated and met over 35 speakers/investors. Also, one-to-one mentoring sessions were held at the event. IIT Mandi Catalyst has become the flag bearer of developing startup ecosystem in the nascent Himalayan region. Since its launch in May 2016, Catalyst has evaluated over 150-200 business plans, supported 15-20 startups, and committed INR 35-40 Lakhs in grants/investments to these startups. The incubator is currently mentoring ten entrepreneurial initiatives across a wide set of domains including healthcare, education, agrotech, road-safety, natural disasters, and clean energy. Two startups, 4Play and Medsamaan also won Annual Entrepreneurship Award from HP state government.

Supported by Department of Science and Technology (GoI) and HP State Government, Catalyst aims to enrich the startup ecosystem in the state and beyond. With Indian Government's recent 'Make in India' and 'Startup India' initiatives, startups have witnessed a boom throughout the country. The HST 2018 is an attempt to make sure that Himalayan region is no exception to it. This event brings together entrepreneurs, ideas, startups, investors, mentors, government bodies and enthusiasts interested in the startup scene in the hill state of Himachal Pradesh.

HST 2018 has received Gold sponsorship from Google India and the Himachal Pradesh Centre for Entrepreneurship Development. However, the event provides an open opportunity for other sponsors to join hands and become a part of this initiative.

Important links:

- Link to speeches and photographs on HST 2018 event: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/7bpwlkozlab7ifi/AABVp3gh0c3vodnGMDt7DQVka?dl=0>
- HST 2018 event website: www.iitmandi.ac.in/Catalyst/HST
- IIT Mandi Catalyst page: www.iitmandicatalyst.in
- Message from Board of Catalyst: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p014QnkbcZM>
- Message from Startup Teams of Catalyst: <https://youtu.be/RndXrW-Sifg>
- Some highlights of HST 2017: <https://goo.gl/vhNXqH>

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