BY DEEPAK SHARMA ('91A1)

OF HUDDLES, CUDDLES & THE NEURON NETWORK

It is around 12.30a.m. On

Vinod replied emphatically, "

instantly able to get together, unite and share passion, jokes, and work with each other easily! All of us were working in a virtual team over email and phone for the past one-year to set up NEURON, BITS' gigabit Ethernet backbone, and today was a day to celebrate and take a breather before the team launched on more ambitious projects for the future! This is truly being connected by BITSConnect – the ability to bring together people from different walks, generations and locations together to create something that will further the cause of students and ultimately India in the world!

My mind raced back to September 2003. I was pulled in by Mukul to attend the weekly conference call for BITSConnect project of wiring up the campus. In the very first call, I was amazed by what had been achieved by the group –and the passion in the folks was unbelievable. Here were folks who were devoting their precious personal time and working odd hours and up at all times to get a pro bono job done. It was a great ride for me as I got involved with the marketing/branding team and we started preparing our messaging, content and co-ordination work with the PR agency. It meant phone calls at midnight – sometimes midnight in US and sometimes midnight in India! There were folks like Karthik who arranged all the logistics for

March20, 2004 and the ANC at BITS Pilani is in full swing with students jostling at the counter – "Ek maggi, do sam chat, 4 chai", " Teen coffee, 2 chips, char samosa", " Hey Ramesh idhar aa re yaar – I can't lift all this myself", the constant chatter of "laccha" – Intellectual talks ranging from solving electro-magnetic problems to how to date Kareena Kapoor, a few clouds of smoke in a dark corner and a group that was able to get late night permission for the girls sitting proudly at the center!.

Amidst all this there was another group of folks that were sitting around in a circle and sharing old 'n' new jokes. "So how do you define a huddle vs. a cuddle?" asked Vikram and

Arre bhai what we saw was not a huddle it was definitely a cuddle – anything more than 30 seconds is automatically in the cuddle category!" The whole group roared in laughter.

So what was different about this group. For starters nobody was a current student. The group consisted of alums ranging from 1960s all the way to 2000! Second, behind the joviality were strong, smart determined men & women who had come together based on their passion for BITS Pilani and had made NEURON – Interconnecting Minds –a reality on campus today!

Last but not the least – most of these folks had not met each other till today and yet were

Cover Story

the two-day event at BITS Pilani including transportation logistics and he was not able to make the trip!! It amazed me to see what technology, passion and single purpose determination can achieve! The list of people was endless, connecting 100 people around the world. And even when the time came for media campaign it just took one phone call and/or email to get a yes from the concerned alum to volunteer to do something. Many of them made the memorable trip to Pilani just for this purpose!!

Lastly it was very heartening to see NEURON (The gigabit

(NEURON) for web connectivity –downloading music, running radio stations and doing online coursework today (Although it did take some students 15 minutes to find the course online, a bit like the 15 minutes it takes to find the class we never attended except to show up for the exam)!

The network is already transforming the way education is imparted at BITS Pilani and also inspiring students to think "outside the box" for business models revolving around using the network both for research and commercial purposes. In my mind this is the new face of

changing and at their freedom to connect to the rest of the world.

The two days at Pilani went by in a fleeting second. We hardly slept, staying up till 4a.m. every night and also managed to recreate our classroom bunking days by ducking out of a few conference lectures to have shikanji in sky and get some feedback from the 'real' students present in sky!? . We did the early morning visits to the temple and had dinner in the RB mess (yes now it is RB since Malviya has been handed over to the better sex!). The evening was filled with trips to C'Not and then sessions of coffee/chai at the ANC.

As the car drove out of the guesthouse, I looked back one more time and promised to be back next year for the next project. This was truly a remarkable project. BITSConnect had cut across batches, industry, faculty, students, geographies, time zones and created an unbreakable bond. The end goal for all is to put BITS Pilani on the world map for its education, diversity and global leadership. So behind the huddles 'n' cuddles jokes lies the absolute faith,

network project) in action at Pilani. As we walked down memory lane with Nagarji's shikanji in hand we walked into several rooms, it was a startling sight to see brand new PCs sitting on old wooden desks! It was very exciting to see students using the Ethernet network

BITS Pilani – changed yet unchanged. While the hostel room is the same and the serenity plus peace at the temple is the same and one can still get Pappu's coffee at Sky, there is now a PC in almost every room at BITS Pilani, students are excited that the world is

determination and rock solid dedication that will not accept anything less than total success!

Deepak is an engineer at Cypress Semiconductor in the Bay Area ¦

MEDIA COVERAGE