

BY VENU PALAPARTHI ('87B3A7)

BITSCONNECT: OH WHAT A PARTY!

BITSCONNECT'S first initiative, the gigabit Ethernet network called 'Neuron,' was launched by Dr. KK Birla in an impressive ceremony on March 20, 2004. Using a laptop that was equipped with a wireless card, Dr. KK Birla triggered the curtain raiser which marked the launch of the project.

The auditorium was packed with students, alumni, faculty, and non-BITSian donors, and other key participants in the \$1.5 million BITSCONNECT Neuron project. Media was present in full force – there were reporters that covered both technology and education.

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Himabindhu and Anu Hasan welcomed the guests and introduced the speakers. Dr. KK Birla reminisced about how Shri GD Birla started the school decades ago. He was proud to be presiding over a college who had produced outstanding leaders, and whose admissions process could not be influenced. Smt. Indira Gandhi once recommended some students for admission to BITS. Dr. KK Birla declined politely. A curious Smt. Gandhi asked Dr KK Birla why BITS was so special and surely they could admit a couple of candidates who came with the requisite recommendations. Dr Birla said he would have no problems. But strings were attached. BITS would have to go public with this new method of gaining admission into BITS and Smt. Gandhi would have to own the responsibility of going through the 5,000 applications that came accompanied with recommendations. Smt Gandhi quickly saw his point. There was simply no alternative to pure merit. This particular story was carried by several newspapers the next day.

The excitement among students was palpable. They had been reading newspaper reports comparing their network with the best in the world. They showed off their own technical prowess with a very impressive curtain raiser – a presentation of the type that India has never seen before.

Satish Gupta, Founder of Cradle Technologies, spoke on behalf of the alumni. He announced that BITSCONNECT was not a one-off affair, and introduced the concept of BITSCONNECT representing a movement. This movement would provide BITS with infrastructure that is unparalleled anywhere in the world. Something has to be said about Satish's quick wit. At the press conference the previous day, a reporter asked about Dr. Murali Manohar Joshi's plan to have government clear all alumni contributions. In that context, the reporter asked "what role did the government play in the BITSCONNECT Neuron project" to which Satish's response was "the government had an important role – they just stayed out of our way."

The President of the Students Union, Vinay Babu thanked the Chief Guest and the alumni for everything. He invited us to a music night that evening on behalf of the Music Club. Two things stood out about this President who took over from his illustrious predecessor, Aditi Pany, the first ever woman president of BITS. Firstly, Vinay came dressed looking very sharp in a bespoke suit. Gone are the days when borrowed suits were the order of the day. Secondly, someone whispered that he was an A8-A7 dual! Electronics and Instrumentation and Computer Science. I know of only one other President with such impressive academic credentials! Our very own honorable President Abdul Kalam who would have been impressed had he showed up.



That afternoon, Mario Mazzola (photo) delivered the key note speech. It was his first trip to Pilani. Mukul Chawla mentioned how the project team had to come up with ideas to deal with the intense Pilani heat that threatened to melt the equipment and the dust which was quickly clogging the ports. The Cisco and Wipro teams deserve our thanks for all the efforts in rolling the project out.

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clubbers as they practiced the previous night. She was impressed. But if the practice session was impressive, the actual music night was simply phenomenal or 'mindblowing' as they say in BITSian lingo. The Music Club's rendition of AR Rehman's Vande Mataram was better than the original and I am sure AR Rehman would have readily agreed if he listened to it.

Back when I was in BITS, students rushed to the well and danced until they were driven out or daylight broke. All in good spirits! But the present day



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The music night was a blast. Anu Hasan, a veteran of the Music Club from 1988-1993 sang with the music

students are better behaved – or do I sense that they are subject to more restrictions. Alumni didn't bother to check what the rules were. They were out there dancing. One alum went on stage and started singing. Quick observation: BITSians no longer hurl tomatoes. And they truly respect their alumni!

Two alums announced a reward of Rs. 50K to the Music Club. Just like that! I am sure a lot of ex-music clubbers are thinking “Daaaamn! Where were these rich blokes when I was on campus?” |