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Wellness within

Wellness is so much more than just good health—it is a happy harmony of body, mind and soul, the ultimate affirmation of life.

This truth was reinforced for me at a transformative week spent in a retreat in Dehradun last month. The beautiful environs and experience aside, the real takeaway was the imperative to look within. It was a time to detoxify the body, cleanse the mind, rid the soul of negativity, and emerge renewed and revitalised.

So much of our life, especially our youth, is spent focusing on the external; our happiness seems bound to the outside world. However, with time comes the need for introspection, the realisation to look internally for the truths that have always eluded us, the joy that appears to play hide and seek with us, the peace we crave so desperately. To know oneself is to understand one's place in the world; with that understanding comes healing from traumas of the body and mind, a freedom from past bitterness, and a fresh perspective to embrace the future.

As Indians, we are blessed to have a rich tradition of wellness to draw upon. From Ayurveda's Panchakarma experience to the different schools of yoga, our ancients have always guided us on a holistic path to healing body and mind through meditation, diet and exercise that restores balance and promotes rejuvenation. Now, the



rest of the world is following suit, with scientific studies validating what our ancestors knew all along!

Happily, for us in this country, this wisdom is not confined to exclusive enclaves and remote retreats. It is there all around, accessible to us all. From physical centres of Ayurveda and yoga in our towns and cities to a virtual storehouse of information on our computers, all the knowledge to begin your internal voyage is at hand, waiting to be imbibed.

Indeed, you hold the key to your wellness. This year, as we prepare to celebrate World Health Day on 7 April, open the door to your innermost self and—for a time leave the world outside. You will discover that being alone in a crowd need not be a cry of loneliness but a song of self-discovery.

Tues Julan

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

Harmony Celebrate Age-April 2017 Volume 13 Issue 11

Publisher Dharmendra Bhandari Editor Tina Ambani Executive Editor Arati Rajan Menon Assistant Editors Sai Prabha Kamath, Rachna Virdi Special Correspondent Srirekha Pillai Chief Sub-Editor Natasha Rego Correspondent (Mumbai) Aakanksha Bajpai Design Consultant Jit Ray Studio Manager & Photographer Haresh Patel Senior Graphic Designer Dattaguru Redekar Production Manager Rohidas Adavkar Business Development: Consultant Shrenik Mehta Senior Manager T M Vijaydas Manager Vikaran Chauhan Assistant Manager Vijay Singh Website Coordinator Ajit Nair Editorial & Marketing Coordinator Johnsi Nadar

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cover feature

Ageing and obesity: The double whammy

Cover photograph: 123RF.com

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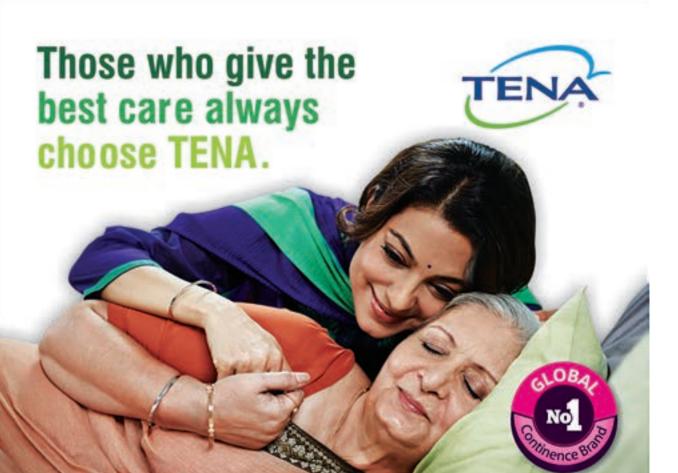


WEB EXCLUSIVE www.harmonyindia.org

SOUL FOOD Monica Liu in Kolkata rises above a brutal past to become one of the city's top restaurateurs

FOR SUBSCRIPTION ASSISTANCE CONTACT: Harmonycare, Living Media India Ltd, A-61, Sector 57, Noida (Uttar Pradesh) - 201301. Toll-free: 1800 1800 100 Phones: New Delhi: (0120) 2479900 from Delhi and Faridabad; (0120) 2479900 from Rest of India Fax: (0120) 4078080; Kolkata: 033-22827695 Fax: 22828949; Bengaluru: 080-2212448, 22213037, Fax: 2218335; Mumbai: 022-66063355 Fax: 24444358; Chennai: 044-28478525 Fax: 24361942; Email: harmonycare@intoday.com

Total number of pages in this issue of Harmony-Celebrate Age, including covers: 84







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column

Body-shaming is a complete no-no at Harmony-Celebrate Age. But size, unfortunately, does matter. Today, over 30 million Indians are believed to be obese, a figure expected to double in just five years. Aesthetics aside, those extra pounds could cost us dearly, as we discuss in our cover feature, "Heavy Weight". A sedentary lifestyle and decreased metabolism make elders more prone to obesity, opening the door to a range of ailments, from hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular disease to arthritis, Alzheimer's, and even some cancers.

The silver lining: obesity is preventable. We present strategies and solutions—encompassing diet, physical activity, medically managed weight loss and surgical treatment—from a range of experts. In addition, our columnist Naini Setalvad, who lost an astonishing 100 kg herself, shares her inspirational journey, and ways to fight fat with food in 'Nutritalk'.

Inspiration also comes this month from Uttarakhand Governor Dr K K Paul. Erudite and dashing, this chemist turned top cop, and former member of the Union Public Service Commission, is enjoying his fourth innings while eagerly anticipating his next—as a writer!

From the mountains of Uttarakhand, we whisk you away to Europe along the Danube River, through Budapest in Hungary and Wachau Valley in Lower Austria, a voyage replete with history and breathtaking vistas. And while you sail on uncharted waters on journeys of discovery, never forget your protective anchor—economist Priya Desai discusses the need for medical insurance and the options available to you. Read on.

—Arati Rajan Menon

This is with reference to the message by Mrs Tina Ambani in the editorial column ('Connect': "Shared Symphony") in the February 2017 issue. I was glad to know she has completed 25 wonderful years of marriage. I'm happy to share that my wife and I have also enjoyed 60 years of marital bliss. The editorial took me down glorious memory lane and I recalled an interesting event. Some years ago, my wife and I had been to the US Embassy for a visa interview before travelling to the US and Britain to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. The lady at the visa counter asked me, "Have you been married for 50 years?" When I replied in the affirmative, she shot her next question: "To the same woman?" I was astonished but gave a witty answer, saying, "Sadly, yes." She then went on to tell me that people in the US change partners at least three to four times over their lifetime. The conversation ended with a laugh and my visa was granted on the spot. I'd like to add that my spouse and I are two distinct and different people. While she is very practical in life, I follow my own set of rules that are sometimes viewed as unworldly. The surprising truth is that our distinct nature complements each other and has brought us closer. Together, we have created our own definition of a perfect, happy family.

Manmohan Bagri

Mumbai

It is interesting to know that the world is finally exploring the power and potential of seniors. Gone are the days when geriatric studies were considered insignificant and seniors were inadequately represented during promotional surveys owing to lack of awareness. Today, manufacturers are thinking beyond the youth and increasingly exploring the market for seniors. FMCG companies are ensuring

that senior citizens are tapped to keep the cultural ethos of our great nation intact. The best example of this is the latest energy drink for seniors launched by one of the world's leading nutrition and health companies, Nestle. It is high time other companies join the campaign and give prominence to issues affecting seniors, and advertisements clearly highlighting malnutrition, obesity and other health-related aspects. There is no doubt that this neglected segment needs nurturing because cultural niceties can be rooted only if mentoring is done in a systematic manner.

Kishore Prabhu

Mumbai

We extend our heartfelt thanks to *Harmony-Celebrate Age* for giving us the opportunity to participate in the Art Contest organised in November 2016. Our community's seniors wholeheartedly participated in the contest and it was an absolute pleasure to share in their enthusiasm. It is heartening to note that your magazine not only focuses on the problems faced by senior citizens but also the ocean of opportunities in which they can add quality to their lives. In times to come, Harmony-Celebrate Age is sure to change the way society views 'old age'. Cheers to that! And we look forward to more such contests in the future.

Team Aashirwaad

Naval Wives Welfare Association (NWWA), Western Region

HITS OF THE MONTH

Our most-read stories in March on www.harmonyindia.org

- 1. 'Four' the love of writing
- 2. House of cards
- 3. The wordsmiths

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P16: Silver services

P24: Born to win

NEWS ● VIEWS ● PEOPLE ● RESEARCH ● TRENDS ● TIPS



≥MEDIA WATCH

ON POINTE!

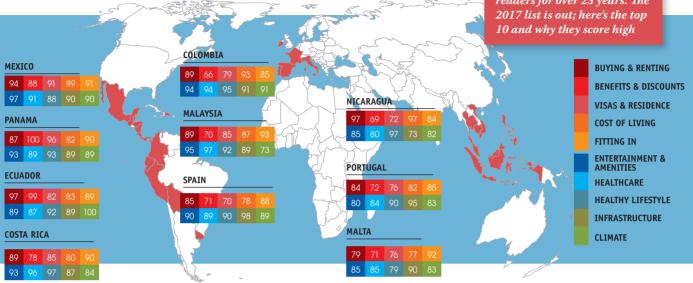
"Don't fight your age," proclaims Italian prima ballerina Alessandra Ferri. What makes her words even more remarkable is that the 53 year-old is the new face of Boots' No 7 Lift & Luminate Triple Action Serum. Clearly, endorsements do not come in the way of being upfront for her. "When a brand says, 'If you use this product, your wrinkles are going to disappear in two weeks,' first of all, it's not true," she tells website www. refinery29.uk. "And second of all, you're promoting an idea that there is something wrong with having a wrinkle. And why? Why are we promoting that beauty is wrinkle-less?" Good question. "I've never been afraid to show who I am," adds the star, who returned to the stage in triumph in Romeo & Juliet (see pic) last year after a nine-year hiatus. "There is beauty in every age and every face and every body. And unless we stop rejecting the fact that the passing of age is part of life, we will be unhappy. It's fine to have a wrinkle; it's fine to be 50. There is beauty and there is energy and there is life and there is love in every age." Standing ovation.





HAVEN ON EARTH

What are the world's best places to retire for the well-heeled global citizen? Well. International Living magazine has been ranking them for its American readers for over 25 years. The 10 and why they score high



Mexico: Rated No. 1 for the past five years owing to low cost of living, friendly locals, plenty of expats, an appealing balance of exotic culture and First-World lifestyle, and the ease of becoming a legal resident, which entitles you to a host of retiree benefits

Panama: Modern, comfortable, welcoming people and policies, rock-solid infrastructure, and one of the best retiree benefit schemes in the world

Ecuador: Excellent weather, high-quality healthcare at incredibly low costs, great retiree benefits and a burgeoning expat community

Costa Rica: Safe, stable and modern, low cost of living, good retiree programme, highly rated healthcare, welcoming and happy people, stressfree life, easy transition for expats

Colombia: Low cost of living, excellent healthcare, diverse and temperate climate, beautiful scenery and rich heritage, welcoming people

Malaysia: Clean and modern, fabulous public transport, lots to see and do, low cost of living, excellent healthcare, extremely friendly people, a truly multicultural society

Spain: Beautiful beaches, rich history, great climate, low cost of living and real estate, relaxed lifestyle

Nicaragua: Low cost of living despite vastly improved infrastructure, great expat lifestyle with ease of opening a business, great healthcare, warm people

Portugal: Low cost of living and real estate, mild climate, laidback lifestyle amid modern amenities, friendly locals

Malta: Beautiful islands with rich history and water sports aplenty, fabulous weather, a large international community and excellent healthcare, with relatively low cost of private health insurance.

MARKET SURF: Global market research report provider Research and Markets has announced the release of the Indian Anti-Ageing Market Outlook 2022 report. Segmented on the basis of product categories and region, the report has surveyed over 500 consumers across Tier I and II Indian cities and interviewed marketing heads and business development and sales managers of leading brands to understand purchase behaviour and preference. For more info, go to \{\bigg\} www.researchandmarkets.com/research/5fd6gh/indian_antiaging

GOOD NIGHT: Calling all insomniacs! YouTube channel Sleep Machine. created by American David Thomson, promises to help you significantly improve your sleep, longevity, breathing capacity, muscle strength and stamina. Check it out at \$\frac{1}{4}\$ https://www. youtube.com/channel/ UCWKnx_8FWCnqAWJV iZ7tUkA



SILVERS IN THE CITY

Inspired by the Humans of New York project, photographer Cathy Teesdale celebrates one of the world's greatest cities and its people in Humans of London. Poignant recollections by people who have lived, loved and aged there with arresting photographs tell the story of a city in perpetual evolution. Check out Teesdale's work at @ www.facebook. com/humansofgreaterlondon. If it catches your fancy, the book is available for sale on www.amazon.in—the e version (Kindle) is available for ₹ 400 while hardcover will set you back ₹ 1,196.

THE MEMORY BOO







ographs by Alexander Chekmenev / Dewi Lewis Publishin

n off-the-wall assignment to visit the homes of immobile elders in post-Soviet eastern Ukraine to take their passport photos turned into an odyssey of exploration for photographer Alexander Chekmenev. Shocked by the vulnerability of his subjects—loneliness, poverty, mental instability, dire living conditions—and keen to chronicle their reality, he started shooting them in wide-angled colour, going beyond his brief of passport pictures and his official budget, which was limited to black-and-white

film. Now, two decades after they were taken, his moving and powerful repository of memory and history is available for the world to see in Passport (Dewi Lewis: 156 pages). "The theme of old age and loneliness is one for the whole world, no matter what language or country," he tells London newspaper The Guardian. "Passport is like a reminder or an appeal to all, that there are people who need our help, our attention and our psychological support." The hardcover, large-format book is available on www.amazon.in for ₹ 2,235.



THE HOME FRONT

With elder abuse on the rise, especially when it comes to fights over property, here's some welcome news on the home front. Following an amendment of the Delhi Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens' Rules 2009 by the state government, silvers can now evict their children from a 'self-acquired home' by simply approaching the area Deputy Commissioner (DC),



rather than going to the police or filing a timeconsuming lawsuit. "If the DC finds the son, daughter or legal heir of senior citizens is not caring for them or ill-treating them, and yet occupying their self-acquired property, a notice will be issued to the accused party. The heir will get a chance to explain; if found unsatisfactory, it will lead to an eviction notice," an official tells media. The onus lies on the Deputy Commissioner to verify the complaint and evict the heir within 21 days.



hile social welfare is often put on the backburner, our state governments are clearly very concerned about fulfilling the spiritual desires of silvers.

Following on the heels of other states like Odisha and Uttar Pradesh, the **Haryana** government has prepared a **Tirath Darshan'** scheme under which it will pay for a maximum of 250 silvers a year to visit religious destinations. While silvers from BPL families will be fully subsidised, the government will bear 70 per cent of the cost for other elders. The trips will be conducted under the aegis of the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Cor-

poration. Interested silvers need to submit their applications at the office of the concerned Tehsil, Sub Divisional Magistrate or Deputy Commissioner.

Meanwhile, **Rajasthan** is upping the ante even further. While its earlier Teerth Yatra' scheme involved taking silvers on pilgrimages by train, the state government recently sent 30 senior citizens (including 15 women) to Tirupati by air—in addition, of course, to free boarding and lodging—under its new 'Deendayal Upadhyay Varishth Nagrik Teerth Yatra' scheme. Similarly, 357 silvers citizens will fly to Rameshwaram while 225 will make their way to Puri.

AT YOUR SERVICE

Apollo Hospitals has launched 'Apollo Elder Care', a dedicated and comprehensive geriatric care centre, intended to be a one-stop service to address the physical, psychological, medical and financial concerns of patients and their caregivers. In the first phase of the launch, the service will be available across Apollo Hospitals in Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Delhi and Bhubaneswar. Core areas include prevention and management of falls and fractures; treatment for dizziness, poor vision, fatigue, unsteadiness or weakness, memory loss and depression; psychological revitalisation; vaccinations; physiotherapy; diet counselling; and medicine management.





It may be India's maximum city. But Mumbai's suburban rail network is minimally safe for silvers. A recent audit by the India Centre for Human Rights (ICHR) to assess the accessibility of suburban railway stations, directed by the Bombay High Court, found that 98 per cent of the stations are dangerous for persons with disabilities and senior citizens. As *Indian Express* reports, the one-month study examined 124 suburban stations on Central Railway including the Harbour Line and Trans-Harbour Line and the Western Railway (WR) to check if features such as entrances, ticketing counters, platforms, level changes (ramps, stairs and lifts), toilets, offices, and waiting and parking areas were compliant with the guidelines of the Ministry of Urban Development and the Railway Board for passenger amenities. It found that only three railway stations—Masjid Bunder, Mahim and Khopoli—had an acceptable height difference between the platform and footboard of the train.

In fact, 46 stations were deemed dangerous and 30 high risk; the remaining were seen as uncomfortable with regard to ease of boarding. Almost 33 per cent stations on the Harbour Line were found to be least compliant with the guidelines, followed by Central Railway at 38 per cent and Western Railway

at 40 per cent. According to the report, the least compliant stations were Shahad, Khopoli, Ambernath, Thakurli on Central Railway, Manasarovar and Khandeshwar on the Harbour Line, and Naigaon and Virar

on Western Railway. "A suitable platform height is a must for people with disabilities to be able to board or alight from the train with ease," Meenaz Kakalia, a member of ICHR, tells the newspaper. "For those using crutches, a 30-second gap at each platform can be difficult for quick movement. Thus, all platform height details that can help disabled or older people to conduct their movement with ease are a must."



Travel light: Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) has announced a 25-per-cent concession for people over 60 on ticket fares of city, suburban, ordinary, express, semi-deluxe and Rajahamsa bus services. To avail the concession, any of the following identity cards will suffice: passport, voter ID, Aadhar, driving licence, NREGA ID, ID cards issued by any department of the Government of India or Karnataka government (with date of birth and residential address), ID card issued by PSUs or corporations of the Government of India or Karnataka government (with date of birth and residential address), ID card issued by the Physically Challenged and Senior Citizens Welfare Directorate and senior citizens' card issued by KSRTC.

To your health: Thiruvananthapuram City Corporation is launching 'Arogya Vayomithram', a project that focuses on the well-being of silvers. With an allocation of ₹ 4 crore for the first year, the project aims to continually monitor the health of elders in the city's 100 wards through health camps every quarter and provide remedial measures, including distribution of necessary equipment, such as beds, walking sticks, spectacles and mosquito nets. Priority will be given to those from economically weak backgrounds and silvers living alone.



Elementary, dear Watson



ith the arrival of the giants in the arena, the battle for active ageing has got fiercer. Powered by its unique 'Watson' cognitive system, which is capable of answering questions posed in natural language, IBM Research has developed a prototype 'Multi-Purpose Eldercare Robot Assistant' (IBM MERA) to help elderly and their caregivers in collaboration with Rice University in Texas. As website phys.org tells us, IBM MERA will study how real-time data generated by sensors can be combined with cognitive computing to potentially improve healthcare and wellness. This includes measuring an individual's vital signs; answering basic health-related questions; and determining if an individual has fallen by reading the results of an accelerometer. What's more, going forward, IBM Research will work with Sole Cooperativa, an independent healthcare provider in Italy, to create smart living spaces for silvers. "Our new research on 'embodied cognition', which can combine real-time data generated by sensors with cognitive computing, will explore how to provide clinicians and caregivers with insights that could help them make better care decisions for their patients," Arvind Krishna, senior vice-president, IBM Research, tells the website.



LOST AND FOUND Here's a homing device for silvers, quite literally. As website edition.cnn.com reports, local government officials in Iruma, near Tokvo, are issuing stickers with a QR code (a type of matrix barcode) to silvers with dementia. Each sticker has a unique identity number with the wearer's contact details embedded in the code so they can be tracked by their relatives and police in case they get lost or suffer a mishap. The stickers, which last about a month, can be stuck on the fingernail or a keychain. Despite the obvious concerns of violation of privacy, the move has been welcomed in the country, where an estimated 4.6 million people live with dementia.

Inside outside A vista of excitement just opened up for silvers who can't bear the thought of slogging it out on their exercise bikes, cooped up indoors. Using virtual reality, researchers at Denmark's Aalborg University in Denmark have developed a hi-tech digital exercise experience for elders in nursing homes. Large TV screens were set up in front of exercise bikes, offering silver riders a variety of virtual landscapes; the bikes were linked to the screens so their speed was reflected through the landscape. And for a more sensory experience, the riders were also fitted with virtual reality goggles with small screens in front of their eyes that gave them the experience of being outdoors. "The seniors were really happy with the experience," team leader Jon Ram Bruun-Pedersen tells website huffingtonpost.com. "They really lived it and felt as if they had to pedal extra hard to get up the hill on the screen—even though they really didn't feel higher resistance on the bike. This is really positive. Partly because it is good for them physically to move more, but also because I wanted them to experience getting out of the nursing home and out in the world—even if it's a virtual world."



DESIGNED TO EMPOWER

Created to 'explore the potential for design and designers to enhance the experience of our later lives, New Old, an exhibition held at London's Design Museum from 2 January to 19 February, was organised into six sections—Ageing, Identity, Home, Community, Working and Mobility each featuring a special design commission by a leading designer or team. The exhibition was curated by Jeremy Myerson of the Royal College of Art. "Life expectancy has increased almost everywhere, and for almost every social and ethnic group. This is both a triumph for society, and a fundamental challenge to the way that cultures organise themselves," museum director Devan Sudiic tells media. "Where we live, how we live, how we support ourselves, and the quality of our lives as we age, represent the key questions that every society must address." As website dezeen.com shares, these were the

six projects on display:



Aura Power Suit by Yves Behar, Fuseproject and Superflex: This lightweight and flexible garment incorporates motors, sensors and artificial intelligence to support the wearer's torso hips and legs. The V-shaped band within the fabric assists the elderly to stand up, walk, climb stairs and sit down. For more, go to fuseproject.com/work/superflex/aura-powered-suit/

Exchange by Special Projects:
The installation creates a garden room setting for members of the public to engage in conversation with an older person. It includes a custom-built table with a surface made from giant sheets of paper for participants to write down their questions. For more, go to \$\mathbb{Q}\$ specialprojects. studio/project/exchange/\$

ElliQ robot or 'emotionally intelligent robotic companion' by Yves Behar, Fuseproject and Intuition Robotics: Described as an 'emotionally intelligent robotic companion', it helps elders connect with technology. It includes a tool

that sets goals, a connection to social media and video chat and links to audio and video libraries. For more, go to *intuitionrobotics.com/elliq/*

Scooter for Life by PriestmanGoode: This scooter with a trolley-like compartment increases the mobility of elders. The fold-down, highly adaptable design, based on the micro scooter so popular with children and younger people, not only offers support but encourages physical activity. For more, go to priestmangoode. com/project/scooter-for-life/

Head in the Sky by Konstantin Grcic: A secluded outdoor haven for those who want to work and think, this zinc galvanised-mesh structure features a ramped access to symbolise a departure from age stereotypes. The absence of a roof is designed to give thoughts free rein.

New Old Fine Aged Spirit by Mother London: This branding design promotes the benefit of ageing to reduce stigma. With the use of decorative graphics, an older product is transformed into a desirable object.



SHEEP TO SWAN? IT JUST GETS MORE AND MORE BIZARRE IN THE ANTI-AGEING JAMBOREE. A-LISTERS IN HOLLYWOOD

ARE APPARENTLY FLOCKING TO **GFT SHEEP PLACENTA FACIALS.** WHICH ARE PACKED WITH STEM CELLS AND OTHER NUTRIENTS THAT PROMISE TO FIRM, LIFT AND HYDRATE THE SKIN AND INCREASE ELASTICITY. THE IDEA OF SLATHERING THIS OVER YOUR FACE MAY JUST GET YOUR GOAT. BUT IF YOU'RE WILLING TO GIVE IT A GO, MANY COSMETOLOGISTS IN INDIA HAVE STARTED OFFERING THE



TREATMENT—GOOGLE TO FIND THE ONE NEAREST YOU.

SOFTWARE UPGRADE

In Puducherry, the Department of Plastic Surgery at the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (JNIPMER) has upgraded its Anti-Ageing Clinic with software-based video dermoscopy and trichoscopy for its patients. These technologies will help accurately diagnose problems and diseases of the skin and hair, and guide treatment protocols. This is the first unit of its kind in the government sector to offer these services free.



NECK FIX

ast month, we told you that stickers are the latest anti-ageing go-tos. Here's another stick-on, peel-off beauty fix doing the rounds: Nexsey, a 'simple anti-ageing tape', which promises to temporarily—take years off your neckline. Just pinch the skin at the nape of your neck and place this super-strong, medical-grade tape over it so it tightens the neck and smoothes any wrinkles. When you want to remove the strip, use lotion, oil or water to gently remove the tape. It comes in a 10-ft roll priced at \$ 15.99 (₹ 1,100); you can cut it as you require with 5-6 inches being the average length per use. If you're interested, they ship worldwide—go to www.nexsey.com to learn more.

FREEZE FRAME Many wine connoisseurs rave about icewine, a dessert wine produced from grapes that have been frozen while still on the vine. Now, those same grapes promise to lift more than just your spirits. British cosmetic giant Superdrug has launched Optimum PhytoFreeze, a budget cream with a wonder ingredient, Vin-upLift, derived from frozen grapes, which claims to tighten the skin and reduce the appearance of wrinkles. "The cream offers an instant result," David Cooke of Superdrug tells media. "The Optimum range aims to bust some of the myths around anti-ageing skin products, namely that you have to spend a huge amount for products which work." Right now, the price is £ 7.45 (about ₹ 620) for 50 ml on the Superdrug website; unfortunately, they don't ship to India.



NO HURRY TO BE A MUMMY

Forget the sleepless nights and constant fatigue, there may actually be an upside to having your kids later in life! According to a study by Columbia University Medical Centre in New York, women who have their last child after the age of 33 live longer. In fact, as London newspaper Daily Mail reports, their odds of living to the top fifth percentile of their birth cohort are twice as high as those who had their last child before the age of 29. Women who give birth later have been found to have longer telomeres, the protective caps at the ends of our chromosomes; the link between telomere length and ageing has already been established. "Several studies have found that late maternal age at last childbirth is positively associated with maternal longevity," says team leader Professor Dr Nicole Schupf. "This finding suggests that late maternal age at last childbirth is a marker for rate of ageing and, if heritable, might be associated with genetic variants playing a role in exceptional survival." The study was published in Menopause, the journal of The North American Menopause Society.



JOINED AT THE HIP

Married couples are stronger together literally. Elderly men are 50 per cent less likely to fracture a hip if they are married, while elderly married women cut their risk by 30 per cent, according to a study at the University of Zaragoza in Spain, reported in London newspaper Daily Mail. A possible reason is that silvers with a partner are more likely to eat well and less likely to be depressed, making them less frail. One good reason to keep the faith, wouldn't you say?

FROM BABY TO BONE



Just born—a new way to boost your bones! Researchers at the University College London have discovered that stem cells extracted from human amniotic fluid can increase the strength, plasticity and structure of bones. When they injected these cells into mice suffering from brittle bone disease, it led to 79 per cent fewer fractures. (Human amniotic fluid is the protective fluid that surrounds the baby in the uterus.) "We could inject these factors into older people, or into astronauts [who experience rapid loss of bone density], to give bone-forming cells a boost," lead researcher Pascale Guillot tells London newspaper The Guardian.



Photographs courtesy: CIMGlobal

A conference with a difference

ogether, we learn. That could have been the tagline of the 'International Conference on Services to the Elderly – Current Challenges & Emerging Trends', held on 23-24 February 2017 in Hyderabad. Hosted by the Heritage Foundation in collaboration with the Global Ageing Network, with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) as knowledge partner, the event drew over 130 participants, including academicians, researchers, doctors, caregivers, social scientists and therapists and government officials, in addition to media and volunteers, as well as silvers themselves.

The event was inaugurated by Dr K R Gangadharan, founder of Heritage Foundation; Marcus Riley, chairman of the Global Ageing Network; and Prof S Siva Raju of TISS; along with chief quest Anand Katoch of the National Institute of Social Defence, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment; and guest of honour Mathew Cherian, Chief Executive, HelpAge India. In his address, Katoch noted that the National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) is being revised, with a focus on trained manpower and caregiving, and that the establishment of the Senior Citizens' Association Welfare Fund had been approved by the Government. It was a positive start to the two-day conference, which featured 63 presentations along four main themes: geriatric healthcare, caregiving, age-friendly environments, and dementia care. In addition, keynote speakers addressed participants on concerns on ageing in the global context.

Right from the get-go, it was clear that this was a conference with a difference, with the sheer breadth and depth of the knowledge capital from India and overseas. From

old-age homes in Kerala to the widows of Vrindavan, the 'grey crab' (silvers with cancer) in the Northeast to the silver women working in the fireworks industry in Tamil Nadu and the senior survivors of the Kedarnath Deluge, elder abuse in institutions to partner violence in later life, from lack of awareness of dementia to the dilemma of caregivers in the sandwich generation, an exhaustive range of concerns was addressed. Speakers also pointed to positive initiatives for silvers; for instance, Silver Innings, Adhata Age-Friendly Community Centres and Aaji Care in Mumbai, Anugraha in Uttarakhand, and Heritage Elder Care Services in Hyderabad.

There were also global insights aplenty, from the elderly healthcare conundrum in Bangladesh to the role of poverty and gender in the lives of silvers in Pakistan, proactive psychological intervention for elders with depression in Brazil to the promotion of functional health in silvers in Canada through a 'Retain, Restore and ReEnable' approach, long-term care services and support systems in the US to BallyCara, a leader of care, services and accommodation for older Australians that is guided by its person-centred 'SONA' philosophy of happiness and successful ageing.

Further, innovation was a refrain among both Indian and international speakers as a key component of future elder care strategies. Examples included the successful use of music therapy for people with dementia (with two case studies, one from the US and one from India); telemedicine and tele-health initiatives; home sensor technologies; the use of GIS mapping to understand walkability and mobility patterns to make cities 'smarter' for silvers; and

Clockwise from top left: Dr Gangadharan of Heritage Foundation; Prof Siva Raju of TISS; Arati Rajan Menon of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*; Marcus Riley of the Global Ageing Network. Opposite page: Speakers and participants at the conference

the transformative potential of technology, from simple social connections like Skype to more complex virtual reality, to bring quality of life to silvers.

In sum, what emerged from all the panel discussions was the need for systematic documentation and dissemination of existing models, networking of various stakeholders, lobbying for the rights of silvers, promoting active ageing, the creation of age-friendly environments, social connectedness, social capital and infrastructure, and the constructive use of technology.

One of the most significant takeaways from the event, as Arati Rajan Menon, executive editor, *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, pointed out in her remarks, was that customisation is the key to care—every solution or intervention needs to be placed in the context of the individual, culture and community in order to be sustainable. Indeed, many of the









successful initiatives presented in the conference, even those from overseas, are certainly replicable and scalable in India, even with a narrower bandwidth and smaller budgets—if the stakeholders are committed enough.

Lend an ear, please

id you know that older adults with hearing loss are more likely to develop dementia? And the medication for blood pressure or diabetes could affect one's hearing? These and many other interesting facts were revealed at a hearing loss awareness programme organised by *Harmony-Celebrate Age* in association with hearing aid specialist Amplifon on 20 March in Mumbai.

Around 150 silvers participated enthusiastically in the highly interactive event. Sadanand Gore (*in pic*), senior audiologist from Amplifon, spoke at length about the preven-



tion, symptoms and treatment of hearing loss, the latest technologies available in the market, and the cost implications of hearing aids. "The cost for hearing aids ranges from ₹ 15,000 to ₹ 2 lakh," he said. "It's up to the patient to evaluate the cost of buying a machine vis-à-vis the price you pay for hearing loss."

Gore also explained how hearing loss tends to affect one's self-esteem and balance and, in turn, alienates the patient from family and society. The event ended on a positive note with silvers winning prizes in a lucky-dip contest, followed by distribution of snacks.



Spin that wheel! Short bursts of exercise can stave off the ageing process. According to a recent study by the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, high-intensity interval training (HIIT), which includes an intense four minutes of cycling, followed by three easier minutes, 12 times a week, along with another 90 minutes walking on the treadmill, can improve fitness, cut body fat and prevent diabetes as well as improve longevity. Time for that gym membership!





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Then: Pizza box

Now: Wall hanging

ate throwing away those pizza boxes that overcrowd the bin whenever you decide to binge? Here's a fun idea to repurpose them into home art! All you need is some attractive chart/wrapping/wall/poster/printed paper, ruler, scissor, glue, and double-sided tape. First, clean the pizza box carefully and ensure there are no food particles left inside. Cut the sheet of paper longer than the pizza box so it folds nicely on the sides; place the box in the centre of the paper, making

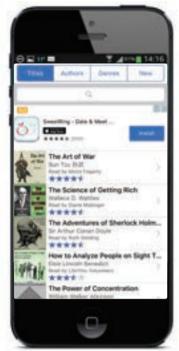
sure the design is on the outside, and press down. Now, cut diagonally at all four corners of the paper fold over two opposite sides and glue on the sides of the box. Do the same with the other two sides. Make sure the corners are neat and there is no gap left. Wait for five minutes and cut any excess paper left. Now, you can use the double-sided tape and paste your art on the wall. You can dress it up further by pasting quotes or photographs on the front side of the box!

MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...

- 1. DIVIDE THE BOX INTO SMALL PORTIONS BY CUTTING AND PASTING SMALL DIVIDERS FROM ANOTHER BOX TO MAKE A CASE FOR YOUR EARRINGS AND JEWELLERY.
- 2. MAKE A TABLE SOCCER GAME FOR YOUR GRANDCHILDREN BY PAINTING THE BASE OF THE BOX GREEN AND MARKING THE FIELD WITH WHITE PAINT. USE A SMALL BALL OF PAPER AS THE SOCCER BALL AND MOVE IT BY BLOWING AIR THROUGH STRAWS!







LIBRIVOX

Available for: iOS 8.0 or later, Android varies with device

What it does: Here's a great app for book lovers suffering from vision loss and those uncomfortable with reading a book online. This free app allows users to listen to books; simple and user-friendly, it gives you access to over 24,000 books. Books can be streamed over the Internet or even downloaded for later.

After installation: The user doesn't need to sign in or make an account, which is generally the case in most apps. After opening the app, you learn that books are available in 30 languages and it gives you an option to choose more languages. (While this option does not include Hindi, it does include Tamil.) The homepage hosts the 'Catalog' section; on top, you see four tabs: 'Titles', 'Authors', 'Genres' and 'New'. Thus, you can search by title, author, new releases or genres, which include action and adventure, ancient texts, animals and nature, anthologies, art, business and economics, children, chemistry and many more in alphabetic order. At the bottom, there are three more tabs: 'Favourites', 'Search' and 'Settings'. Once you choose a book, the app gives you the option to download a single chapter, the whole book in one go or listen to it online, along with a description of the book and reviews. It also mentions the time it takes to listen to each chapter. A blessing, indeed, for book lovers.

Hyderabad-based IT solutions provider YITSOL has developed an app called CAREMI, which is designed as a mobile wallet that holds your medical history, diagnostic reports, and treatment protocols. The app user is given a unique tag that can be scanned by a medical practitioner and accessed with the same app. The developers are now in talks with the Telangana and Andhra Pradesh governments to launch the app.

SNAPGUIDE

Available for: iOS 7.0

What it does: This is a lifestyle app that covers everything from home decor, fashion, makeup and technology to life hacks and cooking. Users can also make their own 'how-to' guides and share them on the app.

After installation:

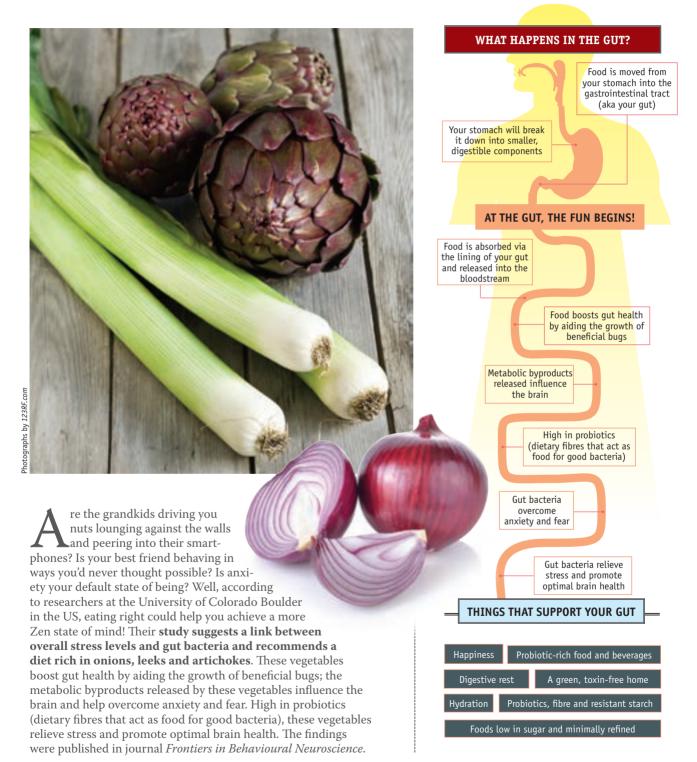
Users are given the option to personalise the app according to their preferences of guides and get notifications when new guides are added. You can choose from a long list that contains topics such as food, arts and crafts, beauty, technology, drinks,



and many others. This user-friendly app asks you to sign in through your email address, Facebook account or Twitter account. Once you sign in, it shows you many guides on the home page. At the bottom of the app are the tabs: 'Home', 'Search', 'Add', 'Notifications' and 'Your Profile'. When you select a guide, it tells you who has shared it, how many people have viewed it and how many likes it has received. On the upper bar, you can either go back, like the guide or share it with your friends. Swipe right and you can see the whole guide in the form of cards. The 'Search', 'Notifications' and 'Your Profile' tabs are self-explanatory; the 'Add' tab takes you through the steps to make your own guide. This is an enjoyable app for people looking to get—and share—ideas on upping their lifestyle quotient.



VITAL VEGGIES



SWALLOW THIS

Indigestion may literally be causing heartburn but scientists advise against taking pills over prolonged periods. Taking heartburn drugs over a period of time can seriously affect your kidneys, eventually causing

kidney failure, warns a study that recently appeared in journal Kidney Interna*tional*. Researchers at Washington University in St Louis, Missouri, US. analysed 125,596 new users of proton pump inhibi-

tors (PPIs) and 18,436 users of other heartburn drugs referred to as H2 blockers. They found that the latter are less likely to cause kidney problems. The sudden onset of kidney problems, therefore, serves as a red flag for doctors to discontinue the use of PPIs that reduce the secretion of gastric acid. Given that kidney problems can develop silently and gradually over time, patients are advised to tell their doctors if they are taking PPIs and use the drugs only when necessary, according to the study's senior author, Ziyad Al-Aly.

Heart-stopping

aving a bad hair day? It could be 1 worse than you think. **Those on** a pacemaker could be at risk from hairdryers, electric razors, hand drills and other household

devices, a new study suggests. Researchers at Aachen University Hospital in Germany tested 119 patients and found that the electromagnetic fields generated by these appliances are strong enough to interfere with the performance of a

pacemaker. This could lead to bradycardia, or a slow heart rate, according to the study published in Circulation, the journal of the American Heart

Association. The risk depends on various factors such as the settings of the implant and the strength of the field source. So don't throw out that razor just vet: better still, you might want to have a word with your cardiologist before your

next close shave.

SUGAR ALERT

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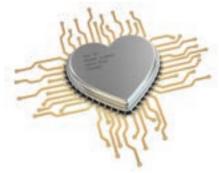
PUT DOWN THAT CUPCAKE! IT'S MORE LETHAL THAN YOU REALISE. A NEW STUDY SUGGESTS THAT TOO MUCH SUGAR COULD LEAD NOT JUST TO DIABETES AND OBESITY BUT ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE TOO. THE STUDY, CONDUCTED BY RESEARCHERS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF BATH AND KING'S COLLEGE LONDON IN THE UK, FOUND A POTENTIAL LINK BETWEEN ALZHEIMER'S AND SUGAR. THE TEAM FOUND THAT WHEN BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS REACH TIPPING POINT, THEY RESTRICT THE PERFORMANCE OF A VITAL PROTEIN THAT NORMALLY FIGHTS THE BRAIN INFLAMMATION ASSOCIATED WITH ALZHEIMER'S.



Can't sleep? Just pretend you've popped a pill. Research says that a simple placebo—with no active therapeutic effect—may work to cure insomnia. A team from Oxford University in the UK recruited 30 patients with insomnia who underwent neuro feedback and placebo feedback treatment over a few weeks. After the participants' assessment of the sleep-wake cycle, they did not find an advantage of neuro feedback over placebo feedback. Indeed, the findings showed that improvement of symptoms was brought about by unspecific factors such as trust, affection and care. So, take a deep breath, hug someone you love, and hit the pillow. Good night!



Take heart



Scientists at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, US, have created a 3-D heart-on-a-chip that can mimic the heart's biomechanical properties. This 'chip' could prove invaluable in studying cardiac disease, drug screening, drug development and regenerative medicine. This 'chip' or engineered heart tissue model is called the I-Wire. which consists of a thin thread of human cardiac cells stretched between two wire anchors. The amount of tension applied to the heart tissue can be varied via a probe that pushes against the band of tissue. This allows researchers to study the mechanical behaviour of the living heart, which is continually stretching and contracting. As the tissue is suspended in fluid similar to that which surrounds the human heart, researchers can also study the electrical behaviour of the heart under controlled conditions. Initial experiments have made much headway by demonstrating that the I-Wire faithfully reproduces the response of cardiac cells to two different drugs that affect heart function in humans. The results have been published in journal Acta Biomaterialia.



Pain in the BACK

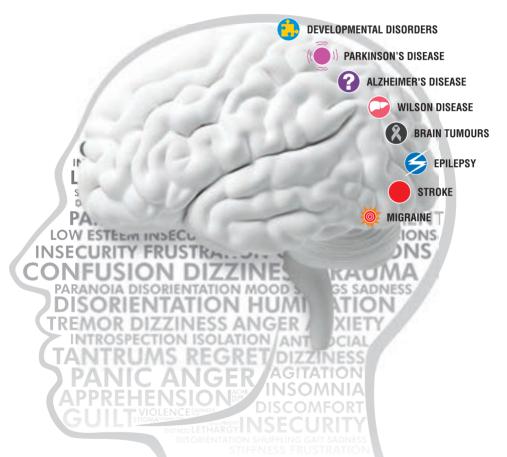
While anti-inflammatory drugs have been found ineffective against back pain, the truth could be far more painful. Researchers at the University of Sydney in Australia warn that spinal pain can reduce life expectancy. Their study on 4,390 Danish twins over the age of 70 showed that those with spinal pain (back and neck) had a 13 per cent higher chance of early death, vis-à-vis those without spinal pain. The researchers point out that back pain is a serious issue and an indicator of poor health that should be screened for, especially among silvers. And there is no quick fix for this problem. While medication and anti-inflammatory drugs are ineffective in treating spinal pain, the best treatment is a healthy lifestyle, including physical activity.



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Born to win

ekhein kitthe latt-moddaa na tudda laeen!" (Be careful, you'll get a leg or an arm broken...) is the unsolicited advice given by peers and neighbours to Captain (retd)

Gurjiwan Singh Sidhu. But it's a risk the 85 year-old is willing to take.

Here's why. This Chandigarh-based retired Army man has the distinction of being Asia's shot put record holder, four times over, in the veterans' category; two-time Asia gold medallist in the hammer throw; and Asia gold medallist in the javelin throw. A regular participant at international meets, Sidhu's latest achievement was the shot put gold and hammer throw bronze at the Asia Masters Athletics Championship held in Japan in 2014. At the national level, his undisputed status as 12-time champion in shot put and six-time gold medallist in the hammer throw, in the veterans' category, is intimidating for even young sportsmen.

His sports journey began in the 1950s but it was a tepid beginning. "I used to throw shot put during my school and college days but I did not really pursue sports. After retirement, I took to badminton," says Sidhu, who earned a degree in law in 1956 before he took up his first job as panchayat officer at the Block Development Office in Jalandhar. "I had applied to do the bar-at-law in London but when the Emergency was imposed, I had to join the armed forces owing to familial compulsions," he explains.

After retiring as joint director, Department of Public Relations, Punjab, Sidhu has been practising law at the Punjab and Haryana High Court in Chandigarh. But his true second innings started when he rediscovered



his love for sports a decade ago. "One day, while the house was being whitewashed, my son and grandson discovered a host of certificates and said, 'Daddy, why don't you continue your passion for sports at senior citizens' tournaments and veterans' championships?'"

It was an idea he could not resist. Even at the age of 71, Sidhu was in great shape and so, accompanied by his son, he participated in a seniors' meet in Chandigarh and won the gold in the shot put event, hands down. The year was 2003. "Since then, my record as shot put champion in the veterans' category in India has been unbroken."

It was only after he turned 70 that this sportsman picked up and mastered the discus, javelin and hammer—and won medals in all three events! In recognition of his remarkable achievements, Sidhu was honoured by the Punjab government with a cash prize of ₹ 100,000 this year.

Armed with a towering frame and an unassuming demeanour, Sidhu's zest

for sports is grounded in a structured routine. He is an early riser and a stickler for exercise. He is addicted to his afternoon practice sessions at the stadium and is careful about what he eats. "Wherever I travel in India, I carry homemade parathas, even when I visit my village," he shares. "Except for a cup of tea and some fruit, I avoid eating outside. At home, I eat a healthy breakfast and enjoy a drink whenever I visit the club."

Sidhu recently received the Vayoshreshtha Samman, an award conferred by the Government of India in recognition of exemplary contributions by senior citizens and institutions. While his family celebrated the news, Sidhu remains understated. "It is sad that our Government does not look after senior citizens. I can afford to participate in national and international tournaments but there are those who cannot in spite of their talent. For instance, Japan has a sizeable geriatric population but state-of-the art sports facilities and opportunities are readily available for them."

—Suparna-Saraswati Puri





BIRTHDAYS

India-born British actor **Roshan Seth** turns 75 on 2 April.

Singer Hariharan turns 62 on 3 April.

Indian actor and chairman of Balaji Telefilms **Jeetendra** turns 75 on 7 April.

Martial artist and actor Jackie Chan turns 63 on 7 April.

Actor Jaya Bachchan turns 69 on 9 April.

English author and former politician **Jeffrey Archer** turns 77 on 15 April.

Queen Elizabeth II turns 91 on 21 April.

IN PASSING

Popular Gujarati writer and noted playwright **Taarak Mehta** passed away on 1 March at his Ahmedabad residence. He was 87.

Former Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer and MP **Syed Shahabuddin** passed away on 4 March following a prolonged illness in the NCR. He was 82.

Dr Thomas E Starzl, a surgeon who performed the first successful liver transplant on a human patient, passed away on 4 March in Pittsburgh, US. He was 90.

Former speaker of the Lok Sabha **Rabi Ray** passed away on 6 March after a prolonged illness in Cuttack. He was 91.

Bengali singer **Kalika Prasad Bhattacharjee** passed away in a car accident on 7 March in Hooghly district. He was 56.

Former director of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology **Dev Raj Sikka** passed away on 18 March owing to cardiac arrest. He was 85.

Chuck Berry, the father of Rock 'n' Roll, died on 18 March 2017 at his home in St Charles County, US. He was 90.

MILESTONES

- Prominent Konkani writer
 Mahabaleshwar Sail was
 selected for the Saraswati
 Samman 2016 on 9 March
 for his novel Hawthan.
 It was shortlisted from
 22 books written in as many
 languages. The selection
 for the award was made by
 a jury presided over by the
 29th Chief Justice of India
 A S Anand.
- Rashtriya Swayamsevak
 Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan
 Bhagwat was conferred the
 honorary degree of Doctor
 of Science (DSc) by the
 Nagpur-based Maharashtra
 Animal and Fishery Sciences
 University on 9 March for
 his contribution to the fields
 of veterinary sciences and
 social work. Bhagwat is a
 veterinary doctor by training.





HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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A WHOLE NEW ME

Coming from an orthodox Tamil Brahmin family, I did all the right things by my scientist husband and three boys. Through years of cooking tons of sambar and mounds of idlis and dosas, cleaning and keeping our house, and being a good wife and mother, my husband learnt of my love for dance and encouraged me to pursue my passion.

Once my responsibilities were done, I set about finding a good dance teacher who could go beyond my age handicap and teach me Bollywood dancing—my favorite genre! There were more than enough relatives and friends to discourage me, and remarks about learning dance 'at my age' were commonplace.

In 2008, when I was 51, I reached out to an accomplished dancer, Ambika, of Rangmanch Studio at Himayatnagar, close to where I live. I was trying to get some of my friends to join the dance class but they backed out. Disappointed, I almost withdrew but Ambika sat me down and encouraged me to fulfil my dream. She told me, "It is your dream; you do not need friends to help you. Just focus and you can learn and perform."

I conquered all my fears and apprehensions and found myself enjoying the experience. I also realised I could dance quite well! One day, Ambika said I was ready for my solo on stage. I was terribly anxious but equally excited; with Ambika as my anchor, I stepped onto the stage on 2 June 2009. My husband and children attended my performance, which encouraged me to give my very best.

After that, there was no looking back. At my second son's wedding, I danced along with my husband, who was happy to be taught by Ambika. Although South Indian weddings have none of the song and dance typical of most North Indian weddings, my love for dance overcame my respect for tradition. My husband and I, and my son's friends, danced to our heart's content. I am quite sure a few traditional eyebrows must have gone through the roof!

I have emerged from the shackles of tradition in another way as well. I have been brought up to wear a sari ever since I was 15 years old. After I got married, my parents-in-law allowed me to wear the salwar kameez. But when



Dance has helped Thyagarajan stay fit and happy

I visited the US for the first time in 2005 to meet my eldest son, I agreed to wear jeans on my kids' urging. When I came back to India, the jeans were shelved. They came out again for my dance class, where everyone else was wearing them. Ambika and all the young students encouraged me to switch over for comfort.

My frequent trips to the US have made me realise that our lifestyles are so different. In the US, people live for themselves, while in India everyone believes it is their prerogative to advise you on how to live after the age of 60. You will be told that you need to go to the temple, sing bhajans or listen to them, and watch lots of soap operas on TV, when you are not helping with the grandchildren!

Speaking of bhajans, I have done my share. I have learnt Carnatic music and I often sing at temples and other religious gatherings. I can happily claim that I am physically and mentally fit, thanks to my music and dance sessions. I also go to the gym regularly and find great satisfaction in dancing for an hour, non-stop!

It would be wonderful if every woman in India made this extra effort to tap into her own potential and make herself happy. She would then not need any TV, or gossip sessions, and she would definitely not feel sorry for herself!

—Bhuvaneshvari Thyagarajan, Secunderabad

A SECOND CHANCE

I am 56 years old and, after an intense battle against Parkinson's disease, I am pleased to say that I have emerged a winner. This is my story.

I live in Bengaluru now but studied mechanical engineering and acquired an MBA degree from Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi and the Xavier's Institute of Labour Management in Jamshedpur, respectively. I have worked in senior positions in prominent companies in India and Oman, where I was posted for seven years. I returned to India in 2004 and was fortunate to be appointed as general manager of an American multinational's South Asia operations.

The first red flag went up in 2008, when I noticed tremors in my left hand. This was associated with sluggishness of body movements on the left side and other symptoms like stiffness, rigidity and shaking. I consulted doctors but as the tremors did not affect my daily activities, I was only put under observation. However, the tremors worsened and so did the sluggishness in gait and body movements. A battery of tests confirmed Parkinson's, a progressive disorder of the nervous system. Doctors put me on medication for Parkinson's.

By 2011, the tremors progressed to my right limbs, with further worsening of body movements. This compromised my work and daily activities like driving and even shaving,

Hari Prasad on an awareness drive after overcoming Parkinson's



dressing and sitting for long periods, which I needed to do at official meetings. My condition worsened and now included obsessive symptoms and hallucinations. By 2014, I experienced motor

fluctuations that forced me to take a break from my professional life. I also developed involuntary movement of the upper trunk and neck as a side effect of the medication. In January 2015, I had developed sleep issues and had problems concentrating. Finally, doctors told me I should stop driving.

PARKINSON'S

AWARENESS

MONTH

Through this emotionally painful journey, I tried to stay calm without ever losing faith in God but my patience was running out. The doctors' visits, long-term medication and tests were taking a toll. It was getting increasingly difficult for me to cope with the illness.

It was then that I met a neurologist and neurosurgeon trained in MDS (movement disorder surgery). They suggested deep brain stimulation (DBS), a surgical procedure that treats disabling neurological symptoms. I was very apprehensive but the doctors calmed my fears.

In March 2015, I underwent DBS, which cost me ₹ 10 lakh. I responded well to the surgery, and my gait and quality of life significantly improved. I slowly returned to normalcy. After six years of debilitating symptoms, I finally felt normal again. Even better, I have been taken off medication. The surgery has not only helped me get back to my normal life but has boosted my confidence.

Being an avid traveller, I have since been on two road trips. The first trip was in 2016, when I travelled across 25 cities from Bengaluru to Thimpu in Bhutan, in 41 days. Recently, I travelled 10,000 km across 30 cities in Western India. Both trips were aimed at creating awareness about Parkinson's and the surgery. Owing to low awareness among patients and general practitioners, the disease is often detected in an advanced stage. Although DBS is not a new surgical procedure, not many opt for it owing to low awareness.

Thankfully, I have been able to reach out to many patients and tirelessly talked about the disease and surgery. Looking back, I feel my journey has been extremely fulfilling. And I am back to being 'me' again!

-Hari Prasad, Bengaluru



NUTRITALK BY NAINI SETALVAD

Fight fat with food: Eating right can be an important weapon in the battle against obesity



ne of the key tools to maintain health—at any age—is to maintain optimum weight. If weight goes up, it has a domino effect. You suffer knee, joint and back pain, constipation, a rise in blood pressure, sugar and cholesterol levels, and a host of other problems. Amid all your weight loss efforts, hardly a day would go by without being haunted by write-ups on 'the right diet to lose weight' from magazines and newspapers looking squarely at you. It's sad to watch people (young and silver alike) getting caught in the vicious circle of 'dieting' and still unable to keep the weight off. It's interesting to know that the word 'diet' comes from the Greek word dietika, which means the course of life. And it is important to remember that each individual has their own dietary needs and requirements. There is no one-size-fits-all formula; every diet plan must be based on personal history; the course, indeed, of the individual's life.

WAYS TO KEEP WEIGHT GAIN AT BAY

- Listen to your body: As you age, digestive functions also slow down. Your stomach is not able to digest the same amount of food as quickly and efficiently as when you were younger. It is easy to keep eating unhealthy and not realise the additional weight that gets accumulated as the years pass. It is, therefore, important to pay attention to what your body is telling you and eat accordingly.
- Make changes in your diet:
 Change is the only constant:
 - Change is the only constant and if this change can be sustainable, it's even better. Cut out simple carbohydrates like pizza, white bread, white rice, cakes, pastries, *roomali* roti, mithai, fried foods like samosas, spring rolls and puris, and processed foods from your diet and see the changes in your body.
- Watch your sugar levels: Your sugar level should always be kept in control—neither too
- high nor too low. High sugar can make you diabetic, increase inflammation, causing joint pains, and spur weight gain. On the other hand, low levels of sugar can cause hypoglycaemia. Thus, be careful to maintain your sugar intake.
- Have mini meals: Have small quantities of food throughout the day so you don't remain hungry for long periods, causing you to binge when you finally eat. It's important to eat four or five low

glycaemic index smaller meals a day rather than two heavy meals. Not only does this keep hunger pangs at bay, it also picks up your metabolism. When you eat low glycaemic index foods, it keeps you fuller for a longer time—especially your carbohydrates in the form of grains.

- e Eat more vegetables: When you sit down to eat, ensure that at least half of your plate is filled with vegetables. This comprises not only green vegetables but orange, red and yellow vegetables too. These have fat-fighting properties as well. While you eat fresh, whole foods to lose weight, it's also important to pay a little attention to what you should stay away from.
- Have small amounts of protein and grain: Try and eat more complex carbohydrates like unprocessed whole grains, fruits, vegetables and lentils. Eating even small amounts of these proteins and grains can help as they are rich in nutrients. As for rice, shift to the unpolished brown basmati variety. Your daily diet should consist of three to four servings of brown rice (two medium cups) per meal, or wheat, *nachni*, jowar or bajra chapattis (about three per meal), one or two servings of lentils (dal or pulse) and low-fat yoghurt. In non-vegetarian meals, instead of dal you can have a fillet of fish or a chicken breast (with skin removed) and five to six servings of fresh vegetables, including salads (one serving is one bowl) and fruit.
- Eat fruits: The benefits are multifold. Fruits provide natural sugar that is easier for an elder person's stomach to break down (being organic) and lend instant energy to the body. Eating at least one fruit a day also helps you get over your sweet cravings.



When you go out to eat, be smart in choosing what drinks you select. Sweetened drinks, alcohol, liquor and fruit juices are the guilty party in retaining the fat cells in your body. Instead, choose lemon water, sparkling water, green tea, or non-sugared mocktails like Virgin Mary

- Go for good quality fat: Eating the right fat can actually help you lose weight as fat satiates you. It also helps absorb vitamins and minerals, preventing ill health and low immunity. Plus, as you age the joints in your body start losing flexibility. To prevent this, have goodquality fats like ghee, nuts, seeds and coconuts.
- Get enough sleep: As we get older, our body takes longer to repair itself; the best time the
- body can do this is when we are asleep. Ensure you fulfil the minimum requirement of eight hours of good sleep daily so your mind and body are fresh to tackle the next day with vigour.
- Choose your beverages right: When you go out to eat or even if you are eating at home, be smart in choosing what drinks you select. Sweetened drinks, alcohol, liquor and fruit juices are the guilty party in retaining the fat cells in your body.



Instead, choose lemon water, sparkling water, green tea, or non-sugared mocktails like Virgin Mary, etc.

- Move your body: At any age, it is necessary to keep moving our bodies by exercising. While it is true that major weight loss can be achieved by changing your food habits, exercise gives additional support to the endeavour. Simple exercise in the form of walking in the park for half an hour a day can help you reap tremendous benefits in the long run—it not only aids in weight loss but increases your stamina.
- Have nuts: Instead of fried food or savouries, have a handful of nuts occasionally for snacks in between meals. Crush the nuts for easier consumption.
- Drink a lot of water: Water is the most powerful drink as it is filled with nutrients that instantly refresh you. It is essential

to keep yourself hydrated. Also, water keeps you full for a longer time, thus preventing you from overindulging in food.

• Check your vitamin and mineral levels: Having low vitamin and mineral levels is a very common occurrence among elders. If Vitamins B12, D3 or iron or sodium levels are below normal, fatigue sets in. So always keep a check on these parameters.

IN A NUTSHELL

Remember, it is possible to lose weight with sensible eating. Make sure you add vegetables, fruits, whole grains, pulses, dairy, fish and eggs to your diet. Avoid fried foods, sweets, processed and refined food, jams, pickles, butter, cheese, sugar, red meat, chocolates, egg yolk, ice-creams, cakes, cream biscuits, white flour, fruit juices, aerated drinks and sherbets, and alcohol and cigarettes.

WEIGHT CONTROL RECIPE

KAND HANDVO

Kand (purple yam) is low in calories. The natural fibre in this root vegetable helps to slow down the rate at which your body processes sugar, keeping you from being hungry between meals.

Ingredients

- Kand: 250 gm; cut into pieces
- Ginger-chilli paste: 2 tsp
- Groundnuts: 1 tsp
- Sesame seeds: 1 tsp
- Cow's ghee: 2 tsp
- Rock salt and lemon: to taste

Method

Boil the *kand* and mash it well. Keep the batter aside. Roast the groundnuts and grind them coarsely. Add rock salt, lemon and ginger-chilli paste. Mix well. Grease the baking tray with ghee. Place the *kand* batter evenly. Toss with sesame seeds and groundnut paste. Bake for half an hour till a brown crust forms on top. Serve hot.

It is also important to be more aware. There are common misconceptions about certain foods—there are foods we consider unhealthy that are actually good for you and can be added in your weight loss diet. These include potato, beetroot, coconut, cashewnuts, ghee, rice, sweet potato, and sugary fruits like pineapple, chikoo, mango, banana, and custard apple. Don't be afraid to include these foods in moderation in your daily diet unless you have a medical problem that prevents you from eating them.

Setalvad is an obesity and lifestyle disease consultant who offers diet counselling at Health for You, a wellness clinic in Mumbai, as well as online. Visit www.nainisetalvad.com for more details or write to contact.mag@harmonyindia.org if you have any queries for her



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YOGA RX BY SHAMEEM AKTHAR



Photographs by 123RF.com

Rolling in the deep

Using a gym ball can help you get comfortable with a new pose as well as intensify an already strong practice

ome props help you enter a new pose and give you support. Other props help you intensify it. So the trick is to know what prop to use and the intention of use—to get over physical or emotional inhibition, or to deepen an already strong practice. So, in this latter category, the gym ball fits

the bill perfectly. It is also called the stability ball for that reason, because it requires you to stabilise your body when you use it, and the challenge of maintaining the balance is so demanding that it loads the demand on your muscles enough to deepen the challenge and tone you up further. All balancing acts require intense

engagement from the mind too; so, therefore, it can be meditative in a dynamic fashion.

The first reason, of course, is a strong one: to get over your inhibitions in a pose or develop and prepare your muscles for the pose, such as the wheel pose (*chakrasana*). Ideally,

when you use a gym ball on your own, you need to ensure there is somebody to help hold the ball in place or use a wall or block to prevent it from rolling off. Even though it looks like a fun prop, it can be an extremely tricky one to use and a fall from it can be disconcerting. Here, we are showing you a simple and safe pose that may be attempted with the gym ball. It is the shoulder pose (*kandharasana*) and referred to more popularly as the pelvic tilt.



YOGIC MOVES

PELVIC TILT (kandharasana)

Stabilise the gym ball by placing it firmly against a wall or strong, immovable furniture like a long sofa. Lie down as shown, with legs bent at the knees, feet close to the ball. Lift both feet and place them firmly on the ball. You may need to keep both feet apart to increase control. Your arms should be along the body, palms firm and flat on the ground. Hoist your hips high, inhaling. Exhaling, drop the hips down. Do this a few times and increase

the challenge by increasing the number of repetitions, or by holding the pose longer. **Benefits:** This pose exerts a more intense challenge on the calf and hip muscles, thus toning and shaping them further. Other benefits are the same as in the basic pose: an immune boost, resolution of lower back problems, control of cardiovascular and blood pressure issues, strengthening the uro-genital system and working on the thyroid gland.

KREEDA YOGA

DRAKSHA SPARDHA (grape race)

As this involves a race, choose a space where people can walk/ run (depending on the ability of participants). At one end of the space, hang several bunches of grapes (according to the number of participants). They should be at

a height where the participants can reach them with their mouth. Lightly, tie the hands of the participants behind their back with a scarf or kerchief.

When the race is announced, the lined-up participants should cover the space fast, run to their respective bunches and, without using the hands, eat up as much as possible and race back. The winner is the one who finishes first. You can also hang other edible stuff like a biscuit or anything that allows itself to be hung and eaten without too much chewing or biting. Remember not to keep too much of the edible stuff, though, because participants may get excited and forget to swallow! (Ensure there is no such danger by suggesting that the participants display that they are chewing the food and not keeping it in their mouths.) This game builds speed, impulse control and mental and physical agility.

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



HEART TO HEARTH BY PRATIBHA JAIN

A series about silvers who believe nurturing the body and mind is the key to joy

Serving the divine

Leela Krishnan • CHENNAI



There is easy grace and contentment when she cooks. A certain calm.

She placed the pan on the stove and added the oil. Without waiting for it to heat up, she added the mustard seeds. She immediately covered the pan with a lid. When she heard the spluttering of the mustard, she removed the lid and added the *urad* dal. Then she closed the lid again. After a few seconds, she added the curry leaves, red chillies and later the asafoetida.

Whatever the order of the ingredients for the different recipes, she uses the lid in this manner while tempering (baghaar). For me, it was the defining feature of her cooking. There was no fumbling or hurry in her movements even though there are so many ingredients to be added in the tempering. She was diligent and, at the same time, relaxed. Apparently, a spluttering mustard seed had hit the eveball of one of her relatives and damaged the eye. Ever since, she follows this safer procedure while cooking. After meeting Leela Krishnan, 78, I have created a small space next to my gas stove where I stack a few pan lids within easy reach. For cooking with extensive tempering, this is ideal. It also keeps my cooking range cleaner, free of the spluttering mustard and oil so typical of Indian cooking.

There is the tangible aspect of the cooking—the ingredients, recipe, and food tips. Those are easy to learn and write about. But the real taste resides in the intangible. With Leelaji, I could

not help but admire the easy spirituality she has infused into her cooking and every other aspect of her life.

When I finally tasted the sambar, potato *podimas* and *mor kozhumbu* with steamed rice, the question just burst out of me: "But honestly, what makes these simple, everyday preparations so supremely delicious?" Leelaji smiled gently. "Because I prepared it for my first child—whom I call Baba and you know as God."

Hailing from Palakkad, Leelaji is a Tamil Iver who has been living in Chennai for the past three decades. Having heard her grandson Theias wax eloquent about her cooking, I was led to her cosy residence in Kalakshetra for a soulful lunch. Along with her daughters Geetha Sethuraman and Vasanthi Siyakumar. we chatted about traditional food, recipes and kitchen tips, interspersed with her spiritual insights. She belongs to the Brahmakumaris, where she has found an inner calling; a deep connection. Here are some snippets from our conversation.

IN HER OWN WORDS

I grew up in Tatta Mangalam, a quaint town in Palakkad. We were six sisters and one brother. We lived in a large joint family, so my grandmother never allowed me into the kitchen. When I turned 16, I got married to K G Krishnan. After marriage, we lived in Singapore till 1990 before moving to Chennai.

CULINARY INSPIRATION

I cannot attribute my love for cooking to any one person. Life is the real teacher. When I went to Singapore, I did not know any cooking. With the help of friends and through trial and error, I managed. From my Gujarati neighbours, I learnt to make many dishes and enjoyed that slight

sweetish taste. Our own traditional recipes also include a dash of jaggery. I also enjoy experimenting with other cuisines such as Chinese and Italian.

INNER CONNECTION

When I was 42, my husband passed away. I was so lonely. At the time, there was a centre of Brahmakumaris right next door. So I joined them to dispel my loneliness. Since then, there has been no looking back. I love their system, their way of thinking and their attitude to life. I realise that we have an inner power with which we can accomplish whatever we

"It means when you cook, be unhurried. Feel love and joy in your heart. Feel affection for the person you are cooking for. Always remember that your first offering is to the divine; that's the thought that must accompany you in whatever you do"

want. Once a week, we conduct the meetings at my home as well. I feel truly connected to the divine.

PURITY OF FOOD

It is important to eat food that is cooked with a pure heart. I have followed one rule since I joined the Brahmakumaris: I eat what I cook. Even when I visit my sister, I make my own dosas. When I travel, I either carry *thepla* or other items that do not perish easily.

CHERISHED COMPLIMENTS

I feel most rewarded when my children and grandchildren share a meal with me. My great-grandson Kashyap says that my white *adai* is the best in the world! You must try it sometime since it is so easy to make. Soak 2 cups of idli rice for 4 hours. Grind the soaked rice. Add ½ cup each of coconut and washed soft *aval*. Grind again. The batter will be slightly thicker than dosa batter. You don't have to keep this dough overnight or ferment it. You can make soft and thick *adai* with it immediately. As an option, I enjoy adding drumstick leaves in the batter.

WHEN SUDDEN GUESTS ARRIVE

There is always food at home. It is a pleasure when people visit and eat with you. When I want to make something easy as well as special, *bajji* and *bonda* are always on the list. You can make *bajji* with so many veggies—a handy recipe indeed.

SPECIAL TOUCH

Whatever you undertake, do it with your complete mind and heart. The term for this is *nidaanam* in Tamil; it means when you cook, be unhurried. Feel love and joy in your heart. Feel affection for the

person you are cooking for. Always remember that your first offering is to the divine; that's the thought that must accompany you in whatever you do.

INCULCATING VALUES

Carry your roots with you; do not forget them. It is good to be fashionable, but always be connected with your tradition as well. This is what I have taught my children.

MY WISHLIST

I am truly content, but if you ask me to state a special wish, it is to travel to the US and stay with my granddaughter.



ARACHHU VITTA SAMBAR

This sambar with freshly ground spices is a family favourite. You can add any vegetable of your choice. Along with a side-dish such as potato *podimas* or beans *poriyal*, it makes a perfectly yummy meal for lunchtime.

Ingredients

- Tur dal: 1 cup
- Mixed vegetables (capsicum, red pumpkin and radish):
 1 cup each; large chunks
- Tomato: 1; large
- Green chillies: 2; slit
- Oil: 2 tbsp
- Mustard seeds: ¼ tsp
- Turmeric powder: 1/4 pinch
- Tamarind paste: 1 tbsp
- Curry leaves: 1 spriq
- Salt to taste

For the paste

- Coconut: 3 tbsp
- Coriander seeds: 2 tbsp
- Bengal gram (chana dal): 1 tbsp
- Fenugreek seeds: 1 tsp
- Dry red chillies: 6-8
- Asafoetida powder: a pinch

Method

Cook the dal in a pressure cooker along with the chopped tomato, a pinch of turmeric powder and 2 slit green chillies. Churn well and set aside. Dry-roast the ingredients for the paste (except the coconut). Add the coconut in the end and switch off the flame. Grind into a thick paste using very little water. Set aside.

Heat the oil in a rice cooker (or pan) and add the mustard seeds. As they splutter, add the chopped vegetables

and curry leaves. Add 2 cups water and a pinch of turmeric powder. Cover and cook until the vegetables turn tender. Add the tamarind paste and cook for a few minutes. Add the ground paste and salt and cook for 5-7 minutes. Add the cooked *tur* dal and cook for 2-3 minutes. Add a cup of water if the sambar is too thick. Switch off the flame. Garnish with coriander leaves. Serve with steamed rice and a side-dish of your choice.

Pratibha Jain, an author and translator from Chennai, is the co-author of two award-winning books Cooking at Home with Pedatha and Sukham Ayu. Her area of specialisation is documenting Indian traditions through research, translation and writing





MONEY MATTERS BY PRIYA DESAI

The wind beneath silver wings: The benefits and risks of medical insurance and the options available to you



he silver years creep up on us all, sooner than later. And no matter how hard one tries to maintain health and vitality, age-specific health issues begin to rear their head with greater frequency.

Very few silvers in India have medical insurance and that can become a major stress point. Contrastingly, those who have been wise and prudent enough to opt for medical cover find they are on more steady ground.

The simple fact is that age and medical expenses are two aspects that run on parallel tracks; and, in most cases, where one exists, the other follows. Many older people find themselves riddled with various illnesses, some of which are far more complex than rigid muscles and physical aches and pains.

To them, ageing becomes synonymous with escalating doctors' fees, medication expenses and a string of medical tests whenever their health takes a turn for the worse. Considering this, it makes perfect sense for silvers to ensure that a certain portion of their annual income is channelled towards a comprehensive medical policy.

Medical policies: the cost-benefit factor

In an ideal world, people should obtain medical insurance before they reach the half-a-century milestone. It's considerably less complex to obtain medical insurance at that age and it won't burn too big a hole in your pocket either. As age is directly proportional to illnesses and medical conditions, it leads to higher medical claims from silvers. From an insurance company's viewpoint, senior citizens are more of a liability.

The tax deduction under 80D for the premium paid up to ₹ 30,000 is a good attraction for buying a policy. Annual preventive check-ups are also permissible under this limit.

The providers

Though most companies may not be keen on providing substantial medical cover to silvers, several banks and companies do have medical cover plans for silvers. In fact, according to the new guidelines laid down by the Insurance Regulation and Development Authority (IRDA), health insurance providers will need to cover an individual up to an age of 65 years with lifetime renewability. If health insurance is denied on any grounds to senior citizens, it needs to be in black and white with reasons furnished and recorded, and the criteria of reasonableness and fairness fulfilled.

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Public-sector companies that provide medical insurance include National Insurance Company, United India Insurance, New India Assurance and Oriental Insurance, while private-sector companies that provide medical insurance include Max Bupa, ICICI Lombard, Tata AIG, Cholamandalam DBS, Royal Sundaram, AG Health Insurance and Star Allied. Banks that have alliances with insurance companies include

Andhra Bank, Indian Overseas Bank, Maharashtra Bank, Indian Bank and Canara Bank. Those who have accounts with these banks can apply for medical insurance for their parents. Despite the fact that the premiums seem pretty manageable, the claim processes are quite arduous and riddled with hurdles.

'I am different': competitive variables

Though the medical cover that many companies offer may be in the same range, there are a number of differentiating factors. This makes it very difficult to set comparison specifics. The different factors that can vary by insurer are:

- Age coverage
- Waiting period for pre-existing illnesses
- Requirements of pre-insurance medical tests
- Ailment coverage
- Premium amounts
- Claim payment records
- Claim amounts
- Payment modes
- Time taken for payments

For instance, National India Assurance Company restricts medical cover to $\ref{totaleq}$ 150,000 for senior citizens. While it loads premium in the range of 10-200 per cent in case claims have been made for two successive years, a renewal after the age of 80, too, attracts premium loading that increases with advancing age. ICICI Lombard has a high loading of 200 per cent.

Another variable is the waiting period for pre-existing illnesses. Max Bupa's Heartbeat stands at four years while National Varishtha's has a waiting period of one year. Most policies have an overriding period of two to three years for diseases that indicate no permanent exclusion. Apollo Munich's Optima Senior Policy has a permanent exclusion for illnesses such as thyroid and asthma. Insurance companies tend to shun those who suffer from chronic diseases such as diabetes, and heart and renal ailments.

Circumventing technicalities If health insurance is denied

While the benefits of these medical policies hold a distinct sheen, the patina of limitations can make them far less attractive than they seem at a cursory glance. Silvers have a tough time trying to peruse and sift information, compare benefits and premiums, and make sense of the reams and reams of terms and conditions; and

they become less keen or open to getting a medical policy in the first place.

The insurance agents of many companies are overly persuasive and sometimes threateningly aggressive in their approach to selling policies; when it comes to meeting their sales targets, they are unstoppable. But once the policy is bought, you need to remind and chase them even to get the hospitals covered and the rules/regulations booklets they are supposed to include with the mediclaim policy.

During meetings with prospective customers, they paint a pretty picture and speak volumes about the benefits of the different policy offerings. Unfortunately, they tend to sideline the comparative view and don't say much about what other companies may or may not be offering. Most silvers have little or no inclination to thoroughly study all the policies that are currently available to them from different companies.

The loopholes in the medical policies come to light only at the point of a claim and policyholders realise they have been left with the short end of the stick, so to speak. It is a must to scrutinise the details and categorisation in various mediclaim policies. As you need to process your claims through third-party administrators (TPAs)—the TPA is indicated in your policy—you may face hurdles in getting your dues in time unless you have opted for a cashless mode if available.

Cross-referencing

It's always a good idea to cross-reference the details agents provide, with information displayed on the health insurance company's official website. Online information like customer reviews and complaints help to arrive at a sound decision about which medical policy you should opt for. The sites listed below and many others can be a mine of medical insurance-related information:

- www.healthinsuranceindia.org
- www.mvinsuranceclub.com
- www.mediamanage.com/health-insurance-store.aspx
- www.mediclaimindia.co.in
- www.medindia.net
- www.coverfoxcom
- www.policybazaar.com
- Individual insurers' websites.

You will find that arming yourself with as much information as you can find is the best way to reduce the hassles when you actually need to file a claim.

Pitfalls are avoidable

Getting medical insurance cover represents a significant investment. This is why it's crucial for you to pour some effort and time into getting as many details as you can about the different medical policies available, and the companies that are offering them. Some common questions you should pose are:

- What are your reasons for getting health insurance cover and what do you expect from it?
- What kind of annual financial obligation are you going to be looking at?
- Will my future income support escalation in future premium?
- Have you gone through the fine print with a finetoothed comb and minutely compared the policy details?
- How will I complement the policy coverage in case of a need?

Before arriving at a final decision about the policy you want to get, a few more aspects need attention:

- Type of policy: There are a number of policies including floater, individual, surgical benefits and critical illnesses, etc. Identify your needs and a matching policy.
- Policy coverage: You cannot avoid tooth-combing the details such as exclusions, coverage of different diseases and any pre-existing diseases or health conditions. For example, certain policies will cover knee operations only after four years of buying a policy. It is also desirable not to hide pre-existing diseases.
- Terms and conditions: This one can be quite a toughie, but it's vital that you check whether the company provides a reimbursable or cashless option. Check the timeframe for the pre and post-hospitalisation expenses, the room rent coverage, extent of the co-payment, deductible and sub-limits.
- Credibility: Insurance companies are very stingy
 when it comes to claim payment and use all the fine
 print to delay or avoid a claim. This is why you should
 check the company's track record with reference to
 policyholders' claim payments. You should not fail to
 crosscheck the insurer's reputation in claim payment
 while being meticulous if filing a claim.
- Avoid discontinuation: Make careful note of the company's renewal and expiry rules, and whether they have a grace period for making premium payments. Under new guidelines, changing an insurer if you are dissatisfied is permitted but extreme care needs to be exercised to avoid heartbreaks while using the portability option.

In conclusion

Illnesses always come unannounced and when they do surface, the financial demands in their wake can be extremely taxing. These can become a serious drain on your finances, especially at a point of time when you need them the most. Healthcare inflation is galloping at about 20-25 per cent per annum. Most silvers have no medical insurance and find their savings evaporating in a single illness and hospitalisation. Thus, a mediclaim policy is a necessity today. However, it will still be inadequate to cover total costs.

When it comes to medical policies, being forewarned is being forearmed. In short, become an information sponge and assimilate all the details you can. It's best to stop and check before you make your final decision about the medical policy you want to take, rather than falter and fall at the time of filing your claim.

The author is an economist based in Mumbai



A governor like us

Former police officer and Uttarakhand governor Dr Krishan Kant Paul in conversation with veteran journalist **Raj Kanwar**

n a cold January evening three years ago, six of us sat in the spacious waiting room in the residential wing of Dehradun's Raj Bhavan to keep our appointment with the new governor Dr Krishan Kant Paul. We respectfully stood up as he walked in with a rare grace and introduced ourselves as he shook hands with us, one by one. He looked at me for an instant and smiled, perhaps remembering that I had described him as "very much like us" in my letter seeking the appointment. I had also had the cheek to say, "We feel one with you."

That was the beginning of our relationship. Two days later, I sent him a bunch of my articles and columns published in numerous newspapers, including *The Tribune*, to which he also contributed. He had written articles on poet Sahir Ludhianvi, a few playback singers and other topics. In fact, it was he who had inspired me to write on these singers of yore. Subsequently, my articles on Talat Mehmood, Geeta Dutt, Dev Anand and others were published in *The Hindu* and *Sunday Midday*, among others.

Indeed, Dr Paul's personal demeanour endears him to all. Modest and incredibly courteous despite occupying such a high constitutional post, hospitality and solicitousness are his innate attributes. The handsome 69 year-old also has an impeccable sartorial sense, and is invariably attired in a well-tailored suit with a tie or *bandgala* coat or Nehru jacket, depending on the occasion and the weather.

Academically, too, Dr Paul is a cut above—his doctoral dissertation in fluorine chemistry was

highly acclaimed and widely reproduced in international journals. In fact, academic excellence is in his genes. His late father Dr R C Paul was a renowned scientist at Punjab University in pre-Independence Lahore, where he had the opportunity of working with iconic scientist Dr Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar—he went on to become vice-chancellor of Punjab University, Chandigarh, a tenure that lasted for over 10 years, making him the longest serving vice-chancellor in the country.

An IPS officer of the 1970 batch of the Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram and Union Territory (AGMUT) cadre, Dr Paul spent much of his police career in Delhi, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and the beautiful hills of the Northeast. He enjoys the unique distinction of having served in almost every position in Delhi, from an assistant superintendent of police to the highest rank of commissioner. He also worked for nearly eight years in the Central Intelligence Agencies. During his 37-year career, he was involved in the investigation of several sensitive national and international cases that included the assassination of Indira Gandhi and cricket match fixing. He also investigated several bomb blasts and terrorists' cases. He is the recipient of numerous medals, decorations and commendations for his distinguished services.

Dr Paul holds authors and creative writers in great esteem and loves to interact with them. He has set up a welcome tradition at Raj Bhavan of inviting well-known authors to spend an evening with the local literati. On 19 March, Mussoorie-born-American-desi author Stephen Alter (*interview on page 74*) was the guest. Three months before, it was the

iconic Ruskin Bond. "More and more authors will be invited in future," Dr Paul tells me.

His wife Omita is an accomplished civil servant in her own right. An officer of the Indian Information Service, she is currently secretary to President Pranab Mukherjee. The couple were classmates from the undergraduate level till they both secured their respective master's degrees in chemistry. They have two sons and three grandchildren.

A great believer in destiny, Dr Paul affirms, "Que sera, sera." Whatever will be, will be. And so it has been! Soon after his retirement from the police, he was appointed member of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and held that position for more than five years. Thereafter, in July 2013, he was made the governor of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur with concurrent and additional charge. In January 2015, he became the sixth governor of Uttarakhand.

EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW

What were the major landmarks during your 37-year career in the police?

In public service, we should not count landmarks. It is the achievement of the task having been accomplished and the public having been satisfied that is more important.

The general perception is that the Indian police are corrupt. The term 'hafta' typically refers to the police in this country. What is your take on this and the way out?

There has to be zero tolerance for corruption; it needs to be firmly dealt with. Transparency and speeding up of procedures will largely curb corruption to a large extent. Senior officers could bring it down if they set an example. Initiatives taken by the Government on cash-less delivery and digitisation are steps in the right direction to curb this evil.

How did you stumble upon the cricket betting scandal in which then South African captain Hansie Cronje was indicted? Was it because you yourself are a big cricket fan? Initially, it was not a case of match-fixing but involved some people who were also the middlemen for an extortion racket. It was their conversation that alerted us. Yes, I had played cricket and am now an ardent cricket buff, like so many others. However, stumbling upon the racket was perhaps just a coincidence. And even if I had not played cricket, the case would still have been cracked by persistence and good analysis, besides the technological help. Cronje was a very big name, and we needed to be absolutely sure of our facts and conclusions before going public. He denied it initially but virtually cracked up after having been exposed. After five days of denials, he finally confessed, and later before the King Commission of Enquiry.

You had a five-year tenure at the UPSC. What is the yardstick that applies in interviewing and recommending interviewees for the civil services? And what were your personal criteria in this regard during your tenure?

There is no hard and fast yardstick as such. The candidates are primarily judged by their smart bearing, alertness, presence of mind and suitability for the service. Merit in general is the sole criterion for their selection. It is a three-stage process, and one of the toughest exams in the country. Out of about half-a-million aspirants, only about a thousand are selected, and even fewer at times. The interviewers are endowed with rich experience both in civil service and academia; they are also guided by the best possible advisors at the interview stage.

Do you agree that the profile of the civil servant has undergone a big change over the past three or four decades? And if so, is it healthy or unhealthy?

Yes, the profile of the civil servant has certainly undergone a big metamorphosis over the past four decades or so. In the early years after Independence as a legacy of the British, most civil servants came from elite schools, colleges and universities. Fortunately, with the proliferation of print and electronic media, it has become relatively easier for a common man to bring his grievances to the notice of officials concerned. Also, the Right to Information

"I see India as a superpower in another 10 years! Hopefully, Prime Minister Modi's speech saying that a new India is born will come to fruition. For this, we have to work with a clear focus"

"Philately has been my pastime for a long time. My father introduced me to this fascinating hobby. I inherited his treasure trove of stamps and have substantially added to it"



With wife Omita Act has also made the bureaucrat more conscious of his responsibility. The recruitment system after the introduction of reservations is more broadbased and not elitist.

What is your vision of India as a country?

A superpower in another 10 years! Hopefully, Prime Minister Modi's speech saying that a new India is born, following the historic success of his party in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, will come to fruition. For this, we have to work very hard and with a clear focus.

What has impressed you most about Uttarakhand?

The first point of contact with any place is its environment. Having spent a good amount of my career in Delhi, coming to Uttarakhand was heavenly. Its fresh air, mountains, rivers and people add to its beauty.

Is philately your main hobby?

Yes, philately has been my pastime for a long time. My father introduced me in my younger days to this fascinating hobby. I inherited his treasure trove of stamps and have substantially added to it. I was also instrumental in personally sponsoring new issues on famous poets Sahir Ludhianvi and Sumitra Nandan Pant. Hobbies provide relaxation and stimulate thinking. Reading newspapers and writing have also been interests since my early days. I took some interest in astrology and even passed a basic course in it but could not practise it continuously.

Aren't you an avid reader and fairly prolific writer?

I am not as prolific a writer as you! However, I write regularly as and when I get the time. At one time, I wrote for *The Statesman* and *The Tribune*, Chandigarh. I also did some freelance writing for other newspapers. Reading has been a passion for a long time.

Generally, what genre do you read? Who are some of your favourite authors?

From crime thrillers to science fiction and biographies to literary classics, I enjoy them all.

You are also a Hindi movie and music buff. Tell us some of your favourites among lyric-writers, composers and singers.

Yes, I have been fond of watching Hindi movies from my younger days and have several favourites among music composers, lyricists and playback singers of yore. S D Burman is an all-time favourite. These days, the emphasis is on watching music and not listening to it, as it was earlier. This has changed the style of music as well as the lyrics.

So far, you have had three innings in your career: police officer, member of UPSC and now governor. What are your plans after you complete your tenure as governor?

Actually, four innings! You are forgetting that I am a qualified chemist with a PhD in a difficult area and have several publications to my credit. So, my first innings was as a chemist. After retirement, it will be my endeavour to go back to some serious and creative writing that was only a pastime earlier. **

The first day at school
The first time you rode the bicycle.
The first crush you had at thirteen
The first drama you got a part in
The first day at college
The first date you went on
The first kiss
The first time you proposed
The first job interview
The first board meeting you addressed
The first day after retirement

BUTTERFLIES never retire

The first click of the mouse.

www.harmonyindia.org

celebrate age

Obesity is a major health hazard with no one-size-fits-all solution. However, a long-term realistic goal and approach can tip the scales in your favour, writes **Srirekha Pillai**

MEGHT

BILLION
people worldwide are
overweight

ow often has your resolution to shed that excess baggage crumbled as fast as the cookie touching your lips? For 67 year-old Saudamini Nayar, who has been on a diet for the past six months, it's an all too familiar scenario. Weighing 114 kg, she suffers not just from morbid obesity but osteoarthritis and diabetes. Though bedridden for two years and instructed to lose another 24 kg so she can be up on her feet, Nayar cajoles her eight year-old granddaughter to sneak in an extra cookie or piece of cake.

Many silvers like her are struggling to lose weight and keep it off, while coping with ailments that walk in unannounced in the wake of obesity. Indeed, obesity is a global epidemic today, cutting across all ages. In India, it has reached epidemic proportions, with the latest data indicating that over 30 million Indians are obese, a figure that is expected to double in the next five years. With incomes rising and India's integration in global food markets, the average caloric intake per individual has been on the rise, even as physical activity has been on the decline. In fact, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 1.2 billion people worldwide are overweight, making obesity the greatest health threat of the 21st century.



ACCORDING TO WHO GUIDELINES. A BODY MASS INDEX (BMI) ≤30 KG/M² AND WEIGHT CIRCUMFERENCE (WC) **GREATER THAN 102 CM IN MEN AND 88 CM IN WOMEN IS CLASSIFIED AS OBESITY**



FIND YOUR BMI

obesity.

BMI is used in determining

• It is a number calculated by

dividing a person's weight in

in metres squared. An adult

with a BMI of 30 or greater

percentage of body fat, it is

weight in terms of what is

healthy and unhealthy.

BMI online at \$\mathbb{Q}\$ http://

obesityfoundationindia.com/

You can check your

bmi.htm

a good indicator to categorise

is clinically obese.

Though it's not an actual

kilograms by his or her height

Understanding obesity

As defined by WHO, obesity is a chronic disease caused by abnormal or exces-

> 102 cm in men and 88 cm in women is classified as obesity according to WHO guidelines. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms (kg) by his or her height in metres squared, while WC is calculated by dividing waist circumference by hip measurement.

> Excess fat mass is thought to lead to chronic, low-grade in-

The obesity paradox

Obesity has risen dramatically worldwide over the past few decades. According to "Obesity and Weight Management in the Elderly", a study published in the British Medi-

cal Journal in 2011, sarcopenic obesity—gain in body fat but loss of muscle mass and functional capacity—is common in silvers, further aggravated by the lack of physical activity.

However, it is generally observed that obesity is not as harmful in silvers above the age of 80 as the mortality rate associated with it tends to fall thereafter. The association between BMI and mortality becomes weakened primarily because silvers with low body weight comprise a mix of those

and those who have lost weight through chronic, covert or overt ill health, and cigarette smoking, but are often physically inactive. There is usually some height loss also with ageing, making BMI data even more difficult to interpret in silvers. Further, the reduction in muscle mass-an important determinant of physical function and metabolic rate—leads to the clinical hazards of obesity appearing at a lower BMI in silvers.

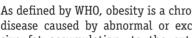
who have always been lean and physically active

Therefore, increasingly, WC is being used as an accurate index of adiposity in adults worldwide. The advantage of WC over BMI is that it correlates highly with both total and intra-abdominal fat. Of late, research has consistently been supporting the notion that abdominal fat distribution and relative loss of fat-free mass is more important than BMI in determining the health risks associated with obesity in silvers.

Facts and figures

The rapid rise in prevalence of obesity across the world has caught health organisations by surprise. According to WHO statistics, 2.8 million adults die each year directly or indirectly as a result of being overweight or obese. According to the WHO report, "Obesity: Preventing and Managing the Global Epidemic", the prevalence of obesity among adults aged 65 and above increased from about 12 per cent in 1990 to 19 per cent in a decade. The data shows that though the percentage of silvers who meet the recommended level of physical activity-30 minutes of moderate intensity activity for five or more days per week—increased marginally, it is still relatively low, with women having a consistently lower level of recommended activity than men.

> Closer home, according to studies, central (abdominal) obesity is a cause for concern among Indians. "Geriatric Health in India: Concern and Solutions", a report published in the *Indian Journal* of Community Medicine, argues that silvers belonging to middle and higher income groups are more prone to developing obesity and related complications owing to a sedentary lifestyle following retirement. Co-morbidities and medications (several of which tend to cause obesity) are other contributory factors.



sive fat accumulation, to the extent that health may be impaired. A body mass index (BMI) ≤30 kg/m² and weight circumference (WC) greater than

flammation that is associated with an increased risk of ill health such as metabolic and cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal problems, decreased physical function, and some types of cancer.

> the prevalence of obesity among adults aged 65 and above increased from about 12 per cent in 1990 to

in a decade





Women vs. Men

New research shows that women are more likely to be obese than their male counterparts. A study published in British medical journal *The Lancet* put the number of obese women in India in 2014 at 20 million, compared to 9.8 million obese men. According to the National Family Health Survey conducted in 2015-2016, one-fifth of Indian women are obese.

Local surveys seem to corroborate this. A 2005 survey among those over 65 years in Chandigarh pegged obesity among women at 42.1 per cent, compared to 20.9 per cent among men. In another study conducted among 206 silvers attending the geriatric clinic at a tertiary care hospital in Delhi, women again beat men in obesity with the former comprising 40.3 per cent compared to 34 per cent among men. Similarly, a study con-

ducted in Kollam district of Kerala in 2014 among those over the age of 60 also revealed a larger percentage of obesity among women—49 per cent—compared to 35 per cent in men.

This, experts say, could be because of psychological factors and weight gain during pregnancy.

Health risks

Several studies have linked obesity in silvers with difficulty in performing physical functions and daily tasks such as walking, climbing stairs, rising from the chair or bed, picking up an object from the floor and lifting heavy objects, among others. "Obesity can lead to not just other health issues like diabetes and heart disease, but also cause mechanical issues such as knee pain, wear and tear of the ioints, varicose veins and arthritic issues, affecting mobility," points out Dheeraj Kapoor, endocrinologist at Kokilaben Dhirubhai Am-

SILVERS BELONGING TO MIDDLE AND HIGHER INCOME GROUPS ARE MORE PRONE TO DEVELOPING OBESITY AND RELATED COMPLICATIONS OWING TO A SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE FOLLOWING RETIREMENT

bani Hospital, Mumbai. "The super obese can also suffer from sleep apnoea, where the body doesn't get enough oxygen."

SOME HEALTH HAZARDS THAT ACCOMPANY OBESITY ARE:

Type 2 diabetes: The single best predictor of type 2 diabetes is being overweight or obesity. Almost 90 per cent of people living with type 2 diabetes are overweight or obese. People who are obese have added pressure on their body's ability to use insulin to properly control blood sugar levels, and are therefore more likely to develop diabetes.

Cardiovascular diseases: Obesity, especially abdominal obesity, is a very important risk factor for cardiovascular diseases. India accounts for about 60 per cent of the world's heart disease burden, despite having less than 20 per cent of the world's population. NGOs such as the Indian Heart Association (IHA) have been raising aware-

Obesity medical complications IDIOPATHIC INTRACRANIAL PULMONARY DISEASE **HYPERTENSION** abnormal function obstructive sleep apnoea STROKE hypoventilation syndrome CATARACTS NONALCOHOLIC FATTY LIVER DISEASE CORONARY steatosis HEART DISEASE steatohepatitis cirrhosis ← DIABETES ← DYSHPIDEMIA - HYPERTENSION GALL BLADDER DISEASE **SEVERE PANCREATITIS** GYNAECOLOGIC **ABNORMALITIES** abnormal menses CANCER infertility breast, uterus, cervix. polycystic ovarian syndrome colon, esophagus, pancreas, kidney, prostate **OSTEOARTHRITIS PHLEBITIS** venous stasis SKIN GOUT

COVER FEATURE



"OBESITY CAN LEAD TO
NOT JUST OTHER HEALTH
ISSUES LIKE DIABETES AND
HEART DISEASE, BUT ALSO
CAUSE MECHANICAL ISSUES
SUCH AS KNEE PAIN, WEAR
AND TEAR OF THE JOINTS,
VARICOSE VEINS AND
ARTHRITIC ISSUES"

SKIP THEM

- Fried & processed foods
- Aerated drinks
- Fruit juices
- Sherhet
- White flour
- Chocolates & sweets

ness about this issue. Sishir Rao, resident physician in diagnostic and interventional radiology at the Massachusetts General Hospital and a clinical fellow at Harvard Medical School, and co-founder of IHA. along with Sevith Rao, medical student at Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, points out, "There are numerous functional implications of obesity in silver years, including the rising incidence of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and arthritis. These problems are often compounded by the decrease in physical activity and energy expenditure as individuals get older."

Hypertension/stroke: As recently outlined by the Ameri-

can Heart Association Professional Education Committee of the Council for High Blood Pressure Research, advanced years and obesity are two of the most powerful risk factors for uncontrolled hypertension, which in turn is a major determinant of mortality and stroke.

Arthritis: Obesity and arthritis go hand in hand. Sustained period of excessive strain in silvers can end up in osteoarthritis of weight-bearing joints. It's a vicious cycle, wherein patients with severe

arthritis who are unable to perform physical activities end up gaining more weight.

Alzheimer's: Studies also indicate a connection between obesity and reduced brain volume, linking it to vascular dementia and Alzheimer's. The Framingham Heart Study comprising male participants aged 55 to 88 years detected a link between obesity and dementia. It found that the risk for Alzheimer's increased by 36 per cent for every BMI unit at the age of 70 years and above.

Respiratory disorders: Weight gain is associated with a decrease in lung volumes and shortness of breath. Obesity is also responsible for obstructive sleep apnoea, caused by a blockage of the airway. Excessive adipose tissue on the neck, thorax and abdomen results in a number of pulmonary function abnormalities, leading to complications such as obesity hypoventilation syndrome, a condition in which a person fails to breathe rapidly or deep enough, resulting in low blood oxygen levels and high blood carbon dioxide levels. Asthma is also more common in the obese.

Cancers: Obesity increases the risk for many forms of cancer as well. Over 7 to 15 per cent of breast cancer cases and 11 to 14 per cent of bowel cancer cases are attributed to obesity. Studies have indicated that post-menopausal women with a BMI of over 28 kg/m² have a 26-per cent increase in risk of breast cancer. Higher oestrogen levels in obese post-menopausal women compared to their leaner counterparts are thought to promote carcinogenesis. The American Cancer Society's Cancer Prevention Study has shown a risk of colon cancer greater by 75 per cent in men and 25 per cent in women with a BMI of 30 kg/m². Obese post-menopausal women are also at a high risk of malignant melanoma and endometrial cancer, while silvers who are obese are at an increased risk of other forms of cancer such as gallbladder, pancreatic, renal, uterine, cervical and prostate cancers.

Urinary incontinence: Strain, stretch and eventual weakening of neuromuscular structures, along with the apparent excessive weight and pressure applied on the bladder by increased intra-abdominal fat mass, can result in incontinence. Diabetic patients are at a higher risk of incontinence.

Sexual dysfunction: Studies link central obesity with erectile dysfunction in men over the age of 60. Though age appears to be a major determinant of erectile dysfunction, obesity increases the chances for impotence. In a cross-sectional analysis of men over 50 in the US Health Professionals' study, obesity, independent of other confounding factors, increased the risk of erectile dysfunction by 30 per cent.

Non-invasive solutions

In silvers, the aim of weight loss is to improve physical function and quality of life with emphasis on cardiovascular risks. Even moderate weight loss may bring about dramatic improvement in mood and mobility. "There are no quick-fix solutions to weight loss," says nutritionist and obesity consultant Naini Setalyad, "Following fads or skipping meals won't help. A balanced diet consisting of proteins, fats and carbohydrates along with moderate exercise will yield results." Her own inspirational life story ('From 160 kg to 60 kg'; page 50) is testament to the ancient wisdom of eating right and in moderation. In her column for Harmony-Celebrate Age, 'Nutritalk', she shares some simple tips to keep weight gain at bay ('Fight fat with food'; page 28).

An ideal diet plan is customised depending on the age, weight and medical history of the patient ('A healthy balanced diet will do the trick'; page 52). However, there are a few food items that can be ticked off for good from our plates (Skip them; opposite page). A combination of exercise and modest calorie restriction appears to be the optimal method of reducing fat mass and preserving muscle mass to combat sarcopenic obesity, most commonly associated with health risks in silvers. "The safest way for silvers to lose weight is like anybody else: Go on a diet, have your meals on time, get proper sleep and exercise for at least 30-40 minutes daily or at least five to six days a week," says Kapoor. "Simple aerobic exercises and walking will go a long way in combating obesity."

As polypharmacy (the use of multiple medications) is common among silvers, the benefits and risks of anti-obesity drugs should be considered while introducing them. There is an urgent need to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to weight control through awareness campaigns and strategies to increase physical activity and change eating behaviour. A preventive health package should include weight management, good nutrition, balanced diet and physical exercise. Proposing a well-rounded model, the Rao brothers say, "We at the Indian Heart Association believe any therapeutic plan should incorporate weight loss strategies, physical activity, healthy diet, and careful follow-up with medical professionals."

Any weight loss programme should be tailored according to individual needs, keeping in mind the age, along with other vital parameters and depen-

A COMBINATION OF EXERCISE AND MODEST CALORIE RESTRICTION APPEARS TO BE THE OPTIMAL METHOD OF REDUCING FAT MASS AND PRESERVING MUSCLE MASS TO COMBAT SARCOPENIC OBESITY, MOST COMMONLY ASSOCIATED WITH HEALTH RISKS IN SILVERS

SHED THE EXCESS BAGGAGE

Obesity treatment strategies vary from person to person. Beginning treatment early is an essential part of success. It's important to talk to your physician before beginning any weight loss programme. There are several methods for treating obesity such as behaviour modification, physical activity, medically managed weight loss and surgical treatment.



Behaviour modification:
Modifying behaviours
that have contributed
to developing obesity
is one way to treat the
disease either alone or in
conjunction with other
treatment. A few suggested
behaviour modifiers include
changing eating habits,
increasing physical activity,

engaging in a support group and setting realistic weight management goals.

Physical activity: Increasing or initiating a physical activity programme is an important aspect in managing obesity. Set realistic goals and make sure to consult your doctor before initiating any exercise programme.

Medically managed weight loss: Medically managed weight loss programmes provide treatment in a clinical setting with a licensed healthcare professional, such as a medical doctor, registered dietician and/or psychologist. These programmes typically offer services such as prescription of weight loss medications, nutrition education, physical activity instruction and behavioural therapy.

Surgical treatment: Surgical treatment of obesity is an option for those who are classified as morbidly obese. Morbid obesity is defined as a patient with a BMI of 40 or greater, or weighing more than 40 kg over their ideal body weight. In addition, a patient with a BMI of 35 or greater with one or more obesity-related diseases is also classified as morbidly obese.

Courtesy: Obesity Foundation India

FROM 160 KG TO 60 KG

BEFORE







160 kg

60 kg

Obesity, lifestyle and disease consultant Naini Setalvad's epic transformation from 160 kg to 60 kg was not without hiccups. Her weight yo-yoed with frequent crash and fad diets. Finally, she triumphed. Her journey in her words ...

I was born tiny, weighing just 2.7 kg. As I was very active and a small eater, my family worried for me. To make me put on adequate amount of weight, excess sugar and fat were added to my food. Looking back, I realise that my weight gain story started there.

By the time I was in Class 7. I had made the transition from skinny to fat. I had become addicted to unhealthy eating. Now, my family started making rounds of dieticians, worried about my weight. Every year, a new attempt would be made. From hospitalisation to popping pills, slimming powders to meal replacements, high protein diets to starvation and gyms, I was put through everything. But the pattern was similar: I would lose 10 kg and put 20 back on.

At 14 years of age, I weighed 60 kg, and at 18, I touched 90 kg. By 27, I was 149, and by 32, an impossible 160 kg. I could not fit into normal chairs, my body ached, and moving was impossible. I felt like a prisoner in my own body. I resolved that enough was enough. I then embarked on my final weight loss iourney. It was simply about the right food combinations, eating seasonal and local vegetables and fruits and moderate cardio exercises. In three years, I lost 100 kg. Today, 18 years later, I have been able to maintain my weight by simply following the above.

dency on drugs. Weight loss should be routinely monitored, as most silvers are on drugs, and even moderate weight loss could fluctuate vital parameters, altering the need for certain drugs such as diuretics, hypoglycaemics and analgesics.

The surgical option

Bariatric surgery has been mired in controversy, especially regarding its effectiveness and safety for silvers. There is also a lot of confusion regarding the upper age limit for such a surgery ('70 is the cut-off age for surgery'; opposite page).

OPERATION SUCCESSFUL

The surgical treatment of obesity in silvers remains controversial, largely owing to a lack of data demonstrating its long-term benefits for them. Recent reports, however, imply that there is no significant increase in the risks associated with the surgery for silvers.

A study conducted at Columbia University's Centre for Obesity Surgery found that patients over the age of 60 who have bariatric surgery enjoy the same benefits as younger people. They also found that post-operative complications for silvers are no more than those for younger people. The study also mentioned that the mortality rate among silvers was about the same as it was for silvers who had heart bypass or hip replacement surgeries.

Another report published in *WebMD*, an online medical portal, based on a survey of more than 48,000 patients over 65 years who had open or laparoscopic bariatric surgery procedures in US, states that age does not increase the associated risks. To quote study researcher Robert B Dorman of the University of Minnesota Medical School, "If patients are over the age of 65, and otherwise relatively healthy, I think this study gives surgeons an opportunity to tell them that they can undergo these operations with relatively similar outcomes compared to younger age populations."

According to the report, compared to middle-aged adults, silvers did not appear to be at any increased risk of death or having major adverse events such as heart attacks, strokes, and serious infections after the procedure.

However, recent studies point out that silvers should not be denied the opportunity to go under the knife for losing weight based solely on their age. Though there is a paucity of studies on silvers operated upon in India, data from 150 patients—cutting across all ages—operated in Delhi between 2006 and 2009 shows that surgery helped in controlling diabetes in 88.4 per cent, hypertension in 58 per cent, and increased heart-protecting good cholesterol (HDL) in 93 per cent and triglycerides in 82.1 per cent.

International studies that are silver-specific seem to affirm the benefits of the surgery. And the position paper by the European Society for the Study of Obesity outlines that selected elderly people should also be considered for surgery, eliminating the

"70 IS THE CUT-OFF AGE FOR SURGERY"

Jaydeep H Palep is consultant robotic, laparoscopic bariatric & GI surgeon, Department of Bariatric Surgery, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital (KDAH)

With underlying health issues

such as hypertension and diabetes associated with ageing and obesity, is it safe enough for silvers to go under the knife? Yes, obesity surgery is done under strict guidelines laid down by the Obesity Surgery Society of India (OSSI). As per these guidelines, it can be safely offered to individuals up to the age of 70 and sometimes even up to 75 years depending on the merit of the case.

Is there an upper age limit for bariatric surgery?

As per the guidelines, currently 70 years is the cut-off age above which we tend to avoid offering surgery unless left with no other alternative.

Who is the ideal candidate?

Anyone who is of a BMI >37 kg/m² is straightaway a candidate for weight loss surgery. And any individual who is less than a BMI >37 kg/m² but more than a BMI of 32 kg/m², with at least one medical illness other than obesity, such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, obstructive sleep apnoea and osteoarthritis, among others, qualifies for surgery.

What are the preoperative quidelines?

A strict preoperative workup is required for any patient undergoing this form of surgery and is inclusive of a preoperative liquid diet and



chest physiotherapy. This is especially enforced for all those above the BMI of 40 kg/m² because the liver in these individuals is enlarged and fatty and it needs to be treated medically prior to the surgery.

Do silvers require a longer hospital stay after the surgery? What are the necessary precautions during this period?

We usually see silvers recover in four days after surgery, going home on the fifth day. It is very important to make sure that these patients are mobilised out of bed early after the surgery. At our institute, we start mobilisation six hours post surgery and continue until the day of discharge. A very special precaution is taken to prevent deep vein thrombosis (DVT)—blood clots forming in the veins of the leg leading to pulmonary embolism, cardiac complications, stroke, etcby applying pneumatic stockings to patients prior to surgery and continuing until discharge and a single shot of subcutaneous (like an insulin injection) low molecular weight Heparin daily for 28 days.

How many silvers seek surgical help in a month?

We get at least 12-15 patients every month who are above 50 years of age. The numbers have been increasing over the past five years at our institute.

Can you share some interesting case studies?

Recently, we operated on a 58 yearold lady for morbid obesity. She had a BMI of 45 kg/m², and was confined to a wheel chair for almost two years with end-stage liver disease owing to a non-alcoholic fatty liver. It was a unique case, as it was for the first time in the world that a patient had a living donor liver transplant along with a bariatric surgery done in the same sitting. It has been nine months and she is doing absolutely fine. She comes walking to our hospital for routine follow-up visits.

Another interesting case was that of a 65 year-old morbidly obese lady from Uganda, who came to our hospital on a stretcher for a multi-level disc prolapse and was first offered a spine stabilisation surgery. We did a bariatric surgery on her five days after that. She recovered wonderfully after vigorous physiotherapy and we were able to send her back home in just two weeks. She went back walking!

It is generally believed that the risks of bariatric surgery far outweigh the benefits for silvers. This is pure myth. The risks for any major surgery will only outweigh its benefits if the patient has a very complex and irreparable cardiac or respiratory illness owing to which putting the patient under general anaesthesia is a risk to life. Once such a condition is ruled out in our preoperative assessment and workup, the benefits of surgery will always outweigh any risk whatsoever.

What is the approximate cost of bariatric surgery?

We usually have fixed packages for bariatric surgery at KDAH, ranging from ₹ 320,000 to ₹ 700,000 depending on a variety of factors.

ACCORDING TO A 2011 STUDY, THE LIFE EXPECTANCY OF INDIANS IN THE PAST 50 YEARS HAS BEEN INCREASING EXPONENTIALLY, THANKS TO BETTER MEDICAL FACILITIES

"A HEALTHY BALANCED DIET WILL DO THE TRICK"

Bhakti Samant is chief dietician, Nutrition Therapy Department, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital (KDAH)

What are the things to keep in mind while putting silvers on a diet?

The factors that need to be considered before planning diets for silvers are:

- Any metabolic disease such as diabetes mellitus, coronary artery disease, renal disease, liver disease, etc
- Dietary recall to be taken to rule out nutritional deficiencies
- Gastro-intestinal disturbance
- Physical activity level [whether they are mobile, need partial support or are bedridden].

Should the diet be customised keeping in mind health issues, age and weight?

Yes, each diet plan is customised depending on the age, weight and medical history. For instance, for a geriatric patient with diabetes mellitus, the diet plan would focus on whole grains and cereals containing complex carbohydrates, and restricting simple sugars while ensuring adequate amount of fibre and protein that are easy to digest.

In patients where movement is restricted owing to obesity and strain on the knees, how far will diet play a role in helping them recover?

Diet would definitely help to reduce the weight in such patients by 5-10 per cent. This weight loss would help them to relieve the symptoms to some extent. It will also help to reduce the progression of the disease. For instance, a 64 year-old woman suffering from morbid obesity and osteoarthritis in both knees was referred to us. She was bedridden. We put her on



a low calorie diet with moderate increase in protein and fibre to help her lose weight. She lost almost 10 per cent of her weight, enabling her to move around in the house and independently take care of the household work

What would be the ideal diet for such patients?

There is no such thing like an ideal diet. A healthy balanced diet that includes all the food groups in the right proportion will do the trick. Whole grain cereals, whole pulses, dal, low-fat milk and milk products, small quantities of nuts, three to four servings of vegetables, two servings of fruits and good levels of hydration should help.

upper age limit. "The overall primary surgical goal should be to slow the functional decline trajectory," it argues. Following the surgery, silvers, like younger patients, may see improvements in medical conditions related to obesity such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritic pain, etc.

Jhawar quotes the instance of a 55 year-old lady from Jaipur who was morbidly obese at 140 kg and immobile. "When she came to us, she was highly diabetic, and was on 100 units of insulin per day. A year since surgery, she's 30 kg lighter and able to walk around. With her diabetes in the manageable range, she's on oral medication now."

In conclusion

According to a 2011 study, the life expectancy of Indians in the past 50 years has been increasing exponentially, thanks to better medical facilities. With obesity on the rise among a rapidly ageing population, it's time for a proactive approach. Policymakers should focus on well-rounded antiobesity measures and awareness campaigns.

Here's the silver lining though: a WHO report that lists obesity as one of the 10 most preventable risk factors affecting the global population. The ball, evidently, is in your court—game on! *





THE DANCE OF THE DANK

Following the course of Europe's second longest river through Budapest and Wachau Valley offers a glimpse of history and period architecture

DANUBE



Rekha Sarin



ome summer and the urge to take a respite from blistering subtropical heat is strong. It's an opportune time to look at Europe, with destinations that bask in benign temperatures with long daylight hours that give way to mildly cool evenings. Reason enough to inspire us to make a tryst with the Danube, following the river along the Hungarian capital, Budapest, and onwards to Wachau Valley in neighbouring Lower Austria.

Our itinerary was consonant with the pages of history as this river—the second longest in Europe—has witnessed a period when the kingdoms of Austria and Hungary were united under the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. Ruled by the House of Hapsburg, the Austria-Hungarian Empire endured right until World War I, a time when Austrian composer Johann Strauss II wrote the famous

An der schönenblauen Donau, The Blue Danube Waltz, the strains of which have continued to haunt music lovers over the ages. The Danube, though, is not exactly blue. More often than not, its waters are in shades of green, at times even muddy—and it creates scenic splendour wherever it flows. In Budapest, the river embraces the city on both sides, the capital being the outcome of two independent cities, Buda and Pest, which united with the Roman settlement of Obuda in 1873. Of all the bridges across the river, the most splendid is the Széchenyi Chain Bridge, designed by English engineer William Tierney Clark in 1849.

Besides the obvious charms of the river, Budapest on its own is a jewel of a city, resplendent with sumptuous period architecture. I find myself looking skywards in several photographs of the trip. I simply could not stop admiring the craftsmanship that expresses itself in



I find myself looking skywards in several photographs. I could not stop admiring the craftsmanship in myriad forms, whether it is the embellished exteriors of churches, palaces and buildings or the high-vaulted ceilings and domes

myriad forms, whether it is the embellished exteriors of churches, palaces and buildings or the high-vaulted ceilings and domes.

We selected a conveniently located hotel in Deák Ferenc tér on the Pest side, a central square downtown, and a great transport hub for the metro, trams and buses. It is best to buy a carnet of tickets from the station office, and use them at will on any of these modes of transport. Walking, however, is the best means to absorb the atmosphere. We headed for Chain Bridge, on the way sauntering into the lobby of the heritage Gresham Palace Hotel by the Four Seasons for our 'Elevenses' cup of tea and delicious cake—the patisserie tradition of this region is famed—under the Art Nouveau glass dome of the tea lounge. Outside, after another pause to admire the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, we crossed the bridge to take the Castle Hill funicular up to Buda Castle, where the statue of the mythological Turul bird gazes down at the Danube below.

The district is a mind-boggling treasure of historic sights and museums, laced with cobbled streets and medieval houses, as its first inhabitants moved up here in the 13th century. Two centuries later, it became the seat of the Royal Court, when under the rule of King Matthais, Buda became one of Europe's most influential cities. Then came the Turks from 1541 until 1686, followed by the Austrian Hapsburgs, who introduced the elegance of Baroque architecture. Many sights were ravaged under the Occupation after World War II, but have since been restored.

Exploring the Royal Palace with its several courtyards, gardens, art gallery, National Library and History Museum took up the better part of the morning, whetting our appetite. It called for a break in one of the many restaurants and cafes that dot the district. We decided to combat the summer sun with a glass of chilled Hungarian beer. For lunch, we had a serving of Hungarian goulash, a meaty soup with a strong accent of the famed regional paprika, accompanied by potato dumplings.

Next, we were on to Szentháromságtér or Holy Trinity Square in the heart of the district with its landmark Matthais Church. Behind it, at the edge of the hill, we joined the tourist crowd at the Fisherman's Bastion, a lookout terrace with intriguing neo-Gothic arches and neo-Romanesque turrets—the seven towers representing the seven Hungarian chieftains of ethnic Magyar tribes who first settled down here.

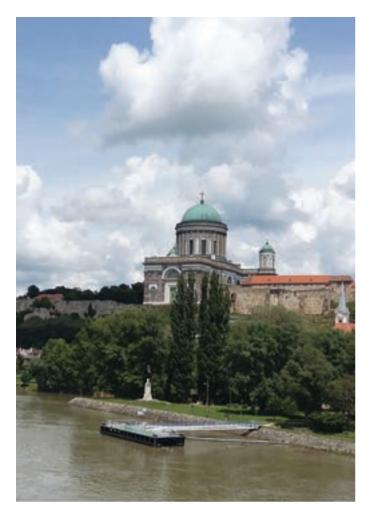
The adjacent Hilton Hotel with its modern glass façade seemed a contrast, but a closer look revealed some remains of the castle wall. In the depths of a tunnel below the hotel is the Faust Wine Cellar where one can enjoy tastings of Hungary's famed wines, especially 'Bull's Blood', red wine from Eger. Moving on to the gothic Mary Magdelene Tower, we skirted the National Archives and Museum of Warfare to take a walk on Tóth Árpád promenade. Bordered by trees, houses and hills, it is charmingly romantic, with sweeping views that include the handsome Hungarian Post Office Headquarters heritage building.

Close to 6 pm, with tired feet and exhilarated hearts, we exited the district from the medieval Vienna Gate. We could have started our tour from this end or taken a Castle bus, but the walk served to remain etched in memory. We stepped into one of Budapest's famous yellow trams from Széllkálmántér, located at the lower end. We made a stop at Margaret Island, located in the middle of the river, to enjoy the musical fountain and the laughter of children as the sun came down.

At dinnertime, Budapest swings, especially the Pest side. Take your pick from bars, international cuisine restaurants, and the unique 'ruin pubs'—ruined buildings transformed into lively bars, like the popular Szimpla Kurt, where youngsters pack verve to musical beats and food. We preferred Gozsdu Courtyard in Király Utca street near our hotel. Here, seven old buildings and their courtyards are knitted together to provide a host of eateries. Our next few days were a swirl of sightseeing, browsing and relishing Hungarian culture and summer bonhomie.

The Parliament Building with its grandiose Renaissancestyle dome and intricate workmanship around its Gothic windows and turrets with spires is a sight not to be missed. We took the highly recommended guided tour to see its rich interiors, especially the legislative chamber.

A walk down Andrassy Avenue, a beautiful tree-lined boulevard with fashionable branded shops and the Opera House; Heroes Square, a complex of iconic statues in a semi-circular colonnade on either side of the Millennium Monument, erected to commemorate the 1,000-year history of the Magyars; a day excursion to Gellert Hill, trekking up to the citadel or fortress and Liberty Statue, the highest point in western Budapest; Dohany Street Synagogue—the largest in Europe—with its gold embellished minarets and circular windows; the Danube Bank memo-





Clockwise from top left: The Basilica at Esztergom, one of the charming towns along the Danube Bend; the Fisherman's Bastion with neo-Gothic arches and neo-Romanesque turrets; a day cruise in lower Austria unfolds a scenic panorama through the wine regions of Wachau Valley; the splendid Széchenyi Chain Bridge





Some 50 km north of Budapest lies the idyllic stretch of the Danube. The sloping hills on its banks cajole the river to bend sharply and flow southwards. Along its banks lie the charming towns of Esztergom, Visegrad and Szentendre

rial, where sculptor Gyula Pauer has created 60 pairs of realistic shoes out of iron, a remembrance to the 3,500-odd victims who were ordered to take off their shoes and shot at the edge of the water by fascist militia during World War II, are some of the highlights of the town.

Keep aside a day for thermal baths as well. Pamper yourself in these spas with dreamlike settings of arched walls, Roman columns and domes. The largest, Széchenyi Baths, boasts 18 pools, 15 of which are spring-fed thermal pools. We chose the elegant Gellért Baths, built in Art Nouveau style in 1918. One can also enjoy the bustle of shopping streets, the most famous being Váciutca or Fashion Street that runs from Vörösmarty Square to the picturesque 19th-century Central Market Hall, the oldest indoor market in Budapest. Its neo-Gothic entrance gate and quaint roof with colourful tiles prompted us to whisk out our cameras. Inside, we found restaurants and stalls selling fruits, vegetables, pickles, meats, pastries and paprika.

For anyone craving cultural extravaganza, an operetta performance in one of Budapest's atmospheric theatres is a must. Though we had no such luck, we enjoyed an enchanting classical music performance under the exquisite high dome of St Stephen's Basilica, the largest church in Budapest. We emerged, to rejoin summer tourists listening to a foot-tapping performance by a pop group in the park.

One of the highlights of our trip was a day excursion to the Danube Bend. Some 50 km north of Budapest lies the most idyllic stretch of the Danube. Here, sloping hills on both sides of its banks cajole the river to bend sharply and flow southwards. Along its banks lie the charming towns of Esztergom, Visegrad and Szentendre. An hour-and-a-half by train from Budapest, Esztergom impressed us with its columned frontage and the neo-classic dome of its Basilica. More thrills followed as we traversed Mária Valéria Bridge, crossing borders over the river onto Sturovo, in Slovakia.

Besides taking in some marvellous perspectives of the river bend, there was that childlike kick of having visited yet another country! The next town, Visegrád, had to be tackled in fast mode, time ticking uncomfortably quickly. We stopped at the Nagymaros ferry, crossing for tea at a riverside restaurant, content with the charming view of the Royal Palace and Citadel complex nestling high amid the hills across the waters, the town spreading out below in obeisance. We made it to Szentendre just in time to

walk through its cobbled Old Town and taste its crystal waters from an ancient well with a charming hand-pump in the town square, a living declaration of its past. After a stroll by the Danube Promenade in the setting sun, it was time for us to take the train back to Budapest.

It was nightfall on our return; the city dazzled and the waterside took on the surreal dimensions of a movie set. Chain Bridge with its illuminations glittered against the canvas of the floodlit Royal Palace and Buda Castle in the backdrop. On the Pest side, the floodlit magnificence of the Parliament Building by the river claimed our attention. Though a dinner cruise on the Danube is touted by tourist brochures, we were content to dine in an outdoor riverside café, marvelling at the shimmering night lights weaving a golden tapestry on the inky waters.

Our next rendezvous with the Danube was reserved for the second part of our itinerary: a visit to the neighbouring Lower Austria and a whole day cruise through the famed wine regions of the Wachau Valley.

A three-hour train ride from Budapest took us to Melk, the starting point of the cruise. Although it lies just 45 km west of Vienna, this charming little town lives in a cocoon, away from urban noise. Over the next two nights of our stay, the only sounds were the soul-touching chimes of the bells of the Benedictine Melk Stift (abbey) striking the hour. This 11th century monastery flourished under the Hapsburgs and remains beautifully preserved. Its baroque architecture with a stunning domed cathedral spreads out in quiet glory on a rocky outcrop above the town.

In the evening, while sitting outdoors under an indigo sky in the cobbled street of Old Town square, where we had booked ourselves in a small family-run *pension* (lodging) to enjoy local ambience, the floodlit abbey created an ethereal mood as we dined on *wiener schnitzel*, a typical Austrian breaded pork dish, and local wine from the region.

Next morning, after a chat with the *pension* owner while downing cups of coffee over a selection of home-baked breakfast rolls, we took the local minivan to the cruise point. We were happy to join the crowd of fellow holidaymakers, most of them silvers, eager to tune into the rhythm of nature. As our cruise ship glided over emerald waters, we whisked out our hats, perching on the terrace deck. Our hop-on, hop-off cruise ship made its first stop at



WHEN TO GO

Budapest is best visited April onwards until October: for those who like the cold, till November. It is springtime from mid-April, although temperatures are still cool, ranging from a maximum of 16.4°C to a minimum of 7.6°C. By June, the weather gets warmer, with long sunny days and cool evenings. July to August is likened to Indian summer, which means it can be fairly hot. By September it tapers off, and October ushers in temperatures as low as 7°C. By November, the days are short, with sunset by 5 pm, but for the enthusiast, this is the theatre and opera season, and the beginning of Christmas markets. Always carry your brollies, as fanciful clouds can give way any time. May to September would be the best time for the Danube cruise.

VISA & CURRENCY REQUIREMENT

Like anywhere in the European Union, a Schengen tourist visa is required. There are no direct flights to Budapest from India, though there are several airline carriers with connections. We flew into Budapest and took a return from Vienna, which is just 85 km from Melk, with a very reasonable fare. While Austria uses the Euro (about ₹ 73-74 for one Euro), Hungary uses its local currency, the Hungarian Forint (4.24 HUF for one rupee).



TIPS

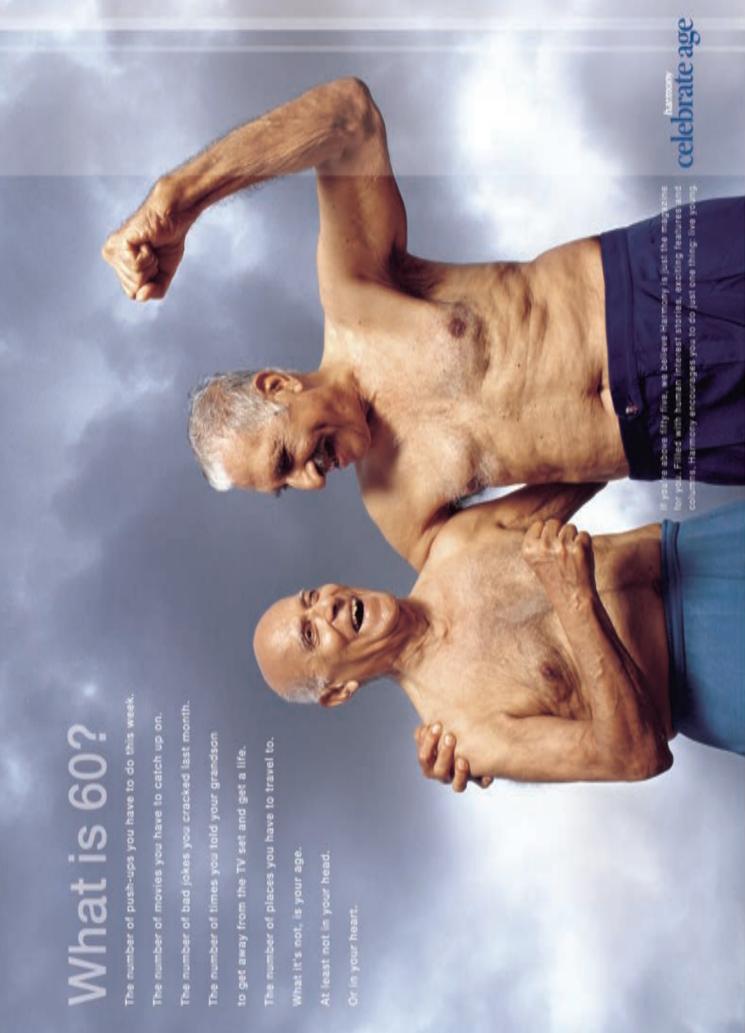
- For a good currency rate, it is recommended that you change your currency at a bank in Budapest, rather than at one of the several money changers you may find in the touristy areas. Airport exchange rates are also high.
- It is best to book your hotel on the Pest side, as it is lively at night. The Buda side and Castle District also have some good hotels and restaurants, though it tends to get rather quiet during the evenings.
- Book your Parliament tour online beforehand. The tour is much in demand as entry into this splendid building, which also houses the Hungarian crown jewels, is not allowed without
- a guide. On any given day, there are guided tours in many languages, including English. Each tour has limited places and on-the-spot tickets may be hard to find. The website for bookings is: *Jegymester.hu*. Opera and theatre tickets can be booked on the same website.
- For the Danube cruise in the Wachau Valley, tickets can be purchased on the spot at the jetty as there is a relay of ships that go down the 24-km valley upstream from Krems or downstream from Melk. Brandner Cruise Line and DDSG Cruise Line both offer day cruises, in addition to a host of other cruise lines that offer cruises along the Danube, including a river cruise from Budapest to Wachau Valley.

Spitz, a small town that sits amid vineyards that clamber all over the hills. We followed steep curving pathways, lined with neat cottages, vines growing even in small backyards. After a quick look at the gothic-style St Maurice Church in the town square, and a quick sandwich picnic on the park bench—with a bottle of flavourful light wine, of course—we were back to the wharf to take the next scheduled liner.

Our next halt, Durnstein, enchanted us with its medieval character. We made a challenging climb to its castle ruin, keen to see where King Richard, the Lion Heart of England, was kept captive during the Third Crusade. All fatigue evaporated at the bird's-eye view of Lilliputian houses punctuated by neat rows of vineyards and the landmark blue Augustine abbey by the glistening river. Back to the stone archway leading to the Old Town, we

barely had our fill of its cobbled alleys, making a short cut through a fairytale narrow passage to take a boat to our final destination, Krems an der Donau, or Krems-on-the-Danube, a city 40 km upstream from Spitz, which marks the end of the UNESCO-protected Wachau Valley.

At Krems, we could see layers of the past in Old Stadt or Old Town, the 15th-century Steiner Tor (gate) and the baroque Rathaus, the town hall that reminds one of Melk Abbey, as it was built by the same architect. Before leaving, we took a very special photograph. It wasn't of any monument or building; of those we had plenty. It was a beautifully rendered tourist map outside the Old Stadt, showing the course of the Danube winding its way through Wachau Valley. We simply had to take that shot. The river flows on, but it creates memories that stay. **







Language of change

Actor Nedumudi Venu (right) consults Prabha (centre) on the sets of *Ishti*; opposite page: a still from the film

anskrit and film don't often go together—whereas film is a medium of communication used to reach the masses, the ancient language of Sanskrit is viewed as the preserve of a privileged few. So when Sanskrit professor **Dr G Prabha**, 60, combined the two to make an evocative film on Kerala's Namboothiri Brahmin community, he aimed to take Sanskrit to the common man while shining a light on how socially regressive ancient customs can be.

"Sanskrit will remain selfcentered and within a certain
community or religion if we
only associate it with scripture. But
language is universal. To make it
relevant, we should move away from
classical subjects and start telling contemporary stories," says Dr Prabha,
retired head of the Department of
Oriental Languages in Chennai's
Loyola College. His film, Ishti, is one

of few Sanskrit feature films ever made, and the only one that ventures away from mythology and biopics. Set in the early 20th century, it revolves around a prominent Namboothiri Brahmin family entrenched in orthodox rituals and regressive practices.

Dr Prabha, who originally hails from Kerala, has also worked as a freelance writer and published several short stories in Malayalam. Inspired by 20th century social reformer V T Bhattathiripad, who led the re-

forms against the inequality and patriarchal traditions of the Namboothiri Brahmins, he has been mulling over the

story of *Ishti* for 15 years. Owing to their very nature as keepers of Vedic knowledge, the community stubbornly clung to their identity even as change swirled around them. But it was only a matter of time before change seeped into their ranks, with the younger generation rebelling

against antiquated traditions. This has been mirrored in Dr Prabha's 108-minute film.

Ishti has been making the rounds at film festivals since its premiere last year. **Pratibha Jain** spoke to Dr Prabha after the film was screened at the 150th year celebrations of University College, Thiruvananthapuram, recently. Excerpts from the interview:

What is *Ishti*?

Ishti is another term for *atmanveshan*, which means 'search for the self'.

You are a self-taught filmmaker. How did your journey begin?

I have always been fascinated with film as a medium. This interest was fed by the strong visual communication department in Loyola College, where I taught. I have also attended many film festivals and did a monthlong course on film appreciation at the Pune Film Institute after I retired in 2014. I stayed on for a couple of months, watching numerous films and having conversations about filmmaking.

What triggered the story?

The story is inspired by the autobiography of V T Bhattathiripad, a Namboothiri Brahmin and a great reformer of the 1940s. He learnt the *Vedas* by rote and became a priest, but remained illiterate.

When I read about his life, there was mention of a young girl mocking him innocently for not knowing how to read and write. Her laughter triggered something within him and he went on to educate himself. This incident played on my mind often. In *Ishti*, it is mirrored in the life of the 71 year-old protagonist Ramavikraman's son Raman [played by Malayalam actor Nedumudi Venu], who reveals to viewers his hidden desire to be literate.

Considering this is your first film, what were the biggest challenges?

I have made two documentary films before, but this is my first feature film. The biggest challenge was completing the shoot in time. We took 17 days, a few days over schedule, even though every little detail, from setup to the frame, was planned at the location in advance. And I had so much more in mind... what I wrote, visualised and wanted. For example, I had a story on the plight of the Namboothiri widows. It would have taken another two weeks to depict their lives and correlate it to the film. I had to compromise because we didn't have the funds for it. Overall, I am glad it happened the way it did or the film may have become too lengthy.

Tell us about your role as director.

It was my story, my script and my direction. Apart from not finding a producer, some actors were also reluctant because there was no model Sanskrit film, no precedent. Except for Venu *etan*—he is not only an actor; he is a knowledgeable person, who has done many Sanskrit dramas on stage—they are all newcomers. They mingled well with the language and studied hard as I would explain the meaning of each line.



"I was very specific about what I wanted—to convey meaning through silence, as much as I wanted to use the Sanskrit language"

How does screenwriting differ from writing articles or books?

Ishti was screening in my mind for many years! So I used a cinematographer, Eldho Isaac, who had the time to understand my vision, and thus enrich the frame. I was very specific about what I wanted—to use the visual language to create an atmosphere and convey meaning through silence, as much as I wanted to use the Sanskrit language. The background, symbols, colour, light, materials, props and pictures in the frame needed to import meaning. All this has come from keenly watching films, especially the classics.

Even from newspaper photographs, paintings and observing nature. You automatically create your own visual language that is influenced by your experiences. But certain concepts or abstract ideas cannot be visualised. You fill in that gap with language. For example, in *Ishti*, there is a fire that Ramavikraman must maintain unto his death. But the only way for me to convey this is through dialogue.

What has the response been like so far, from experts as well as viewers?

I am delighted that several film festivals across India have screened Ishti. I took it to Thiruvananthapuram recently. The Sanskrit department of University College screened it one morning and then we spent the afternoon discussing the film. It has been applauded on an academic level, and it has been accepted by ordinary people. It portrays the historical background of Kerala, through a new story, in a new language. However, the film has not gone down well with some people. The Brahmana Kshema Sabha in Muvattupuzha, in Kerala, has filed a case against the CBFC for granting the film a U certificate, and

me for showcasing the Namboothiri community in a poor light. I am fully aware that the Namboothiris have evolved since then and many of them have made tremendous contributions to literature and culture. This story is of their past, but such practices survive in some communities. As long as individuals or society continue to suppress women in any form, this story will be relevant.

Are there more Sanskrit films forming in your head?

Always. But first I need to find a daring producer who will take that chance.

Etched in time

he signpost outside Hut No. 21 at Sargaalaya Arts and Crafts Village in Kozhikode, Kerala, reads 'Special Metal Engravings & Decorative Paintings'. On the walls inside hang framed sheets of embossed and etched aluminium, fabric paintings, pen sketches and cartoons. Amid these works of art are two photographs featuring the winners of the Grand Kerala Tourism Crafts Award 2015-16 in August 2016. "That's me," announces Vasudevan Chethil, the resident metal-etcher at Sargaalaya, pointing to himself in the pictures.

Sargaalaya, where Chethil has been residing since 2013, is a crafts cluster set up by the Kerala Tourism Department to provide a profitable platform for artisans. "I won the award for my portrayal of Gandhi*ji*'s Dandi March, etched on an aluminium sheet. It now adorns the office of the Tourism Department in Thiruvananthapuram."

Aluminium is the smoothest and most malleable of metals for etching, explains Chethil, as he cleans an





aluminium sheet with paint thinner. He applies a light coat of primer and then a layer of enamel paint. After it dries, he uses chisels of various shapes and points to delicately scratch away at the layer of paint. Seven chisels, an aluminium sheet, thinner, primer and enamel paint in primary colours are all that Chethil needs to create his stunning marvels of portraits, landscapes, flowers, animals and birds.

Chethil takes an average 10 days to complete a frame but, ever since he won the award, he has been



keen on taking up something even more challenging. "Etching human portraits is very tricky. You make a slight error and you have to start afresh. I did my first portrait of [Sachin] Tendulkar two years ago. Now I plan to create portraits of public personalities and do a series of engravings on the scenic beauty of Kerala. They will make good souvenirs," says the artist, whose clientele mainly comprises tourists.

His tryst with metal etching began during his school days in Kozhikode, where he studied it as a subject in 'work experience' at school. He later acquired a bachelor's degree and undertook a teacher's training programme, while he simultaneously apprenticed under P V Narayanachari, an artist of great repute in Kerala. When he retired as an art teacher at Malabar Christian College High School, Kozhikode, Chethil joined Sargaalaya, where students learn his rare metal craft. And while teaching is its own reward, he is not shy of flaunting his recent award. "After all, no matter the age, a pat on the back never hurts."

—Chitra Ramaswamy



All too real

You know it's a painting because it's framed and hangs on a wall at Delhi's Threshold Gallery. But 58 year-old painter V Ramesh's untitled painting of pomegranate seeds evokes disbelief owing to its hyper-realistic nature. This painting is part of Ramesh's recent exhibition, titled V Ramesh: Recent Works, which comprises a watercolour series of disquieting realism—from large oils that border on the abstract to a series on peaceful dogs sleeping in the corner of his frames. The collection was inspired by the Ramana Ashram in Tamil Nadu, including a picture of Ramana Maharshi that instantly captivated him 20 years ago. "I felt a need to be thankful for his grace, so I decided to create a body of work of anything and everything from one's mundane life and make it extraordinary. It is a tribute to Ramana's sense of inclusivity both in his life and teachings," the artist tells us.



Every Mahashivaratri, classical dancers from across the world descend on the holy precincts of the Sri Subramania Samaj in Chembur, Mumbai, for 'Natyanjali', a festival of dance. This year, with more than 80 participating groups and 200 dancers, the 15-day festival was a veritable feast of Indian classical dances offered at the feet of dance God Nataraja and the sacred Shivalinga in the divine premises. The highlight of the event was Nruttamaalika, an inaugural day offering by senior gurus who, while showcasing individual traits of different styles, displayed their unity in diversity. The artists performed in two groups—below 50 years and above 50—presenting five unique compositions choreographed by Bharatanatyam and Mohiniattam exponent and dance guru Jayashree Nair. Says Bharatnatyam dancer Padmini Radhakrishnan, 56, one of the gurus on stage, "To perform was like being a student again; all of us became 20 years younger, learning the dance and having our students watch. It sends a positive message about uniting as dancers." Bharatanrityam dancer Jayashree Rajagopalan, 64, adds, "We worked together, accepting each other's ideas with such bonhomie. We must salute this attitude, and the city for making it happen."

"...the role of the individual in history somewhat receded into the background. I think it is a big weakness because when you don't look at personalities, it is no longer easy to animate history. And therefore history becomes confined to professional historians, rather than to the serious reading public."

—Former High
Commissioner of
India to Singapore
and Pakistan,
T C A Raghavan,
61, whose debut,
Attendant Lords:
Bairam Khan and
Abdur Rahim,
Courtiers And Poets
In Mughal India,
profiles two Mughal
noblemen, speaking
to Open magazine





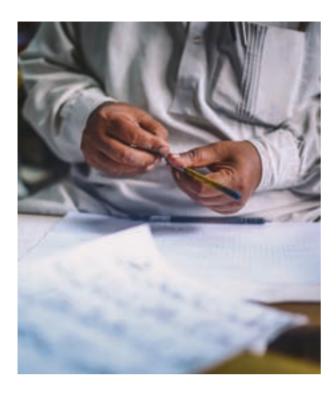
Delhi's *katib* write the last chapter in the city's Urdu Bazaar

atib Mohammed Ghalib, 54, has very little to do these days. There was a time when he would stay seated for hours, head bent almost reverentially over sheets of paper, and leave a trail of beautiful handwriting in his wake.

As the hours wore on, Ghalib brought poetry to life, imprinted news on handwritten newspapers and magazines, and etched stories in books whose covers were decorated in gold foil. He is one of only three surviving *katib* or Urdu scribes in Old Delhi's Urdu Bazaar, a market near the southern gate of the Jama Masjid.

Till a couple of decades ago, the market was a hub for Urdu poets, writers, scholars, intellectuals and publishers, and it teemed with scribes like Ghalib, whose Urdu, Arabic and Persian calligraphy has graced the pages of religious texts, travelogues, essays, speeches, biographies and fiction. Today, Urdu Bazaar has more eat-outs and noisy clothing stalls than bookshops, and its three scribes have been reduced to writing the titles of books, wedding invitations, and wedding and birth certificates.

"A few months ago, a man from Chandigarh came looking for us. He phoned me but I was not feeling well that day, so he returned without getting his work done," says Ghalib, who works out of the Kutub Khana Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Urdu bookstore, one of the biggest bookshops in the market.







Ghalib, a native of Ambala, was the first person in his family to receive an education. He, like several other *katib*, learnt the craft at Darul Uloom Deoband, an Islamic school in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, close to Ambala. "I elected to learn calligraphy because this was a respected profession, one from the time of the Mughal kings," says Ghalib, twirling a flat-nibbed, hollow wooden pen that doesn't see much work these days.

"In the old days, it took 50 to 60 scribes working eight to 10 hours per day to complete a newspaper. When I was young, it would take me up to three months to complete a

200-page book, while also working on other assignments," reminisces Ghalib.

A few lanes down, we find Katib Abdur Rahman, 62, who learnt his craft at the Ghalib Academy in Nizamuddin, New Delhi. "I have six children but I don't see the point in them taking up this work, when the art is trying hard to survive," he says.

works out of

Opposite page:
Katib Abdur
Rahman adjusts
a fine metal nib
and gets to work,
meticulously
inscribing each line

from right to left

Mohammed Ghalib

Aniuman-e-Taraggi-

e-Urdu bookshop

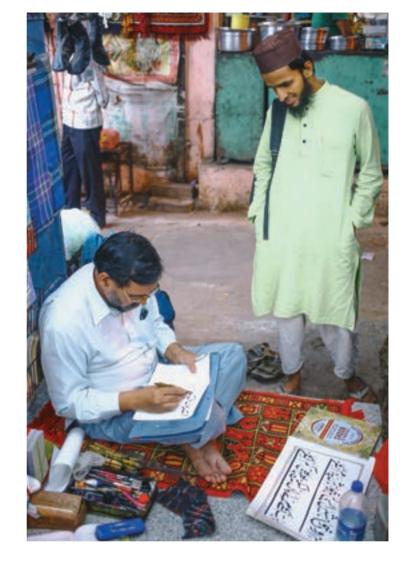
(below) that he

(right) tends to

a customer at the Kutub Khana

Not only is there little demand for handwritten literature these days, few are willing to commit the patience and dedication it takes to become a calligrapher, says Rahman. "I invested two years learning to write Urdu and two years to write Arabic. These days, there are no returns on that investment."

Our third scribe, Mohammed Tehsin, a septuagenarian, is nowhere to be found. Neighbouring shopkeepers say he hasn't been coming around much, instead spending most of his time with his children and grandchildren. Tehsin knows that his beloved Urdu Bazaar is writing the last chapter in its history.







La la land

Homeless in the City of Dreams, some silvers turn entrepreneurs, others altruistic, writes **Kamla Mankekar**

ost evenings she would be sitting there, resting her back against the wall of one of the student housing buildings on Gayley Avenue, her legs stretching out and a beat-up shopping cart with her worldly possessions piled up neatly, parked by her side. She is one of the many thousands of homeless on the streets of Los Angeles (LA).

While out on my evening walk, I would sometimes stop by to drop a few coins on her plate. She would acknowledge it with a nod and a smile. Light-skinned, with big luminous eyes, her patched dress washed clean and her hair piled high in a bun, she looked somewhat different from the common run of the homeless. Once, when I tried to talk with her she told me she was 68 years old and her name was Angela; beyond that she would not reveal.

A couple of weeks later when I stopped at a café after my grocery shopping, the lady on the table next to mine nodded at me with a friendly smile; she

looked familiar but I could not place her. She was dressed in a black gown and a matching hat, and had a magazine in her hand; she finished her coffee, dusted some cake crumbs off her lap and got ready to leave. And then I saw the shopping cart parked next to her chair. "Oh my God," I exclaimed! She looked at me, amused, and wheeled away her cart. That was Angela.

Ben, who occupies a bench near University of California - Los Angeles (UCLA) Medical Plaza is different; he looks every inch a man living on the street. Chased away from his roadside perch by police during the day, he ventures to rummage trash bins outside restaurants and bakeries. University students, perhaps collecting data on the city's poor or out of curiosity, sometimes stop by to talk with him and

give him a few coins. Ben is 72 and has been on the streets for well over a decade-and-a-half. Unwashed, smelly, wrapped in a tattered coat even under the midday sun, his baggage bundled in plastic wraps held under his arm, he clutches a soiled blanket that protects him from the night chill. He returns to the bench at night to sleep.

As per city rules, while the homeless are not allowed to occupy pavements and public places during the day, they may pitch their tents on sidewalks or sleep undisturbed on roadside benches at night.

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Annie of Skid Row is an entre-

Annie of Skid Row is an entrepreneur in her own right. Her bobbed hair dyed jet black is a contrast to her ageing face. A folding chair, a set of scissors and combs and a hand mirror are the tools of her trade; she is a hairdresser for the street dwellers of Skid Row in downtown LA.

Skid Row, however, is different; it is a world by itself. Stretched across three major streets that

cover an area of a few kilometres, Skid Row is home to thousands of men and women, old and not so old, who live on its pavements. Adjoining the city's fashion district and a flourishing business hub with jewellery shops, hotels, banks and corporate offices, it is home to the largest congregation of homeless in the country. Back walls of luxury apartments loom large over its streets, which become a city of tents by night. As the day breaks and the police start their rounds, the tents are folded and along with bundles of clothing, sleeping bags, mugs and plates, mattresses and blankets are stacked on sidewalks and the occupants move away to roam the streets. They hobble on canes, push walkers; some even are on wheelchairs. They sit outside restaurants, hoping to get some leftover food or rummage trash bins to pick up what is tossed in there.





An encampment at Skid Row; a homeless woman takes a nap on the street

Some have been without a home for a generation. Dispossessed, sick, lonely, scared of their future, they strive to ward off hunger and disease.

Skid Row is riddled with crime; petty thefts, sex and drugs often result in bloody fights. Yet it is a community to which the Skid Row dwellers cling. They feel a sense of belonging here. Mariam, 70 and on a wheelchair, goes to the soup kitchen run by a charity group that doles out food three days a week, with a plastic bag to collect some extra bread and beans. She brings it to those who are too frail or sick to stand in line for the dole. Jeff, at 76, is like a community doctor; he distributes painkillers for the arthritic and cough syrup when flu sweeps the tents. Lucia, still strong at 64, watches over her friend's belongings when the latter goes in search of her runaway poodle.

The civic authorities have set up night shelters, which though inadequate for the growing numbers of homeless in greater Los Angeles, provide certain basic amenities. The street dwellers, however, shun these places. "Those dumps," Angela had said with disgust, "full of disease and dirt! Not for me."

Skid Row is not the only area inhabited by the homeless silvers of LA. They are seen practically everywhere—under the flyover bridges, along parks, in Hollywood and around fashionable and rich Santa Monica and Venice counties. They are of various ethnicities—Jews, Greeks, Italians, Latinos, African Americans and White Americans—and

come from different backgrounds. Some are victims of the recession of the 70s; some lost jobs following long periods of sickness; drugs and alcoholism, too, add their share of victims to the growing numbers on the streets. A couple of years back, a hospital was found dumping on Skid Row patients who had no homes to go back to.

Once on the streets, it is almost impossible for silvers to get back into mainstream life, to secure a job, a place to live and financial stability. Even voluntary agencies which strive to rehabilitate the homeless prefer to use their resources on the younger lot.

The majority of silver women rendered homeless happen to be either divorcees or those who left homes and families to escape domestic violence. Emmy is one of them. For years, she suffered an alcoholic husband who beat her relentlessly. But, she said, she did not have the heart to abandon her two daughters. "Now they are in their teens and can you believe it, they blame me for all those fights! I could not take it anymore," she told me. Her family does not know her whereabouts and she has no intention of going back.

The emergence of growing numbers of ageing homeless is a challenge for rehabilitation agencies. The government is well aware of the problem but has its own priorities, including finding homes for war veterans.

The silvers, meanwhile, have little else than one another to fall back on. A family away from home.

Mankekar is the author of Breaking News: A Woman in a Man's World, which chronicles her experiences as a pioneering woman journalist in India



FOR THE FOXES

We raise a toast to All Fools' Day with a satirical poem by German-born American poet **Charles Bukowski** (1920-1994) Don't feel sorry for me. I am a competent, satisfied human being.

be sorry for the others who fidget complain

who constantly rearrange their lives like furniture.

juggling mates and attitudes

their confusion is constant

and it will touch whoever they deal with.

beware of them: one of their key words is 'love'.

and beware those who only take

instructions from their God

for they have

failed completely to live their own lives.

don't feel sorry for me because I am alone

for even at the most terrible moments

humor is my companion.

I am a dog walking backwards

I am a broken banjo

I am a telephone wire strung up in Toledo, Ohio

I am a man eating a meal this night

put your sympathy

aside.
they say
water held up
Christ:
to come
through
you better be

nearly as lucky.

Called "laureate of American lowlife", Bukowski was a prolific underground writer who used his words to depict the depravity of urban life

For no particular reason
He had the blue cow tattooed on his right shoulder
He would have been killed in the riots yesterday
But they were good people —
Seeing a cow, they let him go!
-"Tattoo"

Written in inimitable **Gulzar** style, his latest anthology, **SUSPECTED POEMS** (**Penguin**; ₹ **299**; **136 pages**), reflects upon the political reality today. Encompassing the spectrum, the poet anguishes over

political and religious intolerance, oppression of Dalits and minority communities, political high-handedness and tension on the Indo-Pak border. Sample some gems:

Eyes don't need a visa
Dreams have no frontiers
Every day, with eyes closed, I go across the border
To meet Mehdi Hassan!
- "Eyes don't need a visa"

In "Ayodhya", he writes:
Surrounded by iron bars
He sits behind strong barricades
Listening to people now ...
He was an avatar once—
But looks completely like a minister today
Not moving an inch without security!

Laced with acerbic wit and dry humour, the poems hit home with some unpleasant truths. The issues Gulzar rakes up are impossible to ignore or gloss over. In totality, the anthology serves as a carefully crafted commentary on our times. Translated by **Pavan K Varma**, the poems retain the flavour of the original.



Set in the ancient city of Vrindavan,
THE POISON OF LOVE (Penguin; ₹ 299;
106 pages) is at its core the timeless tale of love and betrayal.
"Love is like milk.
With the passage of time,

it sours, splits and becomes poison." With these opening lines, K R Meera sets the tone for this novella that moves at a brisk pace, swinging between the present and past. We're let into the world of a brilliant IITian. Tulsi, who forsakes career, family and fiancé for the love of an incorrigible Lothario, Madhav. It's a love that sends Tulsi hurtling down the path of destruction. Her anguish at dealing with a philandering husband is the pivot for her descent into depression and her evolution into Meera sadhu in Vrindavan. The writer uses the historical story of Meera and her devotion to Krishna as the template for this novella. She doesn't let the pace slacken and, despite the economy of words, manages to tell the tale convincingly.

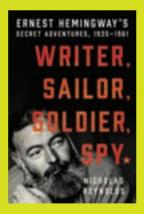
Also on stands



Capitals: A Poetry Anthology Abhay K

Bloomsbury; ₹ 599; 399 pages

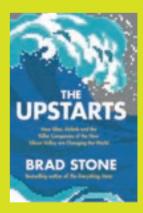
Embark on an unusual journey across the capital cities of the world through this unique poetic offering.



Writer, Sailor, Soldier, Spy Nicholas Reynolds

HarperCollins; ₹ 799; 384 pages

The untold story of Nobel Prize-winning author Ernest Hemingway's secret life as a spy for both the Americans and the Soviets before and during World War II.



The Upstarts Brad Stone

Penguin Random House; ₹ 699; 384 pages

A look at how Silicon Valley companies such as Uber and Airbnb are changing the world.

At the Alter of writing

If versatility is the yardstick for measuring the artistry of an author, Mussoorie-based **Stephen Alter** stands apart. Over the years, he has written 18 books, both fiction and non-fiction with equal ease. His novels are in different genres, while his non-fiction tackles a wide variety of subjects.

His latest novel, *The Dalliance of Leopards* (Arcade; ₹ 1,831; 344 pages), is an international spy thriller a la John Le Carre, exploring the geopolitical fault lines of South Asia. India's legendary fictional spymaster Col Imtiaz Afridi and his brilliant analyst Anna Tagore—principal protagonists in his earlier novel *The Ratanban Betrayal*—join hands again and are at their astute best.

Alter himself doesn't fit into
a straightjacket ethnic profile. He
is of American lineage, but was
born and raised in Landour, Mussoorie. His wife of 40 years,
Ameeta, is Punjabi by birth
but grew up all over India
as her father served in the
Indian Air Force. Though their two
children, Jayant and Shibani, were
born in India, they grew up in diverse
places like Hawaii, Cairo and Boston,
where their parents moved from time
to time.

intervals

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Bob a

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Wood
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Raj F

For this American desi, Mussoorie is much more than home. He was born here, to American missionary parents, in 1956. His grandparents came to Mussoorie in 1916 as missionaries to study at the Landour Language School. Later, work took them to Sialkot, Rawalpindi and Abbottabad (now in Pakistan). His father Robert Alter was born in Srinagar, Kashmir. In a way, the Alter family is inextricably linked with Woodstock, Mussoorie's famed



international school. His grandfather was its principal in the 1930s. His

parents, too, were respected staffers at Woodstock for more than 30 years. In a rare achievement, his father

Bob Alter was appointed principal in 1968. Thus, for the young Stephen, Woodstock was both his home and alma mater. In an interview with **Raj Kanwar**, the author reveals what makes the chief protagonist of his latest thriller smarter than James Bond and shares his attempts at deciphering the enigma that was Jim Corbett. Excerpts from the interview:

The Dalliance of Leopards is your second international espionage thriller in three years after The Ratanban Betrayal. Is it a sequel?

Yes, this is a sequel. I enjoyed the opportunity to write about several familiar characters who face new problems and adversaries. Much

of the story revolves around covert activity in the borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan, though we see it from the perspective of Col Afridi, who directs operations from his headquarters in Mussoorie. His nemesis is a shadowy character known as Guldaar, who controls a criminal empire that stretches from South Asia to the Middle East in collusion with the CIA and ISI. The climax takes place at Humayun's Tomb in Delhi and aboard what used to be called The Frontier Mail, a train with a romantic history.

Is there a likelihood of your latest offering being made into a movie with Col Imtiaz Afridi as the central character, just like James Bond?

I certainly hope so. However, Col Afridi isn't James Bond. He's smarter, subtle and more calculating. Anna Tagore is the one who carries through Afridi's orders and has a license to kill. She is an independent, resourceful agent who is prepared to risk her career when she believes in a cause.

Would you categorise *In the Jungles of the Night*, a novel about Jim Corbett published in August 2016, as a thriller too?

In the Jungles of the Night is a thriller, but different from The Dalliance of Leopards. It's more like a detective story set in the forests of India, with an exploration of Jim Corbett's character and personality. We all know him for his hunting exploits and appreciation of nature. In my book, I've tried to explore certain aspects of his life that don't get revealed in his own books or biographies. At the same time, I've tried to recreate his style of storytelling. It was gratifying to hear from many reviewers and readers that they felt as if Corbett was talking to them through the book.

Tell us about your college days in the US.

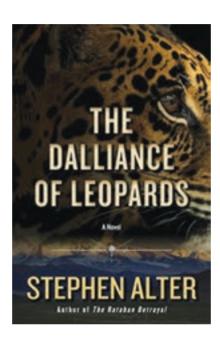
After finishing high school at Woodstock, I went to the US for college and attended Wesleyan University. I learnt a lot about writing from my professors, Kit Reed and Paul Horgan. But I was homesick for India. As soon as I finished my degree, I came back here and began writing full time.

Did you enjoy your stint as a teacher?

I have taught creative writing for 17 years, at the American University in Cairo and at MIT. Teaching is something I enjoy. However, I hate marking papers and giving grades. Now that I'm no longer teaching, I miss the opportunity to meet with students and hear their stories.

When and where did you write your first novel and what was it about?

Neglected Lives was my first novel, written in college and published in 1978. It was about a hill station like Mussoorie and I suppose I wrote it out of a sense of nostalgia for home, though it wasn't a particularly cheerful book. All The Way to Heaven



"The book is a sequel. I enjoyed the opportunity to write about several familiar characters who face new problems and adversaries.... However, Col Afridi isn't James Bond. He's smarter, subtle and more calculating"

was published much later in October 2000. I often used to hesitate when asked a simple question, 'Where are you from originally?' Although I looked American with the trace of a British accent, my reply that I was from a hill station 7,000 ft above sea level, in the Himalayas in India, would generally shock people. In

All The Way to Heaven, a nonfiction memoir, I have written about my family, my Indian friends and my memories, both exotic and mundane.

Tell us about your wife.

I married Ameeta because I fell in love with her. In a few months we'll celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary. She's always been an inspiration and a distraction, for all the right reasons.

How are your children doing?

Our son Jayant works for Patagonia, the outdoor/adventure gear company. Shibani, our daughter, is a production supervisor in Hollywood and has worked on a number of big films such as *Life of Pi* and *American Hustle*. I'm very proud of both of them, particularly because they've grown up to be smart, mature individuals, with a great sense of humour and an ability to put things in perspective.

You have authored nearly 20 books in a career spanning 36 years. What is your daily writing routine?

I try to write 1,000 words daily. After 40 years in this business, all those words begin to add up. I don't think of 18-20 books as prodigious or prolific. There are several books I've written that never got published because you have to discard as much as you retain.

Why did you step down as the founding director of the Mussoorie Writers' Mountain Festival after the 7th edition in 2015?

The Mussoorie Mountain Festival was a lot of fun to organise. I directed seven editions between 2006 and 2015, but decided it was important to hand it over to others rather than hang on to it forever.



Words in the void

Once frowned upon, self-talk is considered über cool in times of the Bluetooth headset, writes **Frank Kaiser**

irst came the thinning on top, followed by an equal and opposite expansive roundness in the middle.

Some obscure law of physics, no doubt.

Then came the wrinkles, the sags, the aches, and the "Where the hell are my glasses?"

Now, dear God, I'm talking to myself. Out loud. Often, without even knowing it.

Just as my father did 40 years ago!

Which makes it really depressing.

However, he used to sing out loud. *Darktown strutter's ball* was one of dad's favourites. *Minnie the moocher* was another. When I'd ask what he was singing, dad would get all huffy and snap, "What do you mean? I'm not singing. You're hearing things, Franklin!"

Ah, Franklin. Using my given name was shorthand for caution, reprimand, and "shut up". We'd enjoyed the close, understanding father-and-son relationship so common in those days.

Not that there's anything really wrong about talking to oneself. Little kids do it all the time. But at 68, I'm a bit long in the tooth to chat day in and day out with my imaginary friend.

Take it from me, when you realise that you've begun to engage in the dreaded verbal masturbation, you don't exactly shout, "Gee whiz! I just spoke to myself! Out loud and brilliantly, if I don't say so myself."

No, what you do is furtively look around, eyes darting, wondering, did anyone hear me? Did hair grow in my palm?

Back when we were kids, the movies gave talking to oneself a bad name. Screenwriters' code for crazier-than-a-loon was having a character walk down the street jabbering to herself. Drooling frequently helped complete the picture.

I've noticed that folks who live alone generally talk to themselves more or less all the time. Especially as they grow older.

My good friend Richard lives and works alone as a freelance proofreader. The rare houseguest will discover Richard jabbering away, gesticulating with abandon, as he proofs his pages. "What a fool!" he'll shout to the manuscript. "Not 'disinterested!' 'Uninterested!' Have you no perspicacity?" Richard would never use such a highfalutin word around real people.

Some of us geezers get verbal with ourselves just to prove we're still alive.

Here in my retirement community, folks get pets for the sole reason of having a breathing something with whom they can converse. They know the white-coat boys with nets would be hauling our octogenarians off right and left it if weren't for the subterfuge dogs and cats around here.

The first time you catch yourself chatting with no one in particular, you may wonder, "How long have I been making a fool of myself this way?" My friend J C Spitznagel recalls his first time with exacting clarity.

"I was flying my Cessna 172 to Peoria. Tired, I ran into a storm about 50 miles out. As I struggled with both the aircraft and my drowsiness, I heard myself saying, 'You can do it! Piece of cake. Just level out now....' And on and on I went until touching down." JC claims that conversation, albeit one-sided, sayed his life.

Most of us just want to save our dignity.

Next time you find yourself word-wanking—before you start calling yourself a moth-eaten old windbag—remember: These days, talking to yourself may be the only way to get involved in an intelligent conversation.

Just try not to embarrass the rest of us. Keep your voice down, OK?

suddenlysenior.com is a Florida-based humour column founded by Kaiser "for everyone who's become senior before their time"





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We go 50 years back in time to bring you products, people, events and fashion that have influenced the world



ong before cougar became cool, young men ogled at Anne Bancroft peeling off her silk stockings to get down and dirty with a toy boy. The image of an uncertain Ben, played by Dustin Hoffman, being tempted by the stockinged leg of Mrs Robinson (Bancroft) on the poster of *The Graduate*—the highest grossing film of 1967—has since become the stuff of young hot-blooded male fantasies.

Pretty racy for its time with its theme of a young man's initiation into the mysteries of sex at the hands of an older married woman, this breakout film ushered in an an era of bold filmmaking in Hollywood. The unapologetic portrayal of Mrs Robinson, seeking sexual satisfaction outside the sanctity of marriage, was a powerful feminist statement of the times. Unlike other films of the fabled decade—obsessed with the Vietnam War and hippie culture—*The Graduate* chose to take a radical stand on matters of love

and lust. A quintessential youth picture, it was also a poignant commentary on feeling young, confused, rudderless, and mixed up about matters of head and heart.

Rated 21st on the list of all-time hit movies by *Box Office Mojo*, the soundtrack of the movie by Simon & Garfunkel was a bestseller in its own right. Back then, *Saturday Review* called *The Graduate* "the freshest, funniest, and most touching film of the year", adding American movies "might never be quite the same again". Director Mike Nichols scooped up the Oscar for Best Director, while Dustin Hoffman, a relatively unknown stage actor, became a household name overnight. Fifty years after it shattered the myth of universal monogamy, *The Graduate* remains so iconic that images and lines from the movie, such as "Mrs Robinson, you're trying to seduce me...aren't you?" and "Only one word: plastics", keep finding references throughout popular culture.

THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: APRIL 1967

- On 15 April, Martin Luther King Jr and Dr Benjamin Spock led an epic demonstration against the Vietnam War in New York City.
- On 28 April, Muhammad Ali was stripped of his boxing title and barred from professional boxing for three years for refusing military service.

RUG-RAT RACE

n. Intense pressure put on children to achieve early educational success, particularly as a prerequisite for eventually getting into an elite university. **Example:** This striving is necessarily, and worryingly, inegalitarian. Parental investment in children's education is an arms race in which poorer families cannot hope to keep pace. Richer, better-educated families can call on many more assets in helping struggling students or providing enriching résumé-building material. The more the **rug-rat race** leads parents to withdraw their children from public-school systems, the worse this trend becomes.

—Ryan Avent, "High-pressure parenting", 1843, 6 February 2017

For age is not alone of time, or we should never see men old and bent at forty and men young at seventy-three.

—American poet Edgar Guest (1881-1959)

Algocracy

n. Rule or government by algorithm.

Example: In the 'Threat of **Algocracy**' I used ideas and arguments drawn from political philosophy to assess the social and political impact of algorithmic governance. I defined algorithmic governance—or as I prefer algocracy—as the use of data-mining, predictive and descriptive analytics to constrain and control human behaviour. I then argued that the increased prevalence of algocratic systems posed a threat to the legitimacy of governance.

—John Danaher, "Algocracy as hypernudging: A new way to understand the threat of algocracy", Philosophical Disquisitions, 11 January 2017

Restify

v. To restore something to its original state and then modify it with new or improved features.

Example: The recently restored and **restified** Petersen Museum in Los Angeles now offers a Cars Mechanical Institute on the second floor.

—"Quick cruise: Jay Ward of Pixar/Disney", Street Rod Life, 30 March 2016

Iceberg home

n. A home where what is seen at ground level is only a small part of structure, with the rest being underground.

Example: Mr Graham already infuriated neighbours five years ago with plans to dig four storeys below his mansion in Knights-bridge to build a swimming pool, a three-car garage, a gym, a ballroom, changing rooms, a hot tub, wine cellars, an art storage room and servants' quarters. His subterranean escapade became a hot topic in London and shed light on the growing trend among the superrich for **iceberg homes**, named because most of the house is below ground.

—Paul Waldie, "Canadian businessman David Graham's home expansion enrages London neighbours", The Globe and Mail, 9 February 2017

Helveticize

v. To make bland, boring, or generic; to set text in, or convert text to, the Helvetica typeface. **Example:** It was rather a skirmish between a bunch of young designers, like your age now, who were called New Wave, Postmodern, Swiss Punk, whatever, and believed it necessary to reject the status quo for something freer and more contemporary. Doing that meant criticising old-guard designers, who believed design should be simple—clean on tight grids and Helveticized.

—Steven Heller, "The legibility wars of the '80s and '90s", Print, 5 December 2016



Secretly dreamed of being a shutterbug? Here's your chance to master digital photography.
Harvard University, in partnership with website alison.com, has started a free online photography course, lasting 10-15 hours. Before accessing the course, you need to register on alison.com. The course covers topics

ranging from exposure settings to camera lenses and computer software. To get a certificate of completion, you need to achieve 80 per cent or more in each assessment of the modules during the course. For more information, log on to alison.com/courses/Digital-Photography

Verbicaine

n. Soothing words used to calm or distract a patient who is awake during a surgical procedure.

Example: Many patients are anxious about anticipated procedural pain. Supportive verbal communication, including distraction and so-called 'vocal local' or verbicaine, can play a role in reducing anxiety and pain.

—"Early abortion training workbook", UCSF Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health, 12 July 2016

Track-a-holism

n. A compulsion to monitor one's health and fitness metrics, particularly those generated by apps and electronic devices.

Example: Digital-health industry leaders such as Daniel Kraft, a Harvard-trained physician and medical-device inventor, predict that in the future, **track-a-holism** will be the norm.

—Adriana Barton, "Tracking down the root of our self-tracking obsession", The Globe and Mail, 27 February 2017

You grow up on the day you have your first real laugh at yourself.

—American actress Ethel Barrymore (1879-1959)

"My contribution is small when I look at the bigger picture"

Hari Babu, 66, Secunderabad, supports special kids



rekking with Hari Babu and his son Krishna Teja to Pragati, a school for the mentally challenged in the Alwal area of Secunderabad, is a one-of-a-kind experience. Teja (in the blue checked shirt), at 32 years of age, talks little but smiles profusely. Suffering from Down syndrome, he is genuinely happy to shake hands with kids at the school, many of whom are familiar faces as he's a regular visitor. As for the 66 year-old father, who has brought up Teja singlehandedly, with his wife being bedridden, these are the little moments he treasures, seeing his son happy in the company of kids. When Teja was born in 1984, Babu quit his Central Government job to set up Bhagavathi Ana Labs—an environment engineering company that employs 400 people—in Hyderabad. Later, he opened an organic store, named after his son, where he has over 150 youngsters with intellectual and learning disabilities such as autism, cerebral palsy and Down syndrome working in the packing section. Babu also runs an NGO, Sai Krishna Teja Foundation (SKTF), which provides medical help for kids in 17 special schools across the city. Every Sunday, the foundation takes doctors to these schools for a

routine medical check-up. Established in 2005, SKTF has helped over 7,000 kids so far. "We have been supported by Hari Babu for the past five years. He helps us financially as well as emotionally," says Rajyalaksmi Chunduri, the headmistress of Pragati. "It's amazing to see him support so many schools and kids." The foundation also pays for Botox treatment and surgery for kids with cerebral palsy. Nine vear-old Kayva is one such child who is now able to stand on her feet. The foundation's support is not just limited to medical check-ups and treatment—it often sponsors the education of poor children and pays the rent for school buildings. "We look after medical treatment, rehabilitation of the mentally challenged and funding required for the day-to-day functioning of special schools," says Babu. "However, there is so much more to do." His dream is to set up an integrated township on the outskirts of the city with not just hostels for special kids but a hospital, canteen and vocational training centres to empower them. As for his own son, Babu has ensured that Teja can go to the store by himself and live independently in a flat.

-Shyamola Khanna

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