

Independence Day, 15th August 2018

Timothy A. Gonsalves
Director, IIT Mandi

Today, we are commemorating 71 years of Independence. Our forefathers earned our freedom from foreign rule. Do we today deserve this freedom?

Independence on 15th August 1947 was in one sense the lack of foreign rule – this is a negative view. A positive view is Independence as self-rule. This implies taking responsibility for the state of our Nation, for improving the state of our Nation, taking responsibility for the failings of our Nation. If this seems a gargantuan task for most of us, make a start by taking responsibility for your IIT Mandi! When we were part of the British Empire, we had the best universities in the world – Oxford and Cambridge – with no effort on our part! After Independence, we no longer have the best universities in the world. However, we do aspire to have the best, and the IITs including our own IIT Mandi have the potential to get there.

Recently, we have witnessed firsthand Nature's fury, and suffered to a limited extent. I'm proud that the IIT Mandi community rose to the occasion. Last week, at 6 am, a very large eucalyptus tree fell on the A3 building. Within minutes, the building was cordoned off, and soon thereafter, tree-cutters were on the job. By mid-morning, only the massive trunk remained solidly lodged against the balcony. They worked until midnight and continued the effort the next morning. Meanwhile, students, faculty and staff quietly went about their work and studies cooperatively putting up with the inconvenience.

Around lunchtime, the trunk was gently lowered to the ground, without any further damage to the building or any injuries. This remarkable response to a potential disaster was due to teamwork of the Construction Wing, under Mr. Sunil Kapoor, the Security Section, under Mr. Hardeep Singh, the Horticulture section, under Mr. Munna Kumar, Dr. B. Viswanath and Ms. Lishma Anand, and the Housekeeping section. They were assisted by NBCC, and especially by all the cooperative, understanding IIT community.

This incident is also an indication of the care taken in design and construction of buildings at IIT Mandi. Despite the massive weight of the tree and the great force with which it hit the building, the structure survived unscathed. Only the roof and balcony railing were damaged and will soon be replaced.

On Sunday night, Himachal was battered by unprecedented monsoon fury. Fortunately, our campus was barely affected, though the surrounding areas witnessed landslides, flooding, and tragic loss of life. Surely, a rude welcome to the 200 new PG students who had come looking for their future in Kamand.

Yesterday evening, while chatting with these students during their Orientation, I was struck by how cheerful and optimistic they are. Without any complaints, they praised the setting and facilities of IIT Mandi, they exuded confidence in their future at IIT Mandi, they shared their dreams of changing India in various ways.

Much of the North Campus form a muddy, unsightly construction zone. Two weeks ago, the entire 1st BTech batch spent their Saturday morning planting 350 saplings in the North Campus. In years and indeed decades to come, the IIT Community and the birds will appreciate the beauty and shade that result from this initiative.

There are many, many more such incidents I could narrate. Suffice it to say that it is the positive-minded, dedicated, hard-working IIT Mandi community that has built IIT Mandi from a greenfield in 2010 to a widely-respected centre of academic endeavours in barely 8 years. It is this attitude that will keep IIT Mandi *Scaling the Heights*, that will preserve our cherished Independent India.

I wish you a happy Independence Day and a fruitful struggle to preserve and deserve our Independence!