

BITS

ECHO



PILANI | DUBAI | GOA | HYDERABAD

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An indefinite journey of
BITS PILANI
ENTREPRENEURS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MESSAGES	01
COVER STORY	02
BEACONS OF INSPIRATION	05
ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT	08
BOOK LAUNCH	14
ALUMNI SPEAK	15

Disclaimer : The information contained in this publication is sourced from alumni and reflects their views and opinions, and not of the institute





Dear BITSians,

On behalf of the entire BITS Pilani family, I wish you and your loved ones a very happy and joyous 2021; may health and prosperity be with you throughout the year. We are grateful to you for investing your time, talents and resources in the Institute during the past year, a year that we spent in extraordinary circumstances.

In this new year of 2021, I urge each of you to recommit to your alma mater, show your bonding and pride by supporting any of the initiatives the Institute has undertaken. With your continued patronage over 2021 and beyond, let's go on building the best BITS Pilani ever, together. Cheers!

Souvik Bhattacharyya
Vice - Chancellor, BITS Pilani



Dear BITSians,

The COVID normal world is expected to be very volatile, uncertain and complex. We are, however, well-prepared to face the challenges of life head on and have a more successful future globally. Having lived in the Pilani campus from 1975 to 1980 and being together for 5 years in a place away from the chaos and noise of the city, we all formed a close bond of camaraderie that would last forever. I am sure the other three campuses too share such unique things that strengthen and maintain the bonding and relationship among us. In the working world we seem to find numerous opportunities in every limitation we come across. Being confident, collaborative, challenging status quos, improving the processes constantly, celebrating success, committing to make things happen and good communication are certain things that one must follow.

Maintaining balance between work and family leads to happiness we all seek. While taking care of the business nuts & bolts, make connections that lead to collaboration; we must socialise outside of the business setting and always keep lines of communication open.

Smarajit Dey
BITSAA, Australia



Greetings to the readers!

When I see our BITSAA Hyderabad Chapter Alumni driving down, taking the time off their work, to lend their expertise to our campus students, I reminisce a famous story of similar commitment and investment in time. In the 1940's the Nobel Laureate Astrophysicist Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar used to drive back and forth, 150 miles, between Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin and University of Chicago, week after week to teach a class of two. It proved worthwhile: The two students won Nobel prize even before him!

It is natural that a 56-year-old flourishing university will have alumni transcending generations, with solid accomplishments in a wide range of fields; however, what is unique is their passion, fond memories of the humble origins of their career at BITS, and the urge to contribute to its growth. Our Alumni with their real world insights can serve as an eye for BITS's future and I wonder at the enormous possibilities.

Prof. Meenakshi Viswanathan
Associate Dean : Alumni Relations
BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus



Dear BITSians,

With every passing day of this unprecedented event, the struggle for survival and the hope of mankind to emerge as a winner is becoming dominant, especially with the delivery of the vaccine. In the past 10 months, the entire BITS alumni community has showcased tremendous camaraderie in supporting each other through whatever was possible. I express my deepest gratitude and sincere appreciation to the entire alumni community and BITSAA team for joining hands towards the noble cause of helping the needy daily wagers and other essential staff, whose livelihoods have been seriously impacted due to lockdowns and empty campuses. Of course, I personally have missed the alumni "pilgrimage" in Pilani campus, which usually peaks-up from October - February on the occasions of Silver, Coral, Golden Jubilee celebrations of different batches, every year. We hope and look forward to welcoming you all in the coming year. It appears that the year 2021 will mark a new beginning in everyone's life

that will fade down all dark clouds of unhappiness and emotional stress, and will fill new energies to restore our Natural Charisma. As rightly said by Mark Twain that "The best way to cheer yourself up is to try to cheer somebody else up", let us vow together that we will continue to inspire and cheer others, and keep our heads high.

This 14th issue of BITS Echo celebrates the success stories of BITSian start-ups. I hope you all enjoy reading it. I wish you all a Happy and Healthy New Year, 2021.

Prof. Rajeev Sahuja
Associate Dean : Alumni Relations
BITS Pilani, Pilani Campus

An Indefinite Journey of **Cover Story** BITS Entrepreneurs

Journey from the Hostel Dorms to Million Dollar Startup

What's common between Swiggy, RedBus and GreyOrange? They all started their journey from the hostel rooms of BITS Pilani. The legacy of campus startups is now taking the new heights. Pixxel, Nexstem, PepperContent, ElixAR Systems are the new players in the game. They are making big noise and have already made their presence felt in the world of startups. For BITSians, Hostel Dorm is not just a place where they live, study and have fun. This is where they Dream Big, Create Big and Achieve Big. This is the shrine of Knowledge, Wisdom and Courage. In the latest issue of BITS Echo, we will take you on the journey of 5 BITS Hostel Start-ups.



Blurring The Line Between Humans & Machines

Start-up Name: NexStem
Started from: Shankar Bhawan Hostel
Room no: 1163 and 1162

Siddhant Dangi (Pilani, '21) and Deepansh Goyal (Pilani, '21) are the co-founders of the start-up NexStem, which focuses on improving the relationship between the humans and the machine. Their passion to explore the human brain made them start NexStem that recently raised USD 14,000 led by BITS Spark. In conversation with the team of Echo, they share the future of AI and how it'll impact the lives of human beings.

How will Nexstem help humans perform extraordinary functions?

NexStem will build technologies that will be used in the creation of brain-actuated wheelchairs, prostheses and even communication systems for people suffering from paralysis. When integrated with the Smart Home devices, these technologies will ensure high-level security. By continuously monitoring the EEG signals, they detect activities, emotions, moods stress-levels and sleeping patterns, and help improve a person's mental health. Keeping the future needs of the humans we still keep working on technologies that improve the relationship between man and machine.

Who are your role models and how have you drawn the inspiration at every step of your start-up?



We have derived inspiration from all the amputees we met in our lives till date. However, we also drew inspiration from a TED Talk by Greg Gage and got the idea of creating the first PoC, which was a mind-controlled prosthetic arm. **We would also discuss and analyze the problems with people who are in the space.** We are truly grateful to the investors who have been a great source of mentorship for us.

How will AI impact our daily lives in the coming future?

AI will surely redefine and reshape mankind by producing computing systems that will facilitate human engagement with its environment. This new age of industrialization (Industry 4.0) is called the age of AI because of the huge impact it has created on every aspect of human life. It'll open doors to more human and environment friendly future by building a symbiotic relationship between man and machine, and will pave the way for a cleaner and a more efficient industry. Consequently, it is also going to make its way into autonomous driving, space exploration, medical research, and mining and agriculture.

Redefining The Ed-Tech Sector

Start-up Name: **Elixar (Kalam Labs)**

Started from: **Krishna Bhawan and VK Bhawan Hostels**

Room no: **1163 and 1162**



Sashakt Tripathi (Pilani, '21), Ahmad Faraaz (Pilani, '22) and Harshit Awasthi (Pilani, '22) co-founded Elixar Systems Pvt.

Ltd (now known as Kalam Labs) in 2019 from the dorm-rooms of BITS Pilani. It is a virtual science playground that aims to nurture the scientific curiosity of young children. They have been declared as the Top-International Ed-Tech Innovators by Finland Education Ministry and have been felicitated by Dept. of Science & Technology as the Top Indian Undergraduate Startup.

What is the key innovation that Elixar - Kalam Lab focuses on in making educational experiences more valuable?

At Kalam Labs we ensure that the scientific curiosity of a child never dies, and they develop a strong sense of scientific exploration which stays forever. This made us work on Kalam Labs. Experiential learning is gaining considerable attention these days.

How excited are you for the future of Elixar with the apps and online programs already making an impact?

Active-experiential learning is the next-step for education. Currently the market is saturated with online videos and live sessions, which expect a student to just sit and listen to a teacher. This kills the sense of exploration and original thinking of the students. Its only about time that solutions like Kalam Labs evolves and disrupts the billion-dollar ed-tech market.

How Elixar will bring about a revolutionary change in the educational system in India?

Kalam Labs will make education an exploration from the current memorization. We'll do that through realistic 3-D visualization of science concepts with the help of Augmented Reality and Live Scientist Interactions in our virtual science playground.

We have 300+ paying customers, \$1500 MRR, and a plan to reach 10 million customers through partnerships with Reliance-Jio, Govt. Education Body and Sri Aurobindo Society. For executing this task, we are raising a seed-stage round of \$1.2 million USD and apart from the VC firms, even the BITSian alumni are supporting us.

The Destination Of Content

Start-up Name: **Pepper Content**

Started from: **Gandhi Bhawan Hostel**

Room no: **3108**



Anirudh Singla (Pilani, '20) and Rishabh Shekhar (Pilani, '20) are the co-founders of Pepper Content which works with talented writers to curate the content for various organizations. Led by Lightspeed, recently the start-up raised \$4.2 million as Series A funding. Here Anirudh talks about the future of content market in the coming times and how it maintains the authenticity of the content.

Having the ability to write well and being contextually appropriate are two different aspects of content creation. How do you achieve a balance between them at Pepper Content?

We have created customized templates and brief structures that encapsulate all data points in a brief to enable the creator to create high-quality content, and align it on thorough context. We also have a very strong screening process at Pepper for people who become a creator. We have proficiency and language tests that a creator has to undergo.

How do you address issues such as confidentiality, plagiarism, and authenticity?

We have a network of reviewers who evaluate the content for plagiarism through software that tracks originality and authenticity. Regarding confidentiality, we have tight contracts with creators and customers alike and ensure the IP of content rests with the customers only.

How would you like to expand the scope of Pepper Content?

We would be scaling up Pepper Content across different content categories like- Graphic Design, Video, and Audio. We are also planning for international expansion - especially across Southeast Asia and eventually the US and European markets.

PIXXEL A Space Odyssey

Mutual love for space and satellites led Kshitij Khandelwal (Pilani, '19) and Awaiz Ahmed (Pilani, '19) to start Pixxel, creating India's first constellation of microsattellites in the LEO. They are all set to launch their first satellite in 2021.

For the cause of humanity, you have successfully launched yourself on a challenging path. How has your journey been with Pixxel so far?

Our journey with Pixxel is all about fun and learning. After going around the space HQ in Los Angeles, we realized what we wanted to do. Upon returning, we worked on the combination of satellite imagery and artificial intelligence to solve the problems like illegal mining, air pollution, and crop diseases.

We decided to build our own satellite to provide global imagery daily, while also working on the quality of data sets it could provide. Our initial investment helped us build our first satellite, which will be launched in a few months.

The process of conceptualizing an affordable and advanced imaging satellite requires you to study various aspects of it. How did BITS support you in realizing your dream?

BITS enabled us to meet and interact with people who were smart in their own fields. The first experience was working with Team Anant, a BITS Pilani students' official Nano Satellite team, where we learned how to build small satellites and the hardware that would work in



space. Another experience was at Hyperloop India- a cross-campus BITSian team. These experiences gave us the confidence and the skills to start our journey with Pixxel. The flexibility provided at BITS in its educational system helped us in taking out time for the things we love doing.

You could have worked with NASA or ISRO. Why did you plan on opening your own space start-up?

The desire to do something of our own at a much faster pace and more innovatively and efficiently made us grab the opportunity and go ahead with it. This couldn't have been possible either at NASA or ISRO.

Making a Workplace For The Freelancers

Start-up Name: Lancify

Started from: B Block Hostel, BITS Pilani (Dubai)

Room no: 315 & 215

Azan Barodawala (Dubai, '18) and Gowtham Sundaresan (Dubai, '18) are the co-founders of Lancify, which teaches the youngsters new age skills. The duo aim to build the world's strongest young workforce normalizing the concept of Student Freelancers. Recently, they raised \$300K for their start-up from Techstars, Under 25 and group of NHIs.



What is the future of young freelancers?

The Future is young freelancers. Workforce is in the midst of a drastic change where trained young freelancers will form at-least 50% of the workforce. Skillsets required are changing rapidly. With digitalization tapping into conventional businesses, we will see a boom similar to the one in coding in other skill areas. With the world becoming global village, workforce will be more remote that will open up immense potential for employers to tap into. For this to achieve, we need to create young workforce that is trained in new age skillsets.

How do you plan on expanding Lancify globally?

Lancify is going after global markets. We plan to hit first the offshore market by early 2022 by scaling one market at a time. Currently Lancify is creating the playbook to be replicated in different markets.

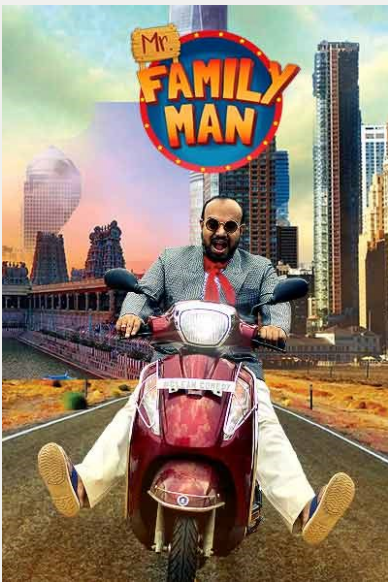
Please share with us what your life on BITS Pilani, Dubai campus, was like.

BITS was the place where I was introduced to entrepreneurship. University gave me the opportunity to connect with people from all the places. It's here where I met my co-founder Gowtham. We were exposed to global market like Dubai at the very beginning of our start-up journey that has really helped us.

The Family Man of Comedy

The Story of most celebrated name in Tamil Comedy

After working as a Senior Marketing Specialist for 7 years, **Praveen Kumar (Pilani, '02)** decided to pursue his passion of being a stand-up comedian in 2009. He has done 1400 shows globally and his clean humour is what makes him stand out in the crowd. He received global appreciation for his show, Mr. Family Man on Amazon Prime.



Tell us about college days at BITS? Were you humorous even back then?

Funnily enough, everything started in BITS. I got on stage for the first time for comedy at BITS. I was part of the Mime club and did about 45 mimes in 4 years that included the mimes in my hostel. The feeling of making strangers laugh was very surreal. During Oasis and Apogee inaus, performing for about 1500 pax was one of the best experiences of my BITSian life. Most of my time at BITS flew away doing mimes only, imagine how I would have done

in my acads. Hahaha!

What was the inspiration behind shifting from a corporate job to pursuing your passion of being a stand-up comedian?

I started doing stand-up comedy in 2009, and for the first 5 years I was juggling between work, comedy and family. Managing all three was very difficult. Things changed when I started getting regular shows and hence regular income. After evaluating the income made from comedy shows for a year and being confident that I could sustain my family with that, I quit my job. Life will be bliss when passion becomes your profession. It's one life, it's always good to do what we like.

People loved your Mr. Family Man on Amazon Prime. How does it feel to be one of the most sought after comedians in India?

Mr. Family Man is very close to my heart as all the stories in that show were true and very personal. I wanted to tell the world about the most underrated person of the family, the Family Man. I wanted to tell the world that he is a superhero who takes up all the responsibilities and does tons of things to make his family happy. Being a relatable topic, it was loved by everyone and got wonderful feed-



back. I don't know if I am one of the most sought after comedians or not, but I am happy that I took my passion for making others laugh as my profession too.

How do you plan to make your presence felt among your non-Tamil speaking fans?

Excellent question! I started my career by doing English stand-up, but then realized that I was more comfortable doing Tamil, and I also felt the audience also wanted me to perform in Tamil. But then, there are a few non-Tamil speaking fans who are following me from my early days. For them, I am still doing English corporate and private shows. I am also making sure that all my new Tamil shows will have English subtitles.

So many youngsters are taking up stand-up comedy as a full-time profession. What is the future of it?

Because many youngsters are taking it up, I'm sure it is going to grow exponentially. Even though it is a western concept, stand-up comedy has been localized and regionalized in India, and hence is reaching to more people than we expected when it started in 2010. I can confidently say that stand-up comedy is here to stay and will reach even more people in its exponential growth.

Story of Vyom and his band “The White Vinyl”

Life, Love and Music

Vyom Joshi (Hyderabad, '13), is an alumnus of the music club on campus and is now pursuing music full time with his band “White Vinyl”. In this piece, we had a candid conversation with him about his love for music, where it stemmed from, and how it transformed from a hobby into profession. We also explore his experience as a member of the music club, and how the induction process was important for him to hone his music skills.

How did you first get into music?

My dad was a huge music fan and some Bollywood retro was always playing at home. This piqued my interest in the art. I learnt the basics of music prior to joining Hindustani classical singing classes. As my singing improved, I gradually learnt guitar primarily to be able to accompany my singing.

What was your perception of the music club when you first joined campus?

Getting exposed to different genres of music as a child, I really wanted to get into the music club. I was in the audience for a music night and was taken away by the versatility and the skill of the musicians there. Though intimidated seeing them perform, I was also encouraged to improve myself and learn new skills.

Being completely new to singing into a mic and performing for a small audience, I failed to make it to the club during my 1st year. Taking advice from my seniors, I realized that I needed to improve my music skills. After working hard, I was finally able to get through in my second year.

What did you enjoy the most about being a member of the music club?

As a member of the music club, I got to interact, jam and perform with various people who were experts in their own fields. Having such experienced people to learn from and discuss music with, the door to different styles of music was opened. I often used to spend hours trying different techniques, recording them and getting the feedback. This helped me improve a lot. Other than learning and growing as a musician, the club also offered me various opportunities to perform on the stage.

In one of the Pearl Inaugurations where we performed ‘Hey Jude’, the entire audience sang along. It was truly exhilarating and all those experiences only helped me become more confident and made me the performer I am today.

How has the music club (and BITS in general) helped in your life post-college?

BITS culture and the system provided good deal of opportunity to explore things outside of what was taught in the classrooms. This freedom instilled in me a sense of responsibility as we chose what we had to do with our time. I could spend good deal of time in the music room working and developing my skills and craft.

I could see improvement in myself and it was a motivating factor that helped me going. On the other hand, I struggled to see a similar trend in my academics. Since I was a dualite, I had a year-long PS in Pune



which could have helped me in converting into a full-time offer any-time I wished. I started looking for gigs along with my PS work and performed around the city. That’s when I believed that I could make it in music. I knew I couldn’t do the PS work because it wasn’t meant for me. The support from family and seniors helped me make the decision of pursuing music full time. I believe that everyone is good at something or the other. One just has to recognize it and follow it with all their hearts.

Life in Pandemic, Lets Make it BIG

Lockdown Didn't Lock Us Down!

Bits and Bytes is a YouTube channel run by Ahana Ghosh (Hyderabad, '19) and Sahana Reddy (Hyderabad, '18). A result of quarantine, Bits and Bytes hosts an alumni chat show where the duo interacts with BITSians from various backgrounds. Ahana, who's currently studying in Germany, talks about the events that led them to start this YouTube chan-



What motivated you to start the YouTube channel? How did the idea come up?

The channel was a product of lockdown. I was living alone and I couldn't meet anyone. This made me discuss the idea with Sahana and hence this YouTube channel. During our college days, we envisioned things we would do for our Bon Voyage and ask slightly spicy and controversial questions.

However, things couldn't happen then. This channel seemed like a great idea to connect with our batchmates and other BITSians with whom we parted ways after graduation. We focused on asking questions that people of age groups 18 to 25 could relate to. Also, knowing how others are navigating life after graduation also sounded fun. That is how it all started.

What's the most fun interview you've done?

Talking to people is the best thing about running this YouTube channel because you get different perspectives on the same things in life.

The most fun interview would be the one with Nishant Suri. The entire team was pleasantly surprised by how relaxed he was. Also the first episode with our batchmates, Jaya and Parakh were fun to conduct.

What is the one lesson you've learned since starting the channel?

BITSAA approached us with the idea of taking it a notch higher, but things didn't work out. During the process, we realized being professional could help us in putting something like this out there. Another lesson we learnt was publicity of the channel with which we struggled. With our batchmates, it was fine but when it got bigger, a lot of time went into it that made us lose the bigger picture. That is something that could have been avoided.

Hypothetically speaking, if you could get absolutely anyone on your channel, who would it be?

I am really interested in talking to Rahul Gandhi and Elon Musk. Rahul Gandhi because I want to try to decode how he handles criticism from mainstream media, while trying to in-

crease his political foothold in the country. Elon Musk because, though his answers would be engineered, it would still be fascinating. If we were to call a BITSian, it would be Sabeer Bhatia, the co-founder of hotmail. I'm really keen on knowing what his experiences were like after he left BITS in his 1st year.

What's the best comment that you've received about the channel and which YouTube channel would you like to collaborate with?

After releasing our first episode with Samiksha, a lot of our batchmates messaged us saying that they were really happy and delighted to see their batchmates talk about things they always wanted to know. A YouTube channel that we'd like to collaborate with is a channel that does something radically different, something like dance videos and music covers. We'd integrate it with our talk show in a way that would be more entertaining.

Is there something that you wanted to do while in college that you have done afterwards?

I always liked to travel, but never had the opportunity when I was in college. Over the past two years, since I've shifted to Germany, through conferences and over the weekends, I've done that quite a bit. I go to places with unique cultures and people, places which are not so well known. Sahana and I went on a Europe tour, not just once but twice. We're both huge fans of Harry Potter, and last December, we went to Scotland where we saw the Glenfinnan Viaduct, the bridge the Hogwarts Express goes over. We checked off almost everything on our Harry Potter bucket list. These are the things you really cherish beyond your professional life and career. These things stand out through the years, and reminiscing about it brings back so many fond memories.

I would really like to thank my entire team for being a part of Bits and Bytes despite their busy schedules. A massive thanks to all the guests who took out time to chat with us on a short notice.

Whizkey Is Future Ready

1 Million Users & Counting

Harsh Hirani (Dubai, '17) is the founder of WhizKey, a start-up that builds state-of-the-art software innovation.

One of their most recent products is used by the utility firm DEWA, and consequently more than 800,000 Dubai residents. WhizKey is extensively working with the government and enterprise – where maximum impact can be driven by software innovation.

How did you come across this idea and what was the source of motivation behind WhizKey?

Positively impacting the society with technology was our primary mission, while forming the company. The motivation was to use technology to solve the challenges faced by enterprises, organizations and the government agencies. Our company, which grew by 500% in the last 3 years is now a 300-million-dollar technology, media and consultancy conglomerate. We've empowered our partners by unlocking and realizing the true power of their data and solving their existing and "future" challenges.

What is the most important thing that your company is working on right now, and how do you plan to achieve it?

Our company is involved in 3 vertical lines of businesses, i.e. Future Solutions, Future Vision and Future Prepare.

- **Future Solutions** is our largest and core business under which we build solutions to the most demanding challenges. We address these challenges with futuristic building blocks like AI, block chain and others.
- **Future Vision** is our creative and design unit and help our partners reach their customers, their own employees in creative ways. We create media, products and designs which are fresh, distinct and inspiring.
- We've started **Future Prepare** very recently. Futuristic technology is a risky investment due to which its adoption is limited. Hence, our experts assist our partners from the process of scoping, discovery, limitations and future potential.

What accomplishments are you particularly proud of?

Our products have won prestigious awards and honors such as The Dubai – The Model Center Award, Golden Bridge Awards to name a few. We are also recognized as a trusted vendor of choice, IBM global entrepreneur, winners of AngelHack.

Our products are being used by over 1 million people in Dubai through which we have saved our partners over 20 million Dirhams and over 100,000+ man hours.

How did BITS encourage you to venture into entrepreneurship?

BITS was where I had my first taste at entrepreneurship, though that idea did not reach anywhere. It was on campus that I learnt team



building, managing talents, being focused on the goal and taking the right action for achieving the desired goals. I came as a young boy, but graduated as an impact entrepreneur in the making with high passion for accomplishment using technology.

What do you think, students of our generation should learn and what suggestions would you like to give to BITSians who are interested in entrepreneurship?

The students need to adapt and grasp the emerging technologies which are in demand by the industries.

BITSians who wish to make their career in the field of entrepreneurship should be adaptable, learn, identify and research the markets that have strong investors and partners. Entrepreneurs should be realistic and should take out time for themselves, family and friends. One personal advice is to go out and enjoy. Meet new people, take a vacation and have fun because that is exactly why you're working so hard.

What do you think is the future of start-ups in the post COVID era?

Digital is the future of start-ups post COVID. Various reforms have been introduced due to the pandemic and some organizations have accepted work from home as the standard even after the pandemic. The current times have brought a generational change in the human ability to conduct themselves, businesses and propagate their ideas. This will help the start-ups become leaner by saving expenses and by investing in digitizing their products, ideas and services. The trend of work from home will create faster turnaround times and tighter global talent network economy. Such factors will support the start-ups and help smart entrepreneurs to accelerate their growth story.

Experiential Learning Goes a Long Way



Mr Raghu Rajagopal (Pilani, '90) is the VP and head of the Indian division at TTEC Digital analytics, Managing Trustee of the NGO Punarjanmam aimed to provide relief to families after natural disasters. He is the co-founder and CEO of DATRI, an initiative which set up a blood stem cell donors registry that has saved the lives of many. In this interview, he shares valuable insights regarding a start-up.

How was your experience in the field of start-up? What expectations did you have when you started and how did it turn out?

When an entrepreneur starts off a venture, he has big dreams; and in my case, I was involved with various entrepreneurial ventures. Working with these start-ups I learnt that for some, ventures turn out to be great, while for others it could be a swim against a tough ride. But, all these ventures played an important part in my growth as a professional.

According to you, what does it take to make a start-up idea successful?

Entrepreneurs have to be very passionate about what they are doing. Initially, people would question their decision because entrepreneurship is a risky field. Conviction and the power to continuously evaluate the idea become instrumental in the success of the start-up. Improvising the idea with changing times has a major role in shaping the company.

How do you think an entrepreneur goes from an idea to its actual implementation?

It is essential to understand the market that one is venturing into and evaluate ones' strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, if the product being offered in the market is relatively new, the entrepreneur should have the ability and the resources to sustain as the market might take time to get used to the product.

How did your experience at BITS help you in your startup career?

I interacted with a lot of people from diverse backgrounds at BITS. I was a part of the management team of the college festivals that was a great learning experience. It helped me develop marketing, leadership, team work, and many more skills. Being the campaign manager of that year's winning candidate of the student council, gave me the experience of pitching to people and convincing them. Life at BITS has been a great learning experience.

How do you gauge the power of entrepreneurship to do social good, like DATRI?

During the initial days of DATRI in 2019, there was no registry to help the donors and the blood cancer patient connect. Through DATRI, we've built a network of more than 4.5 lakh donors and facilitated more than 700 transplants in the last 10 years. Later, I have also started many other social initiatives, especially in the areas that were hit by natural disasters. There is no correct time to contribute to the society; whenever you wish to start, that is the correct time.

How should one adjust their thinking in this pandemic?

The pandemic has taught us to be cautious about every step, we take in order to go forward and gauge ourselves about the difficulties that we might face. We have learnt not to take everything that we have for granted.

Entrepreneurs Don't Quit



Mr Raj Kunkolienakar (Goa, '15) is the co-founder of Stoa School. He has been a part of various start-up ventures which constantly aim at creating easily accessible tech-based education platforms for those who have lost on opportunities by offering them another chance.

My love for physics and wanting to go ahead on the same path made me come to BITS. After completing internship, I realized the need to start something of my own to help others. As a student, I was part of various mentoring programs which helped the kids in their academics. Therefore, I started the entrepreneurial journey in the same line, along with a friend who worked for Teach for India. All along, I have received immense support from the BITS alumni.

As students, we are encouraged to focus on the entrepreneurship ideas that are restricted to the needs of the students. Students should, however, explore other fields and learn the technicalities and the finances that come along with building a business.

To continue on the path of entrepreneurship, it takes a lot of perseverance and the drive to maintain the belief in oneself. As individuals, we need to realize that. If a certain approach does not give the required output, instead of holding on and investing more time in it, it's better to let it go and move ahead on a different path.

Entrepreneurship isn't an easy journey. It takes considerable amount time, focus and willpower to reach the destination. So hang in there and do not quit.

Putting Theory Into Use

Aakash Gupta (Pilani, '12) is the co-founder and CTO of GreyOrange, which uses a combination of AI powered software and autonomous mobile robots to get the right product in the right hands at the right time. Starting with Team AcYut, his journey is a testament to the transformative power of grit, curiosity and passion.



How did you join Team AcYut, and what was your experience working with peers and seniors?

As a fresher, I attended a demo where the students were building robots. While checking out a robot there, I was able to theoretically, relate everything I see, but found it difficult to imagine in reality. This intrigued me to know more about things in the real world that eventually led me to Team AcYut and the Robotics lab. In other words, my 1st year was all about learning and understanding things.

What role did your education and the ecosystem in college play in your journey?

BITS Pilani is a great ecosystem where people like to work on challenging ideas. In Team AcYut, we had people who were ready to question the status quos. The environment at BITS Pilani really helps one in challenging the assumptions set in the life. People come with open minds and are ready to fulfil their dreams.

When did you have the GreyOrange Eureka! moment?

GreyOrange is an expansive project that needed money to build robots. We conducted our first workshop at IIT Bombay, and then we went on conducting various workshops across India and a few abroad as well. We started GreyOrange official after graduation and worked on various projects with different companies. Eventually, we chose our industry and since then the functioning has been very simple. This is how GreyOrange became a supply chain robotics company.

Given that the industry demands rapid innovation, how do you keep yourself and your team motivated?

GreyOrange is a combination of enterprise software, industrial hardware and supply chainers of domain. We want to build a firm where the energy and inspiration are channeled towards achieving something impactful. One should not worry too much about increments, salaries or performances.

Do you feel like your CGPA created problems in your business and technical ventures?

CGPA of a student is not the only thing considered at GreyOrange. Some people love coding and others like analytics. You should either have a good CGPA or good understanding of what you want to do and be really good at it. Be good in at least one of these things. If you still haven't found your silver bullet, concentrate on your CGPA. Gaining knowledge is important, but gaining practical knowledge along with it is even better. Don't let go off both the things at any cost.

What are the key differences you've noticed in the startup ecosystem in the last decade?

The ecosystem is very different now with a lot of support. Today, the founders who fail as a company are equally respected as the founders who are successfully running their start-ups. Whatever you're going through, you learn a lot of things, and even the experience is invaluable.

From Fiction To Fantasy Sports

Halaplay is a fantasy sports app developed by Ananya Singhal (Pilani, '13), Swapnil Saurav (Pilani, '14), Aman Kesari (Pilani, '15), and Prateek Anand (Pilani, '15) in 2017. It went live in 2018. The fantasy sports platform recently received a major investment from Nazara Technologies. Ananya, one of the co-founders talks about how it all started despite going the different ways after graduation.



Have you been an active sportsperson? How was your life at BITS Pilani campus?

Only one of the four founders was an active sportsperson, and the rest were more into computers. We were avid sports fans, but not sportspersons. We loved watching sports more than playing it ourselves.

Do you plan on venturing into sports other than cricket, football, and kabaddi?

Yes. We have plans to include other sports as well. Halaplay right now does real money rami and quiz. New sports will definitely be added in the coming times. Basketball is the next game that is most likely to be added to the platform.

How will fantasy sports change the future of the gaming industry

in India?

The world of sports has completely changed with the advent of fantasy sports. Earlier we were limited to watching only specific games that were telecast. However, with the introduction of fantasy, we've seen tournaments receiving a lot of appreciation. A lot of T20 leagues have started broadcasting tournaments in India according to the Indian sub-continent time zone. That's primarily because there's a lot of consumption. Fantasy is directly proportional to this; it's like a hand and a glove kind of relation where the fantasy promotes the leagues vice versa. Whenever you invest your money, you are bound to get interested in it and once you're interested, you want to see what's going on. Moreover, it engages the consumers for a longer period and makes them understand the game better. It's not binary for the consumer anymore.

Be Passionate About Solving Problems

Prathyush Jereddy (Hyderabad, '12) an alumnus of the first batch of Hyderabad Campus discusses the growth of Pixelvide in the E-Governance sector. He talked about the initial days of the company and his experience of starting a new venture in a college dorm.



How did Pixelvide come to be as we know it today?

We started a graphic design company in our late third year and designed posters and brochures for the annual fests, and we saw that as a potential domain to work in. We began by contacting small firms, designed brochures and built websites for them. After graduating, we developed an interest in the avenue and built a couple of social networks. When that did not turn out to be as expected, we returned to our previous venture and started building small scale

applications and dynamic websites for small businesses. After getting the chance to work with the government, the development of Pixelvide changed.

What motivated you to start Pixelvide and what thought-process led to its inception?

There were some batchmates who ventured into entrepreneurship either in their late 3rd year, early 4th year or right after graduation. Some of them could not survive long despite raising funds. We too were on the verge of shutting down before we started working with the government. We were passionate about solving problems and were striving hard to do that, irrespective of the amount of money we made

and ultimately were able to make it through the long run.

Why did you restrict your target audience to the Government of India and some big private players?

We built small applications in the finetech space after first collaborating with the Government of Hyderabad. After understanding what makes a company 'good', we made our vision and stuck to it. The large scale of problems to solve and the higher intensity of work made us work with the government. Despite earning less, the social impact our work made motivated us to keep on going, making us a government tech company.

What is the future of Pixelvide in the next 5 years? Do you plan to expand to other state governments and the central government someday?

We've been successfully solving problems in Telangana. The software that we built for them is the biggest in the state and it's not very simple to scale things up quickly.

The question isn't about expanding to the neighboring states or even the central government, what's important is to know whether the governments are willing to change their systems and ways of going about all processes. We will also work on the smart electric meters for better energy management and implementation of blockchain technology to understand and improve land management patterns in the state.

Would engaging coursework like New Venture Creation help students formulate ideas in a better manner?

Such courses provide theoretical foundation, but the best way to learn is by solving real world problems. Skills like negotiation are developed eventually.

In The Quest Of Real Learning

Akhil Singh (Goa, '10) is the co-founder of Real Learning- an AI based hand-written answer sheet evaluation system that saves a lot of time for the teachers and gives the students a remarkable insight. He also founded Cubito.in as a student and his start-up was identified as one of the most inspiring start-ups in 2013.



I am a problem-solver, the best kind. Not just because I care deeply about the problems but because I love, understand and respect the process of creating innovative and impactful solutions.

During my 3rd year in 2012, I started my entrepreneurial journey with Cubito.in, a cab sharing platform. With early graduation and seed funding from HNI in Goa, I shifted my operations to Bengaluru. Cubito.in was doing pretty well when Ola came in the scene and the entire competition was wiped out overnight. Cubito.in became a B2B model and I moved out with a positive mind that I still had a lot to learn about building a company.

After trekking through Himachal Pradesh, I set-off on my next venture, Invol.in. It was a platform that enabled news channels to engage with their viewers in real time, eliminating one-sidedness of news discussions and adding quality and perspective to debates. The platform was used by the biggest Indians news players, and Invol.in was gearing up to expand into sports, when a deal with IPL and KPL fell through. At that point, I realized that while cash was flowing in through the news channels, Invol.in didn't have the potential to be big because every news outlet started-off with their own OTT. That's when Real Learning, an AI based hand-written answer sheet evaluation system, happened. After talking to teachers and professors I have realized the time they spent on checking and evaluating data. Post pandemic, Real Learning has pivoted to Questt, a pre-launch platform with similar goal, but tackling the challenge of homework and formative assessment. This saved the teaching professionals time and generated insights for students and teachers too.

I don't know my end goal. There are so many problems in the world right now. Once I'm done with this one, I'll shift to another. Because I am a problem solver- the best you'll have!

Adapting To The Changes Is The Key To Success

Sagar Yarnalkar (Pilani, '11), is currently the CEO of DailyNinja and has a history of being a co-founder for Appspire Technologies. In this interview, he talks about his work and the hustle that comes along the path of an entrepreneur.

What is a day like in the life of an entrepreneur?

Being an entrepreneur is very taxing and hectic than a job. People management and process building are the key things. An entrepreneur wishes his team to manage everyday tasks perfectly while also focusing on the future by improving the current processes. For me, I maintain a list of things that I have to get done. Getting maximum output in less time is important. As a founder, you never run out of things to do. Moreover, time saved by being efficient helps a lot.

What are the future plans of DailyNinja?

BigBasket has always been an inspiration for DailyNinja. The backend capability built by BigBasket in the grocery e-commerce sector is unparalleled and ever since the acquisition, we have been working towards connecting the BigBasket backend to our channel at DailyNinja. The Average Order Values have doubled. DailyNinja was present in 7 cities earlier; now with BB present in more than 25 cities, we are looking forward to expanding our early morning delivery model to all the cities BB is present in.



What are your biggest learnings while managing and running startups from an early age?

I started Appspire as a single developer and software development as the only skill. Later, I thought of DailyNinja which took off really well and the focus shifted completely to it. Things fell in place and eventually it became a business which employed 500 people directly and 2000 vendors indirectly. Continuously persevering and adapting to the changes demanded by the environment is important. Being an entrepreneur gives you unlimited returns and happiness.

Customer Satisfaction Is Success

Prateek Suri (Dubai, '10) is the founder of MASER, which is an independent start-up focused on introducing low cost high quality product products in the consumer electronic market. MASER manufactures and supplies its goods in Africa as



Tell us something about Maser.

In 2014, I founded MASER as a dynamic start-up that is driven by technological innovation and to make high-quality products that are affordable and accessible to all. With the dream of becoming the global leader in affordable consumer electronic segment, MASER has a product portfolio that spans LED televisions, audio systems, washing machines and air-conditioning machines. Client satisfaction has helped MASER grow exponentially. The MASER products are sold through leading e-commerce platforms, which have proven to be popular with the value conscious consumer in the Middle East and Africa.



What aspect of your work do you find the most challenging?

People are the biggest asset of any organisation because they help the organisation realise its vision. Getting the right fit for departments was my initial challenge. Delay in recruitment generally proves to be costly because recruitment process takes time. With time, we have built a team which serves the needs of the clients.

What accomplishments are you particularly proud of?

MASER successfully expanded to the UAE in 2019 to serve the private and the public sector entities in Middle East and African countries of Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, Gambia and Malawi. In 2020, MASER received funding from UK based private finance company. MASER has registered strong sales and sustained growth even in challenging business environment.

Can you share your experience of seeing your start-up grow? What goals do you have for MASER in the future?

Seeing MASER being recognized as a global brand was extremely exciting. The journey was full of growth, successes, failures and experimentation. Our vision is to make consumer electronics reach every household. We have big plans in the pipeline where we continue to innovate and create new products. We intend to impact people’s lives positively while creating employment for the youth.

What qualities did you develop during your college life that helped you shape your future? And if given a chance, what would you do differently, with regard to your college life?

BITS Pilani was instrumental in allowing me to learn resilience and time management. The fact that time waits for no one helped me in planning. As an entrepreneur, one has to be resilient and embrace the hard times as well. Covid-19 pandemic is a great example of how businesses can change in the blink of an eye. I enjoyed my college life and made good use of my time there. I take my time as a great learning opportunity and wouldn’t have done it any other way.

What are your tips for aspiring entrepreneurs at BITS?

There is no short cut to success. You have to be adaptable and focus on offering world class services to the customer. Adapt to changes and embrace technology- that’s where the future is. Though things may get tough, keep moving forward. Also, work on corporate social responsibility by looking for ways in which you can make the world a better place to live.

The Multi-Stage Life



Vishnu Chundi (Pilani '08) is the CEO & Co-Founder of AssetVault Pvt. Ltd, multi-award winning tech-stars backed fin-tech based out of London. AssetVault is a company that provides a systematic approach to asset management by allowing customers to catalogue, protect and manage their assets digitally.

With the intention of leaving the students with a set of actionable tips on moving beyond burnout and building dynamic careers centered around doing something they love—Mr. Chundi elaborated on the pros and cons of the two most popular approaches taken by students:

The Template-Based Approach	The Leap of Faith Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing the first job based on what is popular, eg. consulting, banking, venture capital, product management. • Limited choice during campus placements and mostly driven by FOMO. • Good for people still discovering what they want to do in their life and they learn in depth about various areas. • Offers optionality, exit options and insurance policy for future leaps of faith for building skills and network. • One may reach the goal but still not be happy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires detailed planning, intrinsic motivation, and resilience. • Driven by Fear of Not Trying and challenging in the short-term but promises huge returns later in life. • Gives more time to explore ones’ chosen field if one finds their calling early in life. • One gets in-depth knowledge about their chosen field. • One reaches the happier state earlier than the Template Based Approach.

I chose the middle path, and started-off with the ‘template approach’ and only took the leap of faith once to build a better understanding of my skills and interests. It is difficult to find the calling during the early twenties because there are many paths to choose from. My research at BITS was in Quantum Cryptography and Nanotechnology. I liked working at the interface of technology, but could not see myself sitting in the lab doing research some years down the line.

I spent initial years of my career exploring and assessing diverse fields which let me build the foundation and secure the insurance policy, furthering my decision of taking leap of faith. I learnt from my mistakes and made sure to become financially stable and build courage and the tool kit pivot whenever I felt stagnant at my job. I discovered that building new things for others and myself interested me. I encourage the BITSians to break the Three-Stage Life Model and the age cohorts- full-time education leading into full-time work followed by full-time retirement. Lead a Multi-Stage life, which is far more flexible and gives you the freedom to redistribute time as a resource with overlaps in education, exploration and employment.



Learner for Life

Sarthak Sethi (Dubai, '17) has worked in IoT and software which is a Dubai based smart retail firm. For his work on various projects, Sarthak has been awarded by some of the most esteemed organizations of Dubai. He plans to build projects and solve the real world problems.

As the founder of loLetics, what were the major challenges you faced?

We started building smart unmanned retail solutions/ self-checkout systems for workplaces and commercial places. Things were going great until the pandemic hit and we had to shut down everything. Lockdown made us realise the downfall of vending machine industry because the workplaces won't run at 100% capacity.

We switched to building solutions for retail industry and developed Obilizer in 4 months. Currently, we are working with retail businesses who wish to transit into E-commerce. We are set to launch SwtichMyGadget.com, an online marketplace to buy used electronics. The most difficult decision

was to shut down our line of self-checkout systems during the pandemic, which I feel is a good decision considering the current situation of the pandemic and the new normal.

Before loLetics, you'd been working on a couple of other start-ups as well. What led to this transition?

I had worked on CruxoTrack & ThumbFi in 2018, but the reason they did not workout was because I did not work on the validation of these products. Through this experience I learnt that until and unless a product has demand in the market, or it is solving some problem for the audience, it is as good as a piece of code & research paper sitting dormant in the flash drive.

How has your time at BITS helped you in becoming an entrepreneur? And what advice would you give to your juniors?

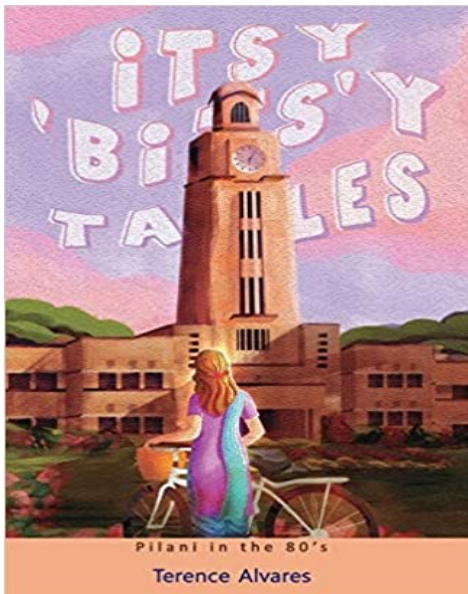
BITS provided me with facilities like the Creative Lab where we have all the tools, components & space to work on innovative projects. Here I met a lot of like-minded people and worked with them on multiple projects.

My advice to young BITSian is that if you're willing to step into the shoes of an entrepreneur, then focusing on the validation of the idea, talking to customers, studying the market is of utmost important. If you're not building something which solves the problem, then you're not building something that the customers would be willing to pay for.

Book Launch

'Itsy BITSy Tales' By Terence Alvares

About the author: Terence Alvares passed out of BITS Pilani in 1988. He worked at and set up the Birla Science Museum in Hyderabad. Over 12 years he set up seven Science Museums and parks across India. In 2000, he shifted to Australia because of which he had to switch to contact centre operations.



I started my student life at BITS in the second semester, i.e. in January 1984. I was admitted to a degree which is no longer there; a C group course called M Sc (Tech) Museum Studies. We were 59 of us in the second semester and I was the sole person doing Museum Studies. I am a Goan, born and brought up in Ajmer, Rajasthan. I

had lived a sheltered life in Ajmer. Shifting to Pilani was another world for me- living in the hostel, ragging, students from pan India with varied cultures.

I was allocated a room in the back-wing downstairs in Shankar Bhawan with 11 other students. I was a small 40 kgs, 5 feet five inches student when I joined Pilani. I befriended people who spent a lot of time in the gym, which used to be near Shankar Bhawan. Soon I was the weightlifting captain of BITS, a bodybuilder and represented Jhunjhunu district in the Rajasthan Open Powerlifting championships. I was also Security Coordinator at the 1987 Oasis, mess secretary in Rana Pratap-Ashok Mess and Security coordinator at the BITS open games. In 2012, our batch got together on a google group as we got ready for our silver jubilee meet. I published a lot of stories real and imaginary on this group and was given some great feedback by my batchmates who kept prompting me to compile a book. This book 'Itsy BITSy Tales' is a result of that prompting. I have always loved short stories. My style is spontaneous, and my imagination builds fictional stories around real-life happenstances and locations.

A Better World

Sanskriti Dawle (Goa, '16) is the CEO and co-founder of Thinkerbell Labs talks about her vision, ideas for the future, her experiences as an entrepreneur, and her time on campus.



I was in my 2nd year when I got inspired from my Digital Design class to design the flagship product- Annie. After learning how to code a Seven Segment Display, I realised that Braille bore a similarity to the segments in the display. Later I implemented this idea while designing Thinkerbell Labs' flagship product- Annie. Annie is the world's first Braille literacy device which helps the visually impaired people learn to read, write and type Braille in any medium of instruction. I felt the need of the product when I saw that the learning of the blind children was limited to teaching them elementary concepts. My desire to become an entrepreneur was fueled by New Venture Capital, one of the courses taught on campus. The support from my professors and alumni, and the start-up environment in Bangalore aided to the nascent start-up in overcoming challenges and creating a successful organisation and the product. The COVID pandemic has made the lack of predictability of the future evident. Such uncertainties also open door to new possibilities. Talking about the expansion and the future of Thinkerbell, we plan on expanding internationally to help more blind children get access to quality education. We are also looking into the possibilities of designing large scale COVID related compliances.

Alumni Speak

The One Funnel Company

Rishabh Kaul (Pilani, '11) is the co-founder of Belong.co, a start-up that helps various firms hire the 'unfindable talent'. Rishabh discusses the challenges he and his team had gone through when they decided to start Belong.co.



The deal sizes in an enterprise is a constant ongoing debate, which we also faced during the starting of Belong.co.

One side of the debate states that securing a logo is more important than the deal values. The other side states that if you already have stakeholders mapped out, it is better to strike the iron hot at the right time. This would also help in getting a starting price which will help in further expansion of the start-up.

From the perspective of a salesperson, it becomes a peek-a-boo exercise where the sales guy would like to get a sense of initial deal

value vs the effort required. After coming up with a potential account value for every account, it was observed that the deals where we met the CEO/CHRO had higher deal sizes in comparison to the overall budget. This proved to be true for mid-sized firms with less than 2500 people in India. Regardless of the multi-threading aspect, the deal size would be capped unless we involved the CEO/Founder or Site Leader.

This led to the following:

- **Sales process:** The sales checklist and the target inputs for our We wanted a sales funnel which ran through the entire company and created the process below. the stages are from the customers' perspective and stages like these puts the funnel stages in perspective. It also helps in getting better probabilities for sales conversion than just writing 'Lead to Opp'. Each stage corresponds to the directions for the salesperson to act on and after some time, we got a sense of time for each opportunity.
- **Push towards ABM:** We created account specific strategies for larger prospect accounts with engagement strategies for each persona which were tied to their budget cycles.
- **Investing in CXO relationships:** Besides helping our young sales team expand their network, we also set up a team in the CEOs office to invest in our CXO advisory team. This advisory network warrants a separate post.



“May the New Year 2021 bring New Hopes and Opportunities with promises of brighter tomorrow. May the New Year see you loving, caring, giving, and living.”



Heartfelt thanks to One and all BITSians for overwhelming support from time to time in undertaking various alumni driven initiatives. Shall look forward to fulfilling and rewarding engagement and contributions in the year 2021 to lift the institution to pinnacle heights.

Happy to see increasing interest by Alumni to go through and contribute to BITSEcho over years. The latest issue of BITS Echo with a different touch has come up with a lot of achievements of Alumni; especially in the area of entrepreneurship and innovation. I am sure you would love to go through it to cherish your memories linked to “Once BITSian, BITSian forever.”

Wishing you and your family Christmas and New Year Greetings !

Arya Kumar
Dean Alumni Relations, BITS Pilani

Special Thanks To

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MESSAGE FROM Editorial Team

New Year's greetings from BITS Pilani!

We feel happy to share with you the new issue of our alumni magazine, BITS Echo. Though 2020 was filled with a lot of uncertainties and unprecedented times, it never, for a moment, deterred the BITSian spirit that our alumnus have always carried with themselves.

In this issue of BITS Echo, we bring to you the most inspiring stories from the dorms of BITS Pilani hostels, which witnessed the prime years of the students. The theme, start-ups from hostel dorms, covers the journey of 5 student teams who with sheer determination and hard work have made a place for themselves in the world of start-ups.

In this issue, we cover the story of Bits and Bytes and YouTube channel which is a product of lockdown boredom. We also bring you to Vyom's pursuit of his passion despite having a good-paying job, and Prateek Suri's efforts in making the high gadget electrical devices for the low-income families. Furthermore, we introduce you to Akhil Singh and Sanskriti Dawle, who have designed computer-based educational tools for students and teachers. This issue also features noteworthy BITSians such as Rishabh Kaul, the co-founder of Belong.co, Sarthak Sethi, the founder of loLetics, Vishnu Chandi, CEO & Co-founder of Asset-Vault Pvt. Ltd., Sagar Yarnalkar, the CEO of DailyNinja among others. We will always be thankful to our esteemed alumni for being generous and taking time out for their alma mater and contributing to this quarterly alumni magazine.

Let's keep working to our greatest potential and keep learning along the way.

Here's wishing everyone a Happy New Year and good health.

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