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IN UNISON

THEY SAY GOOD THINGS happen to those who wait. Right now, silvers in India are waiting for the proposed Bill for social security and protection of senior citizens. The draft legislation calls for the establishment of tribunals at sub-divisional level to ensure maintenance of aged parents by their children. It also aims to provide for pensions, healthcare and the establishment of at least one old-age home in each district.

It has been a while since Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Meira Kumar announced the formulation of the Bill—Harmony first reported it in its October 2005 issue. And while the government continues the process of obtaining the consent of all states, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment again released a statement in January 2006 reiterating its commitment to the elderly. This includes the National Policy for Older Persons, which outlines an ‘intervention and action’ strategy to ensure financial security, healthcare and shelter, and financial assistance to NGOs to establish and maintain old age homes, daycare centres and mobile medicare units. The proposed Bill will be the icing on the cake the government claims it is serving up for silvers.

We at Harmony welcome the new Bill and the government’s initiative. Unfortunately, there have been many instances of such social initiatives becoming forgotten footnotes in the absence of proper execution. If its latest ‘integrated programme for the elderly’ is to avoid the fate of its predecessors, we believe government needs to enlist the support of established NGOs—not just with sporadic financial handouts but by creating an environment conducive for people to come forward and work in this field.

For starters, if NGOs and government are to collaborate constructively, there can be no room for red tape. Right now, it is difficult for an NGO to try and establish a daycare centre or an old-age home. The government must relax the rules for access to land, premises and infrastructure facilities. Further, it must regularly interact with credible organisations working for the elderly and utilise their experience to enhance policies and programmes for silvers.

It will make a world of difference. The proposed Bill speaks of establishing one old-age home in each district. With the help of NGOs, we can have several—run efficiently and transparently. We also need more interactive centres across the country; not just daycare centres but vibrant spaces that stimulate elders with a variety of activities, like the Harmony Interactive Centre in Girgaum, Mumbai.

All this can happen—if we cut through red tape and work in unison. For our part, we are ready, and waiting. Over to the government.

Tina Ambani
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For subscription assistance contact: Harmonycare, Living Media India Limited, 13th Floor, Videocon Towers, E-1, Jhandewalan Extension, New Delhi-110035. Phones: New Delhi: 011-
41529556, 41020913 Fax: 22684841; Kolkata: 033-22821922, 22827726, Fax: 22825398, 22827254;
Bangalore: 080-2212448, 2206562, 2218543, Fax: 2218335; Mumbai: 022-2444423/4/5/6
Fax: 24444358; Chennai: 044-28478525-44 Fax: 28472179, Email: harmonycare@india.com
Lately, the anti-ageing industry—research and products—has gone the way of rocket science. The only difference: it promises to help you take a leap back in time. This month, with our cover story “Forever Young”, we show you how far science has progressed in helping us fight ageing, and how cosmetology and dermatology are helping to defy lines and wrinkles. And if you don’t believe in undoing God’s work, read it as a cache of information. The article is a work of many months in terms of collating information and developments on research and longevity from across the world. And this isn’t the end of it. From next issue, we will keep you updated on the latest developments in anti-ageing research in our Orbit section.

But there’s still time before anti-ageing becomes a general reality. Until then, there’s Harmony. This month’s Get Well Soon deals with a common problem for silvers—arthritis and its complications, which may demand surgery. Written by Dr Arun Mullaji, the joint replacement and arthritis surgeon who was on the team that operated on Atal Behari Vajpayee’s knee, the article tells you about the pros and cons of surgery. Healthy diet and the right kind of exercise can help mitigate arthritis and other age-related conditions, says Mullaji. So start early on good lifestyle choices and add life to your years. Research will discover the limits in its own time.

Meanwhile, Shabana Azmi has apologised for not writing her column this issue. She is travelling and will be back next month.

—Meeta Bhatti
I suffer from diabetes and enjoy reading Dr Pushpesh Pant’s recipes in the ‘Food Wise’ section. His sugar-free recipe for patishapta in the January 2006 issue made me think about the insensitivity toward diabetics on the part of airlines in India. The last time I flew, I was welcomed with chocolate toffees and creamy bread, followed by gulab jamun. The airhostess had no beverages to offer except sweetened juices. I ordered black tea and ate the lone salty snack sulking on the tray. I went hungry. It’s not fair that there is no separate meal for diabetics especially when they shell out the same amount as non-diabetics for a ticket that includes meals. Besides, diabetics must eat on time. People like me—and there are many of us—would really appreciate it if airlines paid a little attention to us. Or else, I will have no choice but to carry my roti and subzi whenever I travel.

RAMA DAS
New Delhi

The letter of the month wins a gift from Vimal

The Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon 2006 was not just an ordinary event—it was akin to a movement where every runner put in his best. I am 61 years old and participated in the Half Marathon (21 km) from Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) to Worli Naka and back. Having started the run at the crack of dawn along with 6,000 other participants, my run led me through Nariman Point, Marine Drive, Kemsps Corner, Worli and finally back to CST.

It was a heady experience and the cheering crowds lining the empty roads, normally clogged with traffic, encouraged me to complete the run. All along, people were offering biscuits and water and urging us on. That day, I truly felt the pulse of Mumbai and realised that this city indeed has a heart.

I cannot describe the feeling when I touched the finish line. I was placed 112th in the general group among 6,000 runners and 1st amongst women runners over 60. However, I must add that I could complete the run, with the blessings of my doctor, only because I follow a strict diet and exercise regimen.

NANCY CONTRACTOR
Mumbai

I am pleased to see that Harmony is addressing issues that concern senior citizens. I agree with you that educated seniors should devote some of their time to work for the welfare of others their age. I would also like to point out certain areas that Harmony can focus on to make life better for senior citizens:

- Senior telephone users should be exempted from service charges and be billed only for calls made.
- Municipal authorities should give importance to senior citizens’ grievances.
- Court matters pertaining to senior citizens should be cleared speedily.

JOSEPH FERNANDES
Litigants’ Welfare Forum for Justice in Courts, Mumbai

I eagerly wait for my copy of Harmony every month. As soon as I get it, I spend hours reading it. But I don’t stop there. I re-read the magazine many times over until it’s time for the next issue. That’s how much I love the magazine.

V P CHHOTAII
Mumbai

I subscribe to Harmony and I feel it makes for an interesting read. However, the magazine is not easily available in Orissa. Perhaps this is because of a lack of awareness or gaps in advertising. I suggest you organise your next Senior Citizens’ Run in Bhubaneshwar. It will go a long way in promoting the cause of senior citizens in this state.

GOVIND SAHER, DSP (RETD)
Berhampur

Thank you for your concern. It’s inputs like these that keeps us going. But it’s not possible for us to organise a run in Orissa at present. We’ll definitely work on making our magazine more visible in your state.

—Editors
The article ‘Home of Hope’ about Avedna Ashram in Jaipur in the January 2006 issue of Harmony was very informative. I would like to get the address of this wonderful ashram.

R K Jain
Meerut

We are glad you enjoyed the article. The address of Avedna Ashram is given in the ‘Resources’ section of the January 2006 issue on page 94.

—Editors

Ever since I saw a copy in the hands of my co-passenger I started subscribing to Harmony. That was about 18 months ago. Although I subscribe to several magazines, Harmony tops the priority list on the day of arrival. In your February 2006 issue, the Get Well Soon article on ‘Dodging Diabetes’ was comprehensive. It not only informed the readers how to manage diabetes but also gave a detailed diet plan. Diabetes indeed is a silent killer as it can damage undetected major organs if undetected.

I recall an incident that occurred in my family. My wife’s brother-in-law was healthy person in his mid-40s. He suddenly went into diabetic coma for several days because his diabetes was undetected. Fortunately, he responded to the treatment. He now keeps his diabetes under control. Such life-saving articles need to be published in your magazine for the benefit of silvers.

Another article I liked was Hariharan Balakrishnan’s article on Rani Karnaa titled ‘With bells on’. Karnaa finds the strength to go on in life despite the sad demise of her only son by saying “It was the saddest moment in my life, but life goes on.” I could relate as I too lost a young daughter. I wrote an autobiography My Reminiscences in memory of my daughter. It reads: “…my beloved daughter who was an upcoming young scientist left us imprinting her unforgettable memories and feelings in our hearts forever”.

We silvers need much encouragement by ways of reading useful books and magazines that teach us to be active, face calamities boldly and send out a message that says that life is worth living, in peace and harmony.

DR K MANIBHUSHAN RAO
Centre of Advanced Studies in Botany, Chennai

AN INVITATION FROM HARMONY

We are looking for contributions from our readers. Write to us if...

■ You had an experience related to money or finance which others can learn from
■ You faced a serious health problem and conquered it
■ You know of someone who has done something exceptional after the age of 55
■ You want to share your hobbies and interesting travel experiences with others
■ You have a funny or insightful anecdote about your grandchildren

...and we’ll print it in the column ‘Your Space’

Mail us at 4th Floor, Maker Chambers IV, Nariman Point, Mumbai-400021. Or email at contact.mag@harmonyindia.org
MEDIA WATCH

COLOUR THERAPY

Three years ago, as a gift to her mother, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, and her father, who became frail after a stroke, Jerusalem art therapist Naomi Gaffni volunteered to give weekly art lessons in the Tel Aviv old-age home where they lived. Now, she writes about her experiences in a 106-page paperback called Lalechet El Hatzva’im: Tziur Ke’emtza’i Lezikna Yetziratit (Go to the Colours: Painting and Drawing in Creative Ageing). “Artistic work such as drawing, sculpture, music, dance, theatre and writing improves the quality of life and influences the health, mood, self image and social status of the elderly,” says Gaffni to newspaper Jerusalem Post. “In fact, because old people are free of other occupations, they can devote considerable emotional and intellectual forces to artistic work.” As her parents were two of her pupils, Gaffni calls it her privilege to describe in detail the open dialogue that allows children to be their parents’ teachers, while the parents serve as both pupils and critics. The book, which costs INS 50 (about Rs 500), comes in an English edition too. For details, got to www.eshelnet.org.il.
**TOP GRAN**

Meet Britain’s favourite granny: Jane Fearnley-Whittingstall. The 66 year-old’s book *The Good Granny Guide*, released in November 2005, has found itself a surprise smash hit. It’s a repository of tips for those who find themselves pushing a pram for the first time, from how to stop toddlers cutting their throats by charging into your drinks cabinet, to how best to make pleasing paper chains, says The Times, a British newspaper. Fearnley-Whittingstall has many grievances against modern parenting, and doesn’t hesitate to share them.

“You can’t sit down with a nice glass of wine, if you have grandchildren to stay, until about 8.15 pm,” she rues. “My own children had lights out at 7 pm, but I suppose modern parents work late and otherwise wouldn’t see their children.” She believes that TVs and computers in children’s rooms create a generation of “grunting social inadequates”. And she is white-hot on manners. “If I don’t get a ‘thank you’, I leave a polite pause for the child’s parent to demand it. If they don’t, I will say something.” The popularity of the book has prompted Fearnley-Whittingstall to set up a new website, www.goodgranny.com.

**INNOVATION**

**MADE IN JAPAN**

It’s sleek and sexy, but the latest addition to Toyota Motor Corp’s range can reach only about 6 km per hour. That’s because the TAO-Light II isn’t a car—it’s a wheelchair made from car parts, developed by Aisin Seiki Co, a supplier of transmissions to Toyota. The TAO is among a host of new products for elderly Japanese from Toyota. The company’s suppliers of rubbers and plastics are also making orthopaedic mattresses and exercise mats. And Toyota Home, the company’s prefabricated housing business, is offering kitchen cabinets that slide down on rails to wheelchair height. As for cars, Toyota offers 37 different ‘Welcabs’—specially converted cars with options like wheel-chair ramps for easy access. The company has no plans to bring these to India until the roads are pothole-free.

**CAPITAL NEWS**

**SUNDAY CLINICS GO 365**

In Delhi, the Directorate of Health Services has announced that the geriatric care units at hospitals that offered medical care to seniors on Sundays will now be open 365 days. “The Sunday clinics could not cater to the patient load which forced us to extend the services through the week,” said A C Tripathy, chief medical officer (planning), Directorate of Health Services. “We are also training doctors to take care of this specialised population.” The Directorate proposes to set up new geriatric clinics in 14 hospitals in the capital that will offer multi-disciplinary medical aid and specialised care for the elderly.
NEWSWORTHY

SAFE IN MUMBAI?

Silvers in Mumbai feel they are safer than in any other city in India, according to a poll conducted by Dignity Foundation, which works for the welfare of senior citizens. Forty-three per cent of respondents said they felt Mumbai was the safest city for seniors. However, 92 per cent observed that crimes against the elderly were on the rise—42 per cent attributed this to poor governance and 38 per cent blamed the lack of interest of senior citizens in maintaining their own security, while others attributed it to the break-up of the joint family. The good news: silvers in the city no longer have to visit the police station to register a complaint, according to a new initiative launched by Director General of Police Dr P S Pasricha on 1 January. They just have to call their local police station, and the police will come to them.

CALL FOR HELP

For retired employees of the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) in West Bengal, the solution to all their pension-related queries and problems is now a phone call away. The office of the Controller of Communication Accounts, West Bengal Telecom Circle, has set up a toll-free help line for them—the number is 1600-345-2000. The service will soon be extended to other circles across the country.

SHOPPING LIST

ZAP IT!

This one promises to zap age, literally. The Integra Total Facial System, from British firm Amstrad Plc, claims to rejuvenate your skin by using micro-currents of electricity to stimulate facial muscles, thus boosting circulation, reducing tension and refining wrinkles and relaxing laughter lines. The price may zap you too, at £129 (about Rs 10,000) but the manufacturer promises a 28-day money-back guarantee if you’re not satisfied. To order, go to www.integra-skin care.com. But don’t forget to check with your doctor first.

A NEW HOME

In Bangalore, the Ashvasan Foundation, a charitable organisation, has built a 30-bed wing for silvers on the premises of the Asha Jeevan Home for the Aged on Bannerghatta Road. The wing was inaugurated on 25 January.
ANALYSE THIS

STAGE A RECOVERY

Can theatre be therapeutic? Yes, according to Helga Noice, a psychologist at Elmhurst College in Illinois, USA, and her husband, Tony, actor, director and cognitive researcher at Indiana State University. They claim that the way actors learn their parts can help people with dementia. According to their research, published in the February issue of journal Current Directions in Psychological Science, actors do not just memorise their lines by rote. Instead, they think their way into the characters they play, breaking scripts down into logically connected ‘beats’. British actor Michael Caine sums up the technique: “You must be able to stand there not thinking of that line. You take it off the other actor’s face.” The Noices studied three groups of older adults, one given a four-week acting course, another a course on visual arts, and a control group. Those in the acting class significantly improved their ability to recall words and solve problems.

TRENDS

THE RIGHT PITCH

Hammers with non-slip handles to prevent injury; and can openers for the arthritic—retailers in the US are making a variety of products for older customers. Labels such as ‘senior citizen’ are an immediate turnoff. You must appeal to interests, lifestyle, values, anything but age. “Today’s seniors are riding motorcycles. The last thing they want is a patronising attitude,” says Alex Lee, president of OXO International, which manufactures cooking utensils for silvers. OXO’s ‘Good Grips’ range comprises more than 750 easy-to-use tools that also boast sleek design.

TRIPPING!

Pensioners in the UK are now going trekking in the Himalaya, and ‘zip-lining’ on a cable through the treetops of the Costa Rican jungle, thanks to Saga Holidays. The company is a part of Saga Group, that provides insurance, financial and entertainment services for people over 50. “Seniors are hearing about the fun of adventure holidays from their grandchildren and want to try it out themselves,” says Amanda Monroe, spokesperson for Saga.
YOUR MONEY

IN YOUR INTEREST
The State Bank of India hiked interest rates by 50 basis points (a basis point is 0.01 per cent, or one-hundredth of a percentage point) on domestic term deposits of certain maturities. Interest rates on short-term deposits between 15 days and 45 days, 46 days and 179 days, and 180 days to less than a year, have been revised upwards by 50 bps, 25 bps and 50 bps, taking them to 4.50 per cent, 4.75 per cent and 5.5 per cent a year. Interest rates on term deposits of maturity between one year to less than three years and three years to less than five years have been increased by 50 bps to 6 per cent and 6.25 per cent a year. Interest rates on deposits of five years and above have been hiked by 25 basis points to 6.5 per cent a year. The best part: senior citizens will receive higher interest rate of 50 bps above the card rate for deposits with maturity of one year to three years, three years to five years, and five years and above, taking the rates to 6.5 per cent, 6.75 per cent and 7 per cent a year.

PENSION ON
The Finance Ministry has issued a clarification that it has no plans to stop pension to retired central government employees beyond 75 years of age.

“The government has for some time been receiving inquiries about a rumour that payment of pension will be stopped after 75 years of age of central government pensioners,” went the official statement, issued on 6 January in New Delhi. “The rumours are baseless and must be ignored,” the statement further clarified.

LOVE THAT

VILLAGE OF HOPE
Chorania village in Limdi taluka of Surendranagar district in Gujarat, with a population of 2,000, is a very special place—its residents have all taken a pledge before the panchayat to take care of their parents. The alternative is social ostracism. Things weren’t always like this. Last year, when Gomtiben Nayak, an 85 year-old resident, had to resort to begging for food after her son grabbed her 2.5 acre plot of farm land, the panchayat had to come to her aid. With the help of voluntary organisation HelpAge India, it found her a new home. Fourteen other silvers in the village suffering a similar fate were also resettled.

“Apart from organising programmes to spread awareness about the plight of the elderly, we also provided financial assistance to those who look after their elders or volunteer to take care of those like Gomtiben,” says Hina Sharma of HelpAge India. The organisation is now circulating a short film on the Chorania experience in other rural settlements. “No one will be allowed to suffer like Gomtiben any more in our village,” says Harshad Panchal, sarpanch of Chorania. “No one should suffer like that anywhere,” Panchal added.
**DID YOU KNOW?**

- In Hong Kong, about one-tenth of the 985,700 elderly people in domestic households are living alone and 71.6 per cent have chronic diseases, according to a Census & Statistics Department survey. The survey found that 23.2 per cent of these people were aged 60-64, 24 per cent aged 65-69, 21.9 per cent aged 70-74 and 30.9 per cent aged 75 and above. And 51.2 per cent were women. The good news: despite their medical ailments, 93.5 per cent were able to perform daily living activities independently.

- According to Population Reference Bureau, a Washington DC-based research organisation, as a result of declining fertility rates and increasing longevity, by the middle of the century, people aged 65 and over will compose about 15 per cent of the world’s population, up from about 7 per cent today.

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**H RECOMMENDS**

**ACTION PLAN FOR MARCH**

**Go blogging.** Blogs (personal online journals) are no longer the preserve of adolescents. Get yourself a blog and share your worldview. “It’s too easy to sit in your own cave and let the world go by,” says 73 year-old Ray Sutton, from Vancouver in Canada, whose blog is called ‘The Oldest Living Blogger’. “Get out and be a part of it.” Go to [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) and get started.

**Teach the young.** Use your skills to make a real difference in people’s lives. In Delhi, many silvers are signing up for an enrolment and employment scheme called Eklavya. The brainchild of NGO Agewell Foundation, Ekalavya is establishing a databank of retired people who are willing to visit the homes of children in their colonies and teach them. “This would be a good inter-generational exercise with silvers earning some money and youngsters learning a few good lessons on life,” says Himanshu Rath, chairperson of Agewell.

**Language of the Gods:** Now is the time to learn Sanskrit, Latin, or Pali. Surabharati Samiti in Hyderabad is conducting Sanskrit courses for a nominal fee and a majority of their ‘students’ are retired government officials, between 60 and 80 years, who nursed a desire to read *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Bhagwat Gita* in Sanskrit. Those interested in Buddhist literature and philosophy can brush up their Pali from their nearest Vipassana research institutes. And silvers who want to learn Latin or Greek to read Homer and Virgil can log on to [www.seniornet.org](http://www.seniornet.org)
Welcome to the section where you can share your thoughts and experiences on anything under the sun. Write in, and make this space your own!

OUR MORRIS

Dhruv Srivastava (centre) and his siblings Ashok and Rani have nurtured the pink Morris for 58 years

My father Krishnamohan Srivastava worked as district manager for Ellen Berry & Co, the automobile company that imported Morris Minor models into India in the 1940s. Naturally, he wanted to own one. In 1948, his shiny new Morris Minor convertible was one of eight cars on the streets of Lucknow—and he used to take his new bride, my mother Urmila, for car rides. I can only imagine the excitement the new car must have brought in their lives.

My father nicknamed the five-seater ‘Dibiya’ (box), as it was so compact. Before he could ride through life in his Dibiya, he was snatched from us at the young age of 35. With five children (three sons and two daughters), my mother was pushed into the driver’s seat.

One of her many responsibilities was dropping us to school in the morning and fetching us in the afternoon. She started taking driving lessons and soon we were riding in our Dibiya to school. Even our schoolteachers remember Dibiya.

As we grew up, each one of us got driving lessons from our mother. We stuck to our dibiya until Maruti stormed the car market in the 1980s. Thinking it was time to buy a new car, we booked a Maruti 800 in 1988.

However, my mother passed away the same year and our attachment towards Dibiya grew stronger. Though we didn’t plan to sell the Morris, the new car would have taken the focus away from it. We cancelled our Maruti booking.

I had already lost my brother Pradeep Kumar in 1980. A few years after mother, my youngest sister Madhumohini too passed away in 1992. Today, my brother Ashok (52), sister Rani Manjulalal (50) and I continue to live in our ancestral home in Sunder Bagh, Lucknow—with Dibiya.

Ashok, who fondly says ‘Abhi to yeh jawan hai’, still drives the car every day and maintains her with great care. He repaints her every year—if she’s sky blue one year, she’s navy blue the next. Now, she’s magenta pink.

Most vintage cars need a regular engine replacement, but not our Morris—she still has her original heart. The only things we have changed are her colour and upholstery. Thanks to Ashok, our Morris has never seen the inside of a garage. He does all the small repair work himself. When it’s time for servicing, which is done regularly without any lapse, a technician is called home. And under Ashok’s watchful eyes, the car is serviced.

For my part, I contribute whenever I can. Like for instance, whenever I go out on tours either to Delhi or Bangalore, I make it a point to hunt for vintage nuts and bolts as these aren’t easily available in Lucknow.

For the 2005 Vintage Car Rally held in October, Dibiya showed up looking like a teenager in hot pink. From the 70 cars that participated in the
rally, she was declared the ‘Best Maintained Car on the Roads’. The Commissioner of Lucknow also stopped by and paid her a compliment on her looks. Now, Ashok is planning a new look for Dibyaj—black-and-white zebra stripes. We can’t wait.

—Dhruv Srivastava, Lucknow

HOME SWEET HOME
For many of us, adjusting to retirement is not so easy. The reasons can be many: the never-ending burden of financial and social responsibilities, fear for one’s safety, loneliness and depression due to neglect from children. The option of a second career is also limited. The situation is no different for ex-servicemen. Keeping this in mind, the Air Force Association (AFA) was founded for retired servicemen in 1980. Two decades later, AFA and the Indian Air Force Welfare Fund pooled in to form a ‘Senior Citizen’s Home’ in New Delhi.

After three decades of service in the Indian Air Force, I retired in 1994 as air commodore. My extensive experience in administration and human resources won me a job as general manager with a reputed company in Delhi the year I retired. However, when AFA approached me with an offer to be the chief executive officer of its Senior Citizens’ Home, I couldn’t refuse.

The home, a four-storied building in South Delhi, has 74 rooms with attached bathroom and balcony. It houses 22 members at a nominal fee. All the rooms have adequate furniture, linen, a television, refrigerator and sockets for connecting a computer. The bathrooms are fitted with grab bars.

Admission is open for all retirees from the Air Force and their spouses who are members of AFA. The only requirement is that members are free from contagious or communicable diseases and mentally and physically agile and coherent. The oldest resident is Captain (Retd) S Roy—he is 86, the same age as my father.

It’s a home away from home with comfort and dignity being the key words. Residents are provided with healthy food (vegetarian and non-vegetarian) and medical care. In case of medical emergencies, they have access to Army Hospital and Batra Hospital in Delhi. Counselling is also provided to those who need it. Two retired Air Force PBORS (Personal Below Officers Rank)—Warrant Officer Brajpal (60) and Sergeant D N Singh (65)—assist me in running the seniors’ home, while my wife Chandra Kanta, a retired teacher, pitches in with the administration work.

We conduct various social and cultural activities for residents. Every year on World Elders’ Day (1 October), students of Air Force School organise a dance performance at the home and everyone participates with enthusiasm.

Festivals are celebrated with the same gusto. And members of the ladies club from the nearby Air Force station drop in every month to meet the residents for a casual conversation or an occasional game of Tambola.

For me, the experience of running the Home has been truly enriching. At 65, it feels like I am looking after my ‘parents’.

—Air Commodore (retd)(R CAP) D V Dhingra, VSM, New Delhi

Residents of Air Force Association’s Senior Citizen’s Home, Delhi

We reserve the right to select articles, which will be edited to suit space and editorial considerations. Harmony takes no responsibility for advice offered in this column. For more Your Space letters, log on to www.harmonyindia.org
Science is catching up with science fiction and anti-ageing has become a buzzword. From extending lifespans of worms and mice, research has moved to changing the way humans look at longevity.

Down the ages, Greek physician Galen, Chinese alchemist Ko Hung, Arabic philosopher-physician Avicenna, English philosopher and scientist Roger Bacon, Alexander the Great and Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon—who discovered Florida when he went in search of the mythical Fountain of Youth—were all men who believed passionately in the idea of immortality. For this passion, these exceptional men faced scorn, even laughter from their contemporaries. They may well have the last laugh.
Today, ‘anti-ageing’, a term first used in 1992 by American physicians and surgeons Dr Ronald Klatz and Dr Robert Goldman, is a buzzword.

Across the world geneticists and molecular biologists are working tirelessly to keep the human body ticking overtime.

Very few venture to use the word ‘immortality’, but that’s the subtext—prolonging life, perhaps infinitely.

And while that work is in progress, the beauty industry is continuously devising new ways to retain the blush of youth on our faces. In the past decade, it has spawned a huge bouquet of products and services—world over, sales are predicted to approach $41.94 billion (Rs 185,157 crore) by 2006.

To live longer is indeed the ultimate quest. How far have we come down that road? Harmony explores the latest developments globally and in India in the fields of cosmetology and dermatology.
LIFE GOES ON

Is ageing inevitable? Arati Rajan Menon looks at how science is finding ways to help your body say no

Immortality is a done deal if you believe tech guru Ray Kurzweil. In his book Fantastic Voyage: Live Long Enough to Live Forever, the 58 year-old American, whose inventions include the first print-to-speech reading machine for the blind, predicts that in the not too distant future, nanobots—tiny robots implanted in our bodies—will replace digestive systems and shuffle oxygen and carbon dioxide around our bodies. We will also be able to upgrade our bodies over the Internet, downloading new programmes to make us stronger and healthier. The bottom line: upgrade Version 1 of the human body, and live forever.

Kurzweil’s scenario may appear a tad fanciful. But the idea of immortality is not so ridiculous anymore. In fact, Dr Michael Zey, a sociologist and future trends and longevity expert, speaking at the annual World Future Society conference in the US in 2003, proclaimed that it could be reality by 2075, if not before.

We’re already living longer lives. At the time of independence, the average life expectancy of an Indian was 40—today, it is estimated at 63 compared to a world average of 66. For the US, the figure stands at 77, while it peaks in Japan at 80.

Is it enough? Evidently not, if you consider the wild success of the anti-ageing industry. Today, anti-ageing medicine, which claims to prevent, treat and reverse age-related disorders, is the sunshine sector. Its goal: longer, healthier, happier lives. Its genesis: the laboratory, where science is finally beginning to catch up with science fiction.

In the past decade, scientists have extended the lifespan of worms and mice through genetic tampering and caloric restriction; identified genes that protect from dementia; changed old rats into young ones (well, in terms of behaviour); physically linked the circulatory systems of old mice with young ones to regenerate damaged muscles and organs; and used stem cells to ‘re-grow’ cells lost through age. Research has changed the way we look at longevity, forever. Let’s see how:
IT’S IN THE GENES

Over the past decade and a half, in her laboratory at the University of California San Francisco, geneticist Cynthia Kenyon has enabled worms to live up to 144 days, six times their normal lifespan, by enhancing the effects of some of their genes. Some of these produce antioxidants (thought to protect body cells from the damaging effects of oxidation), while others keep cell components in good working order. Now, biotech company Elixir, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is trying to develop a drug that would yield the same results in humans.

Another “cure for old age”, Professor Tom Kirkwood told journal Nature, would be “to enhance the maintenance functions of repair genes”. Kirkwood heads the Centre for Integrative Systems at Newcastle University in the UK to explore ways of extending life. So far, the identified ‘repair’ genes work only on worms. The centre is now recruiting 2,800 siblings across Europe over the age of 90 to identify combinations that contribute to longevity.

Nonagenarians who hadn’t suffered a significant decline in mental capacity were also the subject of a study conducted at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine—its findings were released in December 2005. The team identified an increased frequency of gene variant APOE E2 allele in the group—it confers protection from Alzheimer’s. The study also identified genetic regions associated with successful ageing, including DYS389 and DYS390.

STARVE TO SURVIVE

For American microbiologist Leonard Guarente, the key to survival is restricting calorie intake. Guarente and Harvard scientist David Sinclair have come far in understanding why it can kick up the activity of a gene called SIR2 and prolong life in simple organisms. Their focus is on sirtuins, the family of proteins produced by SIR2.

Guarente’s team at Massachusetts Institute of Technology has found that a natural chemical called NADH inhibits the effects of sirtuins; thus yeast with lower NADH levels lives longer. Meanwhile, Sinclair’s work focuses on resveratrol, a natural antioxidant found in red wine—heavy doses can prolong lifespan in yeast by 70 per cent. As few

and reverse age related disorders, is the sunshine sector today
Human embryonic stem cells can regenerate into any adult cell

people want to limit their calories drastically, Guarante is searching for a pill to do it for them with the help of biotech company Elixir—he’s also one of its co-founders. Sinclair has a competing company called Sirtris and he expects to get his drugs ready by 2010.

OLD RATS TO NEW
In 2002, at Children’s Hospital Oakland Research Institute in California, Bruce Ames and his team discovered that feeding older rats two chemicals normally found in the body’s cells, acetyl-L-carnitine and alphalipoic acid, made them more energetic and led them to perform better on problem-solving and memory tests. According to Ames, who’s 77, the combination of chemicals had improved the function of mitochondria, which serve as a cell’s main energy source—studies have already linked unhealthy mitochondria to Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and Type 2 diabetes. He has now formed a company called Juvenon to license the combination and “add years to people’s lives”.

JOINED BY BLOOD
In 2004, scientists at Stanford University achieved the unimaginable—they physically linked the circulation systems of young and old mice. Incredibly, it increased the ability of the older mice to regenerate damaged muscles and organs. Their study, published in May 2005, established that ‘progenitor cells’ in older animals could be activated by elements in the younger rodents’ bloodstream.

Progenitor cells are found in all mammalian tissues, and are responsible for the regeneration of those tissues throughout life. However, as animals age, the hormone which guides these cells gradually disappears. The slowdown in the ability to renew damaged cells can be reversed. Now, it is working to pinpoint exactly what it is in the younger animals’ system that causes the rejuvenation.

Scientists at Stanford University raised the ability of the older mice to...
STEMMING THE TIDE

Stem cell therapy is perhaps the brightest hope of modern medicine. Dr S G A Rao, chairman and managing director of Bangalore-based Cryo Stem Cell (Kar) Pvt Ltd, tells Harmony, “As there are no conventional cures available for diseases caused because of cell death, stem cell-based therapies will eventually become routine treatment.”

Stem cells, the source of all blood cells, are able to regenerate indefinitely, allowing them to form cells that replace those that fail through disease, accident or old age. There are two types of stem cells: adult, which include cells isolated from bone marrow; and embryonic, which are isolated from a four or five-day old human embryo. Although adult stem cells can replace worn-out cells and repair tissues or organs, their scope is limited as they are location-specific. Embryonic stem cells, on the other hand, are undifferentiated and can develop into any adult cell. However, as harvesting stem cells from embryos has caused a furore, especially in Western, predominantly Christian nations, scientists have been exploring other sources of stem cells—like blood from umbilical cord.

Such ethical opposition is rarely seen in India, a fact that has enabled stem cell therapy to become available here. “I use stem cells to treat conditions like paralysis, Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, motor neurosis, to renew damaged cells by elements in the young rodents’ bloodstream.”

INTERVIEW

“India can lead the world in stem cell therapy”

A specialist in fertility treatments like in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), Dr Geeta Shroff branched into stem cell research in 2000. Her clinic in Gautam Nagar, Delhi, offers embryonic stem-cell therapy, along with other medical facilities. Though Shroff is unwilling to divulge much about her techniques until her pending patent application is granted, here’s what she did tell Teena Baruah…

Her work: I was introduced to stem cells in 1999 at a seminar in Singapore. The idea of curing incurables excited me. I did research for three years without any institutional backing so that I could work on my terms. I create cell lines in my private IVF lab.

Ethics: I develop my stem cells from bio wastes so it doesn’t bother me. Being infertility specialists, we routinely get eggs and sperm to create test-tube babies. Only one fertilised egg is introduced back to the donor; the rest are discarded. We use them to create stem cell lines after taking permission.

Safety: With my technique, you don’t get antigen-antibody reactions. I have done over a hundred cases and I have seen no side effects like tumours yet. Anyway, I follow the Indian Council of Medical Research’s draft guideline and treat only incurable cases.

Time line: Patients start feeling better within four to six weeks. But the total process takes one or two years.

The possibilities: I can’t grow back a complete organ yet; I need a bigger lab and more funds for that. Right now, we are just replacing dead tissue. Eventually, people over 60 could be going in for stem cell shots to stay healthy. We could cure balding, grow new teeth, and reverse degeneration in major body organs.

India ahead: Currently, the UK and US are caught up in moral debates over stem cell therapy. According to British and American scientists, it will take another five to 10 years to reach clinics. In India, I am already doing it.

The criticism: A lot of people think I am faking it. And that’s fine by me. They have an image of a stem cell scientist and I don’t fit into that.
cardiac complications, genetic disorders and spinal cord damage,” claims Dr Geeta Shroff (see interview), who runs Nu Tech Mediwold Clinic in Delhi. “People who have not walked for 12 years after spinal cord damage are now walking again.” Costs, according to her, are patient and disease-specific. “In cardiac cases, it takes Rs 20,000-Rs 30,000 a year, while for neurological cases, it costs about Rs 3 lakh.”

Shroff came into the public eye after she treated Congressman Ajit Jogi in 2005. The 59-year-old former chief minister of Chattisgarh was paralysed below the neck after an accident in 2004. After several visits to Dr Shroff, he pronounced that he could sit without back support, breathe normally and attain bladder control. Another patient is Dr Vijaykumar Debsikdar, 45, who is undergoing treatment at Rs 1 lakh per year for an eight-year-old spinal cord injury that left him paralysed in the right hand and from the waist down. “Now, I have sensation in my legs,” says the psychiatrist from Miraj, Maharashtra. “I have started believing in God again.”

It’s one more testimonial for Dr Shroff. But some sections of the global medical community have alleged that she has “failed to provide evidence for scientific scrutiny”. Even the Indian Council for Medical Research has commented that the information submitted by Dr Shroff lacked technical details. Meanwhile, the body has promised to set up standard protocols for stem cell research in the country.

It’s long overdue. As far back as 2002, Hyderabad-based LV Prasad Eye Institute announced that it had pioneered the use of adult stem cells in the treatment of human eye diseases. And companies such as Asia Cryo Cell and Reliance Life Sciences have established cord blood stem cell banks—here, you can bank stem cell from your baby’s umbilical cord to guard against future medical problems. Enrolment fees: Rs 60,000 to Rs 1 lakh.

Stress significantly affects the cell’s ageing process

LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE
Let’s not forget lifestyle. In a study funded by the US-based National Institute of Aging, and reported in National Geographic magazine in November 2005, scientists focused on regions where people live significantly longer—mountain villages in Sardinia, Italy, the islands of Okinawa, Japan, and Lona Linda, California, home to a group of Seventh-Day Adventists. The Okinawans swear by a low-calorie plant-based diet and fun with friends, the Sardinians work hard in the mountains and end their day with red wine; and the Californian Adventists stay clear of junk food.

It really is pretty simple. Drinking a glass of red wine a day; exercising, socialising, eating lots of anti-oxidant-rich fruits, vegetables and ‘super foods’, like tofu, spirulina, pomegranates and fish; combating gum disease and thereby getting rid of harmful bacteria that can damage the heart are all proven to add years to your life.

One more thing—and this you know about already: lose the stress. Elisa Epel, assistant professor of psychiatry at University of California, San Francisco and her team have found that stress significantly shortened the length of telomeres, the tips of chromosomes within cells that can be used as a measure of the cells’ ageing process. The shorter the telomere, the faster our deterioration.
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ON THE FACE OF IT
From creams to corrective procedures, Ruchi Shah and Arati Rajan Menon take a look at what's available to put your best face forward

Hollywood actor Susan Sarandon is the spokesperson for cosmetic giant Revlon’s Time-Defying Range of anti-ageing cosmetics. No surprise there—Sarandon is great looking at 59. But when fellow actor Scarlett Johansson, 38 years her junior at 21, confesses to media that she’s already begun to use anti-ageing cream, it is news. “Everybody in Hollywood is so beautiful,” she said. “It’s hard not to feel under pressure. And I have an obsessive character.”

Johansson’s obsession, echoed by millions of men and women of all ages, across the world, has fuelled the boom in the anti-ageing market.

Worldwide, the market—led by names like Avon, L’Oreal, Estee Lauder, Clarins and Johnson & Johnson—is growing at 8 per cent annually, and is predicted to approach $41.94 billion this year, according to Lifespan, a non-profit organisation in Rochester, New York, which provides information and services to seniors. In India, there is no audited data available, but the anti-ageing segment is said to be close to Rs 200 crore of the Rs 1,200 crore skincare industry by market sources. Today, from creams to corrective non-surgical procedures like Botox, dermal fillers and facial peels, the world’s best is available in India.

CREAM OF THE CROP
International companies like L’Oreal, Garnier, Avon and Oriflame have peddled their products with great success in India—greater awareness on the part of women about what’s available internationally and eye-catching advertisements in magazines have done wonders.

L’Oreal launched its first anti-wrinkle cream back in 1994. In 2005, the company launched ‘Men’s Expert’, an anti-ageing range for men, and Vichy Laboratories, part of the L’Oreal stable, introduced its Novadiol range for ‘post-menopausal women’. Designed to correct skin sagging, Novadiol Day Cream costs Rs 1,190 while Novadiol Night Cream costs Rs 1,290. Vichy has also launched the Myo range for ‘first wrinkles’, including the Myokine Day Cream (Rs 1,190) and Myokine Eye Cream (Rs 990). And for deep wrinkles, the company’s LiftActiv range (from Rs 1,190 to Rs 1,290) claims to wipe off creases in a month. These will compete with existing products like Wrinkle Lift (Rs 179) by Garnier, which entered the Indian market in 1996.

“Awareness about anti-ageing products is rapidly increasing,” says Sulakshna Pathak, marketing manager, Oriflame India. “Ten years ago we had two anti-ageing products. Today, we have an extensive range of over 20 products specific to anti-ageing.” The company’s Time

Awareness about anti-ageing products is rapidly increasing in India
Rendez vous with your inner self

Sit, relax & watch the world go by
Goa, a heaven of peace offers you
not just a holiday but also an opportunity
to rejuvenate your senses through
a total Mind, Body & Soul experience

Discover Self, Discover Life

GOA - a land of Graces and Getaways
Reversing Range, with products for men and women, costs between Rs 498 and Rs 1,090.

“Today, the Indian woman feels skin care is a necessity,” Vandana Luthra, chairman of VLCC, a Rs 130 crore health and beauty company with 100 clinics in India and five in Dubai, told Business Standard. VLCC has recently launched a ‘complete anti-ageing system’, I by Vandana Luthra—the package comes for Rs 4,210. Also jumping on the bandwagon is Hindustan Lever Ltd. The company will soon launch the Pond’s international range of anti-wrinkle products in India.

WHAT EXACTLY ARE THEY PAYING FOR?
All anti-ageing products contend that they are ‘cosmeceuticals’—cosmetics that claim potential benefits from additives such as retinol, Vitamin C, Vitamin E, and antioxidants such as green tea, seaweed, wheat germ, aloe vera. Dr Utpal Durve, consultant dermatologist at BSES Hospital in Mumbai, says, “There is no proof that the anti-oxidants present make them effective.”

SO HOW EXACTLY DO THESE CREAMS HELP?
“Face creams can arrest the symptoms of extrinsic aging, which happens because of exposure to ultra violet (UV) light,” says Dr S G A Rao, chairman and managing director of Bangalore-based Cryo Stem Cell (Kar) Pvt Ltd. This, Dr Durve agrees with.

“But Dr Sanjiv Kandhari, Delhi-based consultant dermatovenerologist (who specialises in the treatment of skin disorders and venereal diseases) and leprologist (who specialises in the study of leprosy), feels cosmeceuticals do more than just block the sun.

He says, “Ingredients like retinoic acid and alpha hydroxides reduce wrinkles and fine lines after consistent use, say six to eight months.” For many, it may not be soon enough. “Creams take a long time before you can see the effects,” said Paula Begoun, syndicated columnist and cosmetics consumer expert, on Oprah, the popular US talk show hosted by Oprah Winfrey. “

And it’s hard not to be seduced by the fantasy of a magic youth bullet, which explains the popularity of procedures like Botox.”

Today, the Indian woman feels skin care is not an indulgence but a necessity

From Vichy Laboratories

Product: Lift Activ PRO
What it does: Reduces deep wrinkles
Price: Rs 1,190 for 50 ml

Product: Myokine Eye Corrective Anti wrinkle Care
What it does: Smooths out eye contours and clears the under eye area
Price: Rs 990 for 15 ml

Product: Novadiol day and night care
What it does: Makes the skin taut and smooth
Price: Rs 1,290 for 50 ml
FREEZING YOUTH
In January 2005, The Hindu reported that around 250 Botox procedures were done every month in Mumbai and Delhi alone. This number has risen to 500 in the past few months, claims website rediff.com. At Kaya Skin Clinic, which has 42 clinics across India, 25-30 Botox procedures are done in each clinic per month compared to five a year ago. And ‘Botox parties’, where celebrities spread the word about the ‘magic’ treatment, are popular in cities.

Anti-ageing products need to be used for a long time before you can see the effect

Botox, a natural protein extracted from the bacterium clostridium botulinum, is administered by injection in small doses to facial muscles where wrinkles develop. It blocks the transmission of nerve impulses to the injected muscles and can remove laugh lines, wrinkles on the neck and crow’s feet (on the side of your eyes). A single sitting costs a minimum of Rs 4,800 (going up to Rs 20,000) and you need to repeat the shots periodically. The effect, which is visible in three to seven days, lasts for four to six months.

Gurpreet Khanna (name changed), 51, who runs a small beauty parlour in Ghatkopar, Mumbai, can’t stop raving about it. She was being treated for pigmentation on her forehead at renowned cosmetic dermatologist Dr Rekha Sheth’s Yuva clinic in Juhu, Mumbai when, six months ago, Dr Sheth (who is also founder and president of the Cosmetology Society, India) suggested she try Botox for the fine facial lines. “I work out, do yoga and watch my diet but I felt Botox could help look much younger instantly,” says Khanna.

Engineer Rajeev Yadav, 49, from Delhi recently tried Botox at a VLCC clinic. “We read the same magazines as women do, have similar aspirations, so why not opt for similar grooming rituals?” he wonders.

Product: Botox
What it does: Removes laugh lines, wrinkles and crow’s feet when injected in small doses to muscles on the face
Price: Ranges between Rs 4,800 (single sitting) and Rs 20,000

Product: Garnier Wrinkle Lift
What it does: Stimulates skin regeneration and reduces fine lines
Price: Rs 175

Documented side-effects of Botox include headaches, respiratory infections, temporary drooping of the eyelids, a mask-like expression and nausea. However, for Khanna, there were no side-effects. “The change was noticeable,” she beams.

The popularity of Botox is not restricted to women. In fact, sources at Allergan, the American pharmaceutical company that has patented Botox, say 40 per cent of people who opt for the procedure in India are men. Businessman Subhash Chawla, 51, tried Botox at Delhi’s Aesthetic Clinic in February 2005 and repeated the process after nine months. “I found it a bit costly, but I am happy,” says Chawla.
IN THE CLINIC

Today, a host of clinics, like Yuva (with two branches in Mumbai), Kaya, Blush Skin Clinic (three branches in Mumbai), and VLCC offer Botox and other non-invasive procedures to arrest ageing, including skin polishing, photo facials, glycolic peels, dermal fillers and non-surgical facelifts. Apart from the four metros and cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad and Pune, these services have been gaining popularity in smaller cities like Jalandhar, Indore, Bhopal and Surat. “Now, there is a solution to every problem,” says pioneering Indian dermatologist Jamuna Pai. Pai says her Blush clinics have about 300 clients a month; 50 per cent of them are 40 years old and above. Her oldest client is 85 years old.

While skin polishing (Rs 800 to Rs 1,250) claims to bring back the lustre in your skin by removing dead cells with crystals of aluminium oxide, photo facials (Rs 13,500 to Rs 15,000 for a five-session package), use a laser to stimulate and rejuvenate collagen fibres, which tighten your skin. Glycolic peels (Rs 4,500 to Rs 8,500) are administered after skin polishing for people looking to reduce pigmentation, scars or open pores. Here, a solution called glycolic acid (derived from sugarcane) is applied to dead cells to dissolve them and improve cell renewal. Though there is no visible peeling of the face, dryness is common after the procedure. And during a dermal filler (from Rs 14,000 to Rs 18,000 per shot), hyaluronic acid, often mixed with acrylic) is injected into the skin to plump it up, thus covering deep lines.

A host of clinics in India offer Botox and other techniques to arrest ageing

The latest procedure is mesotherapy—it claims to be an answer to fine wrinkles, dark circles, double chins and puffy eyes to cellulite (dimpled fat found on the thighs and buttocks). It works by stimulating the mesoderm, a layer of fat cells and connective tissue under the skin, to tighten sagging skin. A ‘mesogun’ is used to inject substances such as vitamins, amino acids and fat-dissolving compounds at multiple points in the required area. The cost: Rs 10,000 to Rs 18,000 per session.

“All our clients want to look like Hema Malini,” says Delhi-based Dr Ashish Bhola, with a laugh. He is a consultant dermatologist at VLCC and specialises in Botox, dermal fillers and peels, operating in 18 VLCC centres. “Forty per cent of our clients are above 50 years old.” One of them is Madhu Chima, 55, a retired architect from the Army. “I had deep lines under my lip and lived with bad skin all my life,” she says. “Recently, I decided to go in for peels. Now, my husband has started looking at me differently!” she says with a laugh.

Product: Oriflame 45+

What it does: Targets hormonal ageing symptoms like dry skin, improves elasticity and clears the skin

Price: Products range from Rs 498 to Rs 1,090
With silver clients like Chima, is safety a concern? “First, we check for lines and crow’s feet,” explains Dr Bhola. “We don’t allow anyone to go for it just for the sake of it. I once refused to do Botox on a lady with clear skin.”

This is the party line at all the clinics. “With advancing age, the skin tends to be drier so the risk of flakiness is there,” says Dr Maithili Kamath, dermatologist and cosmetologist at Kaya Skin Clinic, Bandra, Mumbai. “Also, people suffering from high blood sugar are susceptible to infection. We begin any procedure only after the client is cured.” These clients include an increasing number of men. Dr Bhola says the women-to-men ratio is now 50-50 at VLCC clinics. And according to Dr Kamath, 30 per cent of those who use the services of Kaya are men.

“Attending to your skin is no longer a female preserve,” she adds. In the past three years, Kaya’s male clients have tripled, now comprising 20,000. In fact, the popularity of its services has led Kaya to announce that it expects a turnover of Rs 45 crore in 2006, compared to Rs 25 crore in 2005.

THE DOWNSIDE
Although the number of takers is on the rise, it is clear that everyone can’t afford it. Pramila Shastri (name changed), 55, a housewife from Versova, Mumbai, tried Botox at Yuva in May 2005 and was happy with the results. But she isn’t sure she can afford another session. “My daughter paid the bill of Rs 13,000 and my husband didn’t even know,” she confesses.

Concern about side-effects is another aspect that makes many think twice. Mumbai-based cosmetic surgeon Dr Vijay Sharma, who runs the Cosmetic Surgery Centre of India, is extremely critical. “When the Botox effect goes away in three to four months, the face starts drooping.”

NATURE’S WAY
Another route to a youthful face is diet. Even at quick-fix clinics like Kaya, the experts do not short-change its importance. “We recommend plenty of water intake,” says Dr Kamath. “And Vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables, like pumpkins, oranges, lemons, mangoes, papaya and green leafy vegetables, give nutrition to the skin.” Combine good eating with regular exercise to stimulate your skin.

“Lifestyle is also important,” Dr Raminder Singh, consultant physician at the Geriatric Department in KEM Hospital, Mumbai, tells Harmony. “Smoking causes premature wrinkles and excess intake of alcohol dehydrates the skin.” In other words, live better and you’ll look better. That’s an easy one.

— with Teena Baruah in New Delhi
The work of Homai Vyarawalla, India’s first woman photojournalist, is the subject of a new book.

An encounter with the trailblazer, and her work

When India was fighting for freedom, Homai Vyarawalla was already liberated. She became India’s first woman photojournalist in 1939. Sixty-seven years later, she has pulled off another first—at 92, she is the oldest woman in India to have her work chronicled in a book.

India in Focus—Camera Chronicles of Homai Vyarawalla is history in black and white. Published by Parzor, a UNESCO project, it was released in Delhi on 25 February. Written by documentary filmmaker Sabina Gadihoke, the book records Vyarawalla’s work from 1939 to 1970, in outstanding images captured with her Rolleiflex and later Speedgraphic, cameras “as huge as my head”.

“I shot anything that was interesting,” says Vyarawalla. She was a regular contributor to Onlooker magazine, which covered social events in Bombay. She also photographed beggars, and British women training as ambulance drivers during World War II for The Illustrated Weekly of India.

Vyarawalla’s love for photography began with the Rolleiflex, which was gifted to her husband Maneckshaw, an accountant with The Times of India in Bombay. With the help of magazines like Popular Photography, Vyarawalla taught herself the art and went on to contribute photographs to the newspaper. In 1942, the Vyarawallas moved to Delhi—and she got herself a job as full-time...
photographer with The Times. Dressed in a sari, with two huge camera bags slung across her shoulders, Vyarawalla rode her bicycle around Delhi, chasing stories at odd hours. “When I was lost, I would ring the nearest doorbell for directions,” she recalls with a chuckle. A few years later, after several saris were torn by colleagues stepping on them, she switched to salwar kameez.

Her favourite subject was the “gracious” Jawaharlal Nehru. Among the few photographs that Vyarawalla has on display in her sitting room in a small first-floor flat in Vadodara’s suburban Nizampura is one of Nehru embracing his sister Vijaya-lakshmi Pandit, whose face is partially covered. “People think the woman is me!” she says, adding, “The appreciation of people like Nehru made a world of difference in the professional relationship.” Vyarawalla’s sense of timing and her eye for a telling image earned her an iconic status.

However, in 1970, she decided to quit photography. “My colleagues were gentlemen but the new lot did not know how to behave,” she says. “There was also the menace of security that started with Mrs Indira Gandhi. Photographers were treated with scant respect.” Her decision showed strength of character, a quality that resurfaced years later in 1988 when she prayed to God to take away her only son suffering from cancer. She looks you in the eye when she talks about quitting photography, leaving Delhi after her husband’s death, and living alone. And she is unfazed about disappearing from public memory in 1970.

Now, Vyarawalla lives alone in her flat—without even a phone. She does all the chores, tends to her small garden, stitches her own clothes, and even drives her black Fiat to the market. “Everyone should develop hobbies for the time when our work is no longer the centre of our world,” is her take. Her world consists of a couple of friends in Vadodara and some in Pilani, with whom she corresponds regularly. “My life is isolated but I am proud to be independent,” she says, with conviction.

— Sandhya Bordewekar
I photo feature
(Left) Governor-General of India Lord Louis Mountbatten takes the final salute at the Guard of Honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan, just before heading back to England on 21 June 1948. Standing next to him is Lady Edwina.

(Top) Cabaret dancers perform at a restaurant in Connaught Place. This was part of the Independence celebration in 1947.
(Anti-clockwise from left) This is one of Vyarawalla’s widely published images which also reveals her sense of timing. Nehru is waiting at Palam Airport to receive his sister Vijaylakshmi Pandit, who was then India’s ambassador to Russia. Vyarawalla took the picture when the person who was talking to Nehru moved away to expose the sign board.

As part of tradition, hundreds of folk dancers who came to New Delhi to participate in the Republic Day Parade were invited to garden parties by the President at Rashtrapati Bhavan and the Prime Minister at Teen Murti. These performers often attended the parties in their regional costumes and broke into impromptu song and dance. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had no inhibitions and would often join in.

On a pleasant winter morning, in the Moghul Gardens at Rashtrapati Bhavan, Nehru brought along his grandsons, Rajiv (left) and Sanjay. He lost no opportunity to spend some ‘free’ time with his family and always found a playful way to teach the boys about nature and other subjects.
This photograph is not taken by Vyawalla. In fact, she's seen here (in salwar kameez) shooing off hangers-on who were trying to get into the frame. On special occasions like birthdays, selected photographers were invited to shoot political leaders. In this photograph, Indira Gandhi was posing for the cameras on her birthday. About hangers-on, Vyawalla says, “These people were a big nuisance. Many a time, we had to call the security to take them away.”
In 1969, Jacqueline Kennedy was on a private visit to spend nine days at Teen Murti with the Nehru-Gandhi family. Here, she poses with Mrs Indira Gandhi to oblige photographers.
**Light bites**

**Dr Pushpesh Pant** serves up royal recipes that your body can live with

Can you recall a self-respecting Awadh ruler who lived without the heady stuff associated with carefree youth: *shabab* (women), *sharab* (wine) and shami kebab? Even if you hold back on wine and women in later years, the shami can still be your lissom companion. Here’s a variation on the traditional deadly, deep-fried snack where the quantity of red meat is radically minimised in individual portions that are further lightened by the lentils and the (optional) delicate filling. For vegetarians, I have tried to spruce up a Kashmiri classic (*shahi shalgam*) and make it much lighter. Feel free to improvise both the recipes.

**SHAHI SHALGAM**

**Preparation time:** 20 minutes  
**Cooking time:** 30 minutes  
**Serves:** 2-4

**INGREDIENTS**
- Turnips: 250 gm, peeled and quartered
- Turmeric powder: 1 tsp
- Cinnamon stick: 1, an inch long
- Green cardamom: 4
- Black cardamom: 4
- Onion paste: 1 tbsp, fried
- Kashmiri red chilli powder: 2 tbsp (dissolved in 1/2 cup of water)
- Garlic paste: 1 tbsp
- Refined oil: 2 tbsp
- Tomato puree (preferably fresh): 1/2 cup
- Salt to taste

**METHOD**
Mix 1 tsp salt with the turnips and keep them aside for 15 minutes. Wash well, pat dry and cook until light brown in a non-stick pan glazed with refined oil. Remove and keep aside. Put enough water in a deep pan and add turmeric powder, cinnamon, cardamom, salt, onion paste, red chilly powder and garlic. Bring the mixture to a boil, stirring continuously. Boil for 7-8 minutes. Add fried turnips and cook till the turnips are tender to your taste. Remove and stir in tomato puree for 2-3 minutes.
SHAMI KEBAB

Preparation time: 45 minutes  
Cooking time: 5-7 minutes  
Serves: 5-6

INGREDIENTS
- Mutton mince: 250 gm  
- Channa dal: 30 gm  
- Masoor dal: 15 gm  
- Black cardamom: 2-3  
- Red chillies: 2 (whole)  
- Cinnamon: 1 stick, 1/2 inch long  
- Ginger: 1/2 inch piece  
- Cloves: 2  
- Black peppercorn: 6-8 gm  
- Fresh coriander: a large sprig, chopped  
- Green chillies: 15 gm  
- Salt: to taste (preferably the low sodium variety  
and just enough to register on the tongue)
- Refined oil: Just enough to fry on a non-stick pan  
- Filling (optional): finely chopped onions, ginger, fresh coriander and raisins

METHOD
Mix the mince with channa and masoor dal, cardamoms, red chillies, peppercorn, cinnamon, cloves, ginger and salt. Add just a little water and cook the mince until the water has gone. Cool. Discard the whole spices. Grind the mince to a fine paste and add chopped coriander and green chillies. Mix well. Divide the mixture into 6-8 equal portions and shape them into balls. Moisten the palms of your hand and flatten the mince balls. In case you want to use the filling, place some of it in the centre and roll into a ball and flatten again. Heat some oil in a non-stick pan and deep fry until they are a crisp golden brown.
All about arthritis

Dr Arun Mullaji tells us about different forms of arthritis and treatment options available

The elderly generally suffer from ‘osteoarthritis’, which affects hip and knee bones

We are all living longer, but we can’t increase the lifespan of our joints. With age, the thick pad of cartilage that acts as a cushion between our bones wears out. As a result, bone ends grind against each other and cause pain. The good news: this cartilage can be maintained for longer with diet and the right kind of exercise (see Yoga Rx this issue).

Different people have different pain thresholds. When medicines and physiotherapy aren’t enough, surgery is a viable option for people suffering from severe arthritis. However, hip and knee replacements are not a permanent solution—they last between 10 and 20 years, depending on general health and activity level. Thus, you must evaluate your condition and options carefully before opting for surgery.

DIFFERENT FORMS
Arthritis is common after the age of 50, but some forms can affect younger people as well. The elderly generally suffer from ‘osteoarthritis’, which affects hip and knee bones. ‘Rheumatoid arthritis’, which affects more than one joint, is prevalent in women between 20 and 50 years of age. The cause could either be genetic or a weak immune system.

‘Avascular necrosis of the bone’
is a type of inflammation caused by temporary or permanent loss of blood supply to the bones. Without blood, the bone tissue collapses. This affects the ends of long bones, especially the femur, the bone from hip to the knee. Another condition that affects our joints is ‘ankylosing spondylitis’—vertebrae fusion, characterised by stiffness of backbone and hip joints. Women are more predisposed to arthritis than men. Others at risk include the obese, those who have suffered joint injury and people with a history of arthritis.

**EARLY TREATMENT**  
There is no drug to regenerate cartilage but exercise, physiotherapy and medicines are all helpful in coping with arthritis. Walking, swimming and cycling are beneficial long-term activities. Take drugs only under medical supervision.

**SURGICAL OPTIONS**  
Although hip/knee replacement is commonplace today, the decision to opt for surgery cannot be taken lightly. The operation must be carefully selected to suit each patient. But, there are many new techniques that are less invasive and enable quicker recovery.

‘Unicompartmental knee resurfacing’ is an advanced joint preservation technique. Less invasive, it offers immediate pain relief and quick recovery. It is an excellent option for those in the early stages of osteoarthritis when the damage is restricted to one half of the knee joint. If performed at the right time, the rest of the joint is preserved, and total replacement can be avoided.

Soft tissues, while the use of lightweight material like titanium for implants allow more range of movement to patients. As titanium integrates well with bone, it can be used in a ‘cementless’ fashion (without using bone cement to fix it to underlying bone). Further, pain can be minimised with pain-control pumps that constantly deliver painkillers into the blood.

**Seniors generally suffer from osteoarthritis which affects hip and knee bones**

‘Hip resurfacing’ is a recent technique of preserving bone. The hip joint is a ball and socket joint. In conventional replacement, the entire ball is removed and a metal ball with a stem is inserted into the thighbone. In hip resurfacing, a thin metal cap is applied on the natural ball. This cap moves against a metal cup placed in the socket.

‘Arthroplasty’ involves replacing the ball and socket joint in the hip with a prosthetic model. In ‘hemi-arthroplasty’, only the head of the femur is replaced. Surgical techniques with smaller incisions cause less damage to revision surgery is also available to correct replacements that have failed after many years of satisfactory function.

The cost of replacement surgery depends on the exact design of parts used, length of the hospital stay, and other problems that may need additional care. Generally, the medical cost ranges between Rs 1.5 lakh and Rs 2.5 lakh per joint. Today, the success rate of joint replacement surgeries is over 90 per cent. Even for senior citizens on the other side of 80, the results are good unless there are mitigating medical conditions.

*Dr Arun Mullaji is a joint replacement and arthritis surgeon practicing at Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai*
Eat the pain away!

Research has shown connections between food and certain forms of arthritis, says Payal Khurana

ARTHRITIS: The first step to treat arthritis is to maintain body weight. Joints affected by arthritis are already under strain and obesity will aggravate the symptoms. There is also a clear link between being overweight and an increased risk of developing osteoarthritis.

You can reduce your weight by switching to a diet that is high in nutrition but low in calories. Focus more on fruits and vegetables while avoiding high fat foods. And try low impact sports like swimming and brisk walking.

A Mediterranean type of diet or the eating practices of those living in that area, especially Greece, can help control the inflammation of rheumatoid arthritis. Here, people have a low—fat diet that includes plenty of raw or mildly processed vegetables, fruits, moderate poultry and dairy products accompanied daily by a glass of red wine. The benefits include fewer swollen joints and less pain. An added bonus is lower blood cholesterol levels. When you opt for a diet, do ensure to take high levels of Omega-3 fats that help reduce inflammation when eaten regularly over a few months. Sources are fatty fish like sardines, tuna and salmon; nuts and seeds like walnuts, almonds; cooking oils like canola and soybean; soy and tofu, and green leafy vegetables. Monosaturated fats, contained in olive oil, canola and soybean oils may actually help to raise levels of HDL (good cholesterol) while reducing levels of LDL (bad cholesterol). Phytochemicals like beta cryptoxanthine and lycopene—present in oranges, green leafy vegetables and tomatoes—reduce the odds of arthritis by 30 per cent to 40 per cent. Antioxidants like Vitamin E and C—present in citrus fruits, papaya, pineapple, guava, almonds, wheat germ and nuts—protect against knee pain and help in connective tissue repair.

Tea, claim some experts, may help decrease inflammation. Chicago based Society of Critical Care Medicine in January 2002 revealed that green tea contains a type of polyphenol known as epigallo-catechin-3 gallate, or EGCG, which inhibits the expression of the ‘interieukin-8’ gene, which stimulates inflammation. Black tea is good for you too. It contains theaflavins, strong phytochemicals that help to protect the body. Sipping tea instead of other drinks may help to ward off painful fractures as it includes anti-inflammatory properties.

OSTEOPOROSIS: This occurs more in post-menopausal women. The bones get porous and brittle, making you more susceptible to fractures of the wrist, hip and spine.

Add calcium-rich foods to your diet to combat it. Good sources are râgi, Bengal gram, rajma, soyabean, radish leaves, fenugreek (methi) leaves, almonds, sesame seeds and buffalo’s milk. Isoflavones present in soy foods, like nutri-nuggets and tofu. Prunes also reverse osteoporosis. In addition, soy contains magnesium and boron, which help to increase the calcium content of bones.

The writer is a dietician from Delhi University
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Natural painkillers

Yoga can bring relief to constant joint aches. Shameem Akthar shows you how

**FIRST, LET’S DISPEL A COMMON MYTH. JOINT**

Pains are not unpleasant companions to old age. Whether you are young or old, unused or misused joints cause a lot of discomfort. Strengthening the supporting structure around your joints and introducing certain lifestyle changes can bring relief.

Our joints often hurt because of postural defects or a work condition that excessively overworks a weaker joint at the expense of others. Obesity contributes to this overload. Women are more prone (by around 10 per cent) than men to such pains.

The first step towards repair is diet modification. Higher intake of Vitamin C (citrus fruits) not only helps in pain management but also hastens healing. Limiting intake of meat also helps, as calcium is leached out of the body when there is an overdose of protein. Avoiding refined foods (maida in certain breads, desserts) is also recommended as such foods demand a lot from the body, draining it of stored nutrients that should be put to better use, such as repair.

The next best balm is yoga—it relieves pain by revving up blood circulation. This facilitates provision of nutrients and repairing agents to injured joints. In fact, energy-releasing poses (pawan muktasana) is designed to provide relief in joint pain. Certain breathing practices (pranayama), such as alternate nostril breathing (nadi shodhana) and humming bee (brahmari), heal by improving respiration, thereby helping blood circulation and nutrient transport. Adequate rest, through the meditative sleep of yoga (yoga nidra), also reawakens the mind-body connection.

**Yogic moves**

**For knee pain: Ankle bending (goof naman)**

Sit up straight, legs stretched in front. Press your toes towards the floor. Release and rest for a few seconds by flexing the toes back. Do this five to 10 times. If you feel pain, you may bend at the knees initially. This strengthens the leg muscles to support body weight. After a few days, breathing out while pressing toes towards the floor, and breathing in while pressing them back. If you hold the pose for long, continue to breathe normally.

**For knee pain: Raised legs (Uttanpadasana)**

Lie back, feet touching each other and arms on the side. Inhale and raise the right leg. Hold for a few seconds breathing normally. Exhale and lower the leg to the floor. Repeat five to 10 times. Relax. Repeat with the left leg. Initially, if your knees hurt, bend lightly at the joint. As you advance, flex the toes of the raised leg gently towards yourself. This will help work out the muscles at the back of the leg. This pose has the same benefits as goof naman.

**For elbow pain: Wrist bending (manibandha naman)**

Sit down, both legs stretched in front. Hold hands out in front, at shoulder level. Flex hands backwards, so you can see your nails. Hold. Now, press both hands down at the wrist, so the palms face your body. Repeat five to 10 times. After a few days, breathe in while flexing both hands, and exhale while pressing down.

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 advice given here)
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EAT EASY

Don’t fret about fat. A recent study published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association,* to determine whether a low-fat diet reduces the risk of cancer and heart disease, reveals that a **low-fat diet does not prevent breast cancer, heart attack and strokes.** After following 49,000 women aged between 50 and 79 for eight years, researchers found that women who followed a low-fat diet were at equal risk for breast and colon cancer as those who didn’t restrict fat in their diet. “Scientific evidence shows it’s your genetic and hormonal make-up that makes you susceptible to cancer,” confirms Dr Sameer Kaul, cancer specialist at Apollo Hospital in Delhi. According to current dietary wisdom, you must avoid artery-blocking trans fats (found in processed foods) and saturated fat (found in dairy products).

STAND FIRM

The latest on footwear is **shoes fitted with vibrating insoles.** James J Collins, professor of biomedical engineering at Boston University, who has developed them, claims they will help you regain balance. In the January 2006 issue of *The Annals of Neurology,* he writes that these insoles enable diabetics with numb feet and stroke victims with uncertain balance to stand without swaying. The vibrations are indiscernible but they stimulate neurons in your soles, sending out signals to the brain to promote balance. “As people age, the mechanical sensors in feet, joints and muscles degrade,” says Collins. “Signals from the feet and lower limbs don’t reach the brain. People then stiffen their muscles to try to improve stability and that increases the postural sway.” Collins’ silicon-gel insoles are powered by three lithium batteries and will hit the US market after clinical trials are over.

SEEK, DON’T HIDE

A recent survey conducted on 936 women at the University of Florida reveals that **those over 50 are prone to ‘hidden’ vascular diseases** like chest pain, dizziness and discomfort even though their angiographies may reveal coronary arteries free of blockages. So beware, cautions Dr Carl J Pepine, chief of cardiovascular medicine at the University of Florida, as any delay in diagnosis may only lead to weakening of the heart muscle that can prove to be ultimately fatal. According to him, stress tests to measure blood flow to the heart offer a better diagnosis than angiography in such cases. “Women with a family history of heart disease should be extra cautious,” he says. So, trust your gut—and stay on guard.
POCKET DOC
Meet the newest guardian angel on the block: the Automated External Defibrillator (AED). This portable gadget can talk to you, telling you what to do in case of cardiac arrest. It can even deliver an electrical shock to revive the patient, drastically improving his chances of making it to a hospital alive. Roughly the size of a lunch box, the AED gives instructions like, ‘Remove patient’s clothes’, and ‘Don’t touch the patient’. It even doubles up as an ECG and can automatically determine whether an electric shock is needed to revive the heart. And it’s so user-friendly that even kids can operate it. “Sudden cardiac arrests are fairly common in India and are likely to increase,” says Dr K S Reddy, head of the cardiology department at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi. “If such devices are made available at malls, airports and railways stations, a lot of precious time can be saved.” The only hitch is the price: Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs 2 lakh.

THE TIPPLE EFFECT
A little alcohol can actually save your heart.
Doctors at Max Devki Devi Heart and Vascular Institute, Delhi, recently used it to treat 52-year-old Kamaljeet Chaddha, who was suffering from hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (thickening of heart muscles), a disease that affects one in 10,000 people in India. The doctors used a procedure called alcohol ablation, which involves injecting alcohol to cause a ‘controlled heart attack’. This kills the extra muscle mass and shrinks it. Before the surgery, Chaddha faced breathlessness and chest discomfort and was told by doctors that there was no cure. He was operated upon on 31 January by Dr Praveen Chandra, who calls this procedure the reverse of angioplasty, where blockages are removed. “We blocked the artery and stopped the blood flow,” he says.

HEAL THE PAIN
Have pain, don’t worry. The Indian Spinal Injuries Centre in New Delhi has established a Department of Pain Medicine, which includes a pain clinic, interventional pain management centre and indoor admissions for patients with acute chronic spinal pain.

The department is headed by Dr G P Dureja, who earlier headed the pain management clinic at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in the capital. The centre will not only treat the physical cause of pain but also the emotional, cognitive, behavioural, vocational and social aspects of chronic spinal pain, says Dr Dureja. For details, contact 011-52255225.
Awaken!

It’s time you become aware of your higher self, urges Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT THAT YOU ARE A visitor from the far reaches of the Universe who has just landed on earth. If you revive the memory of the worlds you left behind, you will possess a rare knowledge that is not shared by most of the inhabitants of this small planet: a wide perspective and broad overview of the mystery of existence. In fact, you are a citizen of the Universe—not just the physical world, but all levels and spheres of reality.

In order to achieve these tasks, however, it was necessary to assume a body moulded out of the fabric of your parents and ancestors; you chose them for the purposes of incarnation. As time passes, you became more adapted to your new physical and social environment—you worked hard, fell in love, developed friendships, started a family, and travelled the world.

For a while, your life on earth went smoothly. Then you were affected by a major crisis, a personal upheaval, and life no longer seemed too certain. In the vast reaches of the sky and the sweetness of nature, you rediscovered something of yourself that had been forgotten. Swept by feelings of awe and wonder, you began to have a dialogue within yourself about the nature of reality. Something incredible seemed to lie just behind the surface of things—yet the answer eluded you, slipping beyond the grasp of your realisation.

Then suddenly, after years of searching, all the memories of your previous existence came back to you in a flash of awakening. It was as if the scales had fallen from your eyes; you possessed an x-ray like intelligence that penetrated the truth concealed by the veil of creation—the revelation of the glory of the Universe—the One Being people called God. The miracle was that as you awakened, so, too, did the whole Universe.

From the dance of the atoms and the choreography of the galaxies to the unfurling of a flower and the struggle for self-esteem in those who had been broken by life, the entire Cosmos resounded with the clarion call, “Awaken!” And though you found that you still had the same body, relationships, and responsibilities as before, your experience of these circumstances had shifted: you had become the eyes through which God sees. Your glance was the divine glance.

In this parable is contained the essence of Sufism—the story of every soul’s descent into existence, its experiences of suffering brought about by separation from its original state of being. For, from the moment the soul assumes a physical form, the memory of the celestial spheres from which it has descended is obscured; we remain conscious only of the things that have occurred to us since our birth. But the lost knowledge of the Universe resides within our unconscious.

Indeed, the secret of Sufism is to shift from the vantage point of our personal point of view to the divine point of view. While we may think that our circumstances are the cause of this frustration, the real source lies in not being aware of our higher self. Thus, the goal in meditation is to reconnect our personal self to this transpersonal dimension of our being.

Excerpt from Awakening: A Sufi Experience (Tarcher/Putnam; 1999). Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan (1916-2004), a spiritual leader in the lineage of the Chishti Sufi Order (Ajmer, India), is the founder of the Sufi Order International
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Web of deception

Dinesh C Sharma warns the Purohits against cyber crimes and scams on the Internet

I have found the perfect second career, Dinesh!” Mr Purohit shouted down the phone. His excitement was palpable. “Tell me now,” I replied. “Well, I have received a proposal from overseas by email,” he said. “They want my help in managing their money. The amount runs in millions and I will get a lot of it for helping them!” It sounded all too familiar. To confirm my suspicions, I asked him, “Is it from Nigeria?” That really threw him. “How did you know that?” he sounded baffled. I told him I would explain when I was in Mumbai and warned him not to reply to the email.

When I landed up at the Purohits’ apartment a few days later, the welcome I received from him was a shade cooler than usual. Mrs Purohit more than made up for it though, sitting me down with coffee and hot samosa. Even before I could take my first bite, her husband launched a barrage of questions: “Why did you tell me not to reply to that mail? Now, maybe the offer isn’t valid anymore. Are you surprised anyone would offer me a job? And how did you know it was from Nigeria?” He was confused, and a little hurt, so I explained myself.

“Millions of mails like this are sent over the Internet every day globally to practically everybody
with an email account,” I told them. “Actually, these are cyber crimes, or frauds being perpetrated through the Net.” The mail the Purohits received is called the ‘Nigerian fraud’ and it is fairly recent.

The bait is the millions of dollars ‘there for the taking’. Once you are lured in, these people get you to shell out money for the ‘expenses’ required to transfer these millions to you. Many people fall into the trap. Once you transfer some ‘fees’ to them, the demand for money goes on, while the promised funds are never transferred. Sometimes, victims are even lured to Nigeria, where the worst, like kidnapping for ransom can be expected.

Such frauds are also called ‘advance fee frauds’ and ‘4-1-9’ scams (the Nigerian equivalent of Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code). Most 419 scammers pose as lawyers and sons of former generals or ministers to trick you into thinking they are important. They are always seeking a ‘foreign partner’ to help them. “Yes, yes,” Mr Purohit cut in. “My mail was just like that.” Such mails also mention the Central Bank of Nigeria, I added.

“Thank god you warned us in time,” said Mrs Purohit. “Yes,” echoed her husband, the warmth in his eyes restored. I told them that such fraudsters were asked me for my personal data,” said Mrs Purohit. “But I never win so I knew it was fishy!"

She had hit the nail on the head. This phenomenon is called ‘phishing’—fishing for personal data—and is a menace in the US. “Under no circumstances should you share your address, bank account number or pension fund details to a stranger over email,” I warned them. “Else, you could be duped of all your money.”

Never disclose your password to anyone, including the bank staff.
Memorise your PIN. If you must write it down, keep it safe.
Change password/PIN regularly.
While entering your Internet Banking ID and password, ensure there is no one around you.
Always log out of Net banking after using the service and close the browser application.
Avoid accessing Net banking through cyber-cafes.
Clear your browser’s cache and history after each banking session.
Remember to disable your auto-complete function on your browser, as this will make your login ID and password available to anyone having access to your computer. To turn it off, go to your Explorer browser, click the Tools menu, click Internet Options, click the Content tab, and click the Autocomplete button. Then, disable ‘User Names and Passwords on Forms’.
If you are using a wireless network or device, consult your vendor/service provider to ensure that your network or devices are configured with adequate security settings.
Install good firewall and virus detection software to protect against hackers, virus and update them regularly.
Do not open email attachments from strangers.
Any phishing attempt or cyber crime should be reported back to the bank concerned.

Stealing personal data including banking passwords is a major online fraud

Dinesh C Sharma is a science and technology columnist based in New Delhi. He is a regular contributor to Cnet News.com (US) and The Lancet (UK)
God of small things

Good things come in small packages. Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation is offering special packages for senior citizens to visit pilgrim spots in the state.

**Trip Itinerary:** 3 nights 4 days aspecial package for senior citizens for Devi Darshan

**Cost:** Rs 1,140/- per person including lodging/boarding and vegetarian meals

**Jwalaji:** One night stay at Hotel Jwalaji

**Chintpurni:** One night stay at Yatri Niwas.

**Chamundaji:** One night stay at Yatri Niwas.

**JWALAJI**
Visit the famous Jwalaji Temple is one of the 51 Shaktipeeths in India. Situated in Jwalamukhi town in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh, Jwalaji Temple is one of the highly venerated Shakti temples in India. Legend has it that Sati, consort of Lord Shiva, killed herself by jumping in the sacrificial fire when her father Daksha Prajapati insulted her husband. An enraged Shiva, holding Sati’s body, began stalking the three worlds. The gods went to Lord Vishnu for help. Lord Vishnu used a volley of arrows to severe Sati’s body into pieces. Fifty-one sacred Shaktipeeths came up at places where the pieces fell. Sati’s tongue fell at Jwalaji. Crowned by a golden spire, the famous Jwalamukhi Temple has a blue flame coming from its cracked rocky floor. This is seen as the manifestation of the Devi. The evening arti after which the goddess goes to rest is worth watching. The nearest airport is at Gaggal, 46 km from Jwalamukhi. The closest broad gauge railhead is Pathankot, 123 km away.

**CHINTPURNI**
On the Shivalik mountain range lays the Chintpurni Temple lies in the Una district of the state. The temple lies atop the Shivalik mountain range in Una district. Just 35 km from Jwalamukhi, it is also one of the 51 Shaktipeeths—Sati’s feet is said to have fallen at Chintpurni. Chinnimastika Devi, the headless goddess, is worshipped in an anthropomorphic form. A 10-day temple fair is held during Navratri. This fair attracts pilgrims from all over the country. It is believed that if a devotee prays to the goddess with a pure heart, the wish would be fulfilled. The closest railhead is Hoshiarpur in Punjab, 42 km away. Taxis and buses ply from Jwalamukhi and Hoshiarpur.

**CHAMUNDA**
The ancient Chamunda Devi temple, at a height of 1,000 metre, is also considered among the 51 Shaktipeeths. Legend has it that Goddess Kali slew two demons, Chand and Mund, who were harassing Goddess Ambika. Delighted, Goddess Ambika declared that Kali would be worshipped here as Chamunda, a combination of the demons names. By road, Chamunda Devi is 16 km from Dharamsala and 55 km from Jwalamukhi. The closest airport is at Gaggle, 28 km away. The nearest railhead is the narrow guage line at Noranda near Palampur, 30 km away.

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Take a trip to Paonta and Renuka for some spiritual enlightenment. Soak in the scenic beauty of Renuka Lake as the placid stretch of water does wonders to your nerves.

**Trip Itinerary:** 2 nights 3 days special package for senior citizens for Paonta-Renuka

**Cost:** RS 930/- per person including lodging/boarding and vegetarian meals

**Paonta:** One night stay at Hotel Yamuna

**Renuka:** One night stay at Hotel Renuka

**PAONTA**
The historic town of Paonta Sahib on the banks of river Yamuna is surrounded by sal forest. It is one of the important places for the Sikhs. Paonta Sahib resonates with Guru Gobind Singh’s presence. The city is named Paonta, which means “foot”, either because he lived here for four years on invitation from Raja Maidini Prakash of Sirmour or, according to an alternate story, he lost an ornament which he wore on his foot called “Paonta” while bathing in the Yamuna river. Shimla to Paonta Sahib is 258 km and Chandigarh to Paonta Sahib 132 km. The nearest airport is Jubbarhatti (145 km), the nearest broad gauge line is Yamunanagar (56 km) and road is well connected all over the state.

**RENUKA**
Sixty-km from Paonta Sahib is Renuka Lake in Sirmour district. With a circumference of 3,214 metre, Renuka Lake is the largest natural lake in Himachal. This placid stretch of water is fed by underground springs and the surrounding hills are padded by lush forest that supports a large variety of plant and animal life. It is shaped like a sleeping woman. There’s a legend attached to this lake: In obedience to the orders of his father sage Jamadagni, Parsuram killed his own mother. The myth is brought to the fore every year in November with a 7-day fair to celebrate the immortality of Renuka and her son. Cultural programmes and folk dances are organised for the entertainment of visitors. Several idols of Parsuram, believed to be Lord Vishnu’s incarnation, and other local deities are placed in palanquins and carried to Parsuram Ram Tal. The idols are bathed in this holy lake symbolising the body of the mother before being installed in the temple. Boating and trekking are additional attractions.

Corporation hotels. They will get an additional 10% discount during off-season.
Doctor, no!

Legalpundits discuss legal options in case of medical negligence. Part I

Q Can you take the help of law to redress medical negligence?

A Yes. In 2002, the Medical Council of India drafted the Indian Medical Council (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) Regulations for all medical practitioners. If you are convinced that your doctor has been negligent, you can initiate legal action. Remember that dissatisfactory outcome (for instance, a patient dying during surgery) does not necessarily mean the doctor has been negligent. If patients don’t respond to a certain treatment, it could be because of reasons beyond anyone’s control.

One of the several avenues for redress is to file a complaint with a local professional medical body, usually your state medical council. If it finds the medical practitioner guilty, he can be punished. The council can remove his name from the medical register, either permanently or for a specified period. During this time, the doctor cannot practice. State medical councils generally comprise practising physicians. So there is the chance that they will favour the accused doctor. Thus, it is better to get a lawyer to represent you.

Death owing to medical negligence is a matter for the criminal court under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) or consumer court under the relevant sections of the Consumer Protection Act (CPA). Section 304A of the IPC deals with death caused by rash and negligent acts. When a First Information Report (FIR) is filed against a doctor for the death of a patient under his treatment, the doctor can be arrested. Even if a patient survives but suffers from ‘the effects of alleged grievous injuries sustained during treatment’, the medical practitioner can be arrested under either Section 337 or 338 of the IPC.

In 1997, it was ruled that doctors would be brought in the ambit of the CPA. This was a major step forward in protecting patients’ interests, as the process of approaching the Consumer Dispute Redressal Forum is easier and less expensive than going to court. In this case, the aggrieved can represent himself and need not hire a lawyer.

Q Under what circumstances can a patient press charges?

A Legally, a doctor-patient contract requires that the doctor must treat a patient with reasonable care and skill. He should not undertake any procedure or treatment beyond his expertise and must not divulge professional secrets. If he fails to carry out any of the above, you can sue a doctor for negligence. However, to do so successfully, you must establish the following to the satisfaction of the court: The doctor did not conform to the standard of medical care expected from him; the doctor was derelict and committed a breach of duty; the patient suffered actual damage; and the doctor’s conduct was the direct or proximate cause of that damage. It is the responsibility of the patient or his family to establish these four points.
Making a difference

Thirty-four senior citizens’ organisations come together to discuss silver-specific issues

domestic help and security guards. For silvers living alone, he recommended not informing too many people before leaving town.

The other highlights of the day included an hour-long crash course on ‘Yoga for All’ by Sam (78) and Freny (74) Motiwala. The couple, who teach at the Iyengar Centre in Dadar, have been practising yoga for 34 years. This was followed by a laughter session, games and a talk by M S Subramaniam from Dignity Foundation. Subramaniam shared his experience on assuming the post of administrative manager of the foundation as a second career. A perfect way to end an inspiring day.

IN MARCH

YOGA
Mondays, Wednesdays; 10.30 am—12.00 noon (men); 3.00 pm to 4.30 pm (women)

COMPUTERS
Mondays, Wednesdays; 10.30 am—12 noon; 3 pm—4.30 pm

GROUP THERAPY
March 2: 5.00 pm—6.00 pm. Session on meditation and relaxation by Brahma Kumaris

INTERACTIVE
March 17: 5.15—6.15 pm. Talk on “know your knee” by Dr Ashit Shah

March 23: 5.00 pm—6.00 pm. Session on Investment

SPECIAL EVENTS
March 16: 5.00 pm—6.00 pm. Slide show of Mumbai Marathon and dance programme

COMMON BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION
March 30: 4.00 pm onwards

Programmes are subject to last-minute change

To know more about the centre and its activities, call us at (022) 30976440/6441 or email centre.thakurdwar@harmonyindia.org

THE CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

cell of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry has decided to make its ‘senior-welfare meeting’ a quarterly event to address issues concerning silvers in India. On 28 January, it organised a Senior Citizens’ Outreach Programme (SCOP) at YWCA in Andheri in suburban Mumbai. For the event, the Chamber invited 34 senior citizens’ organisations, including the Harmony Interactive Centre represented by Hiren Mehta.

Mumbai’s Inspector General of Police Javed Ahmed addressed the issue of safety of seniors living alone. He started on a light note with tips for an alert body and mind. “Good physical or mental exercise in the morning is better than reading the newspaper,” he said. He told the audience that, a year back the police took an innovative step for silver safety and issued senior citizen cards across the city.

The card contains a list of emergency numbers. When most seniors attending said they hadn’t received such a card, Ahmed suggested they contact the ‘Inspector of Community Policing’ at their nearest police station. He also urged they follow certain precautionary measures for basic safety, like installing a door chain and alarm system in their homes and getting police verification before hiring

march 2006 harmony 57
Hugh and Colleen Gantzer discover the secrets of Orchha, which means the ‘hidden place’, the former capital of the Bundela dynasty.

An architect friend once said to us, “Age is something we can’t control.” According to him, from the moment we are born, age sets in, smoothing the rough edges, blunting the irascible spikes, toning down the harshness. Ageing, in essence, is maturing. Then, he thought a while, and added: “Ah! But growing old—that’s something else again. You grow old only if your spirit grows old. You can be very old at 24, and be very young at 94!”

That’s how he introduced us to Orchha, the former capital of the Bundela dynasty, located 16 km from Jhansi. “It’s been ageing gracefully ever since it was founded in 1531,” he said. And in 475 years, it has been covered by the finest patina of time, like the light touch of glowing sandal paste on mature skin. To get there, we drove from Gwalior through the eroded, rugged scrubland of Madhya Pradesh, where legends of valour and villainy are still the stuff of ballads sung in the saffron-dusted dusk.

A walled city once rose in Orchha, threaded by the Betwa, a tributary of Yamuna River, guarded by knolls and hillocks with a crenelated fort and regal palaces, and temples with pinecone towers. In the flatlands between the fortress, palaces and temples spreads a remnant hamlet. Here, there are narrow streets where the tiled roofs and the turquoise coloured facades of the cottages hide cool, secluded courtyards. Life in the hamlet has changed little since the days when the Bundela Raja built their palaces and raised great gates that still stand guard over the township that was once a city.

We passed through one of these gates, across an arched stone bridge spanning a curve of the Betwa created to serve as a moat for the royal estate, and climbed a rising fortress road. At first, we wound between thickets of custard apple, and then we were on a flat, wide court, gentled by a cool breeze rising from the hamlet and its green fields below. To our left was the fortress-palace: the old Raj Mahal. To our right was the Jehangir Mahal, screened from the public eye by the palace. In front of us, like a bridge between the two, was the sybaritic addition of the luxury suite, and the terraces and domes of the Sheesh Mahal. High above the hamlet, fort and palace was a secluded haven for royal pleasure. Before its renovation, its
The wall city of fort and regal palaces rose across the Betwa, a tributary of Yamuna river

Orchha is ageing gracefully ever since it was founded in 1531.

Ceiling had inset mirrors and another set of mirrors gave uninterrupted views of the bathroom from the king-sized bed.

Evidently, the Bundelas had very regal tastes, greatly influenced by their Mughal overlords. Both the Raj and Jehangir Mahal were built in their assertive style featuring labyrinths of corridors, halls, living quarters, terraces and high cupolas. It’s a long trudge if you’re determined to see everything. Far more advisable, however, is to hire a guide and ask him to show you the more interesting murals and point out the ingenious system of light-trapping shafts, fretted stone grilles and the friezes of coloured ceramic tiles, particularly those decorating the main gate of the Jehangir Mahal. Raja Bir Singh Deo, who ruled Orchha for 22 years (1605-1627), built this palace. Legend has it that it was constructed to shelter Salim, the rebel son of Emperor Akbar. Salim later became Emperor Jehangir.

We also made it a point to stroll on the slopes behind the palace complex, where you find ruins of the old elephant stables, the hamam (Turkish bath), a very interesting complex, and the sadly neglected mansion of Rai Parveen built by Raja Indramani for his concubine in the mid-
FACT FILE

HOW TO GO

By air: Fly to Gwalior and take a taxi to Orchha, which is 119 km away

By rail: There are several trains to Jhansi, from where Orchha is just 16 km by road. Even auto-rickshaws and buses ply on this stretch

WHERE TO STAY

Betwa Retreat; for bookings call on 07680-252618; Email: bcorchha@rediffmail.com. Air-conditioned rooms cost Rs 1,190 per night and air-conditioned Swiss tents cost Rs 890

Bundelkhand Riverside; Tel: 07680-252612; Email: wildlifer@vsnl.net. Rooms cost between Rs 2,600 and Rs 4,500 per night

Sheesh Mahal (Madhya Pradesh Tourism); Telefax: 07680-252624; Email: hsmorcha@sancharnet.in. The Maharaja suite costs Rs 3,990 per night and Maharani suite, Rs 2,490. Non-AC accommodation is priced at Rs 890 per night

1670s. Rai Parveen was a superbly talented poet, singer and dancer. She fended off the advances of Emperor Aurangzeb by a clever verse that compared the Mughal Emperor with carrion eaters for wishing to taste the ‘leftovers’ of a Bundela king! At sunset, with time to spare, we made a journey across the Betwa and watched dusk flare gold and scarlet on the serene cenotaphs of the old Bundela kings. Of particular interest in the town are three temples built in distinctive styles. The architecture of the massive Chhatrabhuj Temple gives the distinct impression of Mughal architecture.

The Ram Temple looks like a mansion because that, according to a local tale, was what it was when an idol of Lord Rama was placed there temporarily. As the idol refused to budge from its resting place, the mansion was later converted into a temple.

The Laxminarayan Temple, with its murals of hunting, war and drinking foreigners, was probably a cool, elevated, evening retreat for the princely family before it was dedicated as a temple, and an idol of Lord Ganesha installed in a breezy central pavilion. In this rather hot and dry region, cooling systems were in great demand. Ask your guide to take you to the subterranean halls beneath the tall wind-towers or dargah. These Persian devices draw off hot air by natural suction and keep the halls below cool and dry through the hottest summer days.

Alternatively, bachelor prince Hardaul used streams of water drawn up by animal-power to spout in fountains and spray down in a rain-pavilion to simulate a monsoon shower. Hardaul, sadly, incurred the jealousy of the Raja, his brother, was falsely accused of having an affair with one of the queens, and ordered to commit suicide. Whenever we go to Orchha, we always visit Hardaul’s palace, where we see local residents placing their wedding invitations on his cenotaph. It’s clear that though the Prince’s age would now have spanned many centuries, his spirit remains evergreen. That is also how we, and our architect friend, view Orchha. It is, and will remain, hundreds of years young.
The power of puppetry

Going beyond entertainment, 77 year-old Suresh Dutta uses his puppets to spread the values of teamwork and national integration, says Anjana Basu

MY WORLD
Puppets mean the world to me. They burst with energy and personality. Through puppetry, you can teach people so many things. What looks so simple involves many forms of craft. Puppetry requires knowledge of music, acting, dance, theatre, mime, drawing, painting, sculpture and woodcraft, recitation, ventriloquism, light, sound and colour, literature, script, folk tales and storytelling. It fascinates children; they think it’s a game. And when you’ve caught their attention, you can instil cultural, civic and social values in them.

DEVELOPING A BOND
I was born in Hutsibari, which is now in Bangladesh. Every Durga Puja, a priest used to come home to make a clay idol for immer-
sion. My mother asked me to watch him work. Soon I began making things from clay and I developed a strong bond with the craft. It was so strong that if I had fever, the touch of cold clay would heal me. I was fascinated by the figures the priest modelled. The Ganesha idol fascinated me the most. Once I jumped into the river during the immersion and managed to rescue just the Ganesha head. Then I hid it in a bush, balanced it on a stick and used it as the main character in my first puppet show. My mother found out and punished me for playing with god!

RHYTHM DIVINE
Every year, during the Hare Krishna festival on Janmashtami, our house became a cultural hub as my mother hosted dance and mime troupes from across the country. She would dress me in a kurta, put a pugri on my head and make me sing in front of some of the country’s finest singers. That’s when I realised the power of rhythm. I remembered that for my puppet shows.

I joined the Indian League and Albert Temple of Science and School of Art near Fort William and created a sort of record by getting first class in every category in 1951. My art teacher Phani Bhushan was a jatra (folk theatre) actor. First, he made me observe the way leaves interacted with each other and draw them. He sent me out into the forest to see how a creeper twined itself around a neem tree. What he taught me still stands me in good stead. I also trained in Kathakali under Guru Balakrishna Menon and learnt Bharatanatyam and Manipuri. Kathakali is puppetry in human form and dancer Uday Shankar epitomised it.

PEOPLE WHO MATTERED
My first job was as art director for actor-filmmaker Utpal Dutt’s Kallol. I was just 18. He looked at me and asked, “Isn’t he far too young?” The great theatre lighting man Tapas Sen, who had taken me to meet Dutt, replied that I was the only one he could think of for the job.

Puppet maestro Sergei Obraztsov from the State Puppet Centre in Moscow visited India in 1962 and did a show at Kolkata’s Mahajati Sadan. I spoke to him and then applied for a scholarship at his centre. I trained in puppetry with Obraztsov in Moscow for a year. There were tempting offers in Moscow, but I chose to return.

Balakrishna Menon introduced me to Children’s Little Theatre in 1963 where I joined as assistant dance director. I turned my hand to costume design for their theatrical production, Shaat Bhai Champa, followed by Mougli, based on Rudyard Kipling’s famous character from Jungle Book. About a hundred children took part. I also designed the sets.

ON MY OWN
By this time, I had also started staging my own puppet shows, like Aladin, inspired from a tale from the Arabian Nights where a little boy makes it big with a magic lamp. However, Children’s Little Theatre felt my puppet shows were taking attention away from theatre, the main objective of the organisation. In the middle of a tour of Aladin, I decided to start out on my own. I sent in my resignation from Bhopal. A year later, in 1973,
I started the Calcutta Puppet Theatre with the help of my wife Devi. Theatre artists like Shyamanand Jalan, Pratap Chandra, Tapas Sen, Dr Nihar Ranjan Roy, Nepal Nag and Khaled Chowdhury helped me.

After that, I staged a performance of *Aladin* in my own home. Uday Shankar was there and had tears in his eyes. Later in 1973, when the dancer was ill, he sent for me. He told me how much he appreciated my shows and begged me never to compromise my values. Other popular shows put up by Calcutta Puppet Theatre include *Ramayana*, *Sita*, *Gulabo aur Sitabo* (a tale of two women, Gulabo and Sitabo, one a helpless wife and the other a beautiful mistress), and *Notun Jeebon* (New Life).

I often hold workshops in villages. I tell people to bring their children. Everyone brings food so that at lunchtime, the month, I stage a play at my brother Jogesh’s mime theatre [he is a mime artist] near Kalighat Tram Depot—the show is free for children and adults accompanying them.

**GLORY OF ACTION**

*Aladin* has been staged over 3,000 times in the past 25 years. The production was proclaimed one of the best in the world at the Puppet Festival held at Bielskobiala, Poland, in 1980. In 1987, I was awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi award. I have participated in many international festivals and organised an International Puppet Festival in Kolkata in 1998.

India is the home of puppetry. We have so many varieties of puppets here—rod puppets, string puppets, glove puppets, shadow puppets, water puppets. Go into a Santal village in West Bengal and you will marvel at the water puppets. Unfortunately, the craft is not being encouraged.

WORK IN PROGRESS

I am 77 and work out a little room off the Bijan Setu bridge. One of my sponsors recently gifted me an air-conditioner. Everything I own is in this room and the larger one next door that doubles as the puppet theatre. Some old valuable books are bundled up on the shelves along with my puppets. There’s hardly any room but it is all the office space I have—even my lunch hangs from a lamp over the table. My daughter Masoom, who reads the news on *Star Ananda*, has given me an orange-shaped candle to brighten the place.

I’m writing a book on puppetry, its history and how puppets have a life of their own. It will take about two years to complete. I’m trying to get the West Bengal government to set up a puppet village but it needs sponsors. A puppet village would train people in traditional handicrafts, help educate children, provide employment and serve as a magnet for tourists. I am also trying to get puppet makers to create religious plaques and decorative household objects that we can export. Perhaps, one day my dreams will come true.
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I am a 70 year-old resident of Mumbai. I am looking for donations to buy medicines for ailing seniors. Contact me if you wish to contribute. Contact Ravi Bikshu at (022) 26372663; Mobile: 9322633718

I am 56 years old doing social service for a Bangalore-based monthly e-magazine called Master. I edit Master, which addresses awareness issues for free. To receive this free e-mag, mail your request to editormaster@sfy.com. Contact S R Ayyangar at (080) 23642819; email: rama200127@yahoo.co.in; Mobile: 09886196929

I am a 72 year-old resident of Hyderabad. I would like to team up with like-minded seniors, preferably photographers and travel writers, for a 5-7 day trip to places like Sikkim or Leh as these destinations are a photographer’s delight. The starting point of the journey could be New Delhi or Kolkata. Booking/reservations should be done by fellow travellers themselves. Contact P S Rao at (040) 23733600

I am 65 years old and live in Gandhinagar. I am practising feet reflexology and I am interested in alternative therapies like Reiki. I also teach advance courses of Vipasana, Pyavastu and Reiki. I would like to invite people to share their views and news on the subject. Contact Bhalabhai Bakshi at (079) 23245433; Mobile: 09879028129

I am 70 years old and live in New Delhi. I like fine arts and music. I am looking for a healthy and educated male/female caregiver with similar interests. Please apply if you are looking for a long-term arrangement. Accommodation available. Contact Ramanand Sharma at (011) 25527205; Mobile: 09213766630

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For Dhirubhai Ambani Memorial Trust

Sd/- Anthony Jesudasan

Printer & Publisher

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Layered legacy

The Inheritance of Loss
By Kiran Desai
Penguin/Viking; Rs 495; 324 pages

Reading The Inheritance of Loss, Kiran Desai’s latest novel, is much like sailing on a windy day. You get tossed about by words, phrases and imagery of Desai’s language; and you are buoyed by the currents and crosscurrents of this book, which took seven years to write.

Moving away from the fun and sunshine of her earlier book, Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard, Desai paints a gloomy canvas in this one. Sixteen year-old orphaned Sai is tucked away in a rundown house in Kalimpong, high in the north-eastern Himalaya. She lives with Jemubhai Patel, a retired judge (“Grandfather, more lizard than human”), faithful Mutt (“more human than dog”) and an arthritic cook. There are a few grey but cheerful neighbours to give her occasional company. Sai is in love with her math tutor Gyan, a 20year-old Nepali graduate. But conventional romance is overturned when the “ragtag” Gorkhaland rebels arrive to steal the judge’s guns and disappear with food, Lux soap and Pond’s cold cream, “the only items necessary for the movement”. Gyan had tipped them off.

Set in the violent days of insurgency in northern Bengal, dusk hangs heavy on the landscape and mindscape of characters of this novel. No one feels safe—BBC-loving sisters, Lola and Noni, who had fancy visions of retirement, “middle-class” Mrs Sen who cannot stop talking about her daughter’s CNN job, and Father Booty who dreams of serving Swiss-style cheese to the locals only to be deported as an illegal foreign resident.

The insurgents troop into their homes demanding their homeland. It is pay-up time for the well-off and ethnically different as “They, amid extreme poverty, were baldly richer, and statistics were being broadcast over loudspeakers.... The anger had solidified into slogans and guns.”

As lands and hearts are torn asunder, Desai spins an intricate yarn with two entwining tales—the judge’s sordid past and the bleakly comical hop-skip-jumps of Biju, the cook’s son, who is an illegal alien in the US. Through Biju, the third-worldly problems turn to the first where the basement life is different from roof-top bistros; “perfectly first-world on top, perfectly third-world twenty-two steps below”.

Unlike other characters of the novel, who have been awarded their moments of epiphany, humour and bliss, the judge barely has any redemptive qualities. He was insensitively cruel to his parents and abusive to his wife who died of emptiness. Desai swathes him in dark hues of “misanthropy and cynicism”. The only time he shows human warmth is when he goes wandering in search of his stolen bitch Mutt.

A study of worlds and counter-worlds, Desai takes a trip down the places and people she lived with in India, America, down the corridors of convents and the warmth of a Gujarati household. Desai has a way with words; she is funny, ironic, strangely precise if not economical in her descriptions. In all, the novel is prolix yet profound: “All you needed to do was to reach out and pluck it.”

—Trina Mukherjee
BRIEFLY

Inconsistency could well be the greatest weakness of human nature. In *The Old Man & His God: Discovering the Spirit of India*, writer, social worker and teacher Sudha Murty makes a strong case for that statement by telling us about the diverse people who have crossed her path. They belong to different sections of society but their values have nothing to do with their upbringing. One story is about a philanthropic businessman longing for selfless community service through Murty’s Infosys Foundation—while his son wants to make money out of it. Another account compares two mothers, one, a domestic helper seeking the best education for her adopted daughter, and the other a labourer abandoning her visually impaired child to avoid medical expenses. This is Moral Science class all over again—this time, for grown-ups.

(Penguin; Rs 150; 131 pages)

Vanaja Banagiri’s first novel, *Butterflies and Barbed Wires* begins with mother Shehzadi and her daughter Maya getting separated during the 1978 riots in Hyderabad. Then, the story takes a 22-year leap into their new lives. Shehzadi is remarried and has a son while Maya has been adopted by Hindu parents. Shehzadi, Maya and the other characters in the book play out their lives—second romances, haunted pasts, broken homes, extra-marital affairs, it’s all happening in this steamy read. The hottest ingredient in the book is Maya’s friend Varsha, whose life reads like a secret diary into a woman’s mind. Like the sound of Bollywood masala meeting *Sex and the City*? If so, you’ll like this.

(Rupa; Rs 195; 268 pages)

A *Sikh Boy* by Mohinder Singh is the story of a young Punjabi boy who survives the ravages of Partition. Monu lives an idyllic life in Sripur, a fictitious town on the Northwest Frontier. But the life of this studious son of the principal of the local school suddenly takes a cruel turn. Soon, communal unrest turns vicious with riots and brutal killings. It’s time for Monu and his family to leave their home and move to Amritsar. Hitherto timid Monu, who feared physical aggression, now embraces a life of violence as he searches for victims to pay for his lost past. Barring Monu’s sudden change of heart at the end, the book is a moving account of splintered lives that bore witness to a time that was memorable—and bloody.

(HarperCollins India; Rs 295; 230 pages)

The Raja is Dead by Shivani Singh is an inside look into palace intrigue, polo ground gossip, and complex laws of concubinage, kingship and primogeniture in the royal family of Madhupur. You learn that women in the family ordered cosmetics from the *Vogue* catalogue and wore foreign bras, replacing the straps with strings. Leela, the feisty 13-year-old granddaughter of the raja of Sirikot, watches helplessly as her family carries on its tradition of extravagance, debauchery and imperial whim. Then, a murder is committed, and when Leela sets out to investigate, she finds no one in her family is beyond suspicion. Singh’s refreshing sense of humour and smart words set this book apart from the run of the mill.

(Harper Collins; Rs 295; 254 pages)

All titles available at Oxford Bookstore, Kolkata, Bangalore, Mumbai, Goa, New Delhi and on www.oxfordbookstore.com
Fit @ 50

Forget the hormones, just get on the treadmill for a better life, says Lata Pall

SO MANY BIRTHDAYS HAD COME AND GONE
but this one was momentous—a time to pause and reflect on life. Did I feel 50? Of course not. I just felt 30 plus, going for my walks, enjoying my routine. Did I feel like celebrating? My husband suggested a birthday bash. I was aghast. He was quick to remind me that he had a terrific booze binging session with his cronies a few years ago on completing half a century. But I was in no mood to commit social hara-kiri!

I did not know how many moons I had sighted but when I sighted my reflection in the mirror I was appalled. Age had taken its toll and I could no longer see the hourglass figure I had till about 40 plus. The sands of time had congregated in the middle; and the arms had just some loose skin. Not a pretty sight for noodle straps.

I must confess I hate obesity. But the doctor assured me it was quite normal for hormones to go haywire at my age. This oestrogen-evoked eyesore must be nipped in the bud, I decided. I had to get back in shape. My daughter suggested I join a gym. Before I could raise any objections, she went and enrolled me. I relented. After all, I could not waste her hard-earned money.

My first day was full of trepidation. I had read so many reports—take care of your heart, blood pressure, joints, etc. Friends too had scared me with their horror stories. One said she fell off the treadmill, another grumbled about shoulder pain for six months after lifting weights. But at the other end of the spectrum were ageing and age-related problems. So I decided to be brave.

To find a tailor-made routine, I approached the trainer. However, he was busy with two guys preparing for the Mr India contest. A pretty young thing came to my rescue. She advised some warm-up stretches before hitting the treadmill. The dashboard had knobs to control speed, set the incline and, most important, the time.

I started walking on the treadmill, increasing the speed ever so slowly. The first five minutes were tough. I kept looking at the timer. The foot-tapping music in the background kept me going. Soon I was marching with a rhythmic gait. The music helped me walk a full 30 minutes without any strain.

Next, I decided to try a contraption—a techno walker or stepper. It’s for a full body workout as all your muscles come into play when you push the rods and walk in sync. Easier said than done. If ever there was a torture instrument in modern times, this was it. I could barely huff and puff for a minute. Seeing me crestfallen, the trainer finally came to help me. He demonstrated a lot of floor exercises, cycling and some light weights, all very doable. Before I knew it, two hours had gone by, without any mishaps. Afterwards, hot steam and a cold shower rejuvenated me completely.

I have realised I need to be slow and steady and not get carried away by the young studs whose natural habitat seems to be the gym. Like the time a young boy came on the treadmill next to mine. Before I could say hello, he started running faster than John Abraham and Vivek Oberoi in Kaal when a ghost was pursuing them. I know I have a long way to go—but I already look fitter, and feel great.

Lata Pall, 52, is a freelance journalist who has written on diverse subjects for over a decade. She’s also written the script Agra, a documentary film. Pall lives with her husband and two daughters in Delhi

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Oh, telegram!

Amita Malik rues over the lost tradition of sending and receiving telegrams

THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS WHY WE ADMIRE the United States of America. And there are many things that irritate and annoy us about that country, and by that I don’t mean Iraq. This time the US has hit the delete button for tradition—it has abolished the telegraph system. I am shocked and hurt.

I am sure we shall soon do the same in India. And here’s why: The office boy who arrange for my papers gave me a scornful look when I asked him where the nearest post box was. I was dismayed when he asked, “What’s a post box?” Gathering my wits I muttered, “You know, where you post letters.” His reply, “Who writes letters any more? Everybody sends email.” That made me feel like an old fogey.

In not so distant past, getting a telegram was considered a status symbol. It was the only way to send speedy news of birth of a child, death of a relative, and wedding in the family. And whenever the telegramwallah brought good news he would expect a tip of mithai.

I still recall the thrill of getting my exam results through telegram. The university registrar, who was my professor father’s friend, sent a not so cryptic telegram in Bengali, though written in Roman, “Aaabarr Ko-Ek” (again First Class First). My sister Sujata had already achieved a First Class. Sad telegrams like a relative passing away came too. Even the telegramwallah commiserated the sad news.

Another recollection I have is of an happy incident when Mr Coelho, the person in charge of the telegraph office in Guwahati, burst into my father’s classroom repeatedly shouting “twenty-five thousand, twenty-five thousand”. When he calmed down, he told my father that my mother had won Rs 25,000 (a huge amount in those days) for a crossword competition conducted by the Illustrated Weekly of India. The whole town rejoiced and my mother kept doling out mithai to everyone. When she asked what I would like, I replied: “A pair of high-heeled shoes.” I was then just a silly teenager.

There were times when just before bed time and before the front door was shut, we would take turns pretending to be telegramwallah. We would often trick our mother. She settled the score with us one night. We had got into bed when we heard someone shout “telegram”. We all tumbled out of bed and rushed to the main door to realize that mother, who had disguised her voice quite well, had fooled us.

The classic telegrams were the fake ones that came from the village informing the receiver of a ‘dying’ relative. The purpose, of course, was to be able to go on a leave. The message always read: “Father, mother serious, come immediately”. Everyone, including the boss, always knew that both father and mother could not be seriously ill at the same time. My father, for instance, would sometimes feel sorry for the clerk who would get such telegrams and give him a few days off. The clerk would merrily return from his village with things like coconuts or once even a fish from his pond. He would smilingly gift it to my father, who usually asked him to keep it for himself.

As emails and telephones become a way of life, we may soon be saying our goodbyes to telegram and even, letter writing. Life will surely become dull.

Amita Malik, often referred to as ‘the first lady of Indian media’, is a columnist and film critic.
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*Annualised yield in % at the end of the slab subject to TDS wherever applicable.

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CDS FOR A CAUSE

Meet Mahendra ‘Mac’ Patel, 67, a computer professional from New Jersey and trained singer. In order to give the gift of music to Indian seniors in the US, he has come to India to record Gujarati and Hindi devotional songs. “Many Indian in US, especially senior citizens, can’t sustain themselves. My CDs will be a gift to them.” He travelled across Saurashtra and South Gujarat for months, visiting radio stations and universities to hunt for old bhajan. He’s now recording some 300 songs on 30 CDs in a Nadiad studio. He plans to gift these CDs to Indian senior citizens’ association in the US—there are about 50 of them. Sounds good.

LOVE GAME

Raghunath Sule, 80, and his wife Lilu, 72, won the Mr and Mrs 2006 Senior Citizens’ Fashion show, organised by Poisar Gymkhana in Mumbai on 28 January. They were among 38 couples that participated. Lila, mother of two sons and a daughter, also bagged the Best Smile award. The couple got married on 25 November 1954. So how did they celebrate Valentine’s Day? “I gave Lilu a flower and she was happy,” says Raghunath. “We went to a nearby temple to pray for each other,” adds Lilu. It doesn’t get sweeter than this.

ACTOR, ANIMATED

Kids will soon be saying hi to ‘Cartoon Rajni’. South Indian superstar Rajnikanth, 56, will be turned into an animated character in a yet-to-be-named film, initially to be made in Hindi and English. The brainchild of his daughter Soun- darya, the film, budgeted at Rs 10-12 crore, will be produced by Chennai-based Ocher Studios, owned by the actor’s wife Latha Rajnikanth, in collaboration with Adlab Films. “A full-length feature film featuring an Indian icon has never been attempted before,” Soundarya, managing director of Ocher Studios, told media. “It gives me the unique privilege of animating my father for the first time.”

MILESTONEs

Awarded. To actor, activist and Harmony columnist Shabana Azmi, 55, the Crystal Award at the World Economic Forum in Davos, on 28 January, for excellence in the field of art. The award is given to artists who have made a significant contribution in their field and have used their art to reach out to other countries.

Awarded. To British actor Ian McKellen, the Golden Bear for Life-time Achievement at the 56th Berlin International Film Festival, on 15 February. Well known for his role as Gandalf in the Lord of the Rings trilogy and Magneto in the X-Men films, the 66 year-old said he is “enjoying his late burst of global fame”.

et etcetera |
VISITORS

24-27 JANUARY
Who: King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia, 82.
Agenda: To sign the ‘Delhi Declaration’ with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Among other bilateral initiatives, the declaration lays stress on the importance of talks between India and Pakistan.
Extracurricular activities: Information and Broadcasting Minister P R Dasmunshi presented a photo album containing rare pictures of King Saud’s visit to India 51 years ago.

31 JAN-3 FEBRUARY
Who: Ian Anderson, 59, the flautist of legendary British rock band Jethro Tull
Agenda: To perform in Mumbai and Bangalore with Alms For Shanti, with Uday Benegal and Jayesh Gandhi of Indus Creed. Also performed with Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia.
Extracurricular activities: Joked about his desire to teach actor Aishwarya Rai how to play the flute— the wish didn’t come true.

19-21 FEBRUARY
Who: Jacques Chirac, 74, French President
Agenda: To ink a defence cooperation pact, which includes cooperation between the Indian and French armed forces, joint production of military hardware, satellite launches for third parties and cooperation in diverse fields like tourism, education and culture.
Extracurricular activities: Chirac got a taste of Indian hospitality with varied dishes of delicacies, with an entire shipment of purple brassicas flown in from Holland.

IN PASSING

The widow of Dr Martin Luther King Jr, Coretta Scott King was an intrinsic part of the American civil rights movement that captured the global imagination in the 1960s. Even after her husband’s assassination, she carried forward his legacy, fighting for women’s rights and against apartheid in South Africa. She passed away on 31 January at the age of 78.

Betty Friedan’s book The Feminine Mystique is credited with laying the foundation of modern feminism in the US. Friedan, who founded the National Organization for Women, was a leading advocate of the Equal Rights Amendment, a proposed amendment to the US constitution banning discrimination based on sex. She died on 4 February at the age of 85.

Actor Nadira made her debut in 1952 in the film Aam. She went on to act in hits like Julie, Pakeezah, Shree 420 and Sagar. Best known for her negative roles in the 1950s and 1960s, she won the Filmfare Award for Best Supporting Actress for Julie in 1975. She died in Mumbai after prolonged illness on 9 February at the age of 74.

In the mid-1960s, when Peter Benchley read about a fisherman catching a 4,550-pound great white shark off Long Island in the US, he decided to write a book about sharks – the result was the hit novel, Jaws, which was later made into a hit film. Benchley passed away at his home in Princeton on 12 February. He was 65.
A couple from Delhi decided to go to Goa for a long weekend to thaw out during a particularly cold winter. Because both had jobs, they had difficulty coordinating their travel schedules. It was decided that the husband would fly to Goa and his wife would follow him the next day. Upon arriving, the husband checked into the hotel and decided to send his wife an email back in Delhi. However, he accidentally omitted one letter in her address, and sent the email. Meanwhile, in Mumbai, a widow had just returned from her husband’s funeral. She checked her email, expecting messages from relatives and friends. Upon reading the first message, she fainted. The message read:

**To:*** My loving wife  
**From:** Your departed husband  
**Subject:** I’ve arrived!  
I’ve just arrived and have checked in. I see that everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then! Hope your journey is as uneventful as mine was.  
**P.S.** Sure is hot down here!

A gentleman in his mid-90s, very well dressed, hair well groomed, great looking suit, flower in his lapel, smelling of a good aftershave, walks into an upscale cocktail lounge. Seated at the bar is a lady in her mid-80s. The gentleman walks over, sits beside her, orders a drink, takes a sip, turns to her and says: “So tell me, do I come here often?”

When Mr Shastri went for his annual medical check-up, the doctor asked him if there was anything unusual he should know about. Mr Shastri told the doctor that he found it really strange how his best suit must have shrunk just sitting in his closet – it didn’t fit when he tried it on recently.

“Suits don’t shrink,” said the doctor. “You probably just put on a few pounds.”

Mr Shastri replied, “That’s just it. I know I haven’t gained a single pound since the last time I wore it.”

“Well, then,” said the doctor, “you must have a case of Furniture Disease.”

“What in the world is Furniture Disease?”

“Furniture Disease is when you reach that stage in life when your chest starts sliding down into your drawers.”

After examining his 75 year-old patient, the general physician said, “You’re in remarkable shape for a man your age.”

“Yes, I know,” said the gentleman. “I have only one complaint. My sex drive is too high. Is there anything you can do for that?” “Your what??” gasped the doctor.

“My sex drive,” repeated the man. “It’s too high, and I’d like to have you lower it if you can.”

“Lower it?” the doctor exclaimed. “Why on earth would you want to do that? And just what do you consider ‘high’?”

“These days, it seems like it’s all in my head,” said the man. “I’d like to have you lower it a couple of feet if you can.”
NEW TIPS FOR BEGINNERS: A whole variety of clues goes into framing a cryptic puzzle. For instance, the anagram. The clue here could be: Unresting opponent of authority (Unresting being the 9 letters of insurgent rearranged). Another variety of clue is the palindrome—DEIFIED, when viewed backward or when viewed up in a Down clue, reads DEIFIED all the way. Next, there could be the clue (8-letter answer) reading: Complete view of daughter sandwiched between parents—PANORAMA (PANORAMA). The 8-letter solution to the clue, The framework of our constitution, is SKELETON. At times, what looks straight could prove tricky. For example, the clue, How we stand—has UNITED for its 6-letter answer. The clue, How we fall, has DIVIDED for its 7-letter answer. The clue, Walls have them yet they hear not, has EARS for its answer. Next, pertinacity could split into Pert in a city, face to face into fact of ace. For ANISEED, the clue could be: Carminative 1 see inside and outside—AN(I SEE)ID. The possibilities are endless.
The Big Bang theory is an effort to explain what happened at the very beginning of our universe. According to the standard theory, our universe sprang into existence as ‘singularity’ around 13.7 billion years ago. Singularities are thought to exist at the core of ‘black holes’, which are areas of intense gravitational pressure. The pressure is thought to be so intense that finite matter is actually squished into infinite density (a mathematical concept which truly boggles the mind). These zones of infinite density are called ‘singularities’.

After its initial appearance, it apparently inflated (the ‘Big Bang’), expanded and cooled, going from very small and very hot, to the size and temperature of our current universe. It continues to expand and cool to this day. The Big Bang theory has several misconceptions. For example, we tend to imagine a giant explosion. Experts however say there was no explosion; there was (and continues to be) an expansion. According to most experts, space didn’t exist prior to the Big Bang. There is major evidence to support the Big Bang theory—first, galaxies appear to be moving away from us at speeds proportional to their distance. This is Hubble’s Law, proven by Edwin Hubble in 1929, and supports the theory of the universe’s expansion. Second, the Big Bang suggests that the universe was initially extremely hot—in 1965, scientists discovered a remnant of that heat. Finally, the abundance of ‘light elements’ hydrogen and helium found in the observable universe are thought to support the Big Bang model of origins.

One of the most adventurous things left us is to go to bed. For no one can lay a hand on our dreams.
—English author and essayist E V Lucas (1868-1938)

Throw your dreams into space like a kite, and you do not know what it will bring back, a new life, a new friend, a new love, a new country.
—French-born American diarist and writer Anais Nin (1903-1977)

Dreams come true; without that possibility, nature would not incite us to have them.
—American novelist, poet, and short story writer John Updike

I fly in dreams; I know it is my privilege.
—German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

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ACROSS:
1 Aswan Dam (A/swan/Dam); 5 hammer; 9 The Train; 10 pool in; 11 on the web; 13 (Geoff) Dymock; 14 (Anant) Nag: 16 (Sir James Matthew) Barrie; 19 she-goat (Nanny it means, she-goat is the 7 letters of hostage rearranged); 20 Hurray; 21 eure (re it reads, going across and back); 26 RANADE: (Ra/naD/e: Dan turning into Rae); 27 snapshot (snap/shot), snap signifying catch smartly taken; 28 in germ; 29 A Bina Rai; 30 afraid (Fari da its 6 letters rearranged); 31 in the bag

DOWN:
1 Action!; 2 Wreath (its 6 letters rearrange as The raw); 3 nerves; 4 a siren; 6 a copy-cat; 7 Malhotra; 8 Ranikhet (A thinker is this city’s 8 letters rearranged); 12 bangers; 15 Why; 16 Bal; 17 Sharmila (central actor of Gulzar’s Mausam, here identified through that versifier’s 1980 Thodisi Bewafai song-lyric); 18 Srinagar (how they refer to Kashmir in news bulletins); 19 Sardami (Sar/dar/i: darn revealing sari); 22 end ban; 23 a pinch; 24 the rub; 25 string

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“Sometimes it is physically and emotionally taxing, but the nine years after retirement have been extremely enriching and satisfying. The realisation that I’ve been able to help people has given me immense self-confidence and joy.”

After a successful 42-year teaching career and three national awards for innovation in the field of education, Dr Feroza Muzaffar, 69, now devotes her time to street children, school dropouts and physically-challenged children. On the insistence of the Family Counselling Centre, Shahjehanabad, Bhopal, she also counsels people suffering from depression and couples with troubled marriages. Sensitivity, patience, a positive outlook, and the ability to communicate draw people to her. Dr Muzaffar believes the key is in the three ‘Rs’—realise, recognise and regard. For marital bliss, she says, couples must understand each other’s feelings, recognise the good qualities of the other and regard each other with respect. In the nine years after her retirement, Dr Muzaffar and her team have handled 1,000 cases, of which nearly 50 per cent have been successfully resolved. Despite three heart attacks, failing eyesight and spondylosis, her work continues to drive her.
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