

# harmony celebrate age

The magazine for silver citizens

DECEMBER 2011 ₹ 30

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**THE MIGHTY PEN**  
CITIZEN JOURNALISTS  
CHANGE THEIR WORLD

**RHINO LAND**  
WILD & WONDROUS  
KAZIRANGA

THE BOMBAY BOY

**Lord  
Gulam  
Noon**



KRANTIKARI CENTENARIAN CRUSADER



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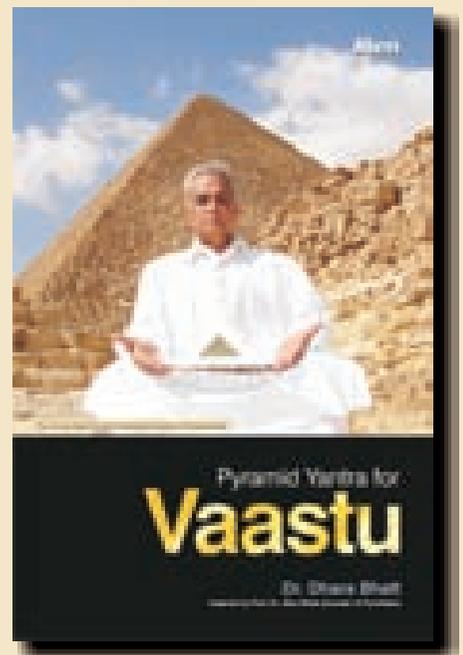
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# Tomorrow never dies

A few words can convey a wealth of meaning. The other day, I read these lines by inspirational American poet and author Maya Angelou:

*Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.*

Another year comes to a close; 12 months of love and laughter, tears and tribulations, strength and struggle... the minutiae of life that every one of us experiences, sometimes endures. No matter how the year was for you and yours, there is a familiar comfort in knowing that another year awaits for the taking; another occasion to turn the tide in your favour; another slate on which to write your destiny; another chance to stake your claim on what you wish to be yours; another opportunity—as Angelou suggests—to ‘rise’.

Indeed, for silvers in India, the coming year holds promise in the form of a new National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) to improve Version 1, which was announced in 1999. Harmony for Silvers Foundation has relentlessly advocated an overhaul of the old policy for the past seven years, including publishing a cover story in July 2004 (“Silvers and the State”) and a research monograph in January 2007 (“National Policy on Older Persons: Taking it Forward”) where we pointed out the grave lacunae in the policy and our recommendations to improve it. Now, the government has confirmed that the new NPOP, based on the findings of a special committee led by activist Dr V Mohini Giri, will soon be unveiled (see ‘Orbit’).



Suresh Matarajan

The government has indicated that the policy is packed with a range of measures, programmes and services to empower and protect silvers—economically, physically, emotionally. What’s more important, though, is that it has real teeth to back up all the good words it will undoubtedly contain. This calls for an effective framework for implementation and monitoring; we hope the government delivers.

While we watch and wait with anticipation for the NPOP, it’s time for some resolutions of our own. Ambivalence breeds apathy, which in turn leaves us in a rut, mired in the past. Shake yourself free and embrace the future. Become proactive about your life, your health, your friends and families; your neighbourhood; value your time and use it productively; recognise your potential and wield it like a weapon. Tomorrow is around the corner—it’s a new year, a new beginning, and it’s yours. Seize it.

## A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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# column one

Sometimes our past is so inextricably linked to our present by way of inheritance of legacies that time and years cease to matter. This fluidity takes us back to people and places constituting our earlier life. Take the case of Lord Gulam Noon, UK's 'Curry King'. His heightened aspirations and flights of fancy took him away from his city of dreams, Bombay, but the aromas of his childhood when he worked in the family sweetshop kept pulling at him. With family in Mumbai's suburban Bandra and a charity hospital that he established in Rajasthan, he keeps in touch with India through newspapers, television and Bollywood. Salman Khan-starrer *Dabangg* might not gel with his genteel nature, but it is his current favourite. On our cover this month, Lord Noon ("The Bombay Boy") holds forth on the learning curve, staying on the culinary shelves with his company Noon Products, and his love for cricket. Coming out unscathed from the 26/11 attack on Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, though, has made him caustic about our approach to terrorism—he believes it should be handled the American way.

It's when our beliefs turn into convictions that the process of evolution is complete. Retired journalist and freedom fighter D N Tara ("Where the Mind is Without Fear"), 101, has made the rights of his fellow *krantikari* his crusade; Kerala's P Sherfudeen's focus is to raise awareness about the Right to Information Act ("Spreading the Word"); and five other silvers ("Truth Be Told") have taken up the pen and with it the cudgels to bring change to their social and political environment. The road to your destination shines clear as soon as you cut through the confusion and make up your mind. So pave your own path!

—Meeta Bhatti

With reference to the news item "Oktoberfest" in 'Orbit' in the November issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) has indeed done a marvellous job by offering a



non-AC bus pass for ₹ 50 and AC bus-pass for ₹ 150 for senior citizens from 1 October. I suggest the Delhi Metro also follows suit. The Metro is the pride of the city—and country—and the most convenient means of transport for residents. Many commuters, especially senior citizens, who are oblivious to the comforts of the Metro, often avoid travelling by it. Such a move would help convince them of the benefits of riding the Metro. Of course, the younger generation too can help convince them.

**Mahesh Kapasi** *New Delhi*

We write to inform you that a senior citizen, Dr V Mohini Giri, recently achieved a Lifetime Achievement Award from the United Nations NGO Committee on Ageing for her lifelong dedication to the empowerment of senior citizens. In fact, Dr Giri has been at the vanguard of human rights activism for many decades. She is a former chairperson of the National Commission for Women and Chairperson of the War Widows Association. She recently served as chair of the Committee for Review of the National Policy on Older Persons; the recommendations of the committee are now being considered.

**Guild for Service** *New Delhi*

I am delighted to share a great moment with you. On 9 October 2011, we attended the release of the first-day cover and special commemorative stamp issued on the tercentenary of the Shri Chitrapur Math at Yeshwantrao Chavan Centre Auditorium in Mumbai. It was wonderful to see our 25,000-strong community be honoured, especially considering the dwindling number of Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmins. Indeed, it is essential to preserve our spiritual heritage. Another means of doing that is the Shri Parijnanashram Museum in our *math* in Shirali, Karnataka, which houses a collection of historically significant sculptures, artefacts, palm leaf records, books and literature dating from 300 BCE to 1800 BCE.

**Vanita Kumta** *Via email*

*Harmony-Celebrate Age* is unique and all its readers are indebted to you. I wish to tell you about an inspiring great-grandmother, Pennamma Pothen, who is 91 years young. The secret of her longevity is faith in the Almighty, a disciplined life, and generosity towards the poor. I am proud to be her son-in-law and have learnt some valuable lessons from her. For instance, I am 81 years old and still continuing my mutual fund distribution with dedication.

**Thomas Malayil** *Alleppey*

## ERRATA

**In the November 2011 issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, the feature on Sudha Gorthi ("Trash Craft") was written by Shyamola Khanna; and Prabhakar Jawadekar ('Speak') has delivered free medicines worth ₹ 4.5 million and not ₹ 450,000, as mentioned in the article. We regret the errors.**

— Editors

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INSIDE

P26: Lumbar lessons

P28: Mind it!

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► FACE OFF

## Sip of youth?

Actors like Jennifer Aniston (*in photograph*) and Gwyneth Paltrow are said to be lapping up the latest anti-ageing fix—quite literally. **Pure Gold Collagen**, developed by London-based Minerva Research Labs, is a liquid food supplement packed with collagen, borage (or starflower) oil, vitamins and hyaluronic acid (found in epithelial and neural tissues). According to the British edition of *Marie Claire* magazine, one 50-ml bottle a day for four to eight weeks will act on the dermis to preserve firmness and elasticity of the skin and reduce deep wrinkles from within. This could be the most expensive drink you buy though. A 10-bottle pack is priced at £ 35.99 (about ₹ 2,900). If you can stomach that, check out [www.gold-collagen.com](http://www.gold-collagen.com)



## The ice effect

The catchphrase 'diamonds are forever' has now gone on to become the baseline for a seriously successful anti-wrinkle product. The Judith Williams Luxury Diamond day cream, which broke all sales records in Britain this October, contains Diamagen—real **diamond particles that reportedly boost collagen while giving skin instant radiance.** According to a press release by creator of the cream Judith Williams, a German TV presenter and opera singer, tests have shown that the cream can reduce the depth of wrinkles by nearly 30 per

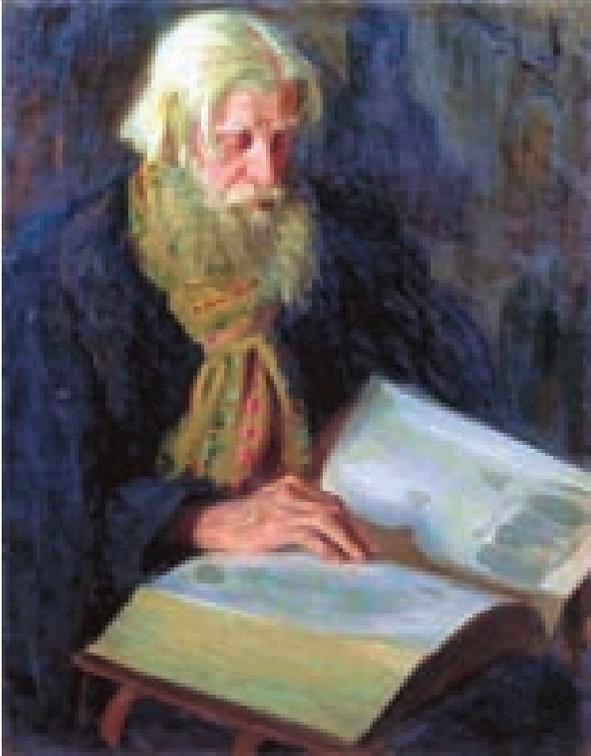
cent when used daily for a month. "It works by targeting the base of the skin's epidermis, where it stimulates and strengthens by boosting collagen and inhibiting the destruction of enzymes that guard against environmental damage," she claims. "The cream also contains anti-wrinkle peptides, or amino acids, that prevent collagen breakdown and help smooth fine lines and wrinkles." Want to slather some bling on your face? The cream costs £ 29.50 (about ₹ 2,400) for a 50-ml pot; go to [www.judith-williams.co.uk/cosmetics/luxury-diamond.html](http://www.judith-williams.co.uk/cosmetics/luxury-diamond.html) to learn more.



## MIRACLE PILL?

As claims go, this is the 'ultimate' beauty supplement—dubbed the '**extended life pill**', **Royal Green Astaxanthin** promises to fight wrinkles and improve skin elasticity, reverse premature signs of ageing, reduce the risk of skin cancer, boost the immune system, and improve joint and muscle pain. Incredibly, as London newspaper *Daily Mail* reports, there seems to be some scientific weight behind the hype. In trials, astaxanthin, which belongs to the family of carotenoids,

reduced visible signs of ultraviolet ageing within four to six weeks of use when taken in the form of an oral supplement that contains no chemicals, preservatives, synthetic sweeteners or flavour enhancers. It also worked on joint and muscle pain; users who suffered from pain reported reduced intensity of pain and improved mobility after 30 days. The price? Two months' supply of the pill will set you back £ 24.99 (about ₹ 2,000). Go to [www.royal-green.eu/en/#/home](http://www.royal-green.eu/en/#/home) if you're ready to bite.



# Dr Silver

**T**his is what you'd call a Harmony moment! In a move that recognises the potential of silvers to act as social capital, the Planning Commission of India will instruct universities across the country to make a mandatory provision for **enrolment of silvers for special PhD programmes**, aided by liberal entry norms. The move is to be implemented from 1 April 2012, when the 12th Five-Year Plan (2012 to 2017) begins. "The draft approach paper to the 12th Plan, which was approved on 22 October by the National Development Council, makes a mention about this initiative, which forms part of the commission's focus on connecting varsities with community needs," Narendra Jadhav, member of the Planning Commission, tells media. The special PhD for silvers is mentioned under the 'Education and Skill Development' section of the paper as follows: "With improvements in life expectancy, a growing pool of retired and elderly people is now available in the country. They have potential to enrich the teaching-learning experience and act as social capital for society....It is possible to tap and convert their valuable acquired expertise into useful codified knowledge through a special PhD programme facilitated by liberal entry requirements." Jadhav, who has been a prime mover of the initiative, assures it will be implemented on a national level by all universities. "The benefits are immense from the viewpoint of extending a much-needed fresh orientation to the lives of senior citizens, who are in search of constructive engagement," he adds.

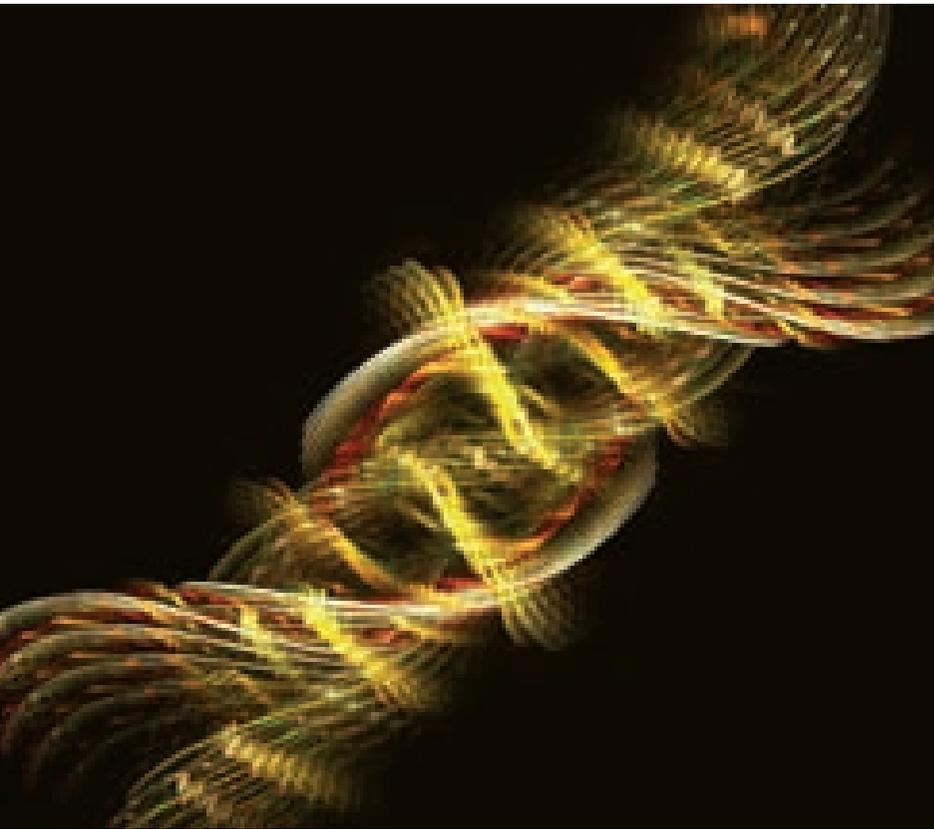
## R U OK?

**THE DELHI POLICE HAS LAUNCHED AN SMS SERVICE FOR SILVERS TO SEND THEM SAFETY TIPS AND OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION. THE PROJECT HAS BEEN STARTED ON A TRIAL BASIS IN WEST DELHI; IF SUCCESSFUL, IT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN OTHER PARTS OF THE CITY AS WELL.**

## Cell warfare

**C**an you just 'flush' out all the ageing cells from your body? The answer is apparently yes—at least if you are a mouse. Scientists at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, have figured **a way to kill all 'senescent' or age-related cells**. They have developed a drug that, when injected in genetically engineered mice, literally zaps senescent cells, thereby dramatically delaying typical symptoms of ageing like formation of cataracts in the eye; wasting away of muscle tissue; and loss of fat deposits under the skin. "We were very surprised by the profound effect," Dr Jan van Deursen, a member of the research team, tells the BBC. "I'm very optimistic that this could really have an impact on elder care and longevity. Nobody wants to live longer if the quality of life is poor. If you can prime the immune system, boost it a little bit to make sure senescent cells are removed, that might be all it needs. Or develop a drug, this time for humans, which attacks senescent cells directly!" The study is published in journal *Nature*.





## Cracking the code

To figure out whether longevity is about nature or nurture, scientists at the University of Utah are studying 100 centenarians with the help of **whole-genome sequencing**. Simply translated as deciphering a person's complete collection of DNA, the process is expected to build evidence that a particular gene (or set of genes) contributes to longevity. Study leader Dr Richard Cawthon and his team first searched for clusters of extremely long-lived family members with "excess sharing" in their DNA, as news agency The Associated Press reports. The next step will be to screen unrelated long-lived people for the same DNA variant. "We're looking for a DNA difference that may be causing the longevity trait," says Cawthon. "We believe research dollars are better spent on ageing research than individual diseases. If you completely eliminated cancer, you would only increase average life expectancy by three years. But if you slow down ageing, you attack all the diseases at once."

---

**FIRST RESORT: MAHARASHTRA HOUSING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTER SACHIN AHIR ANNOUNCED THAT THE MAHARASHTRA HOUSING AND AREA DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (MHADA) MAY BUILD A SEPARATE TOWNSHIP IN MUMBAI FOR SILVERS. WATCH THIS SPACE FOR FURTHER DETAILS.**

---

## NPOP-2

Change is in the air. In November, Union Minister for Social Justice & Social Welfare Mukul Wasnik announced to media that a **new National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP)**, incorporating a range of welfare measures and an institutional framework for effective implementation, is expected to be unveiled soon. The policy will be based on the Draft National Policy on Senior Citizens 2011, which was submitted by a committee led by social activist Dr V Mohini Giri in February 2011; it will seek to improve upon the earlier



version of the NPOP announced in 1999. Recommendations by the Giri committee include the extension of the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme to all silvers below the poverty line; enhancement of monthly pension to ₹ 1,000, to be revised at intervals to prevent deflation owing to higher cost of purchase; grant of an additional pension in case of disability and loss of adult children; taxation policies that reflect sensitivity to financial problems aggravated by high costs of medical care; the establishment of a 'Department of Senior Citizens' as the nodal agency for implementing programmes and services; and the institution of a National Commission for Senior Citizens at the Centre, with similar bodies at the state level. We can't wait.

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# Does your car fit?

**I**s your car the right size for you? The question has nothing to do with the dimensions of the vehicle or the model. It is evident that vision and mobility wane with age, making driving harder. However, what exacerbates the situation is the fact that many silvers drive cars that don't 'fit' them properly. This could be owing to something as simple as an unadjusted mirror or a low seat that prevents you from seeing properly over the steering wheel, but the implications are very serious indeed. For silvers in the US though, help is at hand in the form of **CarFit, a free 30-minute evaluation**



**programme** offered in 33 states by silver advocacy group AARP in association with the American Automobile Association and the American Occupational Therapy Association. As part of the programme, trained volunteers

examine both car and driver and make adjustments and recommendations. "We have screened over 2,000 drivers in Florida alone and found that two-thirds did not have their mirrors properly adjusted; more than half couldn't properly see over the steering wheel; and one in 13 didn't know how to adjust the wheel to fix the problem," CarFit instructor Fran Carlin-Rogers tells website [www.sun-sentinel.com](http://www.sun-sentinel.com). "Most had no clue that they weren't in synch with their cars, and that a few quick tweaks could make the difference between a safe trip and a serious collision. That's where we come in."

**ROADBLOCK: IN AN EFFORT TO CUT COSTS, THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT PLANS TO DISBAND LONG-DISTANCE COACH BUS CONCESSIONS FOR SILVERS AND THE DISABLED. FREE LOCAL BUS TRAVEL WILL REMAIN IN PLACE.**

## Health vs. hype

**I**f you think the younger generation is more 'health-conscious' than silvers, you may just have another think coming. **Workers under 30 are twice as likely to take sick days off work compared to the older generation**, according to a survey conducted in the UK by probiotic multivitamin company Multibionta. From the 3,000 adults surveyed, 85 per cent of those over the age of 55 said they would miss work only if they were bedridden, while 70 per cent of workers aged between 18 and 29 admitted they've missed work for reasons as slim as a 'hangover'. Younger workers were also more likely to eat junk food on a regular basis; eat less fruits and vegetables; drink more; work longer hours; sleep less; and more likely to smoke. Further, 86 per cent of people aged 18 to 29 complained of 'stress' at work compared to 66 per cent of older adults. "Today's fast-paced, work-hard-play-hard lifestyle appears to be taking its toll on the younger generation," Peter Morton, marketing manager, Multibionta, tells newspaper *Daily*



*Mail*. "This generation of young adults must learn how to look after themselves better from their older colleagues."

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## Indian idyll?

Retirement can be outsourced too. That's the premise of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, which follows the life of a group of British retirees living in a swank retirement home in Bengaluru. Directed by John Madden, the film features some serious silver talent, including Judi

Dench, Maggie Smith, Bill Nighy and Tom Wilkinson, as well as our very own Lillette Dubey. The film will only release in March 2012 but you can catch a sneak peek at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDY89LYxK0w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDY89LYxK0w)

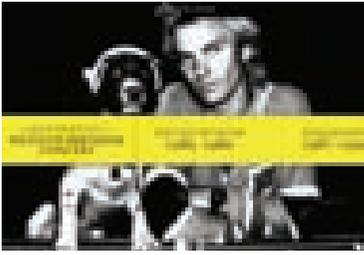
## THE UPSIDE

Stereotypes don't just mislead, they hamper progress. Nowhere is this truer than dealing with the ageing process. Recognising this fact, Australia's Age Discrimination Commissioner Susan Ryan has launched a new website, **Age Positive**, which showcases silvers living productive lives. "In Australia, as in many other western countries, ageing is viewed negatively and destructive generalisations about our abilities once we pass a certain birthday are accepted as true," Ryan tells newspaper *The Australian Age*. "The website is a way to confront these stereotypes." The site—[www.humanrights.gov.au/age-positive/index.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/age-positive/index.html)—invites Australians to send in stories and photos of positive ageing to inspire others.



"Negative stereotypes are not only causing discrimination in employment, but in an environment of skills

shortages, they are costing both businesses and the community economically," adds Ryan. "It really must stop."



## STING 25

Music legend Sting has found a delightfully innovative way to celebrate the 25th anniversary of his solo career: an 'Appumentary'. Confused? The term is jargon for an app (application) on the iPad that serves as a documentary. Sting 25 is a digital scrapbook complete with interviews, live performances and memorabilia. Highlights include footage from his 60th birthday concert this October in New York and handwritten lyrics and journal entries. The best part: it's free! Download the app at [www.apple.com/in/ipad/from-the-app-store](http://www.apple.com/in/ipad/from-the-app-store)

# Game on

What starts as fun can become serious business sometimes. Take the case of Microsoft's Kinect—intended to be a gaming device, it is now being used to monitor the health of silvers in a unique experiment by the University of Missouri and TigerPlace, an independent living community in Columbia, Missouri. The research team is using Kinect's motion-sensing technology to track behaviour and routine changes in residents; the changes they monitor can indicate increased risks for falls or early symptoms of illness. "The Kinect uses infrared light to create a depth image that produces data in the form of a silhouette, instead of a video or photograph," Marjorie Skubic, a professor of electrical and computer engineering, tells scientific website *examiner.com*. "This alleviates many seniors' concerns about privacy when traditional web camera-based monitoring systems are used. The system allows residents to maintain their independent living, while giving them a sense of comfort knowing that illness or falls can be detected early."



## HAIR TOMORROW

The good old shampoo will never be the same. A new hair-washing robot created by Japanese electronics giant Panasonic replicates the dexterous touch of a human hand to care for the infirm, reports Reuters. "Using robotic hand technology and 24 robotic fingers, this robot can wash the hair of the handicapped in the way human hands do," says developer Tohru Nakamura. "The person only has to lean back in a salon-type chair; the robot will shampoo, massage the scalp and rinse in about three minutes. You need to add another five minutes for conditioning and a blow-dry." The robot will be out on the market this year—Panasonic has already begun an aggressive media campaign targeting nursing homes and hospitals.



# Lazy longevity

Some of us will love this one. **Hibernation—or extended periods of sleep—can extend lifespan**, according to a study by the Institute for Wildlife Ecology in Vienna. Experiments with hamsters native to Siberia revealed that when the rodents went into hibernation, they lowered their metabolic rates and body temperatures. This state called torpor actually stops and even reverses a natural breakdown of telomeres, the caps at the ends of our chromosomes linked to ageing. Winter hibernation apart, the results were evident even during daily torpor (deep sleep of several hours during the day). “The findings are probably applicable to all animals that use some form of torpor or hibernation,” writes team



leader Christopher Turbill in journal *Biology Letters*. Not humans, though! “Torpor and sleep are completely different, and possibly incompatible states,” he further explains. “Humans do not significantly lower their body

temperature when sleeping, nor is there a comparable slowdown in metabolic rate. So far, science has not come close to finding a way for humans to enter some form of hibernation.”

# A rat's life

Despite its rather immodest name, the naked mole-rat, which is native to the deserts of East Africa, is spoken about rather respectfully in academic circles—after all, it lives for over 30 years and is resistant to cancer. Now, scientists at the University of Liverpool working in collaboration with Harvard University have identified **a number of genes in the naked mole-rat that may suggest why it lives longer** than other rodents. As the university states in a media release, these genes associated with mitochondria (energy providers), respiration and decision-making capabilities are expressed at unusually high levels in the naked mole-rat compared to the same genes in wild mice. (In animals and humans, these genes are thought to play a role in influencing and adapting to cell damage, a significant cause of

ageing.) Further, the team discovered that although naked mole-rats have increased levels of oxidative stress, which generally leads to cancerous tumours, they are able to regulate their gene responses to limit the negative impact.

“This animal has unique physical traits that allow it to survive in a harsh environment,” writes study leader

Dr Joao Pedro Magalhaes in journal *PLoS ONE*. “It has a lack of pain sensation in its skin and has a low metabolic rate that allows it to live underground with limited oxygen supply. Studying its genome will help us understand the mechanisms of ageing and how the body protects itself from disease. The next stage of the research will be to observe what happens to the cells if gene levels change from high to low and vice-versa.”



**Create a safe zone.** Set up a neighbourhood watch programme with your fellow silvers and younger volunteers. There's no better way to safeguard your homes—and lives—and engender a true sense of community. Take a cue from the Toledo Neighbourhood Watch Programme in Ohio, which recently celebrated 29 years of service. "We look out for intruders; keep track



of the activities of all residents, especially elders; and bring any untoward activity to the attention of the police immediately," says 82 year-old Leola Haynes, who has been part of the Watch for the past 15 years. "The crime rate has dwindled and everyone, of every age, feels safe walking the streets. Plus, the programme has created a tremendous bond between elders and the youth."



**FACTS**

- » The Organic Consumers Association estimates that 3.5 billion wire hangers are used each year by the dry cleaning industry alone. This amounts to 195 million pounds of steel used for production.
- » According to the Steel Recycling Institute, more steel is recycled in North America than glass, aluminum, paper and plastic combined. Yet, when it comes to recycling metal hangers, this proves difficult owing to the plastic coating used to protect clothing from rusting metal.



Hareesh Patel

**MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...**

- 1. BEND A HANGER OUTWARDS TO ASSUME THE SHAPE OF A CIRCLE. WRAP WITH GREEN GARLANDS AND HANG AS A CHRISTMAS WREATH.**
- 2. ASSEMBLE HANGERS ONE ABOVE THE OTHER TO BALANCE CREEPER PLANTS.**
- 3. WRAP THE FRAME IN STRETCHY TIGHT MATERIAL AND FILL WITH HERBS OR POTPOURRI MIXTURE FOR A CUPBOARD AIR FRESHENER.**

Then: Coat Hangers  
**Now: New-Age Christmas Tree**

Get creative this Christmas by making a unique tree out of extra coat hangers from your wardrobe. To begin, place one hanger right above two hangers and fasten firmly with a nylon string. This will form the top of the tree. Now place three hangers below the two hangers and fasten, and so on. Keep expanding depending on the length of tree you want. You can make minor adjustments to align the frame according to the way you want it. Once the main frame is formed, you are free to decorate it as you wish. Use baubles, garlands, lights, any ornament of your choice, to dress up your tree. You can top it with an angel or Santa. Once you get the hang of it—literally!—the possibilities are endless.

# JUNK THE JUNK



**W**e are told sugar doesn't cause diabetes; it's your genes as well. But did you know that your lifestyle can mutate your genes? In a recent breakthrough, scientists have uncovered how **fatty food can trip a genetic switch in the body leading to diabetes.**

This discovery, recently published in journal *Nature Medicine*, explains the link between Type 2 diabetes and obesity. "It's not that everybody bingeing on fatty food will suffer from diabetes," says Dr Shankar Kumar, diabetologist at M S Diabetes Speciality Centre in Bengaluru. "However, it's a major risk factor. Food high on fats can cause metabolic problems; hence avoiding them can be considered the first step towards preventing diabetes." A team of researchers at the Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute in La Jolla, California, found that high levels of fat disrupted two key proteins that control our genes. After the proteins become dysfunctional, the enzyme release shuts down and upsets the ability of insulin-secreting beta cells in the pancreas to monitor blood sugar levels. The absence of a glucose sugar-sensing mechanism leads to disruption of blood sugar regulation. "Now that we understand how states of over-nutrition can lead to Type 2 diabetes, we know how to intervene," writes study head Jamey Marth. "The identification of the molecular players suggests new therapeutic targets and approaches towards developing an effective preventive or, perhaps, curative treatment."

## Early alert

**S**cientists from across the world continue to be engrossed in research for any possible sign of escape from this most debilitating of diseases. A team in Britain is developing a technique that claims to **predict Alzheimer's about a decade earlier than the actual symptoms surface.** Fresh studies conducted by University of Melbourne, Australia, and University of Texas claim to have perfected the technique, which involves the use of positron emission tomography (PET) scans to monitor the build-up of a protein called Amyloid-beta, which is connected to dementia. "Today, every neuron can be scanned in detail individually," says Dr Arun



Marwale, Alzheimer's specialist at Venkatesh Hospital in Aurangabad. "A simple brain scan, therefore, helps to predict most events. A machine for PET scan was unveiled at a conference for Alzheimer's in Barcelona; since then, it has been made available throughout the world." This particular

development, experts say, will allow patients to prepare themselves for the devastating effects of the disease and could eventually lead to early treatment. For the study, researchers invited 100 volunteers, a few cognitively healthy and a few mildly impaired, and ran them through psychological and neurological tests. Regular scans revealed that people with high build-up of plaques earlier in the study were more likely to develop memory problems akin to Alzheimer's.

# Black HOLE

According to an indigenous study, India will have about 7 million silvers suffering from dementia within the next two decades. Conducted and released by Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India (ARDSI), the *National Dementia Report 2010* indicates that **the number of dementia patients in the country will double by 2030**. According to Dr Jacob Roy, chairman of ARDSI in Kochi, "A group of experts working with dementia patients were selected from across the country to develop this report." Despite the increasing number of dementia patients, India is yet to set up adequate infrastructure to tackle the situation, even in the long term. The report points out that the government needs to assign at least ₹ 143 billion to establish well-equipped hospitals, spread awareness through workshops, and hold training sessions with medical and paramedical staff on dealing with the disease. "Not everybody suffering from dementia gets detected, so it is important to curb the ignorance and negligence related to the disease," adds Dr Roy.



## Worth your salt?

Your risk of heart diseases and stroke can be substantially reduced by simply lowering dietary salt intake. According to a recent study at Warwick Medical School in the UK—published in *British Medical Journal*—**reducing daily salt intake to 3 gm would prevent up to 8,000 stroke deaths and up to 12,000 coronary heart disease deaths per year**. A similar lifestyle habit in the US would save up to \$ 24 billion annually in healthcare. According to lead author Professor Francesco Cappuccio, "Prevention implemented through food reformulation and effective voluntary market intervention or mandatory action throughout the industry is what is needed with society, governments and health organisations." Speaking with regard to Indians, Dr Annu Aggarwal, consultant neurologist at Mumbai's Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital and Medical Research Centre, says, "Indians consume lot of salt, which leads to various diseases. Lowering intake will prevent hypertension, which is closely related to stroke and even dementia. Obesity, too, is closely related to stroke." The World Health Organisation has set a goal to reduce dietary salt intake to less than 5 gm per person per day by 2025, but at present salt intake in many countries is much higher than this.



**APOLLO HOSPITALS, HYDERABAD, HAS LAUNCHED THE FIRST ROBOTIC TREATMENT FACILITY TO ASSIST EXPERTS IN TREATING PATIENTS SUFFERING FROM BRAIN STROKES. THIS INNOVATION WILL NOT ONLY DIAGNOSE THE ILLNESS BUT SUGGEST A NEW LINE OF TREATMENT.**



Hemant Patil

## DISCOVERY OF INDIA

That we are a by product of an immensely rich heritage is obviously not evident in India's citizenry and landscape. What's worse is that the divide between scholarly findings and laypeople seems sorely non-pluggable. **Manjiri Khandekar** found this scenario deplorable and launched *Heritage India* to bridge this divide. Today, at 52, she is proud to have birthed 16 issues of the quarterly. With a three-fold aim to create awareness among Indians about our heritage, give authentic information to the world outside about India and motivate the youth to become guardians, keepers and promoters of our heritage, the magazine is a unique guide to our monuments, people, dynasties, festivals, arts and crafts, flora and fauna, nature and all other tangible and intangible vestiges of ancient sciences. The text is written by scholars and experts from respective domains and repackaged to make it reader-friendly and visually stunning. "*Heritage India* doesn't have a limited

shelf life and is not a perishable publication because of what it stands for; in fact, it's a keepsake for being a time capsule," says Khandekar, who has managed to reach out to all the major Indian cities, besides the US and Canada, with an e-version available since February 2011. A lecturer of French at the University of Pune and teacher of translation at the postgraduate level for 12 years, Khandekar has also combined her expertise with sensitivity and awareness about our heritage by bringing out a book in French on the Pandharpur 'Wari', a 250-km pilgrimage undertaken by devotees of saints Tukaram and Dnyaneshwar of Maharashtra. "Conservation and preservation of our rich heritage is a matter of prime concern today," she emphasizes. "India is probably the only country in the world where the past remains inextricably linked to the present. We need help to make the world sit up and take notice and carry the heritage of India across time and space."

—Khursheed Dinshaw

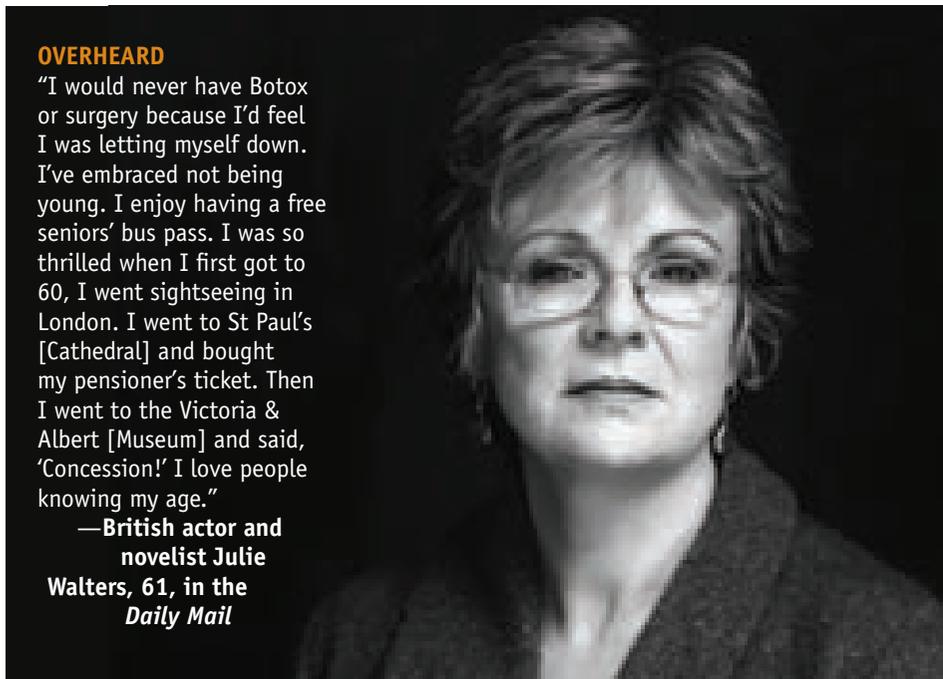
## True grit

There's something special about **Andrena Moore**. Sure, the 60 year-old Australian won gold in the 60-64 category at the Triathlon World Championship held in Beijing. But what left the world gobsmacked is that she did it eight weeks after she broke her right elbow in a fall. "The injury restricted my training but I knew it wasn't over," the 25-year triathlon veteran tells Reuters. Eventually, Moore, who was in second place after the 1,500-m swim and then powered in front during the 40-km bike ride, all the way through the final 10-km run, finished seven minutes ahead of her nearest rival. "My time would have placed me second in the 55-59 years age group," she says. "Damn, I feel like a champion!"

### OVERHEARD

"I would never have Botox or surgery because I'd feel I was letting myself down. I've embraced not being young. I enjoy having a free seniors' bus pass. I was so thrilled when I first got to 60, I went sightseeing in London. I went to St Paul's [Cathedral] and bought my pensioner's ticket. Then I went to the Victoria & Albert [Museum] and said, 'Concession!' I love people knowing my age."

—British actor and novelist **Julie Walters, 61, in the Daily Mail**



**BIRTHDAYS**

● **Kathryn Bigelow** (right), the first woman to win an Oscar as director in 2010 for *The Hurt Locker*, turned 59 on 27 November.



● Music director Alokesh Lahiri, or **Bappi Lahiri** as we know him, turned 59 on 27 November.

● William Michael Albert Broad, the British punk rocker better known by his stage name **Billy Idol**, turned 55 on 30 November.

● Actor **Dharmendra** (left) turns 76 on 8 December.



**MILESTONES**

● Marathi composer **Yashwant Deo**, 85, was awarded the Lata Mangeshkar Award in Mumbai on 28 September.

● **Asha Bhosle** (left) entered the *Guinness World Records* for 11,000 studio recordings (singles) since 1947. She was honoured at the Asian Awards function in London on 21 October.

● Legendary Bengali writer **Mahasweta Devi**, 85, accepted the lifetime achievement award at Tata Literature Live, The Mumbai Litfest, on 6 November.



**IN PASSING**

● Mafatlal group patriarch and social reformer **Arvind N Mafatlal** passed away on 31 October after a prolonged illness in Chitrakoot, where he wanted to spend his last days. He was 88.

● **K K Singh**, Hindi screenplay writer of *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* fame, died in his sleep on 1 November. He was 58.



● Former Olympic heavy-weight champion **Joe Frazier** (above), famous for defeating Muhammad Ali in three epic fights, died on 7 November. He was 67.



● Battling illness for months, legendary singer-composer **Bhupen Hazarika** (left) succumbed to multi-organ failure on 6 November. He was 85.

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## HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

THIS IS THE PLACE TO DO IT. REACH OUT TO FELLOW READERS WITH INTERESTING ANECDOTES, INSPIRING STORIES AND HEARTWARMING MOMENTS FROM YOUR LIFE. WRITE IN WITH FULL CONTACT DETAILS, AND MAKE THIS SPACE YOUR OWN.

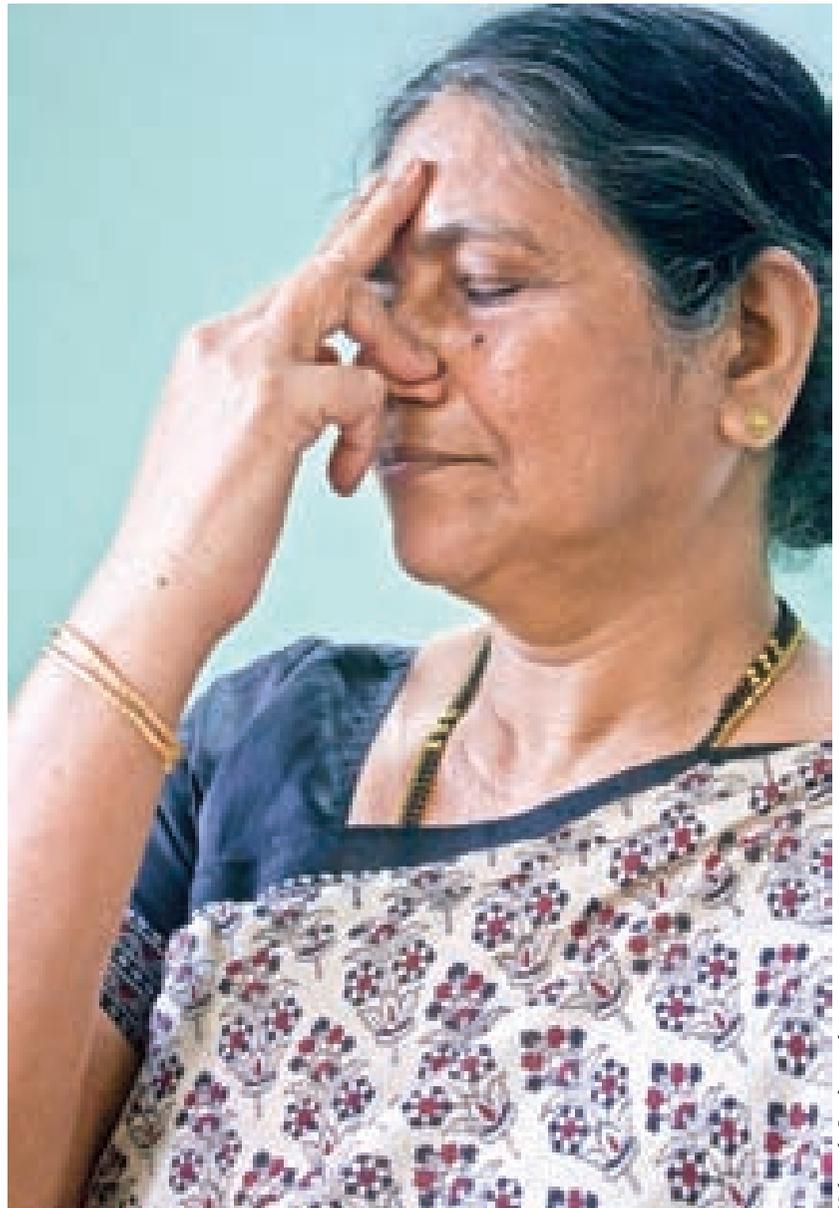
### RETIREMENT ROCKS!

It may sound unbelievable but I have been longing to grow old just so I could do the things I've always wanted to. It wasn't easy being young. I was busy looking after my family, earning, marriage and, after that, raising my children. I took voluntary retirement seven years ago at the age of 55 and now it seems like nature is shouting out to me, "It's all yours! So enjoy, old lady!"

I got an education so I would find a job one day. Now, I plan to study for my own gratification. I have always been interested in reading, writing and painting. I read every book I can lay my hands on. I am a Tamilian married to a Maharashtrian and can read and write in both languages. Thanks to my passion for writing, I have published four books in Tamil: *The Thought That Rules Us*, *Your Life is in Your Hand*, *Your Precious Child* and *New Bharat*. I received amazing response and have two more books due for publication soon. I have also been writing a women's column in *Vellimani*, a supplement in a Tamil newspaper called *Thinamani Kadir*.

I paint regularly and gift my work to anyone who is interested. Unfortunately, not too many people are interested in landscape painting, which is my forte! I used to be inspired to paint from photographs but I recently started using my imagination.

As you can see, my hobbies take up a lot of time but I felt there was still something lacking. Earlier, I didn't have the time to take care of my health and I suffered the consequences. Now, yoga not only fills that vacuum, it makes me feel energised and refreshed. My sudden inclination towards *pranayama* surprised many but I refuse



Utkarsh Sanjanwala

**Happier than she's ever been, Padma Mhatre is putting herself first**

to see age as an obstacle to learning something new. How I wish I had practised yoga earlier! But it's never too late to be happy. I can confidently say I am happier and relaxed in my old age.

My husband and children are extremely supportive. And I don't think it's fair to expect your children to spend all their time with you just because you have a lot of time on your hands! So I make it a point to be a part of their activities as much as possible. I also think a few simple things like taking regular walks, following a proper diet, and having a positive attitude make retired life better.

There is just one message I have for older people: Enjoy life while you can, and paint your days in rainbow colours!

—Padma Mhatre

## FOR LOVE OF THE LAW, AND LITERATURE

I would say that my love of learning comes from my father, who was associated with the famous literary movement, Asamiya Bhasar Unnati Sadhini Sabha, led by Lakshminath Bezbaroa, a doyen of modern Assamese literature. I went on to graduate in anthropology and also completed my MSc from Gauhati University.

However, I really wanted to study law. After marriage, my husband and mother-in-law encouraged me to enrol for the LLB course and I did, but I dropped out after the intermediate examination as I got pregnant. Nor did my happy married life last long. My husband died of typhoid when our son was only five months old and I was widowed at the age of 25. As if that were not enough, my in-laws, who had been very supportive of me, began to believe I had brought the family ill-luck. Things reached such a pass that I returned to my parents' home.

After I restored my lost spirit, I completed my LLB and began a long and illustrious journey in legal research. I joined the Law Research Institute of the Gauhati High Court as a research assistant and enrolled as a research scholar in Dibrugarh University to earn my PhD. Gradually, my research in various fields of law was appreciated by the Gauhati High Court. What's more, my association with child rights and human rights also earned me membership of many prestigious state bodies and commissions for women and children. But my greatest recognition came when the Gauhati High Court asked me to continue as director of the Law Research Institute when I was to retire last year.



Tapati Baruah Kashyap

Her love of learning has sustained—and enriched—Jeuti Barooah

I also discovered a new facet to my personality. I had worked on several projects relating to child rights and this prompted me to write two plays on the theme. I was also invited to speak at various seminars and workshops on the issue, especially in a region where violence has had a serious impact on hundreds of children.

I must have inherited my father's literary genes because I love creative writing too. I write poetry, which I plan to publish, and my autobiography was serialised by a local daily in 2002 and 2003. I plan to update that and publish it as a book. But despite the accolades and recognition, my greatest achievement is having been able to raise my son well despite the initial hurdles. Today, he is happily married and lives with me in a house I built on a plot I bought. Yes, it's been quite a journey from being a young and broken widow to a satisfied and happy mother and a lawyer of repute.

—Jeuti Barooah



## Diagnosis to discipline: Eating right for healthy kidneys

My friend was recently diagnosed with chronic kidney disease at the age of 71. As I am the same age as her and our dietary habits are similar, I am concerned. Is there any way to keep the condition at bay or any special diet I can follow to protect my kidneys?

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a health problem that indicates malfunction of the kidneys. About half of those aged 75 or more have some degree of CKD. Most of these people do not actually have kidney disease but face normal symptoms related to ageing.

In older people, though, the severity of CKD varies. Most cases are mild or moderate and do not progress to kidney failure. However, people at any stage of CKD have an increased risk of developing heart disease or a stroke. Therefore, it is important to detect even mild CKD, as treatment may not only slow down the progression of the disease but reduce further risks and complications.

Poorly controlled blood pressure and diabetes are two major causes of CKD. The other potential causes include large kidney stones and condition of the prostate. What you eat has a major impact on the health of the kidneys. Protein, sodium, fluids and certain minerals are especially important for kidney health.

**Protein:** Eating too much protein can stress the kidneys. But if you don't get enough, you could feel weak, tired and become more susceptible to infections. Decreasing protein intake may slow the progression of CKD. The limit on protein intake is 0.7 gm per kg of a person's total body weight, except for those who are on dialysis. Avoid high-protein foods like meat, poultry, seafood and eggs. Include foods like beans, barley and corn in small amounts.

**Sodium:** Sodium helps keep the right balance of fluids in the body. In CKD, kidneys have trouble clearing extra sodium from the body. Eating too much sodium, however, can cause fluids to build up. Limit intake at 4-6 gm a day to avoid fluid retention and control high blood pressure.

### Some suggestions to limit sodium intake:

- Don't add salt to your food.
- Avoid foods that have salt, sodium or monosodium glutamate (MSG) on the label. Foods labelled reduced sodium and light sodium may still have too much of it.
- Avoid salted snacks such as chips and popcorn.
- Don't use salt substitutes as they are high in potassium.
- Use lemon, herbs and other spices to flavour your meals.
- Avoid eating out more than twice a week as most of the sodium we eat is hidden in processed foods and restaurant food, especially at fast food and take-out places.

**Fluid:** Healthy kidneys flush excess fluids from your body. When you have kidney disease, you might have trouble getting rid of extra fluids, which can raise your blood pressure and force your heart to work harder. Most people drink 1-2 litre of fluids a day. You don't need to reduce fluid intake unless kidney disease is very severe. However, if you are a dialysis patient who doesn't produce much urine, you will need to cut down the amount you drink.



## READERS ASK

### What diet should I follow to curb heartburn?

Heartburn and indigestion are common complaints. However, with hyperacidity and heartburn, there is discomfort in the upper abdomen a few hours after a meal. This is because of excessive acids in the stomach even after food has been digested. Most people choose to ease this discomfort with over-the-counter antacids, which are generally not effective. Chronic heartburn is a sign of poor health and the result of a poor diet. A few dietary suggestions:

- Avoid foods that leave an acidic residue like refined, processed, spicy and fried foods, alcohol, fizzy drinks, coffee, tea and protein-rich foods.
- Switch over to alkaline-rich foods like fresh fruits—watermelon, apples, guavas, pears—and vegetables like pumpkin and potatoes, as well as greens.
- Drink vegetable juices made of green, leafy vegetables like spinach, mint, coriander and beet greens. They act as a buffer in normalising blood pH.
- Drink eight to 10 glasses of water every day, or tender coconut water once or twice a day.
- Engage in regular physical activity like walking and playing badminton or tennis.
- Eat small meals at regular intervals and avoid overeating.

### I am a 73 year-old, not-so-active man. What kind of diet will provide me with essential amino acids?

Amino acids are structural units that make up proteins. They act as building blocks of proteins and intermediates in metabolism. The main purpose of dietary protein is to supply the body with the amino acids it requires. Protein quality is determined by the type of amino acids present and their amount. Based on this, proteins are classified into first-class (complete protein) and second-class proteins (incomplete protein). First-class proteins contain all the essential amino acids (EAAs) in quantities that promote growth in the body. All animal proteins belong to this category. Second-class proteins lack one or more EAA and are not present in quantities that support growth in an individual; for example, most plant proteins like *dal*, wheat, legumes, soybeans, etc. If you eat a balanced diet that comprises eggs, fish, milk, *dal*, cereals, nuts and seeds, you will get adequate EAAs to sustain repair of tissues and other bodily functions. If you are a vegetarian, mix pulses with cereals and include nuts and seeds in your diet for all the EAAs you need for good health and maintenance.

*Dr Anjali Mukerjee is a nutritionist and founder of Health Total, which has 15 centres in Mumbai to treat obesity and other health related disorders. Visit [www.health-total.com](http://www.health-total.com) If you have a question for Dr Mukerjee write to [contact.mag@harmonyindia.org](mailto:contact.mag@harmonyindia.org)*



Poorly controlled blood pressure, diabetes, large kidney stones and condition of the prostate can all cause chronic kidney disease. Limiting high protein and sodium intake and eating plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables can help manage the condition

**Potassium:** This is necessary in advanced kidney disease, where the organ is unable to remove potassium, high levels of which can cause abnormal heart rhythm. Examples of foods high in potassium include bananas, oranges, nuts and potatoes. Choose low-potassium fruits such as apples, blueberries, pears, plums and tangerines. Low-potassium vegetables include asparagus, bean sprouts, cabbage, cucumber, green beans and lettuce.

**Phosphorous:** Decreasing phosphorus intake is recommended to protect bones. Limit foods high in phosphorus like dairy products, nuts, peanut butter, seeds, lentils, beans, bran bread and cereals, organ meats and sausages. Avoid colas and soft drinks with phosphate or phosphoric acid.

As long as kidney disease has not progressed, you can manage it with lifestyle changes like control of high blood pressure, good management of diabetes, healthy diet with plenty of fresh vegetables, lots of fruits, fewer processed pre-prepared foods, and cutting back on salt. However, there is no single diet that is right for everyone with CKD. Your diet may change over time as your disease changes. Get tested regularly at your doctor's and work with a dietician to adjust your diet as needed.



## Strengthen your core: Exercise and posture can treat lumbar spondylosis

I am a 56 year-old woman. Last month, I was diagnosed with lumbar spondylosis. I don't want to be on regular painkillers to deal with the problem. Could you suggest an easy exercise plan that will help me?

Lumbar spondylosis is often characterised by pain and weakness. Individually tailored exercise programmes can help improve pain, particularly if it is chronic. Before beginning any exercise programme, however, check with your physician. You should not be in pain before beginning these exercises; and if you do experience any pain, you should stop immediately.

### **Knee to chest**

This exercise is a simple way to stretch and strengthen the spine. Begin by lying on your back with both legs straight on the floor. Clasp your hands behind one thigh, and slowly pull the leg to your chest, keeping the opposite leg flat on the ground. You can hold the position for up to 30 seconds, and then switch legs. This exercise gently stretches the back as well as the hamstring muscle.

### **Pelvic tilt**

This exercise can work your core muscles, which include your abdominals and back muscles. Strengthening your core is important for posture and protecting your back from injury. To try this exercise, lie on your back with your knees up, soles flat on the floor. The object is to push your lower back to the floor by pulling your abdominal muscles up and inward. Breathe while holding the position for five seconds. You can repeat this exercise several times as long as you do not feel pain.

### **Hollow back**

'Hollow back' is similar to the 'cow' yoga *asana*. This pose gently stretches the back. Your therapist will have you begin on your hands and knees, with your hands under your shoulders and your knees under your hips. Slowly, allow your stomach to sag, without pulling, arching your back gently. Your gaze should be upwards. Slowly, move back to the starting position and repeat if you can.

### **Tail wagging**

Tail wagging is another exercise that begins on the hands and knees and will test your balance while stretching and

strengthening your core muscles. Try keeping your head in a neutral position, looking at the floor. While keeping your shoulders still, shift your weight on to your right knee and try to reach the left hip toward the left shoulder. You do not have to touch your knee to your shoulder; just try to complete the motion. Switch sides and repeat if you can.

### **Single-leg lift**

It is important to stretch your lower back and align your spine. You can do this by doing single-leg lifts. Lie face-down on the floor. Place your hands under your chin and lift your head up slightly so that it is in line with your spine. Slowly, lift your left leg up by about 6 to 8 inches and hold it for three seconds. Do not flex or point your foot. Put your leg down in the starting position. Now lift your right leg up for three seconds to a similar height. Do this 10 times with each leg to gently stretch your lower back.

### **Arm curls on exercise ball**

Sit on a medium-sized exercise ball, 12 to 16 inches in diameter, and find your balance point. Grasp hold of two 4-pound weights and let your arms extend down to your sides. Alternately, curl the weights up to shoulder height, holding the weight at the top of the lift for two seconds. Do 10 lifts with each arm; take a 30-second break and repeat the set. The weights are light enough to not strain any muscles, but the action of doing the curls on the exercise ball will be beneficial for your lumbar area.

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Apart from core-strengthening exercises, you can ensure your back and spine stay healthy by keeping the body well hydrated, maintaining a healthy weight, getting a good night's sleep, and indulging in frequent periods of relaxation to clear the clutter from your mind and lower stress levels

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### **Crunch**

An abdominal crunch strengthens not only your stomach muscles but back muscles too. Lie on your back with your feet flat on the floor. Place your hands behind your head or extended at your sides. Contract your abdominal muscles

to lift your head, shoulders and upper back off the ground. Hold at the top of this contraction for five seconds, and then lower your body to return to your starting position. Repeat this 10 times. Rest for 30 seconds, then repeat for two additional sets.

### Oblique pulls

This exercise strengthens the oblique muscles on the sides of your abdomen, which help stabilise your spine. Hold a vegetable can or a lightweight dumbbell—between 2 and 5 pounds—in each hand. Lean to your right side, moving the left shoulder upward. Repeat on the other side; lower your left hand by lifting your right shoulder. Feel the stomach muscles and the lower back working as you continue to alternate from side to side. Repeat 10 times on each side.

Physical therapy is often prescribed to relieve problems caused by lumbar spondylosis. Starting an exercise regime under the supervision of a personal trainer based on the guidelines prescribed by a therapist will help improve your back health. You can do 25 to 40 minutes of exercise at a health club for about four days in a week. Split these four days into two days of weight training and two days of low-impact aerobic training and add back strengthening and stretching exercises, which I have explained.

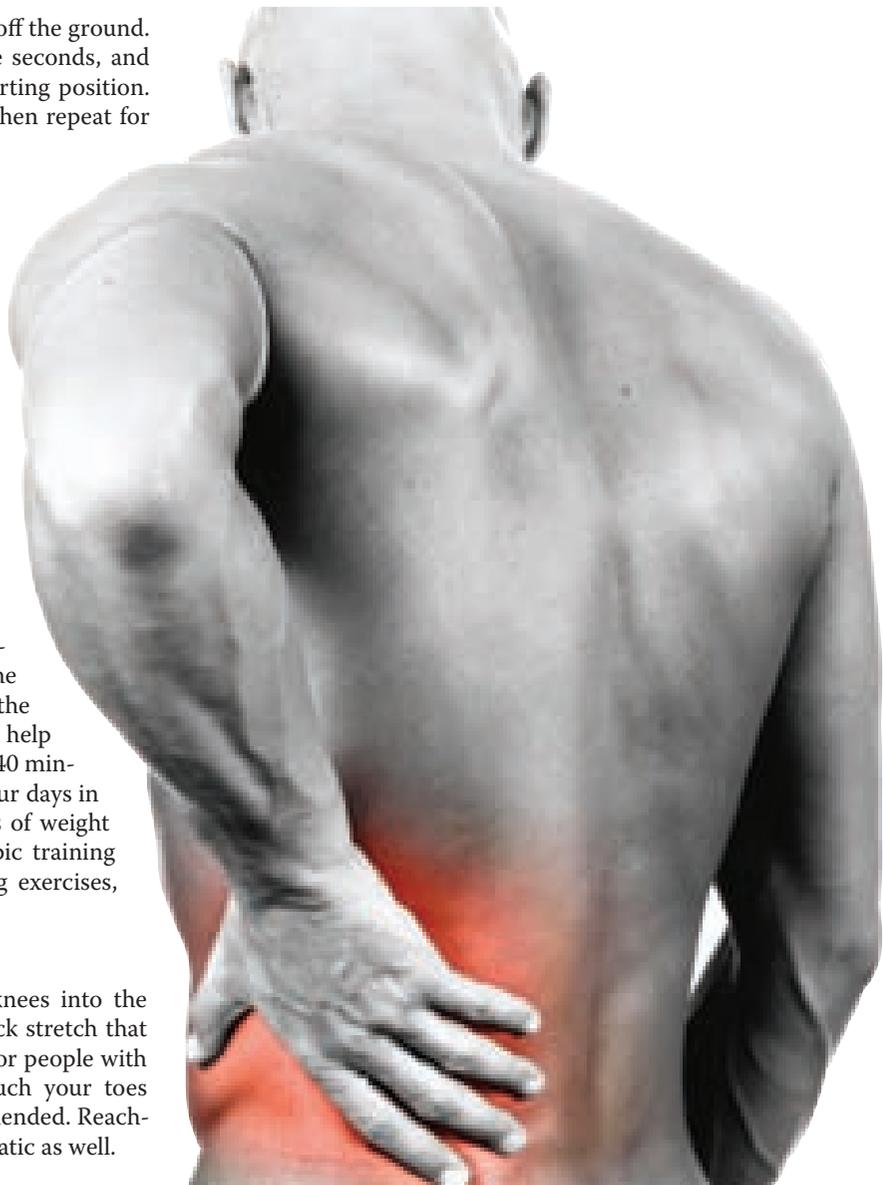
### What to avoid

- Lying on your back and bringing the knees into the chest is an example of a common lower back stretch that flexes the spine. This is not recommended for people with lumbar spondylosis. Bending down to touch your toes from a standing position is also not recommended. Reaching for the toes while sitting can be problematic as well.
- Don't sit on your wallet, cell phone or anything else that may throw your spine out of balance.
- As staying still is bad for your back, don't just pick a position and stay in it. Instead, adjust your seat and make slight adjustments to your position every 15-20 minutes.

### Points to remember

**Water is important** for the spine and back. For example, intervertebral discs consist largely of water (at birth, discs are about 80 per cent water, although this usually declines with age). Therefore, keeping the body well hydrated by drinking water regularly is important to nourish the spinal discs and keep them healthy.

**Maintain a healthy weight.** Try to decrease your intake of sugars and hydrogenated oils and increase your daily



intake of fibre. Ideally, you should consume 35 gm of fibre. **Get better sleep.** Seven to eight hours of sleep is a must for optimal health.

**Relax more often to lower stress levels.** Find time for yourself throughout the day to focus on your breathing and clear the clutter from your mind.

*Madhukar Talwalkar is chairman of Talwalkar's, one of India's largest chain of fitness centres with 78 branches across major cities. Website: [www.talwalkars.net](http://www.talwalkars.net) If you have a question for Dr Talwalkar write to [contact.mag@harmonyindia.org](mailto:contact.mag@harmonyindia.org)*



## The awareness imperative: Train your mind through your body

Though we all believe we are sentient beings, most of us are ruled largely by the subconscious and are really creatures of habit. Only when we sensitise our body to its different parts can we learn to shift our awareness to our mind and its loops. Coordinated movements like Tai Chi, other martial arts, dance forms and yoga belong to a special category of body work that trains our minds through our bodies.

In his book *Yoga for Your Body Type* (co-authored with S S Kozar), yoga and Ayurveda scholar Dr David Frawley writes, "When we practice *asana*, we have the opportunity to see not only the postures we adopt in our physical body but also the attitudes that we follow in our mind. These attitudes determine how we behave in business and in our own homes. Being able to see this behaviour frees us from unconscious reactions, taking us into a conscious awareness in which we can guide our experience."

To fine-tune this awareness, there are poses that engage all our muscle groups or deepen our breath. It has been found that blood flow is most directed to a body part where awareness is constant. Perhaps pain itself is just such a tool to create instant awareness, which the body uses to redirect a healing flow of repairing agents to the injured part.

Thus, shifting awareness by deliberately creating intensity of pressure pays dividend in poses, including simple ones. For instance, the undemanding baby pose (*balasana*), if held for long, can create rhythmic breathing that shifts awareness to the abdomen where the diaphragm is pumping the lungs. The blood shift to the face creates a pleasant heat in the head, shifting the awareness there. Similarly, all balancing poses cannot be held without a shift in awareness over the entire body. Some challenging ones are the warrior (*virabhadrasana*) series, crane (*bakasana*) and crow (*kakasana*). The mind must shift from the legs, to the hands, the breath, the spine, etc, to see where it may strengthen itself to be able to hold on. This creates a deep focus that is powerfully calming to the mind.

However, for awareness to become truly fine-tuned, the most important element is the duration. The longer you hold a pose, the deeper the shift. This is true for any pose, whether it is an easy one like the palm tree (*tadasana*) or an exotic one like the headstand (*sirsasana*). Therefore, instead of doing more poses with scant attention, it would be better to do less, with finer awareness. This learned awareness can be used to rediscover ourselves, clean up relationships, learn new skills or talents, and heal ourselves.

### YOGIC MOVES

#### Spinal column pose (*merudandasana*)

Sit with your legs stretched out. Fold legs at the knees. Hold your big toes. However, if you are very stiff or new to the pose, you can hold the ankle or calves. Inhale. Exhale. Inhaling, lift legs aloft with your hands, balancing on your hips. This pose is not as difficult as it appears and is often easy for those who are flexible or have a good sense of

balance. Initially, you can lean your back against a wall till balance is improved. Continue normal breathing throughout. Hold the pose for as long as comfortable. To wind up the pose, bend your legs at the knees and drop feet gently back to the ground. Avoid if you have a severe lower back problem. **Benefits:** This pose improves balance. It promotes deeper breathing, limb tone and coordination, and removes postural defects. Further, it promotes impulse control and fine awareness.



**Model:** Smita Baadkar  
Harmony Interactive Centre  
**Photographer:** Haresh Patel

*Shameem Akthar is a Mumbai-based yoga acharya. If you have any queries for her, mail us or email at [contact.mag@harmonyindia.org](mailto:contact.mag@harmonyindia.org) (Please consult your physician before following advice given here)*

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## Guard your wicket: Liquidity, growth and regular income.... Just like cricket, if any one of these 'stumps' comes falling down, it could set your retirement planning back

The second innings of a one-day international is the decider. If the team batting second can protect its wicket and outscore its opponent, it emerges the winner. If it is unable to save its stumps, it loses. The crux of the game is to ensure we score more. For peaceful retirement, our wealth must outscore us; it should not run out completely before we leave this world.

Saving the wicket is the mantra. Of the three stumps of retirement, one is liquidity, the second growth, and the third is regular income. Even if one stump is rooted out, we're out. Also, all three stumps are independent of each other. Liquidity is needed to meet emergencies—health-related or unforeseen expenses. As we are living for many more years than our forefathers, our wealth needs to stay above inflation for more years. Therefore, we need to focus on growth of wealth. Over and above this, we also need a regular income for routine expenses.

Here's the reason why all three stumps are independent of each other. If our entire retirement corpus is placed in a savings bank account, it will give liquidity but it will not grow. If it is placed in an equity-oriented instrument, it will grow; however, as equity is volatile, it cannot be relied upon to meet regular (consistent) income. Last, if our corpus is placed in the senior citizens' savings scheme or post-office monthly income scheme, it will give us a regular income, but it will not grow. And in case you need

liquidity, it will be at a cost in terms of interest or penalty.

To save our wicket, all three stumps need to be protected individually. The rule of thumb states we set aside six months' household budget to meet contingencies. Funds equivalent to about one month's household expenses should be kept at home in the form of cash. Balance contingency fund may be kept in our savings bank account, which is linked to a fixed deposit. Preferably choose a bank that offers ATM facility.

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### Set aside six months' household budget for contingencies and invest enough to cover five years of regular expenses

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Next, invest in a way that will take care of the next four to five years of regular expenses. While calculating, keep in mind the regular inflow from the pension, annuities, etc, you receive. For regular income, consider annuities from insurance companies, senior citizens' savings schemes, post-office monthly income scheme, etc. Mutual funds also have monthly income plans; however, their returns are linked to market condition and not guaranteed.

Finally, for growth of the retirement corpus, consider equity-based instru-

ments. If you have both skills and time, pursue direct equity or opt for equity-based mutual funds. After setting aside funds for contingencies and regular income, the balance amount should be parked in equity for growth. Many a time, retirees want to know the asset allocation of their corpus in terms of percentage. What kind of percentage should be parked in equity and how much should be in debt? Here again, the rule of thumb is to have about 25 per cent of assets in equity in initial years of retirement, later reducing it to 15 per cent of equity and the rest in debt.

However, do not directly jump at asset allocation. The optimal way is to first provide for a regular income. For this, predominant investment will be in debt-based instruments. Next, set aside funds for contingencies. This will also be in debt-based instruments. Finally, park your funds in equity for growth. It may happen that while you are trying to adjust your finances for regular income, contingencies and growth, you may not be able to adhere to a 25:75 equity-debt allocation. Priority should be given to your needs of regular income, contingencies and growth. Do not blindly follow this ratio.

In a one-day match of cricket, there is no second chance—no team gets to bat or bowl again. Similarly, in retirement, there are no second chances. If your wealth runs out before you, your innings will come to an end.





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## SOULFOOD AND SOULMATES JIGYASA GIRI AND PRATIBHA JAIN MEET JAYA AND NARAIN MAHBUBANI, CHENNAI

### An exclusive series about life, love, commitment and culinary pleasures that unite hearts

Here is one interesting couple... she with her dry, casual humour, enthusiastic to chat; he, reticent, allowing her to do all the talking, so honest and obviously in love with her. Jaya, 56, and Narain Mahbubani, 63, are Sindhis from Hong Kong who made Chennai their home 12 years ago. We spent the afternoon in their tasteful home over lots of laughter, a few lumps in the throat and some delicious mixed nuts and thoughts to chew upon.

**Tell us a little about your origins.**

**She:** Both our ancestors are Sindhis from Pakistan who had to migrate to India during Partition. We were married in 1982 and have three wonderful children and six grandchildren.

**And thus the world becomes our oyster. Tell us how you met.**

**She:** I was 26 when we met. My uncle brought him home one day with the purpose of matchmaking. I was working with the German consulate in Mumbai.

**He:** Yes, I liked her right away....

**She:** But when he left, we didn't hear from him for months!

**He:** [looks shyly at her and asks] Isn't that when the noose happened?

**She:** [laughs] After almost three months, he turned up at my home in Mumbai. He was based in Hong Kong then. We chatted for a while and then it was time for him to leave, so my parents drove him to the airport. I sat in the backseat of the car with him. All of a sudden he took off the gold chain from his neck and put it round mine. I suppose we were engaged



Chennai Pix

at that moment in time. I call it the noose!

### And what did the parents say?

**She:** Narain's parents had already passed away at that time. He warmly adopted mine as his own.

### What attracted each of you to the other?

**She:** That he was a self-made man. I was impressed. I've never said this to you in 29 years [she looks at him with fondness].

**He:** I was drawn to her because of her education. She has a bachelor's degree in German and two masters—in linguistics and in guidance and counselling. I also had an intuitive impulse that she would help me in my business.

**She:** He was a workaholic and used to travel a lot. I enjoyed keeping home and bringing up the children.

### We notice you have your own work spaces in your beautiful home.

**He:** I used to run an import-export business but have now retired. I have some properties in and around Chennai which I invested in while in Hong Kong, so it keeps me busy trying to cash in now.

**She:** I am back to doing what I love—German. We have been in Chennai for 12 years now. We travel a lot to meet our children and my parents still have lots to look forward to.

**He:** I love listening to music, reading news, and enjoy 'myself' time.

### Are you very different from each other?

**She:** [laughs] Who doesn't have differences? Fortunately, we enjoy many similar activities. In our early years in Chennai, we loved going for movies and concerts during the Margazhi fes-

tival of dance and music. When The Park hotel launched here, we loved going there—it was our *adda*.

### One change you would like to see in each other?

**He:** I am too used to her ways. If she's happy, that's best. I love her caring nature towards others.

**She:** I won't be as humble as him. I wish he wouldn't procrastinate so much. Earlier he was very hard working, now he's too chilled out, but I guess he deserves it. I am very happy that he takes care of my family—my parents, sisters—they are all *his* and he loves them truly. It's the greatest blessing in my life.

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“When the kids were young, we used to take them out for Sunday lunch. It was more for change and to give her a weekly rest. Now we prefer to eat at home”

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### Do you enjoy similar cuisine?

**She:** We have the same taste in food; both of us like variety. A normal day in our lives would include South Indian breakfast, *roti, dal, sabzi* for lunch and an international dish for dinner, like a pasta or bake.

**He:** I'm not fussy about what comes on the table. I thank God and eat.

**She:** My standard question every single day is, 'What would you like to eat?' and his standard answer is, 'Whatever you like to cook'. And I love his answer. I wouldn't have it any other way.

**He:** When the kids were young and still living with us, we used to take

them out on Sundays for lunch. It was more for change and to give her a weekly rest. Now we prefer home-cooked food, which is any day healthier than eating out.

**She:** I cook myself. When he travelled, he loved returning home to my food.

**He:** We are vegetarians by choice. We were not earlier. She turned vegetarian after she joined the Brahmakumaris in 1989.

**She:** I was willing to cook non-vegetarian for them, but they all gradually stopped. In fact, our son Jalesh has a 'go-veg' tattoo on his arm!

### And how did that happen?

**She:** I remember when he was three years old, I was feeding him fish curry and rice one day and he tried to feed me back. I told him that as much as I love him, I cannot take it from him because I don't eat meat. He said, "Animals are my friends too, so I won't eat meat either." (She chokes with a lump in her throat.)

**He:** That same evening Jalesh had a birthday party at McDonalds. He came back hungry from the party because everything was non-vegetarian there. He was so sensitive even at that tender age; and still is. When we went on a cruise in 2008, he insisted that I take an undertaking from the cruise line that even their cheese and pastas didn't contain any non-vegetarian ingredients.

**He:** When he prostrated at my feet for my blessings after his sacred thread ceremony in 1997, I was so touched that I also gave up non-vegetarian food at that moment.

### Narainji, do you like to cook?

**He:** No, but I can make a good cup of tea.

**She:** After 29 years of marriage, I get bed tea sometimes.



Sanjiv Valsan

**Together, you have made a beautiful family. Please share a tip for youngsters on love and commitment.**

**She:** Each partner has to be committed to each other. A perfect marriage would be where each partner brings out the best in the other. They must nurture each other as individuals.

**He:** In today's fast-paced world, it is better to know each other well before committing to marriage because work, the pace of life, everything has changed. There should be no harsh

surprises later. Share and care is my motto. I also believe that it is nice to live with elders...youngsters must try to do that.

**From Jaya Mahbubani's kitchen:**

### *Saibhaji*

This is a popular Sindhi dish that is easy to prepare and flexible as many of its ingredients are optional and can be easily substituted. When we asked Jayaji, "If you wanted to make something special for Narainji, what would

that be?" She said, "Saibhaji with boondi raita and brown caramelised onion rice." She further added, "Saibhaji is a very flexible dish and ever so healthy. It has many different vegetables tossed into it. I think it must have been innovated by women as an 'end-of-the-week' dish, when a little of everything would be left in the house."

#### **Ingredients**

- Spinach leaves (*palak*): 2 bunches; chopped
- Bengal gram (*chana dal*): 4 tbsps; soaked

- Brinjal (*baigan* or aubergines): 1 medium-sized; cubed
- Potato: 1 large; cubed
- French beans: 5-10; chopped
- Carrot: 1; diced
- Onion: 1 medium; chopped fine
- Ginger: 1-inch piece; chopped fine
- Green chillies: 3-4; chopped fine
- Garlic cloves: 4; chopped fine
- Tomatoes: 2 large; roughly chopped
- Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp
- Chilli powder: ½ tsp
- Cumin powder: ½ tsp
- Dry mango powder: ½ tsp
- Salt to taste
- Oil: 1 tbsp

#### If available

- Sorrel leaves (*khatta bhaji*): Less than a bunch
- Dill (*sua*): 1 cup
- Handful fenugreek leaves (*methi*)

#### Method

Heat oil and add the onions, ginger and green chillies. Lower the flame and gently sauté until the onions turn translucent. Add chopped tomatoes and cook for a minute. Add the Bengal gram and chopped vegetables (brinjal, potatoes, beans, carrots) and pressure-cook until the gram has cooked (2-3 whistles). Add the remaining ingredients (chopped greens and *masala*) except the garlic and pressure-cook up to 1 whistle. (Some people add the greens along with the other vegetables but it is preferable to add them at the final stage as they don't require as much cooking as Bengal gram.)

Blend well using a hand blender (*mandira*). Heat 1 tsp oil in another pan and add garlic. Lower the flame and sauté for a minute or two. Toss

into the vegetable. Switch off the flame and serve hot.

*Saibhaji* is a delicious accompaniment to *roti* and *pulao*. The Mahbubanis enjoy it with onion *pulao* or yellow rice. Serve with yoghurt (*boondi dahi* or any other *raita*) if you like. **Tip:** This dish is a good way to use up small quantities of fresh vegetables (except okra). Most combinations work well but at least one of the following is required for the perfect consistency: brinjal, yam or bottle gourd.

*Jigyasa and Pratibha are authors and publishers of two award winning books Cooking at Home with Pedatha and Sukham Ayu. They specialise in documenting culinary traditions. Visit them at [www.pritya.com](http://www.pritya.com)*



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# Where the mind is without fear

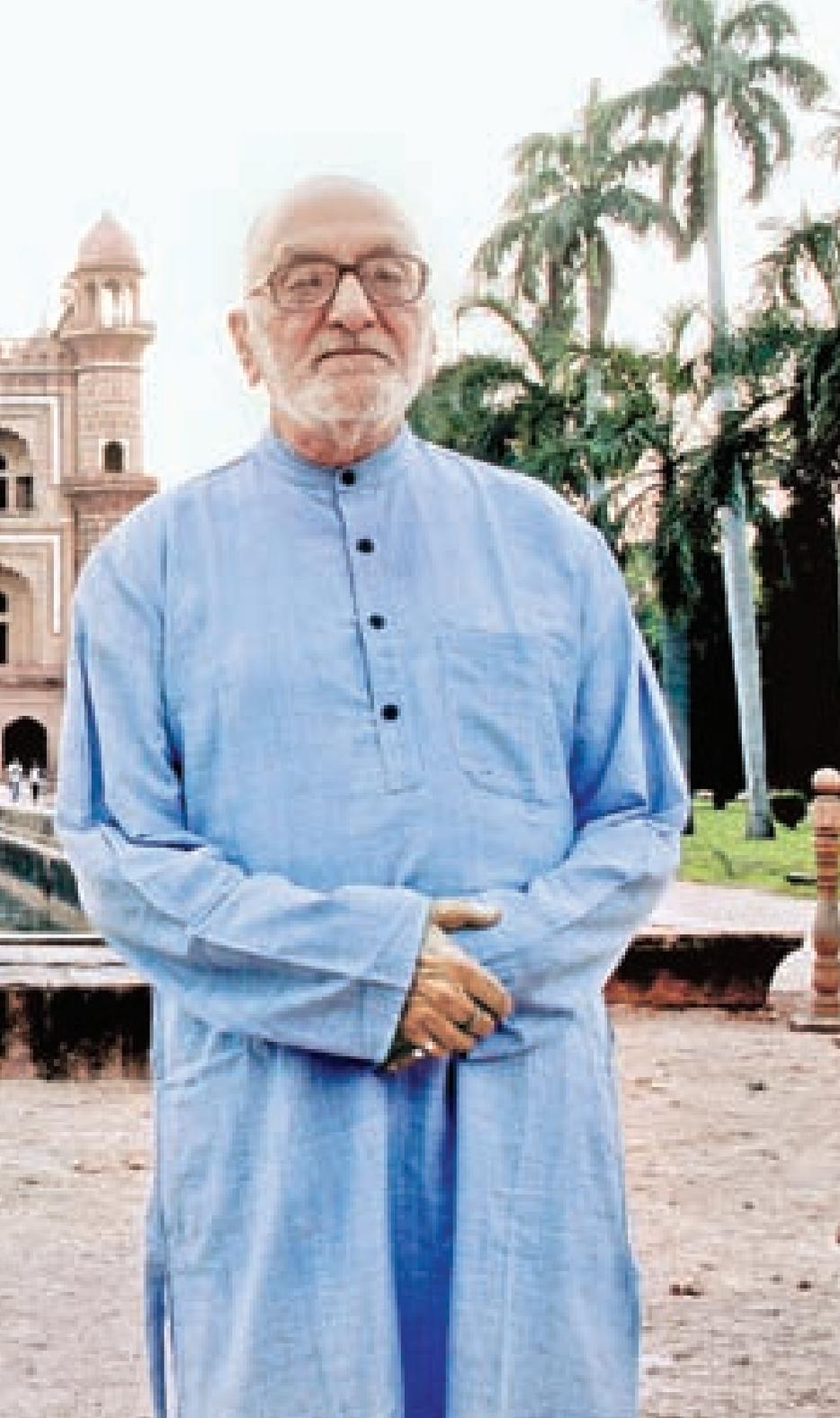
For this *krantikari*, the battle lines are still firmly drawn. Getting the government to pay its dues to the country's freedom fighters fuels D N Tara's inner strength, discovers **Anju Mohan**

**H**ouse No. 911 in South Delhi is a lifeline for freedom fighters. At the age of 101, its much-respected resident Omeshwar Nand Chibber, alias D N Tara, is still carrying the torch for those who participated in the most momentous chapter in the country's recent history. At

the heart of Tara's battle is a decent pension for freedom fighters who are unable to subsist, let alone meet their medical expenses, on the meagre handout from the government. He has also secured medical and other benefits for his erstwhile colleagues. "Our nation is ungrateful to freedom fighters," he asserts. "When

I was a journalist, I visited many countries that had got their freedom just like we did. Unlike us, they have special facilities for their freedom fighters, memorials and, most important, respect."

Despite his long innings, the sprightly crusader is articulate and quick on



Devanshu Sharma

the uptake, giving the government a run for its money. Dressed in an immaculate white *kurta* and *dhoti*, his hospitality is impeccable. A people's person, Tara enjoys plying guests with food and, of course, loves talking! "Nowadays, letters and phone calls to the PMO do not elicit any response," he rues, adding that during the Rajiv

Gandhi era, freedom fighters were given a hearing without ado.

Tara has been a member of the Freedom Fighters' Association of India for over 30 years and, amazingly, is still general secretary of the organisation, a post he has held for more than a decade. When the association had its

office at Connaught Place, he would arrive there on the dot of 11 am and return only after a full day's work. At the office, he would meet other freedom fighters and try to find solutions to their problems by taking up issues with relevant government bodies. Ever since the office shut down, he operates from home.

Thanks to this centenarian's uncommon determination, freedom fighters now receive the same medical treatment that Members of Parliament avail in public hospitals. After many meetings with government officials, Tara got the Central Government to dispatch an order to hospitals, placing the two on a par. "During my years as a journalist, I toured rural India extensively and met many freedom fighters in small towns. Some of them were handicapped. That's when I felt I needed to do something to ease their burden," reveals Tara, explaining what set him on this nerve-racking path.

It took a lot more than inspiration to shoulder the cause. Tara has a matchless zeal, an unimpeachable conscience and a compassionate spirit. And he never gives up! "I recently accompanied *Taraji* to a felicitation programme for freedom fighters at Rashtrapati Bhavan," recounts Amit Kumar, a regular visitor to Tara's home. "He did not hesitate to address the prime minister directly and question him about the response to letters he had written to the PMO. He is fearless and speaks with a quiet authority while questioning senior politicians."

Tara joined the freedom struggle when he was just 11. Even at that tender age, he was outraged that the British looked upon Indians as second-class citizens. So a young Chibber dropped out of school and joined the infamous *Bandar Sena*, a section of 'child' freedom fighters who carried out disruptive activities against the colonial rulers. "For instance, under the guise of playing *gulli-danda* or ball, we would throw the toy inside a

jail compound. When the jailors let us in to retrieve it, we would pass on a message, money or arms to our freedom fighters," he chuckles.

It took the British two years to wise up to this ingenuous tactic; by then, Tara had graduated to more serious 'subversive' activities such as arranging finances for the *krantikari*, disrupting railway and telecommunication systems and participating in agitations across the country. Like scores of his colleagues, Tara was jailed several times but never shed his ever-cheerful demeanour. "My fellow *krantikari* would often say, 'Taraji, the next time we are imprisoned, we hope you go along with us. Even jail is fun in your company.'"

Then he pulls out another memory. "The British had disarmed the Hindu army and it was dangerous for Hindus to move around. My colleagues and I helped move Hindu families from what is now Pakistan to Indian territory. If only we had retained those traits of selflessness and fearlessness, we could have built a great nation, one we could all be proud of today."

Then, slap-bang in the middle of the political strife, Cupid struck; the romance had the makings of a Bollywood potboiler. It was 1948; she was just 17, he was 32. "I was in Jammu and I fell in love with Bimla," he recalls. "I had two older brothers, both single, and I didn't know how to tell them I wanted to get married." So he mustered all his courage and told his brothers the wedding had already been arranged.

"My wife's family was in a hurry because they were living in what was to become Pakistan," he explains. "Hindus were being sent from these areas to refugee camps in India till they found a place to stay. My wife's father had passed away and the family didn't want to stay in a refugee camp. So we got married in a hurry." Thus, wedged between two curfews, the marriage was solemnised quietly in a temple

in Jammu. "Love marriages are more practical because you accept the good and bad in a person and make the relationship work," muses Tara, who lovingly cares for Bimla who has been bedridden for the past two years.

The newlyweds could not drop anchor. Instead, they lived in various cities such as Jalandhar, Amritsar, Sagar and Nagpur. Tara joined the Indian Army after Independence and was assigned to the Artillery Division. But he got into fisticuffs with a senior and was eventually court-martialled.

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**"Other countries who got their freedom just like us have special facilities, memorials and, most important, respect for their freedom fighters"**

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"He used abusive language a lot. When I told him he should not speak to a freedom fighter like that and complained to his superior, we got into a fist fight," reveals an uncompromising Tara.

Next, he joined the police force but ran away from the training institute in Ajmer because he refused to concoct false cases against people. "You see, I belong to the Mohyal clan, the same lineage as Bhai Matti Das and Bhai Jatti Das. Five generations of our community have sacrificed for the nation. We are intolerant of injustice."

In 1953, Tara joined *The Tribune*, kicking off a 27 year-long career as a journalist. During this time, he worked with newspapers like *Pratap*, *Milap*, *The Indian Express*, *Navbharat Times* and *The Times of India* as well as Hindu News Agency before he retired from the *Hindustan Times*. This is where he coined his pen name 'Tara', or 'shining heavenly body'.

While Tara reported on lofty issues, Bimla was a schoolteacher till their daughters were born. "My friends told me I was blessed with four daughters

as I used to always speak up for women! Once my daughters were married, I decided to take *vanprastha*. So we sold our home in Greater Kailash and left Delhi for Haridwar in 1980. But I found that alcohol flowed in the *math*, meat was available in the holy city and the people were insincere. There was nothing spiritual about them," says Tara. So he and Bimla returned to Delhi after 12 years.

Back home, Tara was thrilled to meet old friends like Mohan Singh Bammi. "I was a Parliament-based reporter

and had access to the Coffee Board in Parliament. Bammi and I used to love sipping coffee there." Keeping up the tradition, he, Bammi and their colleagues still meet at coffee houses on Baba Kharak Singh Marg, where they reminisce about old times and discuss the future of the country. "But the Jantar Mantar Dhaba serves the tastiest *dosa*," he adds.

What's this centenarian's recipe for good health? "Never harm anyone, immediately attend to even minor ailments, follow a routine and have faith in God. Fighting for the rights of others gives me a special strength." He practises what he preaches in letter and spirit. "I want to stay active as long as possible." As he was a part of building this nation, we asked Tara what he feels about the country today. "We had a vision of a prosperous nation with strong moral values and a good work ethic," he responds. "Unfortunately, our country is like hell today!" But there's a ray of hope. "Children today are very intelligent and inquisitive. Impart good values and teach them about our culture and they will lead our country to new heights." ✨



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# The BOMBAY BOY

From working in his family's sweetshop to becoming a member of the British peerage, Gulam Noon has written himself a life driven by extraordinary self-belief and ambition. **Radhika Raje** meets him in the city where the first chapter of his story was penned





As titles go, it's a rather intimidating one: Lord Gulam Noon of St John's Wood. But the man himself is anything but. In a crisp blue shirt, shirtsleeves rolled up, he greets us affably, even a little apologetically, in his suite on the 24th floor of the Taj Land's End in Bandra—we are early and he needs to wrap up a meeting. Perched on a chair while his guests occupy the elegant sofas strewn across the room, he is in his element, switching effortlessly from English to Hindi and back, witty and wry, seamlessly including us in the banter. A flurry of goodbyes and it is our turn.

Against the backdrop of the Arabian Sea, a magnificent vista that would dwarf a lesser man, the 75 year-old turns his attention to us with an almost boyish earnestness and intensity as he recounts the highlights of his journey from the by-lanes of Mumbai to the rarefied environs of London's St James Park (his office is a stone's throw from Buckingham Palace) and the corridors of Westminster. After growing his family-run sweetshop into a thriving sweets and savouries business, he moved to the UK to set up a packaged foods business that struck gold, earning him the epithet 'Curry King.' He had better titles in store: a knighthood in 2002, followed by his appointment to the House of Lords in January 2001—Sir Noon became Lord Noon.

To his friends—and wife Mohini Kent—though he is just 'Noon,' a man who straddles the very distinct worlds of the UK and India with a savoir faire that belies his early years of struggle; a man who keeps returning to his beloved Mumbai, the city that fuelled the fire of his ambition, despite the trauma of being stranded in the Taj during the terror attack on 26 November 2008; a man who airs his views on extremism, religion, immigration and education with forthrightness and candour; a man who doesn't forget a favour or a friend. "Noon makes time for everybody even if he doesn't have enough of it to spare," says Mohini, her voice tinged with concern as she fusses with his hair in preparation for our photo shoot. He wouldn't have it any other way. "People love me and I love them," he says. "It's a great feeling."

Photographs by **Jit Ray**

## IN HIS OWN WORDS

**It's always special to be back in Mumbai.** There are so many memories of my younger days. And I still have family in Bandra. I feel instantly at home whenever I return because I remain connected to everything going on in the country. I read Indian newspapers, watch Indian TV channels and follow Indian politics. Of course, more than anything, I am connected to India by the food my company [Noon Products] makes.

**My journey with food started in this city.** I began to work in my family's sweet shop, Royal Sweets, at the age of 14. My father died very early, leaving behind a large family, three brothers, three sisters and my mother, all living in a small house. We used to lay out our mattresses on the floor in a row that extended to the door of the washroom. That's when the fire of ambition began to burn strong; the urge to build my own big house. Although I loved my mother dearly, I couldn't wait to move out of that house. And I did; first establishing my own business in Mumbai and then making the move to the UK.

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**WHY IS THERE A DELAY IN PUNISHING KASAB? THE AMERICANS CAPTURED BIN LADEN, FINISHED HIM OFF AND GAVE HIM A PROPER BURIAL. SOMEONE WAS ARGUING THAT BIN LADEN SHOULD HAVE RECEIVED JUDICIAL PROCESS. DID HE GIVE JUDICIAL PROCESS TO THE VICTIMS OF 9/11?**

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**The Americans weren't ready for the concept of packaged Indian food—they still aren't.** In 1979, I went to the US to explore the possibility of setting up my business there. I found that people weren't really cooking at home. They would go to Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean restaurants but were not very familiar with Indian food. I tried to sell them frozen Indian food but it didn't take off. So I decided to try my luck in the UK—the technology was good and the demand even better. There was a whole generation of young Indians studying and working there who didn't want to cook but wanted the kind of food their mother would make. Over the years, we have come to cater to the British palate too and ventured into European markets like Germany, France, Italy and Switzerland. We supply everywhere in Europe.

**Asians in the UK are no longer limited to corner shops.**

From the 1960s to the 1980s, if you flew to London, you would see Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians all over Heathrow Airport cleaning the carpets, the toilets. My heart would sink when I saw it. Now, corner shops and cleaning jobs have been left to new immigrants and Asians have moved up to industries, offices, even hotels. Many of them are serving in government, have assumed political office. This is a tremendous evolution. When the first generation of Indians went to the UK in the 1940s and '50s, they would share small rooms with other immigrants.





One man would go for a shift in the morning and the other would occupy his bed till it was time for his night shift. Then, people got their families and started creating ghettos. Unfortunately, despite how far we have come as a community, many of us continue to live in ghettos without accepting the culture and traditions of the UK. That's why the country has such strict immigration laws now. We have abused their system for too long.

**I have established 14 factories in the UK and never once had to bribe anyone.** That's what I admire so much about

the country. It is a level playing field; if you have a concept that offers value for money and are brave enough to deliver on it, you will succeed, no matter who you are. Who you know is irrelevant. Unfortunately, corruption has been a part of India since Independence. It was always swept under the carpet; now the carpet has swollen, which is why the protests have emerged. Today, not a single important government document can be made in India without corruption. It's the entrepreneurs like the Tatas, Ambanis and other industrialists who have built the country; I question the role of the government and politicians. In the UK, the




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## MOHINI KEEPS LIFE REAL FOR ME. SHE HAS BEEN PHILOSOPHER AND GUIDE. I'VE TAUGHT HER A FEW THINGS TOO—I INTRODUCED HER TO *DABANNG!*

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government is much more responsive. If a common man wants to meet a local politician, it's so easy. I remember one of our local MPs who would buy milk from the corner shop and walk back home with it every day. Everybody on the road would talk to him and he would hear them out. There, whether it is the House of Commons or the House of Lords, they understand that it's the public paying their salary.

**I have never experienced racism as a Muslim.** But it also depends on how you live your life. The Prophet said, "Be loyal to the country in which you live." I follow that dictum. I do have many Muslim friends but I also have a lot of Hindu friends. I have prayed at a temple. When the House of Lords gathers for a session, it begins with a prayer. I pray in my own language and I pray whatever I want. No one can question that. Every Muslim cannot be considered as a terrorist. These terrorists have no religion. Their only goal is to terrorise people.

**I was in the Taj in Mumbai during the 26/11 attack and escaped unscathed.** I was in my suite with a few people

when the attack took place. We were to dine below but my brother had brought food for us. We remained holed up in that room. Everybody kept saying, 'This is our 9/11.' It was one's worst nightmare. I kept consoling everyone saying, 'Whatever has to happen will happen. If you allow these terrorists to get into your head, they have won.' We live in a dangerous world but if God wants to save you, no terrorist can kill you.

**I admire how America tackles these terrorists.** Why is there a delay in punishing Kasab? He is being provided *biryani* and *korma*. I wouldn't be surprised if his accomplices hijack an airplane and ask for his release; he will be released then. Why wait till that day? The Americans not only captured Bin Laden but finished him off and gave him a proper burial with a Muslim preacher. I think what they did was splendid; they respected the religion and the community.

That was the right thing to do. Somebody was arguing with me about how Bin Laden should have been given full judicial process; I was furious. Did he give judicial process to people that were killed on 9/11?

**Only education can save us from extremism.** It is the strongest currency in the world. As a Muslim, education was lacking in my community for years. Although things are changing now, the pace is slower than I would like. Religion can enhance our lives but it cannot become a substitute for education. I believe any problem a community has begins with its priest class. You don't need a middleman between the Almighty and his follower. You should have a direct connection to your god. But priests act as middlemen and influence your thinking. Every community has this problem; it's just the degree that differs. Once, in Delhi, a lady was crying out of joy in front of her priest, praising him because her child had graduated. I was amazed! The child graduated because of his ability and the support of his parents; the priest had nothing to do with it. This sort of ignorance can be removed only by education.

**It takes very little to make a large difference.** We must never forget our sense of humanity. My close friend in Bombay, who recently passed away, was an ordinary working-class person. He had two daughters and three grandchildren. In spite of that, he brought up a girl from the nearby slums like his own daughter; he educated her, got her married, helped her to buy a small flat. He helped only one child but it will have an impact on generations to come. I follow the same principle with my employees. In 1994, my factory caught fire; it was a very difficult time.

But I told my accountants to continue the wages of my employees until there was no money left in the bank. They too offered me their support wholeheartedly; conservative Punjabi women who would normally keep their distance would come and embrace me, assure me they were praying for me. Providentially, I was able to acquire another site close to mine and we were up and running exactly 10 weeks later.

**I will never let my employees down.** Noon Products became part of Kerry Foods, a large Irish conglomerate, in 2005, but I retain the post of chairman and act as an ambassador for the company. I cannot imagine leaving my employees after they stood by me in such difficult times. Kerry Foods had approached me to buy my company but I came to an understanding with the CEO and sold the company. Rather than stripping the assets of Noon Products, I wanted to take it forward. It's unbelievable but there are at least 1,200 Indians working in Noon Products. Both my daughters have also worked with me.

**My hospital in Rajasthan is another way to pay it forward.** In 2008, I opened the doors to Noon Hospital and Research Centre in Bhawani Mandi, my hometown. I moved to Mumbai as a child but this town is an integral part of my roots. I've built a modern, fully equipped hospital here, dedicated to my mother. Every person who steps into the hospital is guaranteed treatment. If anybody cannot afford it, they are treated free. My doctors have taken up the challenge to make the entire district cataract-free. We have also started mobile clinics. I visit the hospital every year. And even when I am in London, I am in constant touch with everyone there. If my people don't call me, I call and speak to them. I believe in communication.

**I love cricket.** On a Sunday, not even an army of horses can keep me home. Noon Products has a cricket team and we have won many trophies in club cricket. I play with them from time to time and I manage to score a few runs! People sometimes ask me if I need a runner when I play; I assure them that I have my two legs to run with. I was a weightlifter in my younger days and would go to the gymnasium in Mumbai. My passion for cricket began in those days. I used to leave home early, at 7.30 am, and play cricket in Azad Maidan [in Mumbai] before eventually reaching school; my mother never knew!

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## WHEN I WAS REGISTERING FOR A CLUB, I WROTE 'CRICKET' IN THE LINE FOR RELIGION. THEY ASKED ME TO CHANGE IT SO I PUT 'ISLAM' IN BRACKETS

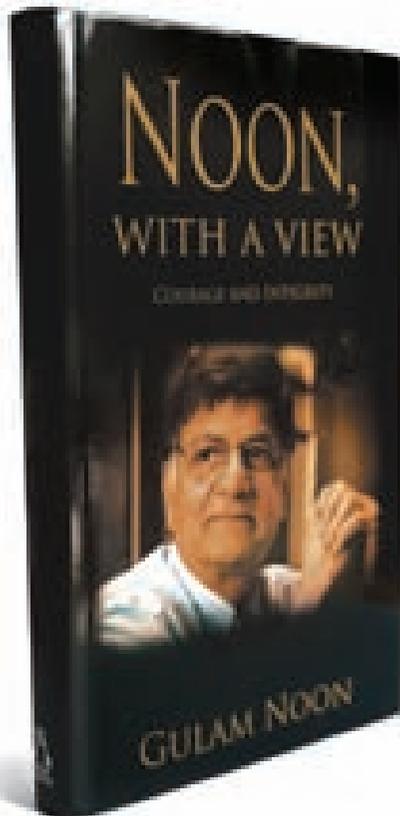
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I missed my younger sister's engagement; it was on a Sunday. I remember the time I was registering as a member of a club; the form had a line for religion and I wrote 'cricket'. They asked me to change it so I put Islam in brackets.

**My mother never understood my love for cricket.** I once told her that if I had enough money, I would go and meet the 3 Ws of the West Indies cricket team: Everton Weekes, Frank Worrell and Clyde Walcott. My mother would laugh and tell me the West Indies was a million miles away. But when I had really earned enough, I made that trip. I went with my children, grandchildren, sons-in-law, nephews and brothers to Barbados for the World Cup in 2008. Two of my heroes had passed away but I still wanted to see the place where they were buried and offer my respects. It was a dream and I made it come true.

**Everyone should have fire in their belly.** Never give up on dreams—or life. Things will keep happening; you need to enjoy the good, and face the bad with all your reserves of strength. You will eventually prevail and come out stronger, renewed. Your age is irrelevant to this process. I believe I am never too old to learn, to work. People ask me why I don't retire; I tell them that if I retire so early, I will drive my wife nuts and die early!

**Mohini keeps life real for me.** We married in 1998. She has been a philosopher and guide; I discuss everything with her—except business. She is not a businesswoman; she is a creative person and very down-to-earth and grounded. I have learnt many things from her, and hopefully taught her a few things too. For instance, I recently introduced her to *Dabangg*; I've seen the film far too many times, although I am generally a Hollywood fan. So is Mohini, but I made her sit down and watch *Munni badnaam hui!* It was fun. ✨



# Truth be told

You can change your world, urged journalist Shishir Joshi in the September 2011 issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*. He was speaking of the citizen journalist workshop he instituted for senior citizens in a bid to translate their immense potential into active service for society. Now, we introduce you to five remarkable silvers who attended the workshop and came back with not just a heightened sense of civic responsibility but the tools to do their bit for their neighbourhoods and communities. Read their stories. And if they inspire you to turn to your pen, go to [www.journalism.org.in](http://www.journalism.org.in) to see how you can be the change you want to see.

## Swatantra Radhakrishnan Media 'veteran'

I was named Swatantra because I was born in 1947," says the 63 year-old media war horse with a smile. With her husband and both daughters working with the media, and her own career in the Government of India's Information Service, Swatantra Radhakrishnan's decision to take up citizen journalism did not surprise many.

When she started her career 40 years ago, she was a bubbly youngster with lofty ideas of changing the world. "Today, I am the grandmother of an 11 year-old but I still hope to make a difference," says Radhakrishnan, who has worked with Doordarshan and the Research and Reference Division of the Film Censor Board. "You name it and I've done it, but the Press Information Bureau remains my favourite."

After retirement, Radhakrishnan happened to stumble upon a citizen journalism workshop organised by Shishir Joshi. "They taught us what type of issues to focus on and simple things like how to write and present an article. I also met people from diverse backgrounds, such as RTI activists, retired cops, BMC people, doctors, teachers and lawyers. It made me feel I hadn't done enough for my country," says our budding citizen journalist, whose personal inspiration is V P Ramachandran, former editor of *Matrubhoomi*.

Ever since the workshop, Radhakrishnan has written on a wide range of issues and contributed to many publications. As she's fluent in English and Tamil, she writes in regional languages as well. "I enjoy writing on health issues," she confesses. "I was quite upset when I saw a brief article in a newspaper that reported a smallpox outbreak. It was disturbing as the WHO stopped the smallpox vaccine back in 1979. I would like to find out what we can do to protect kids across the country."

The rise in breast cancer also concerns her, while the issue of female infanticide makes her angry. "I feel more for social issues than civic issues," reveals our social warrior, pointing to a media campaign that left an indelible mark on her. It was the 'Use a Condom' campaign by the National Aids Control Organisation. "The ad starts with a man saying, 'I can do this, I can do that', and he points out the beautiful things he is doing in his life. At the end, he says, 'because I use a condom.'"

Radhakrishnan says it is important to stay true to the facts and not sensationalise them. And she adds, with the experience of her family in the media and her own innings, "One must not believe everything the media puts out!"

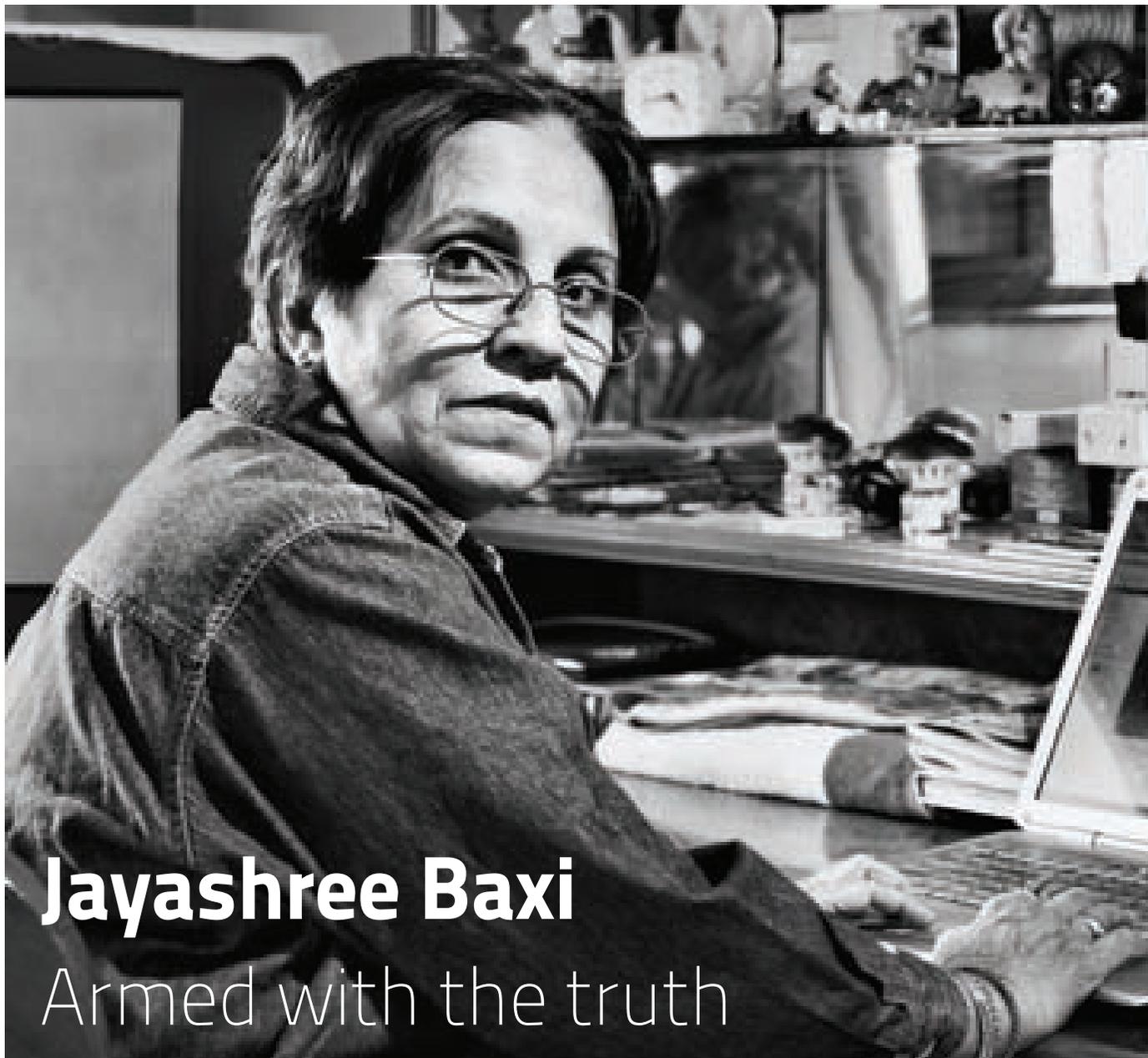
—Radhika Raje



Utkarsh Sanjanwala



“ I'm a grandmother of an 11 year-old but I still hope to make a difference. I feel more for social issues than civic issues. Female infanticide makes me angry



# Jayashree Baxi

## Armed with the truth

**N**ever ask a woman her age; I am sweet-16 plus," laughs 57 year-old Jayashree Baxi, who opted for premature retirement from the Indian Army's Military Nursing Service to pursue her passion for writing and making short films. "To me, citizen journalism means gathering information on what is happening and spreading awareness about it," she explains. "Journalism is about honesty, integrity and courage, and bringing hard-hitting facts to light that have a bearing on the common man." Armed with the desire to make a difference, she has been writing letters to the editor on social issues such as nuclear projects and their impact, human trafficking, traffic chaos, rave parties and human relationships to newspapers like

*Pune Mirror, Sakaal Times and The Indian Express* for the past three years.

Baxi is partial to topics concerning children and the elderly and she's also scripted a short film on the perils of narcotics addiction for children. "Every child has the right to education but it is only on paper," she rues. "It is heart-breaking to see so many children still begging and selling knick-knacks at traffic signals. Worse, they also suffer from various addictions. Also, world over, life expectancy has improved but specialised care for the elderly is not available. Why, even simple facilities like ramps and elevators for senior citizens are not available!"



“ I would like to deal with issues like increases in fuel prices, nuclear plants, unemployment, preventing terrorism and curbing corruption

Hemant Patil

There are many other issues she's concerned about. "Regular increases in fuel prices, nuclear plants, unemployment, preventing terrorism and curbing corruption are all issues I would like to deal with," says Baxi, who has attended workshops organised by the Institute of Moving Images, the Film and Television Institute of India and the National Film Archive of India, to hone her short-filmmaking skills.

A firm believer in the 'power of one', she feels individual action can lead to collective action. "That's when we can make a real difference," says a resolute Baxi, adding, "Making a difference to people's lives is its own reward. We have seen the role of the media in the Jessica Lal case and, more

recently, the media coverage of the two young lads Reuben Fernandez and Keenan, who were killed while trying to save the honour of their female friends. Their families and friends have bravely reported the truth and brought it to light. Getting justice for those who are deceased is citizen journalism in its truest form."

Baxi, who says she is inspired by journalists like Shekhar Gupta and Arnab Goswami, vows that she will don the role of citizen journalist "till her last breath" but quickly adds that it is not as easy as people think. "It is hard work and not one bit glamorous!"

—Khursheed Dinshaw





“ It is crucial to stick to the facts and verify them. That’s what lends your writing authenticity

# Vimla Behram

## Write and wrong

Writing is her *raison d'être* and 68 year-old Vimla Behram uses it to arouse our collective conscience. After she retired from a long and uninterrupted stint with the State Bank group in 2008, she sought to keep herself occupied without the pressures of a regular job. “I have always been fond of the English language and I love teaching and training,” she says. “I did a lot of training in the bank and I knew I could do a good job outside. So I set my sights on teaching and writing.”

Behram, who lives in Sainikpuri in Secunderabad, found a window to the world of writing two years ago, when a friend pointed her to a website called ‘Indian Women’. The portal gave her ample opportunity to express her thoughts on a wide range of subjects, from her twin sons to garage sales! But before she could really find her rhythm, the portal shut down. Then, she found ‘Write Space’, another portal, and the *Twin City Digest*, a tabloid, which further channelled her writing. Although the latter did not last very long, Behram wrote a few meaningful articles about small-time corruption that makes life difficult for the common man.

When she learnt of a citizen journalism workshop conducted by senior journalists Shishir Joshi and Alope Thakur in March, Behram was thrilled. “It is crucial to stick to the facts and verify them,” she says. “That’s what lends your writing authenticity.” An avid reader and restless traveller, Behram is now determined to speak up against injustice of any kind. And when she finds an interesting news headline, the gears in her head start turning. She jots down points, researches the subject and then puts it all together as a rough draft. Finally, she types out her final piece on the computer.

A news report about an MLA slapping a bank manager provoked a passionate piece about a humiliating incident she had endured during her own banking career, where she fought against all kinds of coercion and still survived. And when she read the Supreme Court’s verdict on Aruna Shanbaug’s plea for euthanasia earlier this year, Behram wrote an impassioned plea in favour of euthanasia with the meticulous care of Derek Humphrey in his book, *Final Exit*. Her article was published in Dubai daily *Gulf News*. What’s more, Behram’s take on the tsunami in Japan was completely different from others—she wrote about how Indians would have dealt with such a situation.

“My background gives me a fantastic perspective on life,” says the silver, whose colourful cultural background is a mix of the North-east and South. After travelling far and wide, she married a Parsi, a fellow banker. “It has made me tolerant,” she adds. “But when I notice any wrongdoing, I can’t help but take up the pen.”

—Shyamola Khanna

Anand Kumar Soma

# Alamelu Subramaniam

## Big sister's watching!

As Chennai bathes in the glow of the morning sun and most silvers are nursing a cup of steaming coffee or taking a leisurely stroll, Alamelu Subramaniam is running through a mental checklist of things to do.

Compassionate by nature, Subramaniam always finds the time to lend a hand. But it took a large open pit with a rod protruding from it in Chennai's congested T Nagar that set the 55 year-old on the path to becoming a responsible citizen journalist. Her social conscience aroused, Subramaniam wrote to a local newspaper, drawing attention to the danger the pit posed. Surprisingly, her letter was not only published, it drew an outcry from neighbouring residents. Subramaniam tasted her first success as a citizen journalist when the pit was closed within a week.

That was two years ago. Ever since, the former insurance agent and mother of two began devoting three hours a week to writing 10 letters to dailies such as *T Nagar Talk* and *Mambalam Times*, drawing attention to local issues. Usually, three to four letters are published weekly, which is testimony to her earnestness and honest approach.

The turning point came a few months ago, when Subramaniam took a short course in citizen journalism conducted by J M Foundation, a Mumbai-based NGO, in Bengaluru. "I needed to fine-tune my skills," explains our public-spirited warrior. "The course taught us how to approach legal issues, about consumer awareness, and how citizen journalism is different from mainstream journalism," she explains. "And I gained some valuable in-

sight on how to assess an issue and present it before the media, what to highlight, and how to approach people like civic officials."

Next, Subramaniam's heart went out to schoolchildren and senior citizens wading through knee-deep water on flooded roads during the monsoon, for want of pavements. The photograph she took and a letter to the editor she wrote was published; the municipality has promised to find a solution.

Now, armed with a video camera and voice recorder, this intrepid campaigner is poised to join CNN-IBN as a citizen journalist. "I hope to make a difference by taking local news to a global platform," she says. And she seeks to achieve this in the finest traditions of balanced journalism—Subramaniam not only points out the negatives but the positives too. In fact, she recently submitted a picture of a school that lays stress on cleanliness and garbage disposal to applaud its efforts.

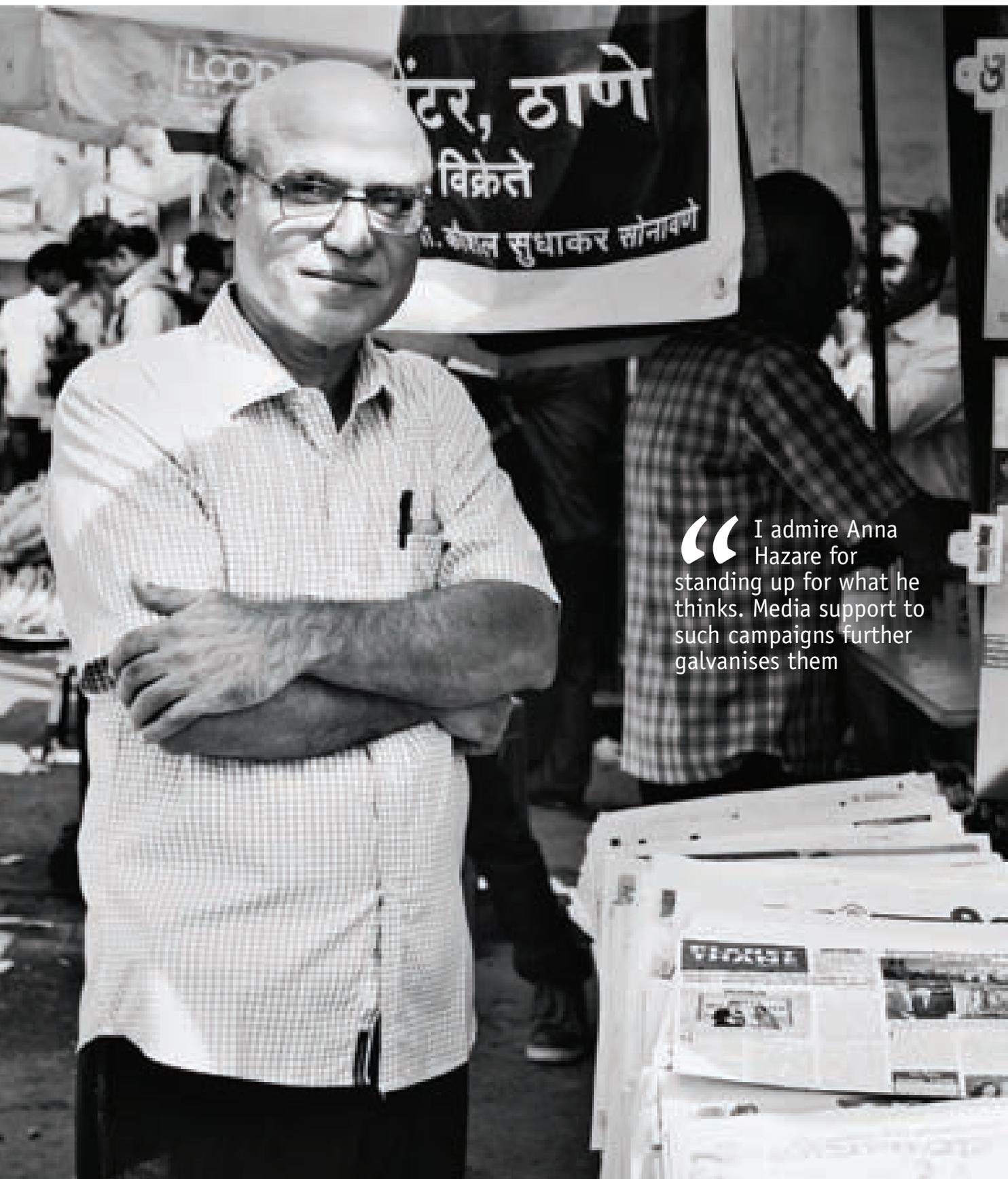
When Subramaniam is not spurring local authorities into action, she leads a group of volunteers who clean a temple a week, every Sunday. She is also involved in a group that encourages people to plant trees and keep their surroundings litter-free. But keeping a watchful eye on public issues and using her pen to do the talking is closest to her heart. Are we looking at the next Cho Ramaswamy, Shivashankari or Barkha Dutt? With a twinkle in her eye, Subramaniam responds, "Who knows!"

—Radhika Mohan



Chennai Pix

“ I have learnt how to assess an issue and approach civic officials. I hope to make a difference by taking local news to a global platform



“ I admire Anna Hazare for standing up for what he thinks. Media support to such campaigns further galvanises them



Haresh Patel

# Raghvendra Odeyar

## It's never too late

For someone who wasn't interested in writing until a few months ago, Raghvendra Odeyar is an unconventional citizen journalist. A regular retiree until recently, Odeyar just can't stop writing now. "I also love blogging and posting titbits on Facebook," beams the affable 65 year-old from Mumbai.

He turned to writing after a friend mentioned a workshop on citizen journalism in January. "So I thought I would give it a shot," says Odeyar, who started his career as a stenographer with Sandoz Pvt Ltd and retired as a senior commercial executive in 1997. But lurking in him all these decades was a citizen journalist begging to be heard.

The three-day workshop, organised by senior journalist Shishir Joshi, was a turning point. "It encouraged me to take up writing, not as a hobby but as a second career. I was most interested in the session on Right to Information [RTI]. I was just generally happy with the experience," says our happy-go-lucky sexagenarian.

News reporting was never his cup of tea but now Odeyar is constantly scouting around for subjects to write on as a freelance journalist. "I contribute to a local tabloid called *Planet Thane* and am drawn to health as well as social issues," muses Odeyar, who loves being "in the field". He has also written on subjects like anger management. "I usually research a subject thoroughly before I write about it," he says, adding that he is especially inspired when he stumbles upon a good piece of writing. "I like reading Asha Mhante, a correspondent with *The Times of India*. She has a good style." According to him, the recent anti-corruption campaign launched by Anna Hazare was an eye-opener. "I admire Anna Hazare for standing up for what he thinks," says our budding campaigner. In his view, media support to such campaigns sends a message of unity that further galvanises them.

Odeyar is a yoga enthusiast and believes it is important to live a balanced life. "I love hanging out with my family, and I have two grandchildren aged eight and four," he says with pride, a broad smile lighting up his face. Indeed, he has much to smile about these days. He can dip into his creative palette whenever he feels the urge and the hours "just fly". And now he aims to be an avid shutterbug. "All my articles are published along with pictures I have clicked. I am still an amateur and have a lot to learn. But isn't it all about evolving and improving?"

—Radhika Rajee

# Spreading the word

Kerala's RTI messenger P Sherfudeen urges people across the state to use the Act in the best possible way, reports Nisary Mahesh

During his non-eventful working years with an airline company in Saudi Arabia, P Sherfudeen itched to do something different, something that would make people sit up and take notice of him and the world around them. In 2000, back in his hometown Kannur after retirement, he tried his hand at business but didn't find it meaningful enough. The news of the passage of the Right to Information Act in 2005 brought in excitement; Sherfudeen immediately got hold of a copy and studied it thoroughly. To spread the message about the Act, he wrote a book the same year in Malayalam titled *Vivaravakasa Niyamam* and joined the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative—as Kerala consultant, he played a proactive role in finalising the police reforms of the state this year.

Calling the RTI Act “one of the best laws passed since Independence”, the 58 year-old asks common people to use it in the best possible way with an aim to achieve transparency in governance and eradicate corruption. “The bill passed by the Supreme Court in 2006 to reform the police department is binding in its authority,” he says. “But it is not being followed in the state. Governments are failing in their primary duty to provide the public with an honest, efficient and effective police service that ensures the rule of law and an environment of safety and security.” Of the opinion that the existing police systems are a legacy of colonial rule and have been shaped by post-colonial histories, he says his main focus is to establish a Police Security Commission, a Police Complaints Authority and a Police Establishment Board. Sherfudeen's four-year fight for the implementation of democratic policing is finally

paying off. The Kerala government issued a Police Act this year to make the force more progressive. That apart, he has used the RTI for more transparency in the appointment of information commissioners and has actively protested the politicisation of the State Information Commission.

“It happened only in Kerala that an active member of a political party became an information commissioner,” says Sherfudeen, recollecting the incident last year that led to wide protests across the state. At present, information commissioners are selected by a panel comprising the chief minister, home minister and the leader of the opposition. “A nominative selection process that includes the public should be introduced,” he adds.

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**Sherfudeen's main focus is to establish a Police Security Commission, a Police Complaints Authority and a Police Establishment Board in his home state Kerala**

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Another area where he played a pivotal role is the regeneration of the Pazhassi irrigation project, which was initiated in North Kerala 40 years ago by then prime minister Morarji Desai. “The project was launched at a cost of billions to satisfy the requirements of the farmland of North Kerala,” he explains. “As a good portion of the land meant for the project came under unauthorised occupation, the project itself appeared ineffective.” Following Sherfudeen's RTI application, when

enquiries were made on land occupancy, revenue officers wrote them off by claiming the land documents were ‘lost’. “It was the toughest challenge,” says Sherfudeen. However, because of his sustained appeals, the ‘lost’ documents are in the process of retrieval and the public voice is finally gaining strength through a mass signature campaign. “Thousands of farmers will be benefited from these efforts,” he asserts.

In 2008, Sherfudeen filed an application against the way in which a former minister promoted her daughter-in-law from personal staff to gazetted rank within a year, which was against the rules and without the chief minister's sanction. “With RTI intervention, the minister was forced to drop her relative. However, she had completed two years of service by then, making her eligible for pension,” says Sherfudeen, who was also instrumental in making the members of the Adiyar community eligible for their privileges—this minor community, which comprises few families, just didn't exist in district documents, thus making its members ineligible for facilities, like educational concessions. “With our efforts, they received a certificate recognising them as a backward community.”

Buoyed by the support of his daughters and wife, Sherfuddin calls his work “challenging but immensely satisfying”. And he will continue in his mission to spread the word. “One of the main reasons the RTI Act has not been properly utilised is lack of awareness,” he says with passion. “It's high time that government departments introduce a system to collect RTI applications online. This will prompt more citizens to participate in the movement.” ✨







# The land of the **RHINO**

Arguably the most beautiful national park in the subcontinent, Kaziranga brims with ponds, lakes and rivers and resounds to the calls of magnificent beasts and exotic birds

✦ 📷 Susheela Nair

**I**t was a chill winter morning. As the mist lifted, visibility gradually improved, revealing the beauty all around us: Kaziranga, the most beautiful national park in the subcontinent, brimming with ponds, lakes and rivers where fish swim peacefully, otters frolic and herds of elephant splash. Situated in the heart of Assam, Kaziranga—‘where the mountain goat has water’, in the parlance of the Karbi tribe—is bordered by the Brahmaputra in the north, and fringed by the Karbi Hills in the south. As much of the 430 sq-km national park is open country covered by wetlands and grasslands, the wildlife viewing here is beyond compare.

We began our voyage of discovery at the Elephant Riding Point in Mihimukh, in the central Kohora range of Kaziranga National Park. This is the range with the most facilities and where you complete your entry formalities. (The

other tourist ranges are Baghori in the west and Agartoli in the east.) After queuing up at the point, we clambered onto the howdah on elephant back and set out into the wilderness. The convoy of elephants trundled its way through the dew-laden grasslands. Our elephant bore us with aplomb, steadily bringing down huge bunches of wild grass, every now and then pausing to pop one into his mouth.

As we lumbered deeper into the grassy plain, we kept our eyes peeled for the one-horned rhinoceros, the star attraction of the Park. We came across a pair of massive rhinos, gently grazing in the elephant grass. Cattle egrets were feasting on the insects that live on them. This was my first rendezvous with the rhino in its natural habitat; we stared and our cameras whirred incessantly. The rhinos remained nonchalant, used to a gawking audience, unfazed even by the presence of our elephant. We watched these lumbering one-horned beasts draped in their grey armoured hide for a very long time. Myopic, built like a battle tank on stubby legs, the rhino is possibly India's most endangered species.

Eventually, we moved forward. From our lofty vantage point on elephant back, we spotted hundreds of swamp deer (or rare *barasingha*) trot past wild boar before they retreated into the high vegetation, the males carrying their antlers with consummate grace. Almost always seen in herds, sometimes up to 50 or 60, they are usually found near water bodies; in the Park they are concentrated in the west and south. Other than the *barasingha* and the endangered one-horned rhino, Kaziranga teems with myriad varieties of wildlife. At any point in your travels through its expanse, you could come across the hoolock gibbon, wild water buffalo, tiger, leopard, capped langur, sloth bear, jackal, hog deer and python.

This richness of fauna is testament to Kaziranga's thriving conservation effort. A swampy, almost inaccessible wetland, used mercilessly as a hunting ground by locals and tribals, Kaziranga found a rather unlikely saviour in Lady Curzon, wife of the Viceroy of India. A wildlife enthusiast, she visited the area in 1904, hoping to catch a glimpse of the rhino in its natural habitat—she returned seeing nothing more than its pugmarks. Poachers had been systematically butchering the great beasts for their horns; at the time, there were believed to be only 12 rhinos left in the forest. Disheartened and appalled, she persuaded her husband to declare Kaziranga a protected area. It was formally declared a 'Reserve Forest' in 1908 and closed officially for shooting in 1926. In 1950, Kaziranga was designated as a wildlife sanctuary and, in 1974, it was accorded the status of a National Park. Internationally acclaimed as one of the last undisturbed habitats of the great Indian one-horned rhinoceros, Kaziranga National Park was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985.

Forest range officer Dharanidhar Boro, 54, is delighted to tell us the history of the Park over steaming cups of tea and biscuits in Mihimukh after the elephant ride. Considered the hero of Kaziranga, he has been at the helm of the Park's conservation drive since 1987—according to the census taken in April 2009, the number of rhinos has gone up to 2,048, from 1,855 in the last 2004 census. Boro, who leads a team of around 250 rangers, and motivates youngsters in the area to join the forest department, truly believes he is among God's chosen few with a mission to protect the rhinos from poachers. A remarkable man.

After exchanging notes of sightings with him, we set out on a jeep safari further into the central Kohora range. The





Hog deer (left) and wild water buffalo are just some of the varieties of wildlife you encounter in the depths of Kaziranga

jungle churned with the sounds of trumpeting elephants, snorting wild water buffaloes, grunting wild boars and whispering deer. The vegetation was a shifting kaleidoscope; flat grassland interspersed with streams and ponds; tall elephant grass, followed by open grazing grounds with shorter grass, tall trees and cane thickets. This swampy wetland ecosystem is nourished by the alluvial floodplain of the immense Brahmaputra.

Bikram, our ebullient driver, doubled up as guide; together, we marvelled at the towering silk cotton trees with their red flowers in bloom. He escorted us to an enormous ficus tree where we were treated to the rare sight of a python gliding effortlessly upwards. We moved on the route that runs along a rivulet through a wooded stretch; here, we saw turtles sunning on rotting tree trunks and a playful otter diving after fish in the water. When we peered through the trees, we sighted an Indian roller (blue jay) taking flight into the sun, flashing its sky-blue wings. Bikram showed us an immense dung heap, a sure sign of the presence of rhinos in the vicinity. Interestingly, rhinos return to the same spot to defecate, leading to the accumulation of such large heaps.

On our return, it was a delight to watch the stately lesser adjutant stork pacing along the banks of a water body. While the rhino is the uncontested hero of the Park, Kaziranga is also a birdwatcher's paradise, as Bikram informed us. The Park boasts over 480 species; of these, 23 are glob-

ally threatened birdlife, both resident and migratory. Kaziranga also plays host to a large number of winter water fowl from distant places like Siberia and Tibet; rosy pelicans too seek sanctuary here. While driving through the grassland, we spotted red jungle fowls dashing across our paths and scurrying into the dense cane thickets. Bikram's sharp eyes spotted a profusion of species, including bar-headed geese, mallard spot-bill and tufted ducks, white and black-necked storks, the endangered Bengal Florican (a type of bustard), pied hornbills, Kaleej pheasants, hill mynas, parakeets, pallas and grey-headed eagles and osprey. We were also graced with a sighting of the pelican (the park maintains a pelicanry), migratory ducks, ibis, cormorant, peacock, heron and ring-tailed fishing eagle.

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**While the rhino is the uncontested hero, Kaziranga is also a birder's paradise, with over 480 species, 23 of which are endangered**

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The next day, we headed to Agartoli, the eastern range, rated by many as the most magnificent part of Kaziranga. Roads from this rich area lead to tall grass habitats and the sandy banks of the Brahmaputra. Driving along the river with a variety of semi-evergreen trees forming close canopies along its banks, we could see a herd of elephants, including a youngster, taking a dip. They vanished into the thick vegetation after their

bath. Sitting on the opposite riverbank, we watched two other elephants indulging in a mock fight with their tusks interlocked. Wild buffaloes wallowed in secluded mud baths and wild ducks paddled across the waters in formations. We also came across a giant rhino freshly gleaming with mud, seeking a shady respite from the sun. Through a



## FACT FILE

**WHEN TO VISIT**

Kaziranga National Park is open from October to the end of April. It is closed during the monsoon months between May and September.

**GETTING THERE**

**Air:** Though Jorhat is the nearest airport, Guwahati is a better option as it is the gateway to Assam.

**Road:** All buses on NH 37 leaving from Guwahati for Upper Assam stop at Kaziranga.

**WHERE TO STAY**

Kohora, the central range, has a wide range of options, ranging from tourist lodges to high-end hotels. The three tourist lodges (Aranya Tourist Lodge, Bonoshree Lodge, Bonani Lodge) run by Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ASTDC) are excellent for the nominal tariffs and facilities offered. You can contact ASTDC in Guwahati for bookings at 0361-2454570, 2454421, 2457117.

**JEEP RIDES**

You can hire vehicles from the Kaziranga Jeep Drivers' Association in Kohora. They have 90 vehicles and 180 guides. The rates are fixed for different ranges. There are three safari trails within the park: Kohora, the central range; Agartoli, the eastern range; and Baghori, the western range.

**ELEPHANT SAFARIS**

Elephant safaris operate only during the early morning hours. There is no advance reservation. However, reservations can be made in the evening, a day prior to the safari.

**TIPS**

Visit the Nature Interpretation Centre at the Kohora range office for maps and postcards. Apart from an entry fee of ₹ 20, you have to pay a vehicle entry fee (₹ 200) and still camera (₹ 50) and video camera (₹ 500) fees.



An elephant safari (top) is one of the highlights of a visit to the Park; the brilliant plumage of an Indian roller

powerful pair of binoculars, we zoomed in on a variety of birds: the great cormorant, darters, Brahminy ducks and bar-headed geese. We returned both sated and humbled by the creations of nature.

For anyone who loves the outdoors, Kaziranga is a must-visit; for a wildlife enthusiast, it is Eden. I only have one regret: I couldn't sight the hoolock gibbon, an elusive and rare primate. The male is black while the female is buff-colored; they are tailless, prancing from tree to tree, relying entirely on their long arms and legs to swing. I'm told the way to track them is by following their plaintive morning calls, a sound that goes something like *hooku-whuoku-hoo-o-ku*. I will return to the Land of the Rhino—and listen for that call. ✨



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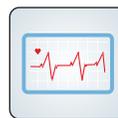
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# Once upon a time

ASSAMESE WRITER BANDITA PHUKAN GETS THE ACCLAIM SHE DESERVES WITH THE BAL SAHITYA PURASKAR, REPORTS TAPATI BARUAH KASHYAP



Photographs by Subhamoy Bhattacharjee

It was 1982. Anant Pai's popular *Amar Chitra Katha* series brought out a story on Jaimati, a legendary Assamese woman from the 17th century. Translated into 14 Indian languages, it was the first time an Assamese legend earned national fame. The writer Bandita Phukan is this year's winner of the Bal Sahitya Puras-

## LITERATURE

kar awarded by the Sahitya Akademi; she won for her Assamese children's novel *Seujia Dharani*, where a young boy Sonti, along with his friend Aziz, discover the alarming rise in pollution around them.

Sonti, who has appeared in 21 of Phukan's enchanting books, including a series, is an eight year-old

'everychild' who embodies the needs and aspirations of young children. In fact, in 2001, during a book tour to the US, Sonti travelled with Phukan through *Sonti and Henry-hont*. "I created him by drawing from my own son," says Phukan. "I never find young children's complaints tiresome; that is why I continue to rediscover their hidden innocence."

Author of 81 books, 55 of which are exclusively for children, Phukan believes her identity does not begin and end with her literary career. One among the first three women engineers from the northeast, and the first woman to write science fiction in Assamese, she draws inspiration from her mother Hiranmoyee Devi and grandfather Kumudesar Borthakur. While Borthakur was the writer of the first Assamese detective novel (and subsequently a series), her mother's novel *Jivan Sangram*, written in 1955 with the great earthquake of 1950 as the backdrop, was also very popular. Her engineer-husband Shyamanta is also a writer of repute who believes his wife is exceptionally talented and hardworking and deserves every bit of the Sahitya award.

Born in 1948 in Dhekiajuli, Phukan had a colourful childhood as her father Bipin Chandra worked as a school inspector in the North East Frontier of Assam (now Arunachal Pradesh) and retired as assistant director of education. His job took the family to various remote places in the mountains and by the turbulent Lohit River in Arunachal. Phukan

graduated from Assam Engineering College in 1971 and, in 1972, joined Assam Gas Company. She revisited her childhood haunts after marriage and was so moved that she wrote *Jumi Rima aru Xihot*, an autobiographical novel that depicts her childhood; the book won an award from the Asom Publication Board and is now in its seventh edition.

"Writing for children requires a soft and appealing language as well as innovative storytelling methods," she says. A mother of two, she vividly remembers the days she wrote late into the night after her children went to bed. "*Maa* has achieved a lot despite *Deuta* [father] being away most of the time. It's remarkable how she balanced her illusionary world with real life," says her daughter Natasha from Hyderabad.

Now living a retired life with Shyamanta in Guwahati, Phukan is working on a science fiction novel centred on Minu, daughter of a single parent. With Minu having already enchanted readers with *Minur Atithi* and *Minu aru Robot Sakhi*, Phukan plans to bring her back in many more books.



**BLOSSOMS AND BELLS  
AN AGRICULTURIST  
TURNED JAPANESE  
INTERPRETER, SARBJIT  
SINGH CHADHA'S LOVE  
FOR JAPAN BLOOMED  
IN 1968 AS A 15 YEAR-  
OLD. HE WAS SENT TO  
JAPAN TO LEARN ORANGE  
CULTIVATION; IN THE  
BARGAIN HE LEARNT THE  
LANGUAGE, ABSORBED  
THE CULTURE AND FELL  
IN LOVE WITH ENKA, A  
SOULFUL 'GHAZAL-LIKE'  
GENRE OF SINGING THAT  
ORIGINATED IN THE  
MEIJI PERIOD (1868-  
1912), WHICH WAS  
KNOWN FOR POLITICAL,  
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC  
'ENLIGHTENMENT'. LAST  
MONTH, CHADHA, 59,  
REGALED AUDIENCES IN  
DELHI, GURGAON AND  
CHENNAI, "THE BEST  
PLACE AFTER JAPAN".  
FOR A GLIMPSE OF  
CHADHA'S MUSIC (HE IS  
THE ONLY NON-JAPANESE  
ENKA SINGER), GO TO  
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# Old-world charm

Khursheed Dinshaw on the ritual called Dorabjee and Sons, the oldest Parsi eatery in Pune

Unpretentious plastic chairs and Formica tables do nothing to discourage foodies as they happily relish their Parsi meal at Dorabjee and Sons, the traditional eatery in Pune that has seduced millions of taste buds since 1878. Now run by Darius Dorabjee, the fourth-generation descendant of Dorabjee Sorabjee Chindy who established the eatery, the restaurant magically satiates palettes with a limited menu. “The mutton and chicken *biryani*, chicken *farcha* and *lagannu* custard are our specialties. On Sundays, we offer mutton *dhansak* with

brown rice, chicken *dhansak* with brown rice and *patrani macchi*,” says Dorabjee proudly of his legacy.

“The taste of our food remains the same because we have not been influenced by time-saving cooking methods,” he adds. “Despite innumerable sophisticated cooking appliances, we still prefer to cook on charcoal in aluminium vessels with seasonings that are freshly dried and ground at the eatery.” According to Dorabjee, his NRI customers prefer ‘deep-freeze aluminium foil’ wrapping to take home abroad.

**FOOD**

Only 10 per cent Parsi, the clientele here mostly comprises Maharashtrians. Coming from far and wide, they all enjoy their meals garnished with undisputed goodwill and values that the Dorabjees stand for. With mouth-watering aromas wafting from the open kitchen where you can see your food coming out of the *degchi*, the popularity of Dorabjee and Sons has consistently touched new heights because of the Persian recipes that have been handed down through generations. Determined to keep the restaurant’s architecture as authentic as possible, only a few changes have



Photographs by Hemant Patil



been made in over a century. “When we started, we had combined three houses to make our restaurant,” shares Dorabjee. “But when the structure started to give away, there was no option but to make it stronger with iron grills. In the 1970s, we tiled the floors and replaced the marble table tops and steel Iranian armless chairs with Formica tables and plastic chairs for convenience.”

During British rule, the English would actually come in to dine on their Victorias and *tonga*. “We were always crowded with top British officers like Lord Cleve and Lord Wellington visiting us frequently. A plate of *biryani* cost only four *anna* then,” recalls

Dorabjee, whose father Marazban told him that in the 1940s, when he was still a young boy, legendary filmmaker Prithviraj Kapoor and his crew would be accommodated in the nearby Jimmy Lodge when they filmed in Pune. For their meals, they would head to Dorabjee and Sons and spend their after-shoot hours here.

In the 1960s and 1970s, filmmaker Raj Kapoor would visit the restaurant to feast on Dorabjee’s *biryani* and cutlets. He would be accompanied by his sons Rajiv and Randhir. In fact, during the filming of *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*, the entire crew’s meals were dispatched from the restaurant, with a special menu for each of the

21 days. Actor Moon Moon Sen and her daughters Riya and Rima have also been regular patrons. “We had to be very discreet when they visited, as eager fans would either wait outside to catch a glimpse or enter and bother them for autographs,” recounts Dorabjee, turning back the clock with memories. “Between July and August, Pune Race Course would see avid race goers and actor Feroz Khan was one of them. He headed straight to us from Bombay and woke up the staff at 5 am to place the order for *paaya masala*. After the race, he came back for his dish—and paid for the vessel as well!” Of such anecdotes is forged a culinary legacy, one that Dorabjee wishes to continue for generations to come.

## Tikka and tadka

J Inder Singh ‘Jiggs’ Kalra, the granddad of gastronomy, has opened a new restaurant in Bengaluru as part of his fine-dining chain Punjab Grill. Party to this culinary *hungama* is his son Zorawar, who runs the chain on familiar truths and menus. Zorawar always wanted to be a restaurateur and

recalls that the only time his parents fought was when the food wasn’t good enough. With a strong belief in the future of Indian cuisine, Zorawar is ready to carry the baton. After Singapore, Delhi, Chandigarh, Gurgaon and Mumbai, Bengaluru is the sixth branch of Punjab Grill.



ART

# In concert

Pritish Nandy's latest avatar as a calligraphic artist enlivens Rabindranath Tagore's sentiment about 'death'. Partha Mukherjee returns enthralled

Shilbhadra Datta

*Oh my Death,  
To me you are as graceful as Lord Krishna,  
Your dusky complexion, tangled locks of lead-black cloud,  
Palms as red as lotus, ruddy lips,  
Your tender heart, that relieves me of my anguished self,  
Offer imperishable death.  
To me you are as graceful as Lord Krishna.*

(The 19th poem in **Bhanu Singher Padabali**. Transcreated in English by Partha Mukherjee)

Around the third quarter of the 19th century, a teenage poet from old Kolkata scribbled a collection of poems. Titled *Bhanu Singher Padabali*, it followed the *Baishnava* wreath under his nom de plume, *Bhanu Singha*. The lines above describe how 'death' was perceived by the budding poet; at the dawn of his life, he discerned its ethereal beauty. To him it appeared so graceful that he found the divine image of Lord Krishna in it. Death was eternal truth and truth, beauty, for Rabindranath Tagore as well.

About a hundred years later, Pritish Nandy, a young poet from the same soil, discovered and translated in his inimitable style a collection of 15 of Tagore's poems, **Sesh Lekha**

(**The Last Poems: 1940s**), an anthology reflecting the bard's philosophy on life and death. It was the Seventies, when death became another metaphor for Calcutta. However, he couldn't publish them as copyright law frowned upon him; he printed only about 100 copies for limited circulation. Now when Tagore's work is older than 100 years and, therefore, free from copyright law, Nandy released the translations at the Centre of International Modern Art in Kolkata in November. With it was unveiled his latest avatar as calligraphic artist; each frame a feast for the eyes.

"We would love to be in love with death, for, according to us, the most beautiful happening on the earth is death," said Nandy at the hall echoing with the clicks of cameras and legendary artist Paresh Maity's latest paintings. "In this age of email and telecommunication, we are about to forget the true art of communication—hand-written letters, which exude the warmth of our relationships. Banging our fingers on the keyboards of computers and cell phones, there will come a time when we will forget those strokes of the hand our parents taught us." With his calligraphy giving Tagore's words a sense of dimension and Maity's landscapes in watercolours (Tagore's favourite medium too), it was like a concert by two musicians in perfect harmony.

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# Their stage

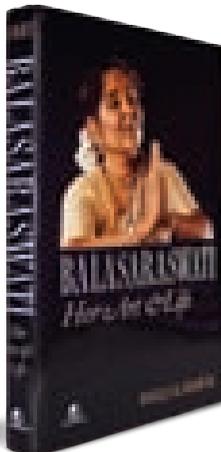
For most of us, the stage is a mere structure, a transitory source of entertainment, forgotten once we leave its vicinity. For some gifted women and men, however, it is sacred ground, an altar where they worship the creative impulse, offering their talents and receiving benefaction that goes inestimably far beyond monetary reward or popular acclaim. The lives of two such icons have recently been chronicled in words and images: Balasaraswati (1919-1984), a Bharatanatyam dancer and musician from southern India who received international acclaim; and Satyadev Dubey, director, actor, teacher and playwright, whose passion for theatre remains undiminished after half a century of commitment to the medium. We present some glimpses into their world



(From left) Performing in New Delhi, 1960; hamming it up with singer M S Subbulakshmi, 1973 (the two friends secretly arranged this photograph of themselves dressed in Western-style sleepwear and pretending to smoke cigarettes)

**Balasaraswati: Her Art & Life**, by Douglas M Knight Jr; Tranquebar; ₹ 599; 325 pages.  
An excerpt:

*Balasaraswati was a seventh-generation descendant of the musician and dancer Papammal from the eighteenth-century Thanjavur court. Since Papammal's time, music and dance have flowed continuously within the family, from one generation to the next..... Balasaraswati, among many who sought to redefine themselves and their culture, remained true to her heritage, unwilling to subscribe to an effort to define India's greatness through a reconstruction of a mythical ancient past. She embodied that greatness*



*instead through persistence in an artistic practice and system of belief that survived the violence of subjugation and cultural repression.... Outside of India, as well as within, Balasaraswati has become something unique in South Indian dance history: a representative of a hereditary art and of a community, sometimes known by the name devadasi, otherwise almost disappeared. As true as this is, she was first and foremost a passionate revolutionary—an internationally significant, entirely modern artist. Whatever our various interests, and this is a defining qualification, we must accept and understand her and what she did on her terms....*

**Satyadev Dubey: A Fifty-Year Journey Through Theatre**, edited by Shanta Gokhale; Niyogi Books; ₹ 495; 311 pages. An excerpt:

*Dubey insists that his commitment is exclusively to that theatre he “enjoys” doing. ‘Enjoy’ is one of those words that can mean practically anything at all, from mindless slapstick to mystical profundities. If we cast even a cursory glance over the plays Dubey has done, it becomes clear that, whilst his spectrum of enjoyment might not touch the two extreme points of slapstick and philosophy, it covers a fair bit of ground in between. Thus we have at one end his earliest plays No Exit and Andha*



*Yug, both meditations on the human condition; and at the other, the rambunctious comedy of errors he wrote, Sambhog se San-yas. He enjoyed doing these plays or else he would not have done them. Whether we like it or not, we must relieve him of the burden of commitment to a narrow thematic or formal range of theatre. Stylistically, however, we may categorise his plays as broadly realistic; although, whenever he has felt that the text demanded a non-realistic treatment, he has shifted modes. The text has always been the determining factor. Modes and styles have never fascinated him by and for themselves....*



(From left) Dubey with Ratna Pathak Shah in *Bali*, 1984; Amrish Puri and Sulabha Deshpande in *Sakharam Binder*, 1973

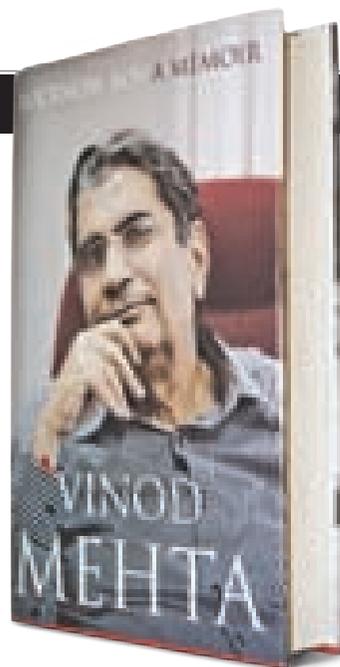
## From the editor

Before a shoe is thrown at me, let me quickly add that I started with no exaggerated notions of selfhood. Actually, I set the bar pretty low." So begins Vinod Mehta in *LUCKNOW BOY: A MEMOIR* (Penguin; ₹ 499; 325 pages). Going by the 'letters' section of the 28 November issue of *Outlook*, the news magazine of which he is editor-in-chief, the statement hasn't been able to shield him from brickbats. Readers are throwing shoes at him for "chickening out" when he should have stood up to recognise his 40-something daughter who he hasn't ever met; for not knowing how to drive; and for the book in general, advising he should feed it to his dog, who Mehta proudly calls 'Editor' for being "disobedient, stubborn, wilful and thinking he knows everything".

Hate mail apart, which Mehta calls the fulcrum of every publication (he claims to have printed each one he has ever received), *Outlook* has also printed congratulatory notes camouflaged as kudos for flying the flag of democracy and free media and condemning corrupt politicians and other 'luminaries' for anti-state activities. And that's the point many would miss if they don't see beyond Mehta's early philandering years, his driving skills and Editor's wagging tail. *Lucknow Boy* is competition to Khushwant Singh's *Without Malice* when it comes to a ringside (if not exactly inside) view of the PMO. From the controversy of Morarji Desai having received peanuts to deliver information to the CIA to more than alluding to the role Brajesh Mishra and Ranjan Bhattacharya played in the BJP government; from fashion to fixing of cricket matches; and the circus-bazaar media and politics have always been.

### FROM THE BOOK

"From her mother-in-law she learned two lessons. One, if you wish to win elections, you woo the poor rather than the fickle middle class. Forget ideology or commitment to 'wipe every tear from every eye'; mathematically the aam-admi approach makes electoral sense—as results have demonstrated. The other lesson Sonia [Gandhi] took from Indira Gandhi, perhaps not by word of mouth, concerns women, married women. They pay a heavy price if they take up politics full-time. Jawaharlal Nehru's demands for companionship and for acting as his social hostess, which resulted in the breakup of Indira's marriage, undoubtedly had a strong impact on Sonia. Which explains the tigerish tenacity with which she fought to keep her husband out of politics, and her own hesitation about taking any official position in the Congress after Rajiv's assassination. Thus Priyanka, despite the clamour, despite her undoubted charisma, has not so far been the contender."



Illustrating his impeccable record as an editor—Mehta has to his credit many a launch and resurrection—he gives graphic details of the sackings he suffered on the way for standing his ground and never cowering to unethical demands of 'dropping' stories. However, it must be said that he was never one to raise his head against the owners of the publications; he always looked for diplomatic culminations to his tenures. While some people like Shobhaa De and Jamshed Bhabha face the blunt end of his pen, he is almost always tactful about everyone, from V S Naipaul and Salman Rushdie to Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi (and especially his proprietors Vijaypat Singhania and L M Thapar), believing there are no permanent friends or enemies—after all, he still dines with some and attends others' funerals.

From one newsbreak to the other, from one controversy to the next, the memoir encapsulates the politics and society of three decades. Between the pages, one finds interesting and voyeuristic details of the lives of many prime ministers (P V Narasimha Rao needs a special mention here), ministers, bureaucrats and celebrities (Protima Bedi, Kapil Dev, Amitabh Bachchan, Satyajit Ray and Maneka Gandhi, to name a few), not letting himself off the hook either. "Journalists, particularly editors, are fallible, although most are loath to admit it. An editor in my book is allowed to make a few mistakes (I have)—say, one every 10 years. And when he does, it is best to be upfront. Justification or rationalization is fatal. If you've made a blunder, acknowledge it. Your readers will think the better of you. However, if you are defiant or unapologetic, you are in big trouble..."

The lone credibility crisis apart, Mehta has probably done better than many editors out there; if not for "keeping [his] ego locked up", then for not falling in line, for not taking a freebie in his life, for not being 'friends' with politicians and, most of all, for producing the most readable memoir of recent times.

—Meeta Bhatti

# A special season

In an essay titled “Christmas” in his anthology *The Sketch Book* (1920), American author Washington Irving describes the joys of a traditional English Christmas. An excerpt....

*A man might then behold  
At Christmas, in each hall,  
Good fires to curb the cold,  
And meat for great and small.  
The neighbours were friendly bidden,  
And all had welcome true,  
The poor from the gates were not chidden,  
When this old cap was new.*

There is something in the very season of the year that gives a charm to the festivity of Christmas. At other times, we derive a great portion of our pleasures from the mere beauties of nature. Our feelings sally forth and dissipate themselves over the sunny landscape, and we ‘live abroad and everywhere.’ The song of the bird, the murmur of the stream, the breathing fragrance of spring, the soft voluptuousness of summer, the golden pomp of autumn; earth with its mantle of refreshing green, and heaven with its deep, delicious blue and its cloudy magnificence—all fill us with mute but exquisite delight, and we revel in the luxury of mere sensation. But in the depth of winter, when nature lies despoiled of every charm, and wrapped in her shroud of sheeted snow, we turn for our gratifications to moral sources. The dreariness and desolation of the landscape, the short, gloomy days and darksome nights, while they circumscribe our wanderings, shut in our feelings also from rambling abroad, and make us more keenly disposed for the pleasures of the social circle. Our thoughts are more concentrated; our friendly sympathies more aroused. We feel more sensibly the charm of each other’s society, and are brought more closely together by dependence on each other for enjoyment. Heart calleth unto heart, and we draw our pleasures from the deep wells of living kindness which lie in the quiet recesses of our bosoms; and which, when resorted to, furnish forth the pure element of domestic felicity.

The English, from the great prevalence of rural habits throughout every class of society, have always been fond of those festivals and holidays which agreeably interrupt the stillness of country life; and they were in former days particularly observant of the religious and social rights of Christmas. It is inspiring to read even the dry details which some antiquaries have given of the quaint humours, the burlesque pageants, the complete abandonment to mirth



and good fellowship, with which this festival was celebrated. It seemed to throw open every door, and unlock every heart. It brought the peasant and the peer together, and blended all ranks in one warm generous flow of joy and kindness. The old halls of castles and manor-houses resounded with the harp and the Christmas carol, and their ample boards groaned under the weight of hospitality. Even the poorest cottage welcomed the festive season with green decorations of bay and holly—the cheerful fire glanced its rays through the lattice, inviting the passenger to raise the latch, and join the gossip knot huddled round the hearth beguiling the long evening with legendary jokes, and oft-told Christmas tales.

Amidst the general call to happiness, the bustle of the spirits, and stir of the affections, which prevail at this period, what bosom can remain insensible? It is, indeed, the season of regenerated feeling—the season for kindling not merely the fire of hospitality in the hall, but the genial flame of charity in the heart. The scene of early love again rises green to memory beyond the sterile waste of years, and the idea of home, fraught with the fragrance of home-dwelling joys, reanimates the drooping spirit, as the Arabian breeze will sometimes waft the freshness of the distant fields to the weary pilgrim of the desert.

# A new religion

Replace prayer with true service, urges Khushwant Singh

It is evident that all religious systems have failed us. They have generated more misunderstanding and hatred than love and friendship. However, since some people need some sort of system of beliefs, we have to evolve a new religion that avoids the pitfall of outworn creeds, of which we have had a bitter experience.

The process has to be dual: first wipe the slate clean and then start afresh to write a new message. What we need to demolish are five established pillars of most religious systems: God, prophets, scriptures, prayer and places of worship.

To my way of thinking, it is not very important whether or not people believe in God, or how they visualise Him—as one, a trinity or in multiplicity; as an old, long-bearded Jehovah, in the shape of an idol, *nirguna* (without attributes) or *sarguna* (with attributes), or as an abstraction. God simply does not matter.

Founder-prophets of religions matter a great deal to people, but instead of worshipping them, they should be regarded as 'historical characters' who brought about revolutionary changes in society. Likewise, I would treat religious scriptures as historical writings and judge them on their literary qualities. They should not become subject matters of prayers. Places of worship should be converted to schools, colleges or hospitals or simply preserved as historical monuments.

We must not erase that past unless we have something positive to replace it



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**Instead of chanting mantras or reading scriptures, every person should set aside at least an hour of the day for social service**

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with: mental vacuum can have disastrous consequences. In my outline of a future religion man replaces God. Fellow humans should be our top priority. You don't have to worship them; only refrain from hurting them either physically or mentally.

I would place the care of all living creatures next to humans. We have no right to deprive them of life for our own sustenance. I subscribe to the Jain concept of *Ahimsa Paramo*

*Dharma* and would make a strong plea for vegetarianism. I would not include other items of food or drink amongst the don'ts. What an adult consumes of his or her own free will—be it alcohol, narcotics or tobacco—is entirely his or her own business even if it does him or her harm or kills him or her.

I would also replace reciting prayers by doing good work. Instead of chanting mantras or reading scriptures, every person should set aside at least one hour of the day for social service from which he or she derives no personal benefit but is beneficial for his or her fellow beings or animals. It should be *nishkama seva* (selfless service): teaching children, tending the sick or the handicapped, cleaning drains. Or whatever.

And finally before retiring for the night, everyone should spend at least 15 minutes entirely with himself or herself to review what he or she has done that day. I would suggest instead of meditating you should look at your own image in a mirror; look squarely into the reflection of your own eyes and ask yourself, 'Did I hurt anyone today? If so, I must make amends tomorrow. Did I do anything to lighten another's burden, sorrow or pain today? If not I must double my efforts tomorrow.' It is not very easy to face one's own conscience, but it is the ultimate test which one must pass.

I think that speculating about where we come from and where we go after we die is a waste of time. No one has the foggiest idea. What we should be concerned about is what we do in our lives on earth.

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Excerpt from Agnostic Khushwant: There is No God! By Khushwant Singh with Ashok Chopra; Hay House Publishers, 2011

# Newsmaker



**B**reaking news is not just a catchphrase for United News of India, or UNI as we all know it—it's a habit. Since inception in March 1961, it has evolved to become one of the largest news agencies in Asia, offering readers news on a gamut of subjects, from politics and entertainment to business and sport, with a reputation for fast and accurate coverage. Working in collaboration with global news agencies and partners, its communication network spans over 90,000 km; it has news bureaus in every major Indian city and stringers across the country (including one in Port Blair!), as well as correspondents in international hubs like Washington, London, Dubai, Sydney and Singapore. Even more significant, in 1981 UNI became the first Indian news agency to



serve subscribers abroad, selling its wire service directly to newspapers in the Arab states and Singapore through satellite channels. There have been many other firsts. It began to operate in three languages (English, Hindi and Urdu), and apart from a graphics service, it launched a full-fledged wire service in Hindi called Univarta, following it up with one in Urdu. There was also a financial service, a national photo service and stock exchange service. Evidently, the UNI is more than an organisation; it is a behemoth that has touched millions of lives. Little wonder then, that a recent takeover attempt by a media house was so roundly criticised by civil rights' groups, journalists' unions and academics—the strength of UNI has always rested in its independent character.

## THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: **DECEMBER 1961**

- On 7 December, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) announced a plan to extend the piloted spaceflight programme by developing a two-person spacecraft.
- On 11 December, the Vietnam War began after the first American helicopters arrived, carrying 400 US personnel.
- On 18 December, India occupied Portuguese colonies Goa, Daman and Diu.

## QUIET CAR

*n.* A train or subway car where riders cannot have cell phone conversations or use noisy devices.

**Example:** Beginning 3 October, a passenger car on every weekday Metro link train will be designated as a **quiet car**. Cell phones, smart phones or electronic devices that can be heard by others will not be allowed. "Some of our passengers prefer to socialise or do business on the train. We encourage that—just not on the new quiet cars," said Metro link Board Chairman Richard Katz.

—Alejandra Molina, "No cell phones on Metro link's quiet car",  
*Orange County Register*, 28 September 2011

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## Ghost Bike

*n.* An old bicycle painted white and locked to a fence or post near the scene of an accident that killed a cyclist.

**Example:** Bob Shenton rolled up next to a blood-stained roadway with a bouquet of white flowers for a woman he did not know. "I'm tired of **ghost bikes** and I'm tired of cyclists getting killed in this city," said the veteran cyclist.

—Natalie Alcoba, "Cyclist dies after being hit by a truck at Toronto intersection", *National Post*, 7 November 2011

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## Two-Pizza Team

*n.* In a business environment, a team of employees that is not too large (and so can be fed with at most two pizzas).

**Example:** Over time, Mr Bezos's unusual management style began to develop.... He wanted a decentralised, even disorganised company where independent ideas would prevail over groupthink. He instituted, as a company-wide rule, the concept of the **two-pizza team**—that is, any team should be small enough that it could be fed with two pizzas.

—Richard L Brandt, "Birth of a salesman", *The Wall Street Journal*,  
15 October 2011

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## Data Furnace

*n.* A computer installed in a home or office to be used as both a server and the building's primary heat source.

**Example:** Then, there's this: Microsoft research suggests the possibility of **data furnaces**, small server packages consisting of tens or hundreds of processors engineered to plug into existing HVAC systems to contribute their excess thermal energy to the heating of air and water in the home.

—"With scavenged power and data furnaces, finding Energy in waste",  
*Fast Company*, 28 July 2011

## Ikea Effect

*n.* Increased feelings of pride and appreciation for an object because it has been self-made or self-assembled.

**Example:** Across four new studies, researchers from Harvard, Duke and Tulane University find that increasing the labour required for a product actually leads to greater appreciation for it.... They refer to this as the **Ikea effect**—named after the Swedish retailer known for its DIY furniture.

—Misty Harris, "The Ikea effect",  
*Ottawa Citizen*, 19 September 2011

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## No Planer

*n.* A conspiracy theorist who believes that no planes were involved in the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.

**Example:** David Shayler had become part of a rare and extreme faction of the 9/11 truth movement—a **no planer**—and journalists who would normally find the movement a little too dry to cover were suddenly entranced.

—Jon Ronson, "The Psychopath test",  
*Riverhead*, 12 May 2011

“ Either  
write  
something  
worth  
reading or do  
something  
worth writing.

—American statesman  
Benjamin Franklin

“ Money won't buy happiness, but it will pay the salaries of a large research staff to study the problem.

—American columnist Bill Vaughan

## War Texting

*pp.* Using text messages to break into a remote system such as an automobile or a GPS tracking device.

**Example:** Researchers at iSec Partners, a cyber security consultancy, have shown how a car's wireless connections can be exploited, using a technique known as **war texting**, to break into a vehicle. Continuing to gather information about a car and maintain a two-way connection, some might argue, may leave owners vulnerable to new threats.

—John R Quain, “Changes to On Star's privacy terms rile some users,” *The New York Times*, 22 September 2011

### Bridge the gap!

For the perfect mind sport, it's hard to beat bridge—it works out the grey cells, keeps dementia at bay and gives you a captive group of friends! Interested? The Delhi chapter of the Contract Bridge Association is looking for converts to the game with special programmes for bridge education and promotion. If you play your cards right, you might be on your way to becoming a champion—without moving a muscle.

Write to Contract Bridge Association, 61, Friends Colony (East), New Delhi-65 or email [info@cba.org.in](mailto:info@cba.org.in)

BUZZ



## Architectural Myopia

*n.* Building design that emphasises distinctive, attention-getting features over practical concerns or simple aesthetics.

**Example:** The phenomenon of **architectural myopia** may explain the repeated mistakes that architects make in fashioning built environments for others, which turn out to be woefully unsuccessful in what may seem obvious ways to laypeople.

—Michael Mehaffy and Nikos A Salingaros, “The architect has no clothes,” *Guernica*, 19 October 2011

## Undruggable

*adj.* Relating to a disease-causing molecule for which it is extremely difficult or impossible to create a drug that inhibits it.

**Example:** “These six presentations represent our continued success in addressing the elusive mGluR targets and reaffirm our leadership position in addressing previously **undruggable** targets with oral small molecule allosteric modulators,” said Bharatt Chowrira, CEO of Addex.

—“Addex to present progress on multiple allosteric modulator programmes for neurodegenerative and other neurological disorders,” Reuters, 3 October 2011

## “The blind are deprived of joyous sights we take for granted; we must all contribute to the cause of eye donation.”

*Gopalkrishna Deshpande, 79, for raising awareness about eye and cadaver donation*

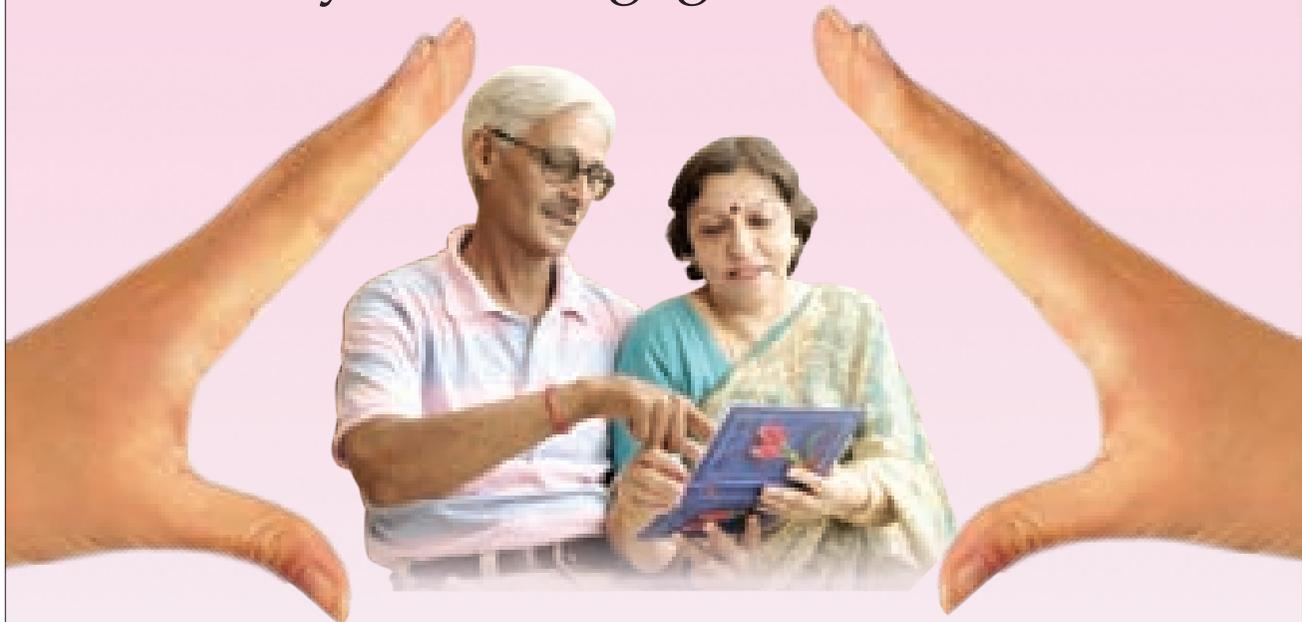
Though all the senses—smell, touch, sound, taste and sight—are equally important, we use sight 75 per cent more than others,” says **Gopalkrishna Deshpande**. “The waiting list for cornea transplant in Maharashtra runs close to 38,000 every year, while availability is only about 1,250. Eye banks are forced to share one donor’s eyes among two people. This gap can be reduced considerably if more people decide to donate.” Deshpande, who retired as an electrical engineer from Bajaj Auto, is a man on a mission. Under the aegis of medical support group Savangadi Jyeshtha Nagrik Sangh, in Kothrud, Pune, he is determined to spread awareness on eye and body (cadaver) donation. He found his calling in 2006, when a close friend’s daughter lost an eye in an accident and found it extremely difficult to get one by way of donation. Since then, Deshpande has facilitated 762 eye donation registrations, of which 12 people have actually donated and helped 24 blind people. He has also facilitated 77 cadaver donation registrations. In his crusade against blindness, Deshpande has triumphed over misinformation and a misguided traditional mindset. Along with 10 volunteers, he visits residential societies, senior citizens’ clubs, women’s clubs and students’ bodies to plead his case. During such meetings, he presents charts, posters, stickers and slide shows, besides arranging talks by doctors and beneficiaries of eye donation. At present, Deshpande works with four eye banks in Pune: Dinanath Mangeshkar Hospital, Janakalyan, H V Desai Eye Hospital and Sanjivan Hospital. For cadaver donations, he helps Dhondumama Sathe Homoeopathic College and Bharati Vidyapeeth.

—Khursheed Dinshaw



Hemant Patil

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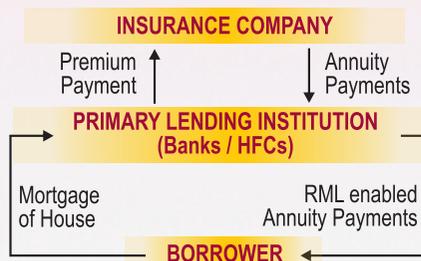
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Please Note: NHB has conceived the Reverse Mortgage Loan enabled Annuity scheme which may be implemented by various banks and housing finance companies (HFCs). NHB does not extend loans directly to individuals. For complete details, please read the terms and conditions of primary lending institutions which are offering the scheme.



### Indicative RMLeA Payments

Age	Property Value	LTV	Net Monthly RMLeA*
			Range
60	1000000	60%	Rs. 2191 to Rs. 3459
65	1000000	60%	Rs. 2267 to Rs. 3987
70	1000000	60%	Rs. 2419 to Rs. 4816
75	1000000	70%	Rs. 3311 to Rs. 7166

\* Net of Servicing Charges subject to detailed terms.

The above estimates are indicative and the actuals may vary depending upon the age of borrower, annuity options and other terms of the Primary Lending Institutions..

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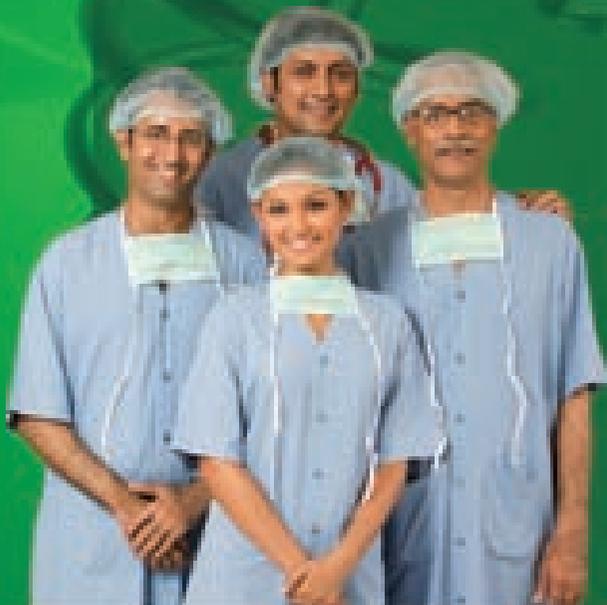
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