Internet turns 40 with birthday party

LOS ANGELES: Technology stars, pundits, and entrepreneurs joined the Internet's father on Thursday, 29 October 2009, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of his culture-changing child.

"It's the 40th year since the infant Internet first spoke," said University of California, Los Angeles, professor Leonard Kleinrock, who headed the team that first linked computers online in 1969.

Kleinrock led an anniversary event that blended reminiscence of the Internet's past with debate about its future.

"There is going to be an ongoing controversy about where we have been and where we are going," said Arianna Huffington, co-founder of the popular news and blog website that bears her name.

"It is not just about the Internet; it is about our times. We are going to need desperately to tap into the better angels of our nature and make our lives not just about ourselves but about our communities and our world."

Huffington was on hand to discuss the power the Internet gives to grass roots organisers on a panel with Kleinrock and Social Brain Foundation director Isaac Mao.

"The Internet is a democratising element; everyone has an equivalent voice," Kleinrock said. "There is no way back at this point. We can't turn it off. The Internet Age is here."

Leonard Kleinrock never imagined Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube that day 40 years ago when his team gave birth to what is now taken for granted as the Internet.

"The net is penetrating every aspect of our lives," Kleinrock said to a room of about 200 people and an equal number watching online.

"As a teenager the Internet is behaving badly, the dark side has emerged. The question is when it grows into a young adult will it get over this period of misbehaving?"

Kleinrock referred to spam emails, online scams and malicious software spread by crooks as an unexpected dark side of the Internet.

On October 29, 1969 Kleinrock led a team that got a computer at UCLA to "talk" to one at a research institute.

Kleinrock was driven by a certainty that computers were destined to speak to each other and that the resulting network

should be as simple to use as telephones.

US telecom colossus AT&T ran lines connecting the computers for ARPANET, a project backed with money from a research arm of the US military.

A key to getting computers to exchange data was breaking digitised information into packets fired between on-demand with no wasting of time, according to Kleinrock.

Engineers began typing "LOG" to log into the distant computer, which crashed after getting the "O."

"So, the first message was 'Lo' as in 'Lo and behold'," Kleinrock recounted. "We couldn't have a better, more succinct first message."

Kleinrock's team logged in on the second try, sending digital data packets between computers on the ARPANET. Computers at two other US universities were added to the network by the end of that year.

Funding came from the US Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) established in 1958 in response to the launch of a Sputnik space flight by what was then the Soviet Union.

US leaders were in a technology race with Cold War rival Russia.

The National Science Foundation added a series of super computers to the network in the late 1980s, opening the online community to more scientists.

The Internet caught the public's attention in the form of email systems in workplaces and ignited a "dot-com" industry boom that went bust at the turn of the century.

Kleinrock, 75, sees the Internet spreading into everything.

"The next step is to move it into the real world," Kleinrock said. "The Internet will be present everywhere. I will walk into a room and it will know I am there. It will talk back to me".

Source: AFP

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