BY DILIP D'SOUZA ('76 EEE)

THIS LITTLE THING CALLED RESPECT

Dogs, biscuits, peahens and CS students who kick butt and take names. Dilip discovered it all on his trip to Pilani.

THE road from Delhi starts out fine, especially if you're looking back a quarter-century. We take the southern-most of three possible Delhi-Pilani routes, and I don't believe I've ever taken this one. (The others are Rohtak-Bhiwani-Loharu and Jhajjar-Dadri). There is, of course, the bottleneck known as Gurgaon. A phantasmagoria of spectacular buildings, each more so than the last -- was there some competition on here? – and shopping centres and roads and dust and construction and traffic like you would not believe... sure, there's all that. But to me, it's a bottleneck and no more. Sorry, Gurgaon-ites: at least as seen from the road, a more soul-less, desolate place would be hard to imagine. We crawled through it, stop and go all the way, my heart beating already only for Pilani.

Beyond Gurgaon, things are smooth and fast: two lane divided highway on which our Esteem hits take-off speed and I could have sipped a cup of hot *chai*, no problem. (Did we actually take-off?) There are other bottlenecks, by name Rewari and Narnaul and one or two more, and the highway gives way at some point to a more familiar undivided road: but it is still a far smoother ride, most of the way to Pilani, than those of us who look back a quarter-century will remember.

Question, then: why does it still take us 5.5 hours?

The Pilani feeling has been building, but it really starts gelling at a *chai* break somewhere beyond Narnaul. Venu and I stop at a *dhaba*, only to find Raj and Deepak already there, and soon enough Vinod, Vikram and Jayan show up too (the last three in shorts, no less). Something about the taste of the *chai*, the clouds of flies trying to share it with us, the crisp air: the BITS camaraderie -- even though between us, we range across four BITS decades -- is instantly triggered. To guffaws, stories are quickly flying back and forth. Along for the Pilani trip, the Economic Times journalist from Bangalore looks on, bemused. He is, of course, poor deprived guy, not a BITSian. How do you explain to an outsider about the bond that BITSians immediately feel?
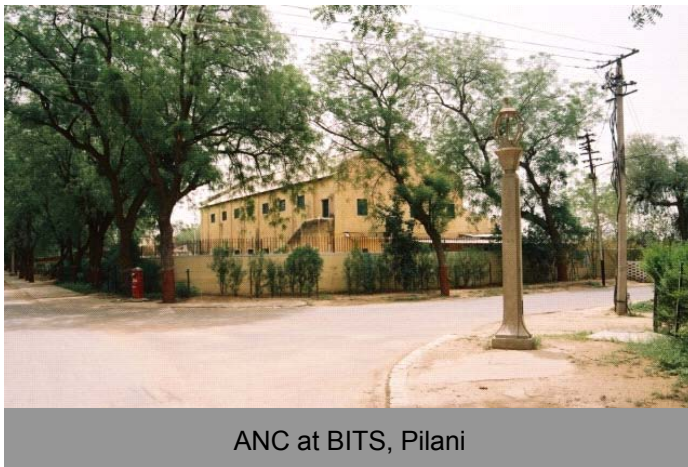
We don't. He guesses.

Venu knew my cousin Kartik at BITS, and rattles off a tale of how Kartik would stick packets of biscuits on his wingies' doors while they slept inside. Then encourage stray dogs to go for the biscuits. The yapping and door-scratching, as the mutts strove to get the treats, proved mighty disturbing to the sleeping dudes.

I listen to this story and laugh, sure, as all of us do. But it must say something about BITS -- and I mean this -- that my dominant feeling is hardly hilarity, but a healthy new respect for my doughty cousin. Dogs, biscuits and doors: what an excellent idea! Why did I never think of it?

Also courtesy Venu is a story about another response to sleeping wingies, this from one Vivek I know in Bombay. Vivek would open their doors, says Venu, and push peahens in... the probably frenetic results, Venu leaves us to imagine.

Healthy new respect for Vivek too.

It's past 8:30 when we arrive at that intensely familiar campus. We float through the gate, already on a high, and turn off immediately into the charmingly-named VFAST guest house, new since my time here. But the adrenaline is flowing, and the last thing I want to do is spend time in a room, even in this fine establishment. I want to be out there, soaking in the smells and the sights and the lights and... oh yes, the sand. So I race through a bath and change, then zoom out of my room for dinner.

ANC at BITS, Pilani

The adrenaline infects not just me: next door, Deepak is out and ready to go even faster.

Long and leisurely walk around campus later, several of us descend on the ANC, another not-in-my-time feature of BITS (a lot of those to note). This is the All Night Canteen, naturally acronym-ized to ANC, but now called just "ank". One word. It's past 11 at night, but the place is buzzing, crowds jostling for the attention of the servers. Everything from drinks to dosas.

Yet tonight, the interesting thing about the ank is not so much the number of students here, but the number of girls here. Even more, the things the girls are doing. Nothing out of the ordinary, and yet that is in itself out of the ordinary -- but so refreshingly out of the ordinary! -- for us graduates from a quarter century past. There are such a lot of girls on campus now -- close to 40 per cent, someone said? -- that they are no different from the boys. Just other students, that's all. In our time, the sheer scarcity of girls made each one an object of constant and usually unwelcome attention, subject to stares and shouts and curiosity. Now they are just around. Like everyone else. As tonight, in the ank.

In one corner, there's a huge circle of students, most of them girls, playing a game that's even led by a girl. It looks organized and intellectual; the ringleader spends a long time explaining rules and what seems like strategy. Deepak and I, parked just outside the circle and unable to hear her over the ank racket, lean in and ask what's going on. Two young ladies turn around to tell us that these are all CS students. Ah, I think, I really do, they are involved in some eclectic game that teases out some esoteric computer science funda. Wow, and late at night at the ank, what dedicated students...

... and the two young ladies say, we are playing Chinese whispers.

Gotta tell you: my respect for CS students at BITS goes through the roof.

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CNN TIME

2 Indians in CNN/Time's 25 Global Business Influentials – Both BITS, Pilani Alumni

Time Magazine and CNN recently released its list of 2004 Global Business Influentials, 25 leaders in a broad range of industries recognized for setting standards in areas like innovation, globalization and effecting change. This year's list includes 2 Indians – Vivek Paul, CEO of Wipro Technologies and Balaji Krishnamurthy, CEO of Planar Systems, both alumni of the BITS, Pilani.

Vivek Paul worked at GE and Bain & Co. and has more recently led Wipro Technologies' growth from a $150 million software developer into a $1 billion force in IT services. He has an MBA from the University of Massachusetts and a Bachelor of Engineering from BITS.

Balaji Krishnamurthy received a BS and an MS in mathematics from BITS Pilani and an MS and a Ph.D. in computer science from the University of Massachusetts. At Planar Systems he crafted a system that rewards rank-and-file employees first, before moving up the management chain founded in the belief that it induces every employee to create greater shareholder value (see this issue's Quarterly BITSian for more on this).