THE TIMES
KUWAIT'S PREMIER WEEKLY MAGAZINE
Issue No 617 Established 1996 16 - 22 December, 2012 www.timeskuwait.com



Deadlocked in Dubai

Communication Conference fails to find consensus

Staff Report

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) facilitated and managed World Congress on International Telecommunications 2012 (WCIT-12) that was held between the 3rd and 14th of December, 2012 in Dubai, UAE failed to reach consensus on key issues related to internet's structural organization and its governance. The newly revised International Telecommunication Regulations (ITR) treaty gained 89 signatures, with 55 countries, including Denmark, Italy, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Greece, Portugal, Finland, Chile, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Costa Rica and Kenya, downright rejecting the treaty or reserving their right to sign it later.

However, on a brighter note, and on other fronts, the final ITR treaty contained many gains and achievements, including increased transparency in international mobile roaming charges and competition, an extremely important win for consumers. The treaty also contains a newly updated Article which will promote greater connectivity for people with disabilities as well as a new Resolution covering Land-Locked Developing Nations and Small Island Developing States. This Resolution will set the framework for increased investment and



roll out of broadband and mobile broadband, bringing vital services to populations that are currently disconnected.

Prior to the conference, in August of 2012, the ITU called for a pubic consultation on a draft document. The proposal would allow government restriction or blocking of information disseminated via the internet and create a global regime of monitoring internet communications – including the demand that those who send and receive information identify themselves. It would also allow governments to shut down the internet if there is the belief that it may interfere in the internal affairs of other states or that information of a sensitive nature might be shared. In his response to proposal for greater government-level monitoring of the internet the U.S. ambassador to the conference, Terry Kramer, stated: "There have been proposals that have suggested that the ITU should enter the Internet governance business. There have been active recommendations that there be an invasive approach of governments in managing the internet, in managing the content that goes via the internet, what people are looking at, what they're saying. These fundamentally violate everything that we believe in terms of democracy and opportunities for individuals, and we're going to vigorously oppose any proposals of that nature." At the start of the conference, Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Sudan tabled a proposal calling for equal rights for all governments to manage "internet numbering, naming, addressing and identification resources". This proposal was eventually shelved, but a discussion on a non-binding resolution was debated, which suggested the UN agency's leadership should "continue to take the necessary steps for ITU to play an active and constructive role in the development of broadband and the multi-stakeholder model of the internet."

Continued on Page: 6



Miss Universe to be crowned on Dec 19

The contestants of the Miss Universe 2012 pageant are getting ready for the big event at the Planet Hollywood Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. The preparations are in full swing and the beauties will spend the next few days touring, filming, rehearsing, and making new friends while they prepare to compete for the coveted Miss Universe Diamond Nexus Labs Crown. The competition will be held on December 19.

All roads lead to Kochi for Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

Will an Indian from Kuwait get the PBD honour?

Staff Report

Speculation is rife that an Indian residing in Kuwait is expected to get the Pravasi Samman award, the highest honour for NRI's by the government of India at the next year Kochi conclave. Known for its rich cultural heritage and picturesque beauty, Kochi is gearing up to welcome the vast Indian diaspora that will descend in the city for the 11th conclave of the three day Pravasi Bharatiya Divas to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on January 8 2013 amidst traditional fanfare and gaiety. The conclave with a theme "Engaging diaspora: The Indian growth story", considered to be the biggest gathering of Indian diaspora settled abroad will conclude with the valedictory address by President Pranab Mukherjee who will also present the Pravasi Samman Awards to persons who have distinguished themselves. In the 10 year history of PBD only one Indian from Kuwait has been honoured with the award. Mauritian Prime Minister Rajkeshwur Purryag will be the chief guest of the three-day convention. Over 2500 delegates are expected to participate in the event, government sources said.



Vayalar Ravi

As the clock ticks closer, Kochi is being spruced up for the celebration. To add colour to the city, traditional art forms will be displayed along the route from Nedumbassery airport to the venue, Le Meridien Hotel. Several Indians from Kuwait are planning to attend the three-day conclave as it is being held for the first time in Kochi.

Continued on Page: 6



See Page 2



See Page 3

gulfmart Presents Dimensions



The Maharaja still flying high

Staff Report

"The Air India office in Kuwait has limitations on what it can do to resolve or mitigate the issues that sometimes arise between the airline and its customers; obviously, we can only work with the products we have been given, and I'll be the first to agree that often these are not the most ideal ones," said Ajay Sinha, the new Air India manager in Kuwait, at the onset of a very straightforward discussion with The Times recently.

"My primary focus is on trying to improve the services we already have and to implement new products on an urgent basis. Our foremost aim is to get better aircraft on this sector as the existing ones have begun to show their age. Currently Kuwait is at the farthest end of our Gulf route and this distance creates limits on the kind of aircraft we can operate. The newer short-range 319 and 321 aircraft are not suited for this route, whereas, the latest 777 and 787 that fly long, non-stop trips to United States, Europe and elsewhere are considered not viable for this stretch. This leaves us with the limited option of only using the current lineup of 320s.

> "In the face of stiff competition from other airlines we realize that our fares also have to be attractive."

"The second initiative that we are following up is to introduce a business class into our aircrafts. Due to an earlier policy decision, all 320 aircrafts plying this sector were converted into versions that had only economy seating. This decision left us without the capability to offer services to the premium segment of travelers and thereby hobbled the economic viability and profitability of the route."

"A third proposal that we are studying is to widen the destinations we fly to in India. At present, Air India and Air India Express together operate 13 flight a week from Kuwait to India, with Air India flying to Ahmadabad, Hyderabad, Chennai and Goa and Air India Express flying to Mangalore, Kozhikode and Kochi, with the flight to Kochi having an aircraft change at Kozhikode. The changeover is quite seamless with passengers undergoing their immigration and customs at Kochi."

"We are also trying to revive some of the other routes to India, especially the one to Mumbai, which I understand was stopped some years back. The decision to stop the route was taken because of decrease in number of direct passengers to Mumbai. Earlier, most Mumbai passengers were transiting to other destinations so when direct flights were introduced to those destinations, the direct Mumbai route was no longer economically feasible. However, I strongly believe that if we can introduce good timings and immediate connections to other places, Mumbai can still be a very attractive hub for Indian passengers."

EXCLUSIVE

Elaborating on the airline's market share, Mr. Sinha added, "Our market share is difficult to determine as many Indian passengers are flying out through hubs like Dubai or Doha. What we can say with certainty is that, despite all our acknowledged shortcomings, all our 13 weekly flights to India are doing very well. I believe that if we introduce attractive offers, provide good aircrafts and competitive products we will see our traffic numbers go up once again."



Speaking about complaints on slow response of the airline to issues, the manager replied, "I fully agree that passengers in Kuwait have several genuine issues, but unfortunately most of them are of the sort that requires decisions from head office. I joined Kuwait office in August of this year and I am only beginning to come to grips with many of the issues raised by passengers during my interactions with them. We are in constant touch with our Corporate Office on these and other issues and have impinged on them the urgency of our needs, but unfortunately being a Public Sector Undertaking our urgency may not immediately translate into priority for the airline. However, we are hopeful of a favorable action in the near future."

"In the face of stiff competition from other airlines we realize that our fares also have to be attractive. Most airlines now operate computerized revenue management systems that automatically open and close different class segment based on complicated algorithms that optimize revenue generation from each flight. Nevertheless, airline margins are razor thin; mainly on account of high fuel prices and manpower costs. While high fuel prices are a global phenomenon, the more than 31,000 personnel employed by Air India and Air India Express together are by industry standards quite high. Following the merger of the two airlines there was an exponential increase in manpower along with the expansion in network. Since then there has been a lot of restructuring going on and hopefully we will begin seeing the results once this transition phase settles down."

"I have been with the airline for the last 33 years; however, this is my first posting overseas as manager. Though I have spent stints abroad, for most of my career I was based in the corporate office in Revenue Management and in New Projects. I was deeply involved in many of the new projects introduced recently, including the opening of our Call Center, our e-commerce venture and headed the division responsible for introducing the SITA-based computerized reservations. The over three decades that I have spent handling various aspects of the airline has been an interesting and eventful journey with its own share of challenges and opportunities."

While apologizing for the services that he could not change immediately, the manager said that he would do his utmost to ensure that passengers had a better experience with their national carrier in future. "I promise our passengers that, despite our limitations, we will implement whatever we can so as to improve the services provided by the airline. Passengers should also bear with us and realize that we are a PSU and cannot just call up someone and ask for changes in aircraft or improved routes, these things take their own time; what we can promise is to keep on trying our best."

The manager recalled that there was a time when it was a prestige to fly on Air India and many of the other airlines looked up to us and tried to emulate us; there is no reason why we cannot revive those days. "Despite the aging aircraft and restructuring issues we still have one of the best seats, the best legroom and seat widths among Indian aircrafts," said Mr. Sinha.

"On a personal level I feel that the Indian community in Kuwait is very strong, they have been very receptive and welcoming. On the business level, the Kuwait market is not very complicated there is a clear segmentation of passengers along economy and premium class with some in the middle. While it is not difficult to understand the market, what is more difficult is to please everyone, as everyone is very price conscious in this market."

The manager concluded by saying, "We hope that as new aircraft are slowly added to the fleet we will see more new aircraft being employed on this route, and would then be in a position to offer more destinations and introduce premium services on this route. This sector is highly important to the airline, especially since this route along with others to and from the Gulf countries are some of the most lucrative. Air travel within India and abroad is increasing exponentially and this is good news for the airline industry. In the future we look to be more competitive, offer periodic promotions and stay in the news for all the right reasons."

غلف مارت
gulfmart
Now Open at Aba Halifa
Please visit us on www.gulfmartkuwait.com

SHUWAIKH
Tel : 24924130/131
JLEEB AL- SHUYOUKH (Abbasiya)
Tel : 24319981/2
JLEEB AL- SHUYOUKH (Abbasiya - Branch 2)
Tel : 24341425/24341594
HAWALLY
Tel : 22644203/4
HAWALLY NUGRA
Tel : 22617295/22617297/22617290
FAHAHEEL
Tel : 23919441/2
FAHAHEEL (Branch 2)
Tel : 23926912/23926913
FARWANIYA
Tel : 24710484/24710359
FARWANIYA (Branch 2)
Tel : 24717972/24717982
KHAITAN
Tel : 24710998/24711929
JAHRA
Tel : 24568925/24568926
SALMIYA
Tel : 25722398/25716498
SALMIYA MINI
Tel : 25644961
SALWA
Tel : 25614968



Vietnam the hidden charm

H.E. Bui Quoc Trung

Staff Report



His Excellency Bui Quoc Trung Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman, is a quiet unassuming diplomat who has spent a considerable portion of his career working behind the scenes in his country's economic revival. As Director General of Planning and Investment he has helped steer changes that are revitalizing Vietnam's economy. Before moving to Kuwait to head the mission here, he was Consular of Economic Affairs at his country's embassy in Washington and prior to that worked at their mission in Australia. With in-depth knowledge and broad experience in the field of planning and investment, it was no surprise that the ambassador could elaborately detail the economic growth and development of his country and its growing bilateral relations with Kuwait.

From a subsistence agricultural economy for much of its history to a plantation economy in the mid-19th century during the time of French colonization, to a planned socialistic economy during and after the Vietnam War, the country has witnessed various economic upheavals in the past. In 1986, with the aim of transforming the country's beleaguered economy into a modern market economy, the government initiated a series of political and economic reforms. The results of these economic changes are gradually beginning to manifest itself in continued development of the country and general prosperity of its people.

"Despite geographic distance and different geo-political leanings, Vietnam and Kuwait have enjoyed friendly relations and developed multifaceted cooperation since both countries established diplomatic relations in 1976. Over the span of more than three and half decades the two countries have cemented their bilateral relations through high-level visits and cooperation frameworks in economics, trade and investment, as well as information and cultural exchanges," said the ambassador.

He added, "My posting to Kuwait in April 2011 was the start of a new experience for me; it was an opportunity for me to interact with people of a different region and a different culture. In the nearly 20 months that I have been here, I have begun to understand the country and people better. As an embassy representing a very small community of less than 350 people, our local interactions are limited, nevertheless, on those occasions when I have had the pleasure of meeting with Kuwaitis, I have found them very friendly, respecting and accommodating."

"Bilateral diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Kuwait were cemented with the opening of respective embassies in Hanoi and Kuwait, this was further augmented with the opening of a Kuwait Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City. However, even before the opening of our embassies there were several high level visits between the two countries. In May, 1995, H.E. Le Duc Anh, the President of Vietnam, visited Kuwait and following the opening in October, 2003 of our embassy in Kuwait, the then Prime Minister, H.H. Sheikh Nasser Al Mohammed Al Ahmad Al Sabah paid an official visit to Vietnam in 2007. This was reciprocated in March, 2009 when the Vietnamese Prime Minister, H.E. Nguyen Tan Dung arrived in Kuwait at the head of a high-level delegation. In October of this year, our country was represented at the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) Summit held in Kuwait, by H.E. Pham Binh Minh, the Minister of Foreign Affairs."

"Three years after the establishment of diplomatic ties, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) extended a development loan to Vietnam. Since then KFAED has been a continuous and reliable provider of favorable loans to Vietnam for the country's infrastructure developments in remote and rural areas. Eleven loans of a total of nearly $130 million have helped stimulate growth in different sectors and areas, as well as contributed to effectively reduce poverty in the country."

"In April, 2008, PetroVietnam, the country's major oil and gas group signed a joint venture contract with its Kuwaiti partner, Kuwait Petroleum International, and Idemitsu and Mitsui Chemicals, the Japanese partner, to establish Nghi Son Oil Refinery and Petrochemical Complex. With a total investment of $6.2 billion, of which Kuwait's share accounted for 35.1 percent and a long-term commitment to supply crude oil to the refinery, the Complex is one of the largest joint venture projects in the country." Though Vietnam is a relative newcomer to the oil industry, it is currently the third-largest oil producer in Southeast Asia, with a total output of 318,000 barrels per day in 2011.

Vietnam's emergence as a major player in oil resources in South Asia has led to significant international investments, especially in its oil exploration, drilling and refining sectors. Since 2000, ample energy resources, foreign investments and positive economic reforms have led to Vietnam enjoying one of the highest economic growths in the world. The country also has the highest Global Growth Generators (3G) Index. The 3G index, which is seen by many economists as being more representative than BRICKS, include 11 countries whose economies have been identified as potential sources of generating global growth in coming decades. Vietnam, which tops the list with a 3G index of 0.86, followed by China with 0.81 and India with 0.71, is forecast to have an average growth rate of 6.4 percent in the five decades from 2010 to 2050. In 2012, the country had a nominal GDP of over US$135billion with manufacturing, information technology and high-tech industries now forming a large and fast-growing part of the national economy.

"The relatively small number of Vietnamese nationals in Kuwait, working mainly in the oil and construction industry, is not indicative of the growing trade volume between the two countries. In 2011, the bilateral trade between Vietnam and Kuwait was to the tune of $800 million, a 46 percent increase on the preceding year." Due to forward looking policies in land reforms, Vietnam is today a major exporter of farm products; it is the largest producer in the world of cashew nuts and pepper, as well as the second largest producer of rice. "The embassy is looking to create favorable conditions for importing Vietnamese goods to Kuwait, principally rice, coffee, tea, pepper, cashew, timber, rubber products and textiles. Meanwhile, Vietnam continues to welcome Kuwaiti businesses and facilitates investments in the country."



Elaborating that cultural exchanges were key to building better relations on the people to people level the ambassador reiterated that embassies of both countries were working to promote bilateral cultural exchanges and looked forward to holding events of this nature in each other's countries in the near future. There have been similar exchanges of sports bodies and athletes of the two countries.

Tourism is another growing industry where Vietnam is looking for Kuwaiti investments, as well as tourists. There are several popular festivals and destinations in Vietnam, including Hanoi, Saigon, the former imperial capital of Hué, the World Heritage Sites of Hoi An and My Son, the caves of Ha Long Bay and the Marble Mountains, which continue to attract significant number of tourists each year.

"With the aim of promoting tourism to the country, numerous tourist projects are currently under construction, such as the Binh Duong tourist complex, which includes the largest artificial sea in Southeast Asia. In April of this year, the embassy took the initiative of taking a delegation of journalists and tourism companies to visit and explore the hidden charms of Vietnam. This was followed in July by a seminar at the embassy during which the country's enormous touristic potential was revealed. I am sure that in years to come Vietnam Kuwait relations will continue to grow and strengthen under the wise leadership of both countries," added the ambassador in conclusion.



Events THIS WEEK

16th-22nd DECEMBER 2012

Dec. 20

Youth Chorus organizes the Sixteenth Annual Christmas Carol program at the Indian Central School Auditorium, Abbasiya at 6.00pm. Choirs from various churches in Kuwait, Youth Chorus, United Indian School, Indian Central School and Indian Public School will usher in the spirit of Christmas at the three hour long Christmas Carol service with a wide repertoire of classic Christmas Carols.



Dec. 24-30

The Regency Hotel organizes the Wonderful Winter Gathering with a festive buffet featuring traditional winter delights, hearty homemade fare and aromatic beverages. For more info call 25766749



Radisson Blu Hotel invites all to celebrate this Christmas with their Traditional Christmas delicacies and celebrate a new beginning with a festive dinner at the Rangoli or Al Boom Restaurant in the hotel.



The British Academy of International Arts presents 'We Will Rock You' following its six sell out performances. For more info contact 60052087.

The British Academy of International Arts presents 'Dance' in association with the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts. For more info contact 60052087.



Dec. 25

AWARE invites all its staff, volunteers and well-wishers to and celebrate their achievements. This party will give us and our guests the chance to socialize with each other and discuss informally what could be done to make AWARE's more successful next year. Those interested to learn more about AWARE's services are cordially invited.



For publishing any events kindly mail to
info@timeskuwait.com
Fax on 24834815

Emperor Akihito's 79th birthday celebrated by Japanese embassy



A national day reception was held by Japanese embassy in Kuwait to celebrate the 79th birthday ofEmperor Akihito of Japan. Ambassador Toshihiro Tsujihara and Kuwait's Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Khalid Al Jarallah cut the ceremonial cake to mark the occasion. Ambassador Toshihiro in his address to the invited guests praised the bilateral relations between Japan and Kuwait and reiterated the historical friendships between the two nations.







TIMES KUWAIT'S PREMIER WEEKLY MAGAZINE

Publisher & Editor-In-Chief
Tareq Yousuf Al-Shumaimry
tareq@timeskuwait.com

Managing Editor
Reaven D'Souza
reaven@timeskuwait.com

P O Box 5141, Safat 13052, Kuwait
Tel : 24814404, 24810109
Fax : 24834815
Email : info@timeskuwait.com
Printed in: Al Qabas Printing Press

Vegetarian Paradise

Saravana Bhavan

Staff Report

A relatively new entry into Kuwait's dining-out landscape, Saravana Bhavan, which opened in mid-March of 2012, has managed to capture the palates of vegetarian food-lovers in Kuwait. Located on the 4th floor of Humoud Towers, off the Gulf Road in Fahaheel, above the Centrepoint Store, the restaurant has easy access and plenty of parking in the vicinity; but finding an empty slot for your vehicle, during the busy hours, is whole different matter.

The Times was recently at Saravana Bhavan Kuwait, nibbling on nuggets of fried mushrooms sautéed with vegetables and crushed peppercorn, while sipping the famed special filter coffee. Served in a quaint little steel tumbler placed in a larger steel bowl, the proper etiquette to drinking the foamy coffee is to decant the steaming fluid in small portions into the bowl, relishing the flavor and aroma as you sip it. We did just that while enjoying the expansive view from the window of boats bobbing in the gentle waters of the Arabian Gulf.





Saravana Bhavan, an Indian vegetarian restaurant that started out as a small food outlet in a middle-class suburb of Chennai, India, in 1981, has in the three decades since, mushroomed across India and the world. In a telling sign of its growing popularity overseas, today there are more branches, 46 in the last count, abroad than in entire India, where it is mainly limited to the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu and to two outlets in New Delhi. However, no matter in which outlet of Saravana Bhavan you eat, in India or abroad, their quintessential taste, the relaxing ambiance and unpretentious, attentive service remains the same — whether it is New Delhi or New York, Anna Salai in Chennai or Abu Humour in Doha, the Saravana Bhavan experience remains unchanged. While this replication may not appeal to everyone, particularly to those who insist on a new dining experience every time they visit a restaurant, to tens of thousands of loyal diners across the globe, who pass through Saravana Bhavan doors each day, this is the way to vegetarian nirvana.

Moreover, there is no denying the immense operational benefits of having standardized processes that can be accurately duplicated 'n' number of times, especially when you are rapidly launching restaurants around the world. This cloning process, which is relatively easy in the case of limited fast food options as served by international chains like McDonald's or KFCs, is a relatively new phenomenon in India and one made all the more complicated by the variety and intricacy of Indian vegetarian cuisine. The fact that Saravana Bhavan has perfected this art of replication is a credit to the stability of the processes they have in place, the training and experience of the staff and the dedication, perseverance and commitment to consistency by the management.

"When we opened, and even before, when we were in planning stages, everyone we talked to was skeptical about the success of a solely vegetarian restaurant in Kuwait. Most people we spoke to were of the opinion that in this country, where 'non-veg' is the general dining preference, a purely vegetarian and that to a specifically South Indian vegetarian restaurant had very little chance of success," said Ananthi Natarajan, the vivacious and politely assertive proprietress of Saravana Bhavan in Kuwait. "Nevertheless, I was convinced that most people, no matter how fastidious their preferences, are willing to try something new, at least one time as an experience. And that is all I wanted, for people to come to our restaurant and try out the food, even if it was for the novel experience. I was fully convinced that having sampled our food one time, they would definitely be back for more. It is this confidence, that as a franchisee of Saravana Bhavan, we would be able to deliver delectable South Indian vegetarian fare that would have diners coming back for more, which made me open this restaurant. I am glad that in the ensuing nine months my initial confidence has been vindicated by the growing number of new and repeat customers."

"The tremendous success of our first restaurant has given me the needed assurance to begin planning expansions. We are currently looking to enlarge with a separate banquet hall and to start an outdoor catering division as well as a dedicated savories section. We have recently started a small early morning breakfast menu and take-away to meet needs of customers who come after their night-shifts. Also, in the wake of strong growing demand, we are planning on opening a second branch, most likely in Salmiya, in the near future. More than finding a new place, it is obtaining the necessary visas for staff that is holding up our expansion plans. South Indian cuisine generally needs more specialized manpower with specific chefs for each of the different specialties. The immigration people were surprised when we asked for 40 personnel to run a restaurant. Besides, as a franchisee of Saravana Bhavan we employ only staff who have been trained at the franchiser's institute in India; so we cannot hire anyone locally," said Ms. Natarajan



Joining the conversation, Sundareswaran, Chezhiyan and Govindraj, the manager, the main chef and the kitchen supervisor respectively added their thoughts on what made Saravana Bhavan different from other eateries in town.

"It is not just that we are a vegetarian haven in the midst of a flood of non-veg restaurants; even among the few vegetarian restaurants in Kuwait, we are unique in that here, there is an added emphasis on delivering authentic South Indian vegetarian dishes, spiced, flavored and served the way they are meant to be. There is no mish-mash of different styles of cooking and neither are the seasoning nor zest of a dish tamped down," said the manager. "Our delicious food prepared with passion under very hygienic conditions and served with élan at very competitive prices is what makes our brand so appealing and enduring," he added.

"There is a consistency to the Saravana Bhavan taste, irrespective of which branch you visit. Whether you eat in Malaysia or Mylapore in Chennai or at Wembley in the UK, everything from the size, weight and diameter of our dosas to the taste of our chutneys and curries to the little steel tumblers in which we serve our coffee, the dining experience will be the same," added the main chef. "All of us are trained at our culinary institute in Chennai; no staff is sent to a branch without undergoing a minimum of 15 days orientation on different aspects of working for Saravana Bhavan," said the kitchen head, adding, "We are taught not only the specific spices and quantities to be added to a curry or soup, but also how to select the best and freshest ingredients and how to roast and grind the spices to correct consistency."

So what, we asked, were the most popular dishes at Saravana Bhavan? "The most ordered dish is Thali, a whole meal on its own, which comes on a steel platter with a mound of rice in the center circled by tiny steel bowls holding soup, lentil curry, vegetable fries, yogurt, sweet dish and pickle among others. Another favorite is the dosa, a brittle, paper-thin pancake either served with chutney on its own, or folded over to enclose loosely mashed potatoes and onion masala, to form the famous masala dosa. And then of course there is our famous special filter coffee at any time of the day," said the manager.



Deadlocked in Dubai

Continued from Page: 1

This was opposed by the US and European nations who argued that the treaty's regulations should not stretch to internet governance. The current structure of the internet, the US claimed, allowed it to ensure that technical experts could make "agile, rapid-fire decisions" about the net's development as part of multi-stakeholder organizations. It added that other references to net might also be used to legitimize censorship and other interference in the operation of internet service providers (ISPs) and cloud-based operations.

Iran then called for a vote on an African proposal, despite ITU's earlier pledge that disputed issues would only be resolved by consensus and not a majority vote, the issue was carried by 77 votes to 33. Following this vote, the US, Canada and UK said they could no longer ratify the treaty. "My delegation came to work for revised international telecommunication regulations, but not at any cost," said the head of the UK delegation Simon Towler.

The ITU, based in Geneva, Switzerland, is today a specialized agency of the United Nations charged with, among other things, assisting in the development and coordination of technical standards in communication and information technologies. The ITU is also responsible for organizing worldwide and regional conferences to bring together representatives of government and the telecommunications and ICT industry to exchange ideas, knowledge and technology. The WCIT-12 was called together to address and update International Telecommunication Regulations (ITR) that were last updated at the ITR conference in Melbourne, Australia in 1988.

By the time of the Melbourne conference in 1988, the regulatory structure was based on telephone voice telecommunications, operated in most countries by regulated monopolies. Today, with over a billion users worldwide, the internet has become the indispensable tool for communication and business. One of the benefits of the Internet for small businesses is that the Internet creates a competitive marketplace in which they have the opportunity to grow as much as larger companies and have the potential to gain customers from around the world. With its preponderance influence on people and business, it was only to be expected that a significant amount of time, discussions and disagreements at the WCIT-12 would be centered on the internet and its regulation. What was also anticipated was that much of the discussion at the conference would be concerned on the 'openness' of the internet and the aspiration of many governments to be able to control it.

Speaking at the conclusion of the conference, Mr. Kramer added, "During the past 24 years, the internet has been running without UN regulations. We candidly cannot support an ITU treaty that is inconsistent. US still believes that internet policy should be multi-stakeholder driven and should not be determined my member states, but by citizens, communities and broader societies. This has not happened here."

Giving his spin on the conference, Mohammad Al Ganim, Director General of Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, UAE, and Chairman of WCIT-12 said, "I was happy that all the regional groups and the administrations worked together in a spirited compromise to produce the final text. The final text was also approved by the opposing countries and does not include internet or content issues. The new agreement will give countries a right to access international telecommunications services and the ability to block spam, which delegations declining to sign the amended text argued would pave the way for government censorship and control over the internet.

According to Dr. Hamadoun Toure, Secretary-General of the ITU, "The treaty will not limit freedom of expression and will mostly seek ways to broaden internet services to developing countries. The new ITR treaty does not cover content issues and explicitly states in the first article that content-related issues are not covered by the treaty. Likewise, in the preamble of the new text signatory Member States undertake to renew their commitment and obligation to existing human rights treaties. The word "Internet" was repeated throughout this conference and I believe this is simply recognition of the current reality – the two worlds of telecommunications and Internet are inextricably linked. Let WCIT be the beginning of this dialogue. As the two worlds increasingly converge so must we increasingly converse and find a common way."



All roads lead to Kochi for Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

Continued from Page: 1

A sizeable population of Keralites reside in Kuwait and have shown a keen interest to attend this year's PBD. Since there will be a special session on NRI's in the Gulf it will be an added incentive for Indians from Kuwait to address issues.

The state government has also strictly ordered the removal of all flexes on the roads. In order to give the visitors a warm welcome, arches would be erected. To ensure complete cleanliness in the city, tightening of all waste management measures is in place and the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) has been asked to ensure uninterrupted electric supply during the conclave

"On request of the Kerala Government, we have decided to hold the next Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in Kochi," Union Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs Vyalar Ravi said at a press meet recently

The event is an annual affair as part of the government's effort to reach out to the nearly 30 million strong Indian diaspora across the globe. Every year the event begins on January 7 - the day when Mahatma Gandhi returned to India from South Africa to join India's freedom movement in 1915.

The first edition of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was held in 2003.

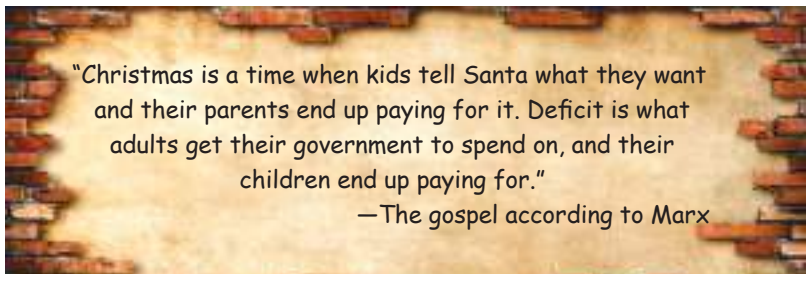
Nearly 1,800 delegates from 50 different countries had participated in the 10th addition of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas that was held in Jaipur in January this year.

Minister Ravi said that participation from the Gulf countries is expected to mark a sharp rise owing to the large number of Keralites living there.

Since the event is being held in Kerala, which contributes a sizeable number of persons emigrating to the Gulf region, there will be a special session on 'NRIs in the Gulf', Ravi said.

"People will come from all over the world, but we expect large participation from the Gulf countries. This is obvious because the event will be held in Kerala," the minister said.

In the forthcoming PBD, there will be pre-PBD seminars related to development issues such as skill development, pure sciences, tourism, youth and NRIs in the Gulf and plenary sessions on 'India's growth: greater opportunities', 'Overseas Indians: safe environment', 'Engaging young overseas Indians' and 'Investment opportunities in States.' More information on the event can be sourced from www.pbd-india.com





From Housewife to Upperhouse

Renuka Chowdhary 26 years in Indian Parliament and still counting



Staff Report

For a person who had contempt for politics initially, destiny, however, crafted strange changes and entered the territory she once feared to tread. Meet Renuka Chowdhary, the Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament from Congress and former Union Minister who was forced to jump into the whirlpool of Indian politics 26 years ago.

"Much as I had a dislike for politics, my destiny was already written and in 1986 I was first elected to the Indian Parliament" Renuka candidly revealed to The Times in an exclusive chat. Renuka recalled her initial fear of politics. "My legs were shivering when I first entered the House to take oath. But somehow I gained confidence when I thought to myself I was in the Parliament where my idol Pandit Nehru once walked in its corridor. And then everything calmed down".

Since 1986, Renuka has enriched Indian Parliament with her mere presence, her powerful persona, articulate speeches, humour and wit, with which she endeared the Indian political horizon now for well over 26 years.

Renuka recalled her days and time in politics, the ups and down and the changing milieu of Indian politics. "It has been a rollercoaster ride for me. I have seen many ups and down, there were moments for exhilaration, anger, sorrow, surprises and of satisfaction. Politics springs so many surprises, sometime unknown development that you can never imagine. And so everything becomes part of your life".

A very well known face of Indian politics, Renuka Chowdhary is among those who could convert a morose moment in the House into a lively ambience with her wit and remarks, the indefatigable energy she exudes all around is always evident. Her bolero laughter and her punches in words has now become a part of the Indian Parliament and also with the Indian media. Success has not changed her at all. 26 years ago the shy girl from Khammam in Andhra Pradesh retains her past, embedded to the ground she belonged, and her doors open to one and all despite achieving so much. It is this attachment to her root which was visible as people in hundreds from her state thronged to the Kuwait airport to receive her when Renuka came for the OCA meet, four years ago. "I was surprised to see the crowd at the airport but that is what you earn in politics and that I treat as my reward" But success has its own cost. "I had to make a lot of sacrifice in politics. When my daughter won 22 medals in sports, I was unable to attend the ceremony due to political compulsion. Also when my daughters were down with measles, I could not attend her as I was busy drafting policies to save million of children in the country as Union Women and Child Development minister" she recalled.



> Renuka recalled her initial fear of politics. "My legs were shivering when I first entered the House to take oath. But somehow I gained confidence when I thought to myself I was in the Parliament where my idol Pandit Nehru once walked in its corridor. And then everything calmed down".



Renuka insist it is this opportunity to serve the people and the nation and that makes politics so dear to her. As Tourism Minister she ran a campaign on tourists as our national guest which caught the imagination of the nation. Then during her tenure as Women and Child Development Minister, she unveiled several new measures to mitigate the suffering the two core sectors of Indian Society which made the ministry a role model.

During her 26 long years in Parliament, Renuka says there were many memorable moments, some great debates, passages of some great historic Bills, transfer of power, floor management. But the most memorable and defining moment was the meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party meeting which was called in 2004 to elect Sonia Gandhi as its leader. It was history in the making

"We all had gathered in the Central Hall and then came the bombshell. Our leader Sonia Gandhi declined to become the Prime Minister despite repeated pleas by our senior party leaders. I was witness to this history to see a great lady refusing to become the Prime Minister of the world biggest democracy which was offered to her on a platter. Everyone was shocked by Soniaji decision, we pleaded, but she remained adamant" It was on this occasion, that Renuka was asked to give a speech. She broke down and then regained herself and delivered one of the finest speeches, impromptu. Her words and articulation made many Congressmen weep in the Central Hall.

Sonia Gandhi, who listened in rapt attention, stood up to hug her, embraced and consoled her saying her decision was in the national interest. In 2009, Renuka lost her Lok Sabha seat from Khammam Constituency of Andhra which she won twice in 1999 and 2004. "You win and lose sometime" was her comment. But she made a comeback within a year when she was appointed as Advisor to the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training in the Lok Sabha and later Congress President Sonia Gandhi appointed her as party spokesperson.

In March this year, the famous face of Indian politics made her re-entry into the Parliament after Congress President nominated her to the Upper House as MP. As Congress spokesperson, Renuka became the most visible face on the Indian TV, defending her party and government engaging in heated debates on TV channels so often. Her rapport with the media at the regular briefing is a treat. "This is a challenging job where every word you speak counts, how you defend and project the party view"

An avid reader, Renuka loves listening to music, travelling, textile weaving and more surprisingly she has a keen interest in agriculture. "I am a farmer and had it not been politics I would have been happily living with my husband Sridhar and daughters at my farm house."

What puts her off is meanness and petty behaviour. "I hate meanness and superfluous people. Be yourself and be honest, don't play game." A splendid host at home, Renuka has keen eyes on aesthetics and presently busy with the makeover of her official bungalow in Delhi posh area. With the energy that she is putting in, Renuka is going to prove Mughal Emperor Babar wrong with her emphasis on symmetry as with her keen observation she matches every space not by inches but by millimeters.



7 Future Wonders of the World

The Seven Wonders of the World were basically Ancient Greece's version of Lonely Planet—a guide to the most awe-inspiring, must-see-before-you-die structures in the classical world. Now, thousands of years later, one spot is still drawing tourists (the Great Pyramid at Giza), while the rest have been destroyed and mostly forgotten (the Tomb of Maussollos at Halicarnassus, anyone?).



Burj Khalifa, Dubai

With just one surviving Wonder, the aptly named New7Wonders Foundation decided the roster needed an update, and in 2007, a global poll of more than 100 million people generated a new list. But the additions weren't all that new—winners included Machu Picchu, Rome's Colosseum and the Taj Mahal. We want to know what future generations will look back on as the most incredible creations of our time. Therefore, we compiled a list of seven "Future Wonders of the World," all completed after the year 2000. Like the original, our list comprises seven structures that manage to push both technical and aesthetic boundaries. And you'll probably find them in a Lonely Planet, too.



Beijing National Stadium

Burj Khalifa

City: Dubai

Architect: Adrian Smith, formerly of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

Year: 2010

Claim to fame: Topping out at 160 floors, this multi-use building is the tallest man-made structure in the world.

Beijing National Stadium (also known as the Bird's Nest)

City: Beijing

Architect: Herzog & de Meuron

Year: 2008

Claim to Fame: The centerpiece of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, this 91,000-seat stadium is also the world's largest steel structure.

30 St Mary Axe (also known as the Gherkin)

City: London

Architect: Foster and Partners

Year: 2004

Claim to Fame: Located in London's financial district, this 40-floor office building won the 2004 Stirling Prize. Its unique design takes advantage of modern technology that allows both sunlight and air to flow through it.

The Shard

City: London

Architect: Renzo Piano

Year: 2012

Claim to Fame: Controversial from its earliest beginnings, this multi-use building radically transformed London's iconic skyline.



Walt Disney Concert Hall

Walt Disney Concert Hall

City: Los Angeles

Architect: Frank Gehry

Year: 2003

Claim to Fame: This complex, contoured building is a prime example of Gehry's Pritzker Prize-winning aesthetic.

One World Trade Center (also known as the Freedom Tower)

City: New York

Architect: David Childs of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill



One World Trade Center

Year: 2013 (projected)

Claim to Fame: At its completion, this will be the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere and the third tallest in the world.

Phaeno Science Center

City: Wolfsburg, Germany

Architect: Zaha Hadid

Year: 2005

Claim to Fame: Completed a year after Hadid became the first woman to win the Pritzker Prize. The New York Times called it "the kind of building that utterly transforms our vision of the future."

Experience the real 'Real Madrid'



Real Madrid is the club of clubs in European football. The long and illustrious history of Real Madrid began 110 years ago in Madrid, Spain, when it was founded as Madrid Football Club. The crown on its logo and the word 'Real', which means 'Royal' in Spanish, were bestowed on the club in 1920 by King Alfonso XIII.

Since its inception, the club has been instrumental in promoting football in Europe and the world; not only was the club among the seven founding members of FIFA in 1902, but it was also the only club involved in creating the European Cup in 1955. And the honors that the club has notched up in century plus ten years of existence includes being honored as the 'Best Club of the 20th Century' by FIFA, winning 32 League titles and 9 European Cup titles amongst numerous others. Since its establishment in 1902, the club has played in First Division tournaments during every season and, since 1947, played all its home matches in its 85,454 capacity stadium, the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

Unlike most European clubs, Real Madrid has been owned and operated by its own members. And, in 2011, with revenue of nearly 480 million Euros, the club is the richest football club in terms of annual revenue. With 181,000 Madrista card holders, 93,267 club members and 2,082 official fan-clubs across the world, the club also has the distinction of having one of the highest number of global supporters.

There are many symbols that represent the club's glorious moments in history, but none like the club's Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. For it is here that some of the most glorious moments of the club's and football's history were written; because it was here that people have had the privilege and pride of witnessing how the best of all-time players elevated the game of soccer to an art; because it is here that one can truly understand what it means to never give up because of the love felt for one's colors.

Now you can share this rarefied atmosphere by hosting your corporate event at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium, through Real Madrid's 'Area VIP' Corporate Hospitality Service. Shape a historic event for your company through sharing in the special and exclusive milieu at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. With seats in special boxes located in various prime areas of the stadium and made available for 'Area VIP' guests, you can be a privileged witness to some of the most thrilling matches between titans of football. Share unforgettable events with your corporate guests in the most exclusive area of the world's most emblematic stadium.

Real Madrid, through its VIP Events service, offers a fully configurable and customizable event area with outstanding audio-visual equipment and excellent care of clients. In addition, VIP Events service offers the possibility of affiliating your company event with a match of Real Madrid, no matter if it is a Premier League, Champions League or the Spanish Cup. The service includes full catering, one hour before the match up to 30 minutes after the match and private access via special gate and a panoramic elevator.

Real Madrid's unique 'Area VIP' corporate hospitality service provides some of the most exclusive offerings to its corporate seat customers, including ticket pre-sales for any match of the season, instant ticket printing and collection and adjoining seats for groups of 2 to 100 people. Another exclusive facility on offer for its corporate seat customers is the ability to select private boxes with 7 to 20 seats that provide privacy, exclusivity and easy customization. Private box members have the option of private use of the hospitality room during the whole day of the match, private access to the room, guided VIP tour of the stadium, audio-visual equipment and, security and hostess service, in addition to optional catering.

Share your historic event with your corporate guests and be a part of history in the making.

How Ravi Shankar will be remembered

When Ravi Shankar turned 90 many friends and colleagues shared their recollections of the man for a special tribute that appeared in the Indian American magazine India Abroad. Here are a few excerpts from interviews conducted for that occasion.

ZakirHussain: He took music from the closely guarded world of the palace court to a more open interactive way of playing. He was forward thinking. He had the advantage of having been educated in the west. He had a greater world view than most Indian musicians. My father (Allah Rakha) and he were a pair that was the face of Indian music for a long time. People were astounded when they realised the sitar player was not the only musician on stage. Ravi-ji really enjoyed the rhythmic interplay. I remember when my father died, Raviji chartered a plane to fly into Bombay just in time for the burial. He must have been 79 himself.

Mamata Shankar: What I appreciate best about him is he always acknowledges my father. He always says Uday Shankar is a super duper star. Kaka keeps him and Baba Alauddin Khan in a special place – they are his gods. That makes me feel very proud. I think what makes Kaka and Baba unique is the spirituality in their dance and music. When Baba danced on stage he was god. When Kaka gets on stage with his instrument in hand he is lost in another world.

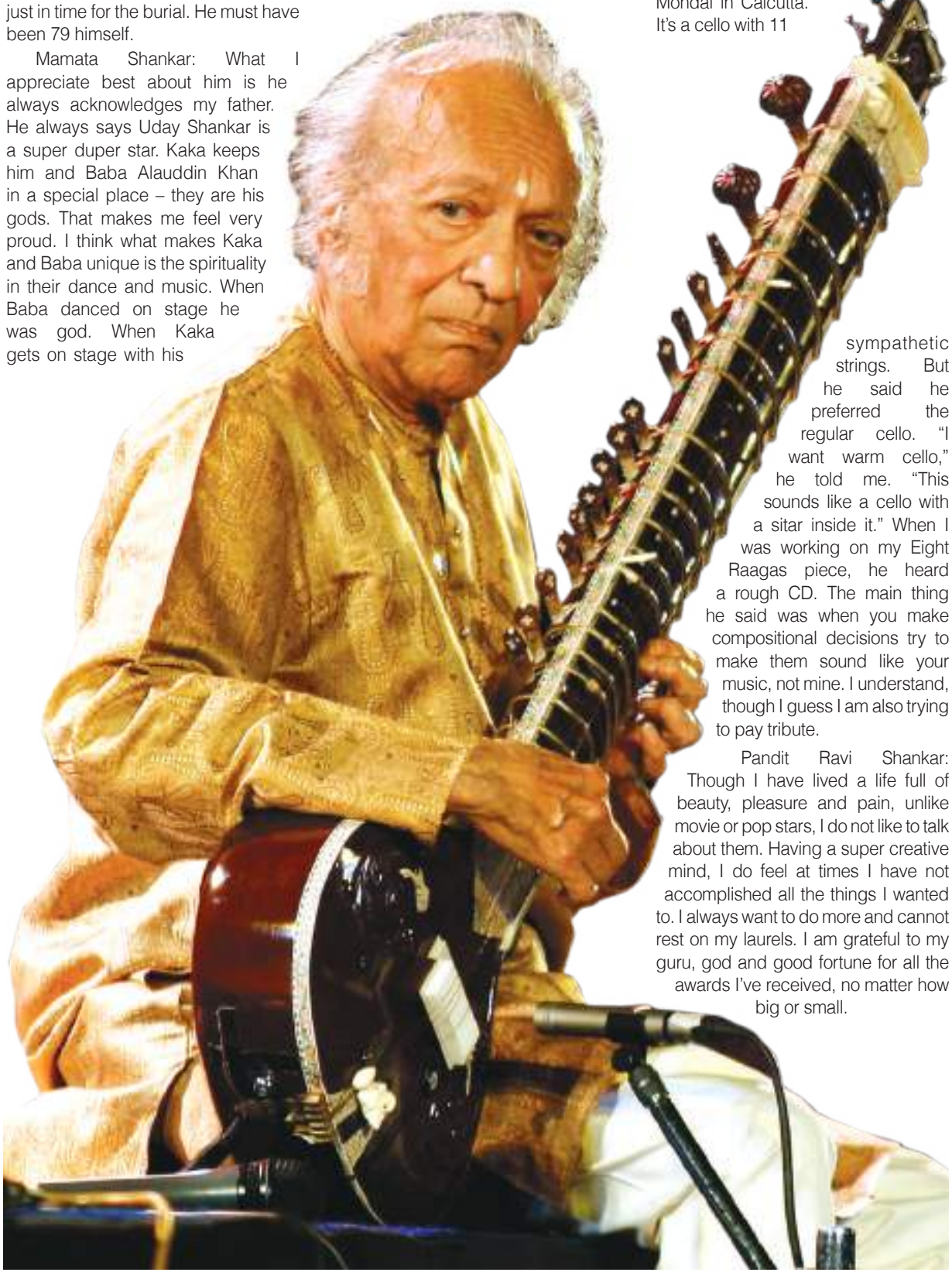
David Murphy: Ultimately rather than fusion, I believe he created music that speaks equally to performers and listeners from East or West. One of the means of doing this is to give Western musicians ragas to play that have notes in common with the modes of Western music. Through Ravi Shankar's approach, musicians from both traditions are able to find common ground immediately. A good example would be Khamaj which is used prominently in the Concerto No 1 for Sitar and Orchestra.

> "Though I have lived a life full of beauty, pleasure and pain, unlike movie or pop stars, I do not like to talk about them."
>
> Pandit Ravi Sankar

Vishwa Mohan Bhatt: When the proposal (for collaboration) first came from RyCooder I was not sure. Then I looked at my guru and said I would do it. If an artist can combine with other streams of music he should go for it. Not all can. I did it keeping him in mind. When Guruji heard my music he only commented that when the mohanveena comes on it is so relaxing. Karsh Kale: Anoushka had told me that he had initially requested that I come to the house as he wanted to practice and needed some tabla accompaniment. This was enough to make me very nervous. I don't even remember what I played, but I do remember it not being so impressive at first. He then began to recite tabla compositions to me. At first they were such that I could play what he was reciting, but soon it became that I had to write them down.

Barry Philips: I have a cello made by Krishna Mondal in Calcutta. It's a cello with 11 sympathetic strings. But he said he preferred the regular cello. "I want warm cello," he told me. "This sounds like a cello with a sitar inside it." When I was working on my Eight Raagas piece, he heard a rough CD. The main thing he said was when you make compositional decisions try to make them sound like your music, not mine. I understand, though I guess I am also trying to pay tribute.

Pandit Ravi Shankar: Though I have lived a life full of beauty, pleasure and pain, unlike movie or pop stars, I do not like to talk about them. Having a super creative mind, I do feel at times I have not accomplished all the things I wanted to. I always want to do more and cannot rest on my laurels. I am grateful to my guru, god and good fortune for all the awards I've received, no matter how big or small.



Family devastated with the loss of beloved Jacintha



The husband and daughter of nurse Jacintha Saldanha who died in a suspected suicide have both told of their devastation at her death. Benedict Barboza, a 49-year-old hospital accountant, also known as Ben, posted a tribute to Mrs Saldanha on his Facebook page.

He wrote: 'I am devastated with the tragic loss of my beloved wife Jacintha in tragic circumstances, She will be laid to rest in Shirva, India.' Mrs Saldanha was found dead at King Edward VII hospital's staff lodgings.

Only three days before her death, the 46-year-old nurse had transferred a hoax call from two Australian DJs who obtained intimate details about the Duchess of Cambridge while she was staying at the hospital. The nurse who died in a suspected suicide was described as a 'lovely lady' who was committed to her family. Jacintha's mother-in-law Carmine Barboza, 69, said she was told about the death when Benedict called and informed her. She said that the couple spent last new year with the family in Udupi along with their son Junal, 16, and 14-year-old daughter. Talking about her daughter-in-law, Mrs Barboza said: 'Jacintha was a very caring woman. She used to call us every Sunday without fail. We just cannot believe what has happened.'

Neighbours revealed that Mrs Saldanha was known as the nurse to the Queen because of her employment at the prestigious hospital, which has long been used by the Royal family. She was also described as a compassionate person, who often walked an elderly neighbour to the shop. King Edward VII hospital said they it written a letter of complaint to the Australian radio station's parent company about the 'truly appalling' prank.. The hospital's chairman Lord Glenarthur said he wanted to 'protest' against the 'extremely foolish' gag which he branded 'truly appalling'. Lord Glenarthur said her death was 'tragic



beyond words'. Mrs Saldanha moved to Britain from the Mangalore region of India more than ten years ago, having previously spent time in the Middle East in Oman

The woman is thought to have split her time between the family home and the London hospital, where she stayed in staff lodgings close to the main building. She first registered as a nurse in 2003. News of Mrs Saldanha's death caused shockwaves both internationally and locally. A neighbour said the family lived in their £130,000 terraced home in Bristol for about eight years. A friend at the family address today said that Mrs Saldanha's partner Benedict Barboza, 49, and their teenage son and daughter, were 'very, very shocked and unhappy at the tragedy'.

Neighbour Mary Atwell, 56, said: 'She was a lovely, lovely person who always spoke to you when you saw her in the street.' 'The kids were always polite and well-behaved. The boy often played football on the green outside with his friends. 'But you could always see that she was very dedicated to her job. She was a lovely person.' Miss Atwell also revealed that the nurse often displayed kindness to her neighbours. Miss Atwell said: 'She used to walk an elderly neighbour who has dementia, who lives a few doors along, down to the shops and back.

'She fitted in well around here, they all did. They've lived here for at least 10 years and were very quiet and pleasant. She also called for the Australian DJs to be sacked, saying: 'They should never have been allowed to do what they did. A neighbour, known as Maxine, said: 'She was a lovely woman, just so smiley and bubbly.'We used to joke with her that she was a nurse for the queen, she was just so nice. 'She'll be much missed, her family will be absolutely devastated. It's so tragic.' Mrs Saldanha's driving instructor Jeff Sellick said he was in 'complete shock' at her death. The owners of the Australian radio station 2DayFm, whose DJs made the prank call, also offered their condolences to the family.

In a statement, the company said: 'Southern Cross Austereo (SCA) and 2Day FM are deeply saddened by the tragic news of the death of the nurse, JacinthaSaldanha from King Edward VII Hospital and we extend our deepest sympathies to her family, and all that have been affected by this situation around the world. 'CEO Rhys Holleran has spoken with the presenters, they are both deeply shocked, and at this time we have agreed that they not comment about the circumstances. 'SCA and the hosts have decided that they will not return to their radio show, until further notice out of respect for what can only be described as a tragedy.'



Christmas Eve Traditions

The night before Christmas has as many unique traditions as it does people who celebrate it. Marking the end of the Advent Season, Christmas Eve is on December 24th. Here is a look at some of the more popular and prevalent Christmas Eve traditions.

Deck the Halls

Throughout Europe and in many last-minute American homes, too, families gather to set up their Christmas tree. They also hang garlands of evergreen boughs over the window and wreaths on the doors.

Bayberry Candles

Bayberry candles were first made by the American colonists, who discovered that, even though they take longer to make, they burned longer and cleaner than traditional wax candles. Because these candles took so much effort to make, many families began saving them for special occasions. Thus was born the tradition of lighting bayberry candles on Christmas.

Feast of Seven Fishes

The Feast of Seven Fishes originated in southern Italy and is practiced today by many Italian American families. In celebration of the birth of baby Jesus, many Roman Catholics do not eat meat on Christmas Eve. Instead, a feast of seafood and shellfish is prepared. Why seven different types of fishes? Tradition tells that it is because God took seven days to create the universe.

Midnight Mass

Many Roman Catholics and Anglicans celebrate Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. In Spanish-speaking areas, the Midnight Mass is called Misa del Gallo ("Rooster's Mass"). Other Protestant churches also have nativity plays and candlelight services, but usually hold them earlier in the evening. Many Methodist churches celebrate Holy Communion in a solemn service lit only by the candles of the Lord's Table.

Caroling

An old European custom of singing Christmas songs throughout the village is still commonly practiced in the United States. Carolers, groups of friends or church-goers, will go from door to door, entertaining neighbors with traditional songs and hymns. Residents often give the carolers hot cocoa in return.

Santa Claus

For many families, Christmas Eve also marks the late-night arrival of Santa Claus. Children leave out milk and cookies before they go to bed, for Santa and his reindeer to enjoy. In some families, children open one present before they go to bed -- often a pair of Christmas pajamas. Other families save all the gifts to be opened on Christmas morning.

The world's brightest stars

Top 10 Christmas tree

New York City, United States

Decorated with more than 30,000 multi-colored energy-efficient LED lights and crowned with a Swarovski star, the Rockefeller Centre Christmas tree is a world-wide symbol of the festive season that appears every year in New York City, United States.

Paris, France

Recognized as fashion capital of the world, it's no wonder the annual 4 storey Christmas tree at Galleries Lafayette in Paris is one of the most stylish Christmas trees around. Adorned in Swarovski crystals, the stunning tree sparkles in the luxurious French department store, Paris.

Washington D.C, United States

The lighting of the Capitol Christmas Tree has been a popular American tradition since 1964 when President Coolidge was in office. The giant Christmas tree decorates the grounds around the White House every year in Washington D.C.

Berlin, Germany

Berlin's beautiful city lights up during the festive season with an impressive Christmas tree that stands illuminated next to the Brandenburger Tor Brandenburg gate, Berlin.

Prague, Czech Republic

Located in the famous Christmas market in Old Town Square, Prague's grand Christmas tree stands as the festive centerpiece towering above the wooden stands which offer traditional cuisine and hand crafted goods, Prague, Czech Republic./

Sussex, UK

Sussex holds the crown for the tallest Christmas tree in the UK with an impressive height of 118 feet. The giant Redwood tree which has over 1,800 sparkling lights is showcased at Wakehurst Place, a country estate near Ardingly, West Sussex.

London, St Pancras station, UK

The world's tallest Christmas tree to be made of plastic Lego bricks was unveiled in St Pancras International Station in London last year. And it's here to stay this year too. Created by Duncan Titchmarsh, the impressive tree is 12.2 meters high and needed around 600,000 Lego bricks to be created, London, England.

London, UK

Every year since 1947 London receives a very lovely Christmas present during the festive season. As a thank you for support and friendship during World War Two, Norway donates a grand Christmas tree that stands in the Centre of Trafalgar square. The tree is cut in November during a ceremony attended by the British Ambassador of Norway, Mayor of Oslo, and Lord Mayor of Westminster before being shipped to London.

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Located on the bank of the Lake Rodrigo de Freitas, the staggering 85m-high Christmas tree in Rio de Janeiro was established by the Guinness Book of Records last year as the largest tree of its kind. However this year Brazil pulled out even more stops showcasing the world's largest floating Christmas tree where 3.1 million bulbs flicker to simulate the changes between the four seasons, Rio de Janeiro.

Ukraine, Eastern Europe

The eco-friendly colorful Christmas Tree in Kiev's Independence Square is almost as tall as its neighbouring monument reaching a staggering height of 130 feet.

Mistletoe

While the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe is a long-standing Christmas tradition, the mistletoe plant itself is anything but romantic.

A parasitic plant that grows on trees along the eastern coast of North America, mistletoe was believed to have spread through bird droppings. In fact, the word "mistel" is an Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'dung' and 'tan' pronounced 'toe' means 'twig'. So mistletoe quite literally means "dung on a twig."

If that image doesn't make you want to pucker up, consider this: Mistletoe has also long been believed to carry magical powers. The Druids believed that mistletoe, which also grows on oak trees throughout Europe, represented the tree's soul and sexual prowess. The mistletoe would be gathered mid-summer and mid-winter and used to decorate one's home. During the Middle-Ages, mistletoe branches were hung to protect homes from evil spirits. Northern Europeans believed that mistletoe could help ward off witches.

The very first people to believe in the magic of mistletoe were the ancient Greeks. The ancient Greeks thought that mistletoe was imbued with the powered fertility, an antidote to poison, and also a powerful aphrodisiac.

In fact, during the festival of Saturnalia, the ancient Greeks would kiss under the mistletoe, which later became customary during marriage rites as well.

The tradition of kissing under the mistletoe on Christmas emerged in Europe during the Middle-Ages. The original custom held that each time a man kissed a woman under a twig of mistletoe, he should remove one of the berries. Once all the berries were gone, no more kissing could take place under that twig.

Italian Chocolate Nut Christmas Cake



Ingredients

225 g dark chocolate broken into small pieces
25 g unsalted butter, melted
2 rounded Tbsp. breadcrumbs
225 g whole blanched hazelnuts
225 g walnut pieces
5 drops vanilla extract
1 Tsp. ground cinnamon
200 g golden caster sugar
5 large eggs, separated
1 large orange, scrubbed under warm water and the peel very finely chopped
25 g icing sugar
Pre-heat the oven to gas mark 4, 350F, 180C.

Preparation

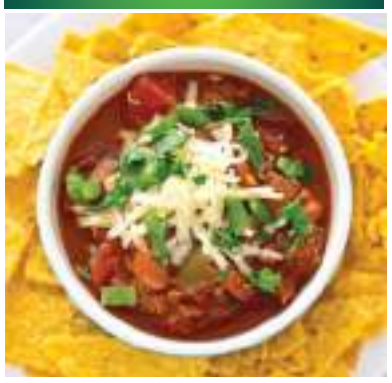
Begin by buttering the cake tin generously, then sprinkle the inside with the breadcrumbs, shaking off any excess. Put the hazelnuts and walnut pieces in a food processor, then break the chocolate into small pieces and add it to the nuts. Pulse the machine on and off until the mixture is of a grainy consistency, but not finely ground. If you don't have a food processor, you can chop the ingredients by hand using a sharp knife.

Transfer the mixture to a large bowl and stir in the vanilla extract, brandy, cinnamon, melted butter and sugar, mixing thoroughly. Now gradually add the egg yolks, mixing them in very well, and, finally, add the orange peel. Next, whisk the egg whites to the stiff-peak stage but not so thick that they become dry. Gently fold them into the chocolate mixture with a large metal spoon, a few tablespoons at a time, cutting through the mixture with a high movement to incorporate plenty of air.

When all the egg whites have been folded in, spoon the mixture into the prepared cake tin and bake in the oven on the centre shelf for about 1 hour to 1 hour 10 minutes. Cover the cake loosely with baking parchment for the last 10 minutes if it's becoming too brown.The cake is ready when a cocktail stick inserted in the middle come out dry. Then leave it to rest in the tin for a couple of minutes, before turning out on to a wire rack to cool. Store in the fridge, wrapped in foil, and eat within 2 weeks.

The cake will also freeze well, again wrapped in foil.

Simple Chili Turkey



Ingredients

1 1/2 tsp. olive oil
1 pound ground turkey
1 onion, chopped
2 cups water
1 (28 ounce) can canned crushed tomatoes
1 (16 ounce) can canned kidney beans - drained, rinsed, and mashed
1 tbsp. garlic, minced
2 tablespoons chili powder
1/2 tsp. paprika
1/2 tsp. dried oregano
1/2 tsp. ground cayenne pepper
1/2 tsp. ground cumin
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. ground black pepper

Preparation

Heat the oil in a large pot over medium heat. Place turkey in the pot, and cook until evenly brown. Stir in onion, and cook until tender.

Pour water into the pot. Mix in tomatoes, kidney beans, and garlic. Season chili powder, paprika, oregano, cayenne pepper, cumin, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer 30 minutes.

Oven-roasted onion soup



Ingredients

1kg onions, thinly sliced
2 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp sugar
1 tbsp chopped fresh thyme or 1 tsp dried
125ml dry white wine
1.3 litres vegetable stock
4 thick slices French bread
50g Gruyère cheese, grated
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Preparation

Preheat the oven to 220°C (gas 7). Toss the onions with the oil, sugar and seasoning in a large bowl. Spread in a large roasting tin and drizzle with 50ml water. Cover with foil and roast for 30 minutes, then uncover and roast for 10 minutes. Add the thyme and roast for a further 20 minutes, stirring often, until the onions are brown and tender.

Place the roasting tin on the hob, over a high heat. Add the wine and stir for 2 minutes with a wooden spoon, scraping the onions and browned bits from the bottom of the tin, until the wine is syrupy.

Transfer the onions and pan juices to a large saucepan. Stir in the stock, bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 15 minutes until the flavours are blended.

Meanwhile, preheat a moderate grill. Place the bread slices on a baking sheet and toast for 2 minutes on each side.

Ladle the soup into four heatproof bowls. Float a bread slice in each bowl and sprinkle with cheese. Place the bowls in the grill pan or a shallow baking tin and grill on a low shelf for 2 minutes or until the cheese is melted and bubbling. Serve immediately.

Iced espresso



Ingredients

1/2 cup ground espresso coffee beans
2 cups boiling water
white sugar, to taste
2 litres vanilla ice-cream

Preparation

Place coffee in a plunger. Pour over boiling water. Stir and stand for 3 minutes. Plunge coffee and transfer to a heatproof jug. Add sugar and stir until dissolved. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Place chilled coffee and 8 scoops ice-cream in a blender. Blend until smooth and frothy. Spoon 1 small scoop remaining ice-cream into each serving glass. Pour over blended espresso. Serve.

Watch that Winter Weight

The cold along with the upcoming holiday season with all its associated baking, frying and partying, makes you pile on the calories. But by matching ingredients you would normally use with the healthier alternatives we suggest here, you get to enjoy a nutritious snack while ensuring your weight does not tip the scales post holidays.

Instead of White Flour, Try Oat Flour

White flour is not only highly refined, it has a high glycemic



index, which makes your blood sugar spike and then crash. Oat flour has a lower glycemic index and it is whole grain, which helps you to feel fuller, longer.

Instead of Sugar, Try Coconut Sugar

Coconut sugar is the nectar of the blossom of the coconut before it grows, and it has a low glycemic



index. What I love about it the most is that it behaves a lot like white sugar when you bake with it. It's low in calories, and it gives you that crunch in cookies that you don't always get from those artificial sweeteners.

Instead of Milk, Try Almond Milk

Take diary out of the equation because it makes a lot of excess mucous in the body. Almond milk is the best go-to and it is also really easy to find in grocery stores. I think almond milk pairs really well



with different things - in cereals, in porridges.

Instead of Cheese, Try Cashew Cheese

When you make cashew milk, you soak cashews in water and then grind them up and strain it. Then what you can do is make cheese — this is like a cream cheese, and we can flavor this with basil or chives.



We can also dry it out and make it have more of a goat cheese texture. All you need to make this is just water and cashews — it's so much easier and so much less expensive to make than to buy.

Instead of Butter, Try Coconut Oil

Even though coconut oil is a saturated fat, there is plenty of evidence that it contains medium and long-chain fatty acids, which help you burn fat. It's anti-microbial, so it has lots of healing properties, too. I also love to bake with it — it keeps moisture in whatever you bake.

Instead of Oil, Try Canola or Safflower Oil Cooking Spray



Canola oil and or safflower oils remain stable at high heat. They are better choices than things like olive oil, which becomes really unstable - this makes free radicals form and that causes a lot of oxidative stress in the body. You know the oil becomes unstable when it starts smoking.



Instead of Filtered Water, Try Alkaline Water

The 'alkaline state' references the amount of acid in the body. There are many things that are acid forming in the modern diet: white flour, white sugar, grains, and animal proteins. One of the things to counteract this is to alkalize your foods — if you pair something with a green vegetable, it alkalizes and balances it. Spring water is naturally alkaline; it has enough minerals to adjust the pH in the water.

Instead of Coffee, Try Green Tea

Coffee is not necessarily bad, but it is an addictive for a lot people, which I think is negative. With green tea, you get the benefit of all the



antioxidants, and there's still some caffeine in there if you absolutely need it.

Instead of White Rice, Try Quinoa

Quinoa is a whole grain -technically it is the seed - but it is very protein-rich and almost a complete protein. Moreover, it is lower on the glycemic scale than



white rice so it will not cause that spike and crash that you can get from eating gluten.

Instead of Potato Chips, Try Kale Chips

Kale is just nature's best super food. It's the healthiest green leaf and it's packed with so many vitamins and minerals. Baking kale chips gives the crunch you'd get from eating potato chips without the calories.

Instead of Wheat Bread, Try Paleo Bread

Paleo bread has almond flour, taro root and egg as its base. What is great about Paleo bread is that it is so dense; it makes you feel fuller, longer.

Instead of Fruit Juice, Try Green Juice

Put kale, celery, and romaine in a blender and pair it with fruit like apple or pineapple which makes the drink more tolerable. If you have circulation issues, add jalapeño peppers and ginger, which are anti-inflammatory.



Eating well, Staying fit



Don't deprive yourself: Enjoy the foods you love in moderation, no single food makes you gain weight, the portions are what matter."

Eat until you feel satisfied, not full: You've heard this before. Putting down your fork between every bite is a technique that also helps you realize when to stop eating before you feel bloated.

Make sure half of your plate contains veggies: Vegetables are filled with fiber and water so they fill you up without filling you out.

Know yourself: If you can't limit pick-able foods (chips, nuts, grapes, candy), then make sure you stick to single serving portions, such as handheld fruit, individually-wrapped hummus or nut butter packets.

Stay hydrated: We get confused and believe that we are hungry when we really are just thirsty. Aim for eight glasses of water a day; add lemon for a flavor and vitamin boost.

Make sure your intake isn't top heavy: Don't restrict yourself all day and then break down at night. If you eat more substantially during the day, the nighttime grazing will taper.

Don't eat in front of the TV: If you are hungry, reach for fiber rich snacks that fill you with fewer calories like popcorn or fruit.

Have a small snack before going to a party: Try a handful of nuts or a fruit so that you don't show up ravenous and make poor decisions.

Carry snacks: This way, you'll always be prepared when hunger hits. Temptation is strong when you are hungry and faced with poor choices—so stash snack bars, or fruit in your bag.

Don't drink your calories: Stick to water or seltzer to keep you hydrated and save the calories for a treat later on.

Be a part-time vegetarian: Give your body a break from animal protein and mix things up.

Always choose whole grains and avoid the white stuff: This way, you don't have to cut out carbs entirely. Whole grains keep you full longer, maintain your blood sugar levels and provide you with vitamins and minerals. White flour quickly converts to sugar in your body. If you don't burn it up, you will store it as fat.

Be active for at least 3 hours each week: Even if that means waking up an hour earlier to hit the gym, going for a walk after dinner, hopping off the bus a few stops early or parking your car further than you normally would.

But know that exercise isn't everything: Going to the gym does not mean you can reward yourself with a gargantuan dessert later on. Eating well, not exercise, determines whether you will gain or lose

Try to avoid the "mish-mosh" dinner: The problem with having a meal of hummus, crackers, yogurt is that these 'snack for meals' often end up being more calories than having a balanced dinner.

No eating after dinner: Calories give us energy. We don't need energy to sleep.

No BLT's—bites, licks, or tastes: Those can add up, especially when you end up finishing your friend's plate.

Stay Away From Artificial Sweeteners: Artificial sweeteners increase cravings and lead to bloating and fatigue. Go for one teaspoon of sugar in the raw, or honey or maple syrup. One teaspoon is only sixteen calories.

How to always be on time

If you know why you're always late, says experts, you can change your behavior. No one ever plans to be late, but something always keeps coming up. Last-minute chores always seem to keep us from stepping out the door in time. Or maybe we just like living on the edge and secretly enjoy the adrenaline rush coming from pushing to make a deadline; even though we don't actually make it.



More than 20 percent of us admit to being chronically late (there are no statistics on how many of the rest are lying). Most of those people, if pressed, would be inclined to blame their lateness on circumstance. But tardiness in fact is a trait of one of many personality types. Do you match one of the personality types here? It may be good news if you do, because we also have some strategies to help each type begin arriving on time.

The Clue-less

Possibly the most common late personality type is the one who believes they can accomplish a lot in a given little time. They try to shower, dress, apply make-up, wash dishes, and start a load of laundry, all in the half hour set aside for getting ready in the morning.

Tell-tale signs: You write to-do lists during your coffee break. You feel the need to squeeze as much activity as humanly possible into each moment of each day.

Getting back on track: For at least a week, time everything you do - from the drive to work to that one last clean-up in the morning. "You'll start to see that what you thought you could do in 20 minutes actually takes 40.You'll get a more realistic idea of time.

Plan to be early for any event and organize your planner. Learn to say no to last-minute demands that will make you late. Practice exit strategies to use when you are on the way out of the door, such as, 'I would love to help you out as soon as I return. Don't answer that last call or check your email just before going out.

The Dead-liner

Deadline-oriented people thrive on the race. They need a crisis to get motivated and react at the last minute -which leads to being late.

Tell-tale signs: You go to the ATM only after you've run out of money, have coasted to the gas station on fumes more than once, and are no stranger to late fees at the library.

Getting back on track: Start retraining yourself. Choose two or three activities you will do ahead of time each day. Fill up the gas tank when it is still half-full and stop by the ATM when you still have money left in your purse. Instead of getting an adrenaline surge from the constant rush of your life, start a contest with yourself to see if you can be 10 minutes early three times a week. Reward yourself when you achieve a goal. If you need a constant adrenaline rush, find another source. There are innumerable other ways of finding action in life than rushing to make an appointment.

The Absent-minded

Sometimes cliches are true. Absent-minded professors are smart, but easily distracted.

Tell-tale signs: You misplaced the piece of paper with that important appointment information. Oh, and the car keys, your glasses and purse. You may jump from activity to activity, like that thing you were doing before you picked up this weekly.

Getting back on track: Like the Clue-less, you can benefit from taking a week to time your tasks. Prioritize each item on your to-do list and assign it a realistic time frame. If you're tempted to start a task at the last minute, refer to your list and see if you have enough time. Organize your time and space. Buy a planner and record your appointments and activities. At night, plan out your schedule for the next day. Set out what you'll need the night before in a designated spot.

Use tools to stay on task. Keep a clock in every room - even a waterproof clock in the shower. Set a timer for 30-minute intervals and when it goes off, ask yourself whether you're accomplishing what you set out to do.

The Fault-shifter

Fault shifters are frequently late for work, appointments, and social engagements yet don't feel it is a problem because it is not their fault, it is always someone else or something else that came in the way of their arriving in time. At least, that's what they think.

Tell-tale signs: You may be late but you always have a ready excuse and a good story to tell: There was a car crash on the way, a sick pet, a last-minute phone call. You feel other people are too uptight about punctuality. Fault-shifters hate being called on their lateness and that is one reason they tend to make up excuses.

Getting back on track: Instead of making excuses, practice saying 'I'm sorry'. Focus on other people. As you get ready to leave, envision the person on the other end and how the encounter will go if you enter flying in the door making excuses.

Make a deal. Tell friends and family that if you're late, you'll buy the drinks or dessert - or to go on without you. Finally, if you're always late and you have a choice, ask yourself: Is it something you want to do in the first place? The answer may be no, but it's better to be honest about it than to let yourself and others down by being late.

Daily stress hinders Daily life

Anxiety is a fact of life. I've yet to meet anyone, no matter how upbeat, who has escaped anxious moments, days, even weeks. And everyday stresses tend to add up.

You'll be much better able to deal with a serious, unexpected challenge if you lower your daily stress levels. When worry is a constant, it takes less to tip the scales to make you feel agitated or plagued by physical symptoms, even in minor situations.

Of course, there are often good reasons for anxiety. Certainly, people who lost their homes and life's treasures - and sometimes loved ones - in natural calamities can hardly be faulted for worrying about their futures.

But for some people, anxiety is a way of life, chronic and life-crippling, constantly leaving them awash in fears that prevent them from making moves that could enrich their lives.

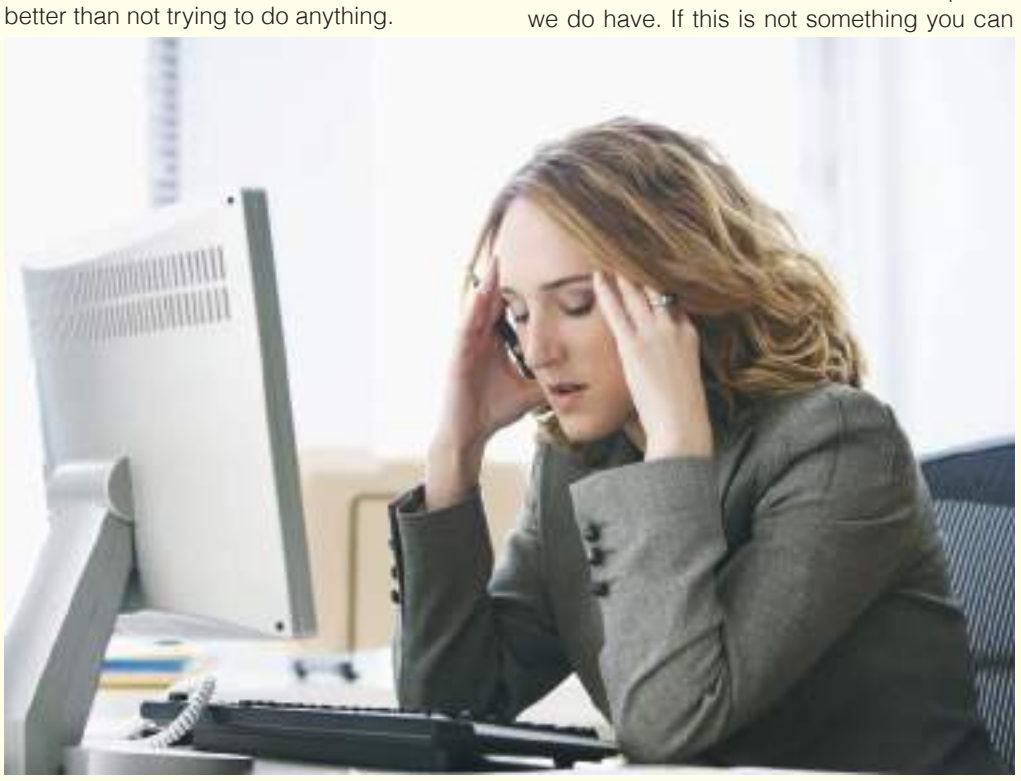
When real calamities occur, you will be in much better shape to cope with them if you don't entertain extraneous catastrophes.

Extraneous means the many stresses that pile up in the course of daily living that don't really deserve so much of our emotional capital - the worrying and fretting we spend on things that won't change or simply don't matter much.

If you worry about everything, it will get in the way of what you really need to address. The best decisions are not made when your mind is spinning out of control, racing ahead with predictions about how things are never going to get any better. Precious energy is wasted when you're always thinking about the worst-case scenarios.

When faced with serious challenges, it helps to narrow them down to specific things you can do now. The most valuable suggestion for emerging from paralyzing anxiety when faced with a monumental task is to 'stay in the present' - it doesn't help to be in the future.

Take some small step today, and value each step you take. You never know which step will make a difference. This is much better than not trying to do anything.



If you're worrying about your work all the time, you won't get your work done. Instead, learn to compartmentalize. Those prone to worry should set aside a little time each day simply to fret, and then put aside anxieties and spend the rest of the time getting things done. And, rather than focusing on what seems like a huge impossible challenge, break down tasks into smaller units and take on one small task at a time.

Many worriers think the solution is positive thinking. We recommend 'possible thinking'.

When we are stuck with negative thinking, we feel out of options, so to exit out of that we need to be reminded of all the options we do have. If this is not something you can do easily on your own, consult others for suggestions. Inevitably someone will come up with a practical solution. But even if none of their suggestions work, at least they narrow down possible courses of action and make the problem seem less forbidding. We often do this about small things, but when something big is going on, we hesitate to ask for advice. Yet that's when we need it most.

Call it 'a community cleanup effort' and it can bring more than advice. During an especially challenging time, like dealing with a spouse's serious illness or loss of one's home, friends and family members can help with practical matters like shopping for groceries, providing meals, cleaning out the refrigerator or paying bills.

Generally, people want to help others in need - it's how the world goes around. Witness the many thousands of volunteers, who pitch in to help victims of natural disasters. Even the smallest favor can help buffer stress and enable people to focus productively on what they can do to improve their situation.

Another invaluable tip is to 'let go of the rope'. When feeling pressured to figure out how to fix things right away, take a walk and return after a while. As with a computer, 'unplug and refresh' seems to work with humans as well. Taking a break, inhaling and exhaling calmly and intentionally, helps calm a situation. The more you practice calm breathing, the more it will be there for you when you need it

Also, taking a break to do something physical helps with the situation: Movement shifts the moment; take a walk or bike ride, call a friend, look through a photo album, or do some small cleaning task like clearing off your night table.

When you have a clear head and are feeling less overwhelmed, you'll be better able to figure out the next step.



Don't stick with a job you hate

Many people endure less-than-stellar jobs for fear that leaving would ruin their career.

When should you stick it out, and when is it time to move on? Of course, there is no full-proof formula for knowing exactly when to leave, but here are a few popular misconceptions that are worth avoiding:

You owe the company 'n' number of years

Many recommend employees spend at least two years at a company, or, for those later in their careers, three to five years. For a first job I've often heard there's a one year minimum, but, after my first job wasn't quite what I expected, I knew it was time to move on after nine months. Does that make me irresponsible or self-aware?

According to career expert Emily Bennington, there are exceptions to the rules regarding how long to stay in a job. "I usually recommend at least a year, but sometimes you just know when an opportunity isn't right," she said. Bennington suggests asking yourself three questions:

Is this position contributing to my long-term goals?

Am I growing professionally?

Am I free to do my best work?

"If the answers are no, no, no, then you need to search for something else," she emphasizes.

Grass is always greener at another job

When you're miserable, it's easy to assume you'd be happier and more productive somewhere — anywhere — else. Every job has pros and cons, and it's important to evaluate your career goals rather than accept the first offer you receive.

Know your strengths when searching for the right position. Make a list of priorities and deal breakers. Reflect on why you dislike your current job and what you would enjoy doing instead.

However, be careful about being too picky. Be willing to make some sacrifices and set realistic expectations. For instance, you might agree to a longer commute or a pay cut to do something genuinely engaging.

There is no perfect job, so be realistic in your evaluations. Stick to your absolute needs and be willing to compromise on the rest.

Don't quit your job until you've another

Many people will discourage you from taking time off, saying it will send the wrong message to future employers, don't believe them. That's what resumes, cover letters and interviews are for. Use those opportunities to shed light on why you made the decisions to extradite yourself from a harmful situation and how you had the courage to boldly move on even without a parachute.

But that doesn't mean you should waste your time. Use your career break to freelance, volunteer or further your education, and highlight these successes to potential employers.

Rules are there for a reason

Don't follow the so-called rules just because you think you should. Follow your own drum's beat.

Your passions are a great place to start. When you are enthusiastic about a position, you're much more likely to stand out in the crowd during the interview process — a necessity during tough economic times.

Haven't found your passion yet? Don't worry. Just keep searching. Experiment, try new things and ask questions.

The most important takeaway is this: if you are unhappy at your current position, don't necessarily listen to all the people telling you to wait it out. Make a commitment to take action. Whether that means searching for a job immediately, taking a break or simply staying positive, it is your decision to make. Own it.

Office gossip is now good

Most workers are guilty of it from time to time, but gossiping in the workplace is viewed by many employers and employees alike as a time waster — and potentially destructive, too.

But a new study by Dutch researchers finds that gossip helps keep offices running more smoothly and can actually improve people's productivity.

According to the study, gossiping about underperforming workers can, in fact, help keep them in line by pressuring them to contribute in subtle ways.



"The results of our studies show that gossip may not always be as negative as one might believe at first," said lead author of the study, Bianca Beersma. "Gossip allows people to gather and validate information, to enjoy themselves with others, and to protect their group."

The group also found that 90 percent of everyday conversations include gossip.

The research suggests that gossip is a product of human evolution, developed over thousands of years, and that, historically, being socially agreeable made humans safer and facilitated sharing of resources such as food.

"A single person cannot ward off a bear or catch a mammoth but a group can," Beersma said.

But as with any group, there are bound to be slackers — those who don't contribute or don't pull their full weight. Talking with other members in the group helped to warn others of the slackers' behavior.

The findings are published in the Journal of Applied Social Psychology. The research encompassed three studies. The first involved 220 students who were asked to describe the most recent time they engaged in gossip and to explain their motives for doing so. It found that gathering or checking information was the most important motive.

The second study, involving the same students, asked whether they would gossip about someone who wasn't pulling his or her full share of the workload. Results showed that people were more likely to gossip about shirkers to colleagues than friends, with the aim of protecting the group as their main motivation.

A third study, which involved 123 students, asked participants to imagine a colleague or a trusted friend gossiping to them about someone else.

Researchers found that if the gossip protected the group from someone shirking their duties, students viewed the act as less immoral and more social than in other situations.

'That's not my job', and other things not to say to co-workers

Whether you love your co-workers or hate them, you're stuck with them for hours each day -- and they're stuck with you. If you're not thoughtful about what you say to each other, you can make one another uncomfortable or even miserable -- and can harm your professional reputation too.

Here are a few things you should never say at work.

'Are you pregnant?'

If someone wants you to know she's pregnant, she'll tell you. Until and unless that happens, assume it's none of your business - and asking is a good way to offend most women, pregnant or not.

'You owe KD10 for this gift for the boss.'

Many workers don't want to budget for going-away or shower gifts for co-workers and resent being asked to give up their hard-earned cash. That's doubly true when the collection is being taken up for the boss, who presumably earns more than them. Besides, etiquette rules say that gifts in the workplace should flow downward, not upward.

'You're so skinny! Why aren't you eating?'

Commenting on other people's bodies should be off-limits in the workplace, even if you intend it as an expression of concern. Your co-workers are there to work, not to have their eating choices or their bodies scrutinized and judged.

'That's not my job.'

Protesting that something isn't in your job description is a good way to plummet in your co-workers' esteem -- and your manager's. Most people end up pitching in to help on things that don't fall squarely within their job descriptions, and refusing to help will quickly earn you a reputation for being unhelpful and probably a little bit lazy.

'The new manager is a real jerk.'

Snarking about the boss is rarely good for your career. Even if others join in, your comments may get back to your manager. And even if they don't, you don't want to become known as a wellspring of negativity.



'Don't ask me. They don't tell me anything.'

Complaining about how disempowered you are, is a good way to undermine your own credibility and authority. If you don't have the information you need to do your job, you should go ask for it -- not complain to others that you don't have it.

'Why are you so dressed up today? Got a job interview?'

You might not be thinking when this pops out of your mouth, but there's no outcome here that doesn't put your co-worker in an awkward position. If she does have an interview, you're forcing her to either confide in you or lie. If she doesn't, she now has to worry that you think she does.

'I'm so hung-over.'

Telling your co-workers about your long nights partying might seem like no big deal, but if you get a reputation as a lush, you'll find your credibility diminishes -- no matter how good your work.

Nice girls don't get a life

Who is a Nice Girl? We would say someone who suffers from 'the disease to please.' They are the ones who always put their needs behind everyone else's. They are figuratively referred to as door-mats as the rest of humanity tends to walk over them. At office they end up doing work that others avoid, they easily acquiesce to demands of their friends and at home they tend up doing the chores that others have left undone.



So what eventually happens to these Nice Girls? They don't get the success that is their due, win the respect they deserve, or the lives they want. Why? Because they don't take the actions necessary to get these things

So, should you not be nice? No, we are not suggesting that it is appropriate to be impolite, nasty or narcissistic behaviors. Being kind, considerate, and generous is an ingredient for success in every endeavor or interaction, but it is simply not sufficient. We know, from years of personal and professional experience, that you can reach your goals in life and do it nicely. It's not an either-or proposition.

How do I overcome being 'Nice Girl'?

Here are seven strategies for transforming yourself from a Nice Girl to a Winning Woman.

1. Evaluate the past and envision the future.
2. Build relationships that work for you.
3. Manage expectations.
4. Craft meaningful messages.
5. Prepare for pushback.
6. Use and share your connections.
7. Live your values

You may be convinced that you want to make this change, yet you may be wondering how to do it. That's why we included specific things you can (and should) do.

Delete the Old Messages

First, delete the old messages in your mind that cause you to do what everyone else wants, but not the things that you want. If you continue being all things to all people you'll never lead a rich and fulfilling life - you'll only live someone else's expectations for you.

Create Boundaries and Manage Expectations

Creating boundaries and managing expectations are intertwined. It's important for women to recognize requests they can and cannot realistically deliver within a certain period of time, or with particular resources. For example, a woman who has a full-time job, cares for an aging parent and is raising a family may have to politely decline if she's asked to be accompany her child's class on a picnic. She can say, "Thanks for thinking of me. But, I can't do it this year because my time is so limited. However, I would be happy to act as chaperone for the next class events." A clear reply, no equivocation, no apologies and clarity about what you can contribute.

Strive For Excellence but Avoid Perfectionism

Excellence is not the same as perfectionism. Perfectionism isn't attainable so it's an exercise in futility. You need to know when good enough is good enough. Look at what you do well and don't focus on minor imperfections that will always be there. And while you're at it, lose the belief that if it's going to be done right you have to do it yourself. Someone else might do it differently, but if you want a richer life, you've got to learn to delegate.

Send Guilt on a Trip

If you spend lots of time doing things that waste your time because you would feel guilty if you didn't; it is time to dump the guilt. Remember not to succumb to someone else's expectations of you. Guilt serves no purpose other than waste your time.

Prepare for Pushback

When you take control of your life, ask for things you want and make room for your own priorities, you inevitably face resistance from those who have invested in having you remain as you are. So, women need to prepare mentally for a pushback and have comebacks ready.

Walk away when it is Time

Few of us can walk away easily—once we've invested time and emotional energy in relationships—even a marginally important one. The challenge for you is to resist the expectations others may have that you'll remain committed for the long term regardless of the quality of the relationship. Winning women invest in relationships, and do the best they can to strengthen them, as long as the relationship includes reciprocity, mutual respect, and authenticity. And, when it doesn't, and they're convinced that it never will, they know it's time to walk away.

Your Life Can Be What You Want It to Be

It's up to you! Taking charge of your life means taking risks - but it also creates the potential of greater rewards. Remember, hope is not a strategy.

Top 101 Women of our times

Over the coming weeks and months we will be featuring in this column 101 women from across the globe whose influence has given a voice to one-half the world's population. These women have opened schools, ignited revolutions, brought down tyrants and fostered a brave new generation and in the process become role models for millions of people, even in places far removed from their native land.Here, we bow to the courage, determination and initiatives of these brave women and, in no particular order, pick the top 101 women of our times.

Henriette Ekwe Ebongo



A journalist, activist, and publisher of Bebela, a weekly independent newspaper in Cameroon, Henriette Ekwe Ebongo received an International Women of Courage Award last year for her lifelong devotion to press freedom and human rights. Presented by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the award recognized Ekwe Ebongo's tireless work in a region where women are generally unable to engage in the political sphere. Ekwe Ebongo is also the founder of the Cameroon branch of Transparency International, an anti-corruption organization.

Tanaz Eshaghian



Last July, Iranian-born documentary filmmaker Tanaz Eshaghian released Love Crimes of Kabul, a revealing profile of three inmates in Afghanistan's Badam Bagh women's prison who were incarcerated for 'moral crimes', such as among others running away from home. An acclaimed documentarian, Eshaghian has previously explored topics from Iranian men undergoing sex changes to the treatment of Iranians in America after the 9/11 attacks. In her newest film, Eshaghian examines the complexities of a society in which a mix of Sharia and family code decides the fate of the women, and the unpredictable legalities involved in each case.

Michelle Bachelet



At 60, Michelle Bachelet has lived more lives than most. She was a political prisoner under the brutal Pinochet regime before being forced into exile. Upon her return to Chile, she became a pediatrician, then a minister of health. In 2006 she was elected to be the first female president of Chile. It was a particularly turbulent period: Two years after taking the job, the world financial crisis struck. Two years later, a magnitude-8.8 earthquake ravaged the country. Nevertheless, Bachelet left office with the highest approval rating in Chile's history. She is now the director of U.N. Women, a United Nations initiative focusing on women's equality worldwide.

Family planning and Gates Foundation

Visiting vaccine programs at clinics in sub-Saharan Africa, Melinda Gates, co founder of the $34 billion Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, would often listen to women speaking about family planning and birth-control. Women would express their frustration at not having steady access to convenient contraceptives, saying "I wish I had that injection I used to get," or "I came to this clinic three months ago, and I got my injection. I came last week, and I couldn't get it, and I'm here again."



The women were talking about injectable contraceptives such as Depo-Provera, which is popular in many poor countries because women need to take it only four times a year, and because they can hide it, if necessary, from unsupportive husbands. As Gates discovered, injectable contraceptives, like many other forms of birth control, are frequently out of stock in clinics in the developing world, a result of both funding shortages and supply-chain problems.

Women would tell her that they'd left their farms and walked for hours, sometimes with children in tow, often without the knowledge of their husbands, in their fruitless search for the shot. "I was just stunned by how vociferous women were about what they wanted," she says.

Because of those women, Gates made a decision that's likely to change lives all over the world. She has decided to make family planning her signature issue and primary public health a priority. "My goal is to get this back on the global agenda," she says, reiterating her new emphasis on contraception.

Now the foundation is putting her agenda into practice by co-sponsoring with the British government a summit of world leaders in London. The summit aims to start raising the $4 billion the foundation says it will cost to get 120 million more women access to contraceptives by 2020. The foundation is also pouring money into the long-neglected field of contraceptive research, seeking entirely new methods of birth control.

Gates believes that by focusing on the lives of women and children, and by making it clear that the agenda is neither coercive population control, nor abortion, the controversy over international family-planning programs can be defused. Right now, 217 million women have unmet need for effective contraception, she points out. The maternal mortality rate is 45 times higher in sub-Saharan Africa than in developed world, 100,000 women annually die in childbirth after unintended pregnancies. Six hundred thousand babies born to women who didn't want to be pregnant die in the first month of life. Gates really sees this as a public-health necessity. She believes, and we hope she is right, that people of different political persuasions can come together, at least, on this issue.

Fitness & Excercise

You need to exercise for about 60 minutes every day. Setting aside 60 minutes all at once each day is one way to get in enough exercise. If you're not active for 60 minutes straight, it's okay to exercise for 10 or 20 minutes at a time throughout the day.

Pick exercises you like to do and choose a few different options so you don't get bored. Aim to exercise most days of the week. If you're not very active right now, start slowly and work your way up to being active every day.

Children and adolescents should do 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of physical activity daily. You should combine the different kinds of exercise below to total 60 minutes each day. For example, you could do 35 minutes of swimming, 10 minutes of push-ups, and 15 minutes of jumping rope to reach 60 minutes.

Even if you have a disability, you should also exercise at least 60 minutes each day. Talk to your doctor about what exercises are right for you.



E xercise Type	How often?	What is it?	Why do it?
Aerobic exercise	Most of your 60 minutes of daily exercise, at least 3 days a week.	Aerobic activities are those in which young people regularly move their muscles. Running, hopping, skipping, jumping rope, swimming, dancing, and biking are all examples of aerobic activity.	It makes your heart and lungs strong.
Muscle-strengthening exercise (3 or more days each week)	As part of your 60 minutes of exercise each day, at least 3 days a week.	Muscle-strengthening activities make muscles do more work than usual. This is called "overload" and it makes your muscles stronger. Climbing trees, yoga, rock climbing, lifting weights, or working with resistance bands are all muscle-strengthening exercises	It increases your strength and builds muscle.
Bone-strengthening exercise (3 or more days each week)	As part of your 60 minutes of exercise each day, at least 3 days a week.	Bone-strengthening activities push on your bones and help them grow and be strong. This push usually comes from impact with the ground. Running, jumping rope, basketball, tennis, and hopscotch are all bone-strengthening exercises. (These exercises can also be aerobic and muscle-strengthening.)	It will make your bones stronger. Your bones get strongest in the years just before and during puberty.

Setting Goals

It is important in set goals in every aspect of your life. But setting goals and working towards it means you will have to make certain changes in life. Here are some facts about setting goals and facing the changes involved with them.

Specific, realistic goals work best. When it comes to making a change, the people who succeed are those who set realistic, specific goals. "I'm going to recycle all my plastic bottles, soda cans, and magazines" is a much more doable goal than "I'm going to do more for the environment." And that makes it easier to stick with.

It takes time for a change to become an established habit. It will probably take a couple of months before any changes — like getting up half an hour early to exercise — become a routine part of your life. That's because your brain needs time to get used to the idea that this new thing you're doing is part of your regular routine.

Repeating a goal makes it stick. Say your goal out loud each morning to remind yourself of what you want and what you're working for; writing it down works too. Every time you remind yourself of your goal, you're training your brain to make it happen.

Pleasing other people doesn't work. The key to making any change is to find the desire within yourself — you have to do it because you want it, not because the teacher, a friend, coach, parent, or someone else wants you to. It will be harder to stay on track and motivated if you're doing something out of obligation to another person.



Roadblocks don't mean failure. Slip-ups are actually part of the learning process as you retrain your brain into a new way of thinking. It may take a few tries to reach a goal. But that's OK — it's normal to mess up or give up a few times when trying to make a change. So remember that everyone slips up and don't beat yourself up about it. Just remind yourself to get back on track.

Avoiding the bully bull

Bullies aren't all big and muscular; they come in all shapes and sizes — and it's not like you can tell who they are by what they look like. You can only tell a bully by their actions — they make themselves feel powerful by threatening, embarrassing, or hurting others. If you have ever been around a bully or been picked on by a bully, you know how hurtful they can be. But, there are a few things you can do to stay out of a bully's way.



Make friends and lots of them — there's safety in numbers. A bully is less likely to approach you if you're surrounded by pals. Try to be friendly and respectful to everyone—smile at someone if you make eye contact in the hallways, and if you dig someone's cool new shoes, tell them.

Stand up for yourself! Practice what you might say if someone starts picking on you. Saying the words a couple of times will make you feel sure of yourself. One word to the wise: Never start a discussion or argue with a bully. You just want to get them off your back, not make them angry.

Check out the way you act and be aware of your body language. How you carry yourself can bring on a bully. Slouching, looking at the ground or feet, and fidgeting make people think that you are afraid or nervous. Try to walk with your head up, make eye contact, and smile. A bully is less likely to single you out if you are the picture of self-confidence.

Ignore insults or name-calling. It'll be hard, but stay calm and don't let them see you sweat. Take a deep breath and try not to show that you are upset or angry. Above all, don't believe for one second what they're saying. Bullies feed on attention and are just trying to get a reaction from you. It's easier to give them the brush off if you don't let them get under your skin. They'll get bored and move on.

Avoid getting sucked into a scuffle. The only time you should ever fight back is when you have to defend yourself. Even then, keep eyes open for an escape route. Chances are, if someone wants to fight, they know they have a good chance of winning.

Don't be afraid to tell an adult if you're being bullied. You are not a snitch if you tell an adult you know that someone is hurting you. And if you see someone else in the same boat, find an adult to help. Once people know about it, the bully is no longer in control. Not telling anyone — especially because the bully told you not to — is just making him or her feel more powerful.

Have a few one-liners ready in your pocket. Things like, "That's funny, but enough already okay?" or "Maybe, you should really think about that" can help defuse a tense situation and keep you out of harm's way. While you're coming up with your witty one-liners, keep in mind you're trying to take the wind out of the bully's sails, not add fuel to the fire with a major burn. Embarrassing the bully in front of everyone won't make your life any easier.

Bless you, Vidya Balan, for not having a big fat Indian wedding!



As a hormonal teenager growing up in the 1970s, I was so enamoured of Shabana Azmi that I took up the courage to write to her with a suggestion that we elope. She was some 14 years older than I, and not quite the star she later became, but something about her – perhaps a mix of the cerebral and the sultry – stirred me up in curious ways. And in the spirit of the precocious boy Erasmus Leaf in the endearing film Dear Brigitte, who is infatuated with Brigitte Bardot and writes epistles of love, I wrote to Shabana and poured my heart out.

I never received so much as an autographed photograph from her, which left me broken-hearted, which pain was amplified years later when I learnt that she had married a poet named Javed Akhtar.

But one of the points I emphasised in my letter to Shabana, I recall, was that I would be perfectly happy to settle for a sherbet wedding – a simple, no-frills wedding. This was as much a concession to my penurious state as to the fact that during the Emergency, which had been in force about that time, the government had introduced a Guest Control Order, which stipulated a ceiling on the number of guests who could be invited even to private ceremonial events like weddings. It was a time of enforced socialist austerity, and everything was strictly rationed. And if you needed additional provisions or sugar or ghee to prepare sweetmeats for a wedding, you had to file an application in triplicate with the Civil Supplies Department. And since Indira Gandhi's minions ran a pretty efficient police state, civil supplies inspectors would turn up unannounced at weddings and – I kid you not – do a head-count of the number of visitors and levy a fine if they exceeded the ceiling. I remember my aunt was married in 1976, when the Emergency was in full force, and my siblings and I were put on sentry duty to sound early warning alerts in case we espied the inspectors coming. Needless to say, it took the joy out of the festive occasion for us. Others elsewhere across India, of course, had far worse experiences of the Emergency, but it says something about those perverse times that they reduced even a 12-year-old such as I to a nervous wreck at what was to have been a joyous occasion.

Nevertheless, although I detest the notion of enforced austerity to this day, particularly when it is characterised by hypocrisy and double-speak, the realisation that there may be some merit in the voluntary curtailment of conspicuous consumption, particularly on weddings, has stayed with me over the years.

Many years later, when I did get married, in far more material times, it was an event of such spartan simplicity – solemnised by an Arya Samaj priest on the foyer of my wife's parents' home – that even if a posse of Emergency-era civil supplies inspectors had raided the premises, they would have been satisfied by the low head-count of invitees.

Which is why I'm profoundly gratified by the news that Vidya Balan had a temple wedding this morning, attended by only a handful of immediate family members.

Weddings are, of course, intensely personal affairs, and – like I said earlier – I don't much care for enforced austerity. But to me, the solemnity of the occasion is inversely proportional to the scale of operations. And although I enjoy a lavish Sooraj Barjatya production, with four weddings and as many suhaag raats, as much as the next man, I have to admit that some of the most solemn wedding ceremonies I've attended have been at austere temple weddings – of the sort that Vidya Balan gave herself.

As actor Aamir Khan noted (here) after one of his Satyamev Jayate episodes, "'Bade dhoom dhaam se shaadi,' is probably one of the most common phrases in India. There's so much of emotion, thought, focus, all concentrated on the 'event': 'How will I look on that one day?' 'How will society perceive me and my chosen partner?' 'What will they say about the wedding arrangements?' 'What will they say about the invitation card?' 'What will they say about the food?' 'What will they say about the clothes?'" But, as he observed, not enough consideration goes into the lifetime that the married couple will hopefully spend together. The higher up the social ladder you are, the better off you are, the greater the societal pressure to have a vanity wedding. And of course, economists will tell you that big fat Indian weddings keep the wheels of commerce spinning in a good way. But it's just as true that among much of middle-class and lower-middle-class India, the compulsions of lavish weddings push entire families into indebtedness (more here).

So, thank you, Vidya Balan, for demonstrating through your personal preference for a simple wedding ceremony that the happiness of what is perhaps the most important day of your life is undiminished by the austere nature of the occasion. You could have had as lavish a wedding as you wanted, but sometimes less is more.

Stars who have had a close shave for the big screen



Demi Moore

Demi's now iconic look came about in 1997 when she lost her glossy locks to appear in GI Jane

Sigourney Weaver

Battling Demi for the most famous shaved head on screen is Sigourney Weaver who had all her hair cut off when she reprised her role as Ellen Ripley in 1992's Alien 3 Image: © Twentieth Century Fox

Charlize Theron

The beautiful South African has said goodbye to her sun kissed locks to play Imperator Furiosa in post-apocalyptic action flick Mad Max: Fury Road

Anne Hathaway

Earlier this year Anne Hathaway had all her hair cut off to play Fantine in Les Miserables. She reportedly wept when she first lost her long locks

Natalie Portman

Not only did Natalie Portman learn how to speak with an English accent for her role in 2005 film V For Vendetta, she also famously shaved her head

Ellen Page

That same year Canadian export Ellen Page lost her long locks to appear in gritty drama Mouth To Mouth

Mena Suvari

Blonde beauty Mena Suvari picked up the shears for her role in The Garden of Eden, released in 2008

Cynthia Nixon

Cynthia Nixon shaved her head to appear in the Broadway production of Wit this year. She was nominated for a Tony Award for her portrayal of cancer patient Vivian



'Angry Birds' Movie Arrives in 2016

Rovio Entertainment celebrated the three-year anniversary of the Angry Birds franchise Tuesday by releasing 30 new levels for the game and announcing details for the Angry Birdsmovie.

The still untitled 3D computer generated feature film will debut in mid-2016 with Despicable Meproducer John Cohen taking the production helm. Former Marvel Studios chairman David Maisel, a senior adviser to Rovio, will remain as executive producer.

"With John's hands-on producer background and David's expertise in establishing and running his own successful studio, these two are the dream team for making a movie outside the studio system," Rovio's CEO Mikael Hed said in a statement. "Both professionals have the ideal skills and vision to achieve incredible things."

SEE ALSO: 'Angry Birds' Turns Queen's Freddie Mercury Into an Honorary Character

Cohen -- who also lent his talents to such movies as Hop, Ice Age, Alvin and the Chipmunks, Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who, Robots and Ice Age: The Meltdown -- touts Rovio for "trailblazing terrific new ways for Angry Birds fans to interact with these characters."

No plot details about the movie have been revealed, but Rovio plans to produce and finance the movie to avoid losing "creative control" at the hands of a movie studio.

Hairy health signs



Your eyes may be windows to your soul, but it is your hair that speaks volumes about your health. We look at some of the hairy signs that could indicate deeper medical problems.

Major shedding

The average woman may lose as many as 100 hairs a day, but if you suddenly notice fistfuls coming loose when you brush or piles on your pillow, it may be a clue that you have a hormonal imbalance called PCOS, or polycystic ovary syndrome. PCOS can trigger your ovaries to produce too many androgens, or male sex hormones, and contribute to hair thinning or hair loss. Other signs of PCOS include stubborn belly fat, facial hair, acne, and irregular periods.

Fine, limp texture

If your once-thick locks morph into thin strands, it could be a sign of hypothyroidism, a condition by which the thyroid gland doesn't produce enough hormones, causing your metabolism to slow down. The thyroid is the master gland that regulates your endocrine system and it also impacts how hair is formed.. Other symptoms of hypothyroidism include unexplained weight gain, being cold all the time, and feeling fatigue despite getting adequate sleep.

Hair that falls out only in patches

Losing hair in dime- and quarter-sized patches could be what's known as alopecia aratha. It is thought to be an autoimmune condition where your immune system attacks your body's own healthy cells and may be triggered by major life events such as a pregnancy or illness. Patches may fill in and regrow, and then another bald patch can show up.

Going gray early

Genetics are mostly to blame for those white hairs sprouting all over your head, and usually aren't indicative of an underlying health problem. However, if you have a lot of grays before age 35, some studies suggest you might be short on vitamin B12 and folic acid. Researchers discovered that folic acid, vitamin B12 and sun exposure could help re-pigment patches of both skin and hair that stopped producing melanin, according to a study by the Department of Dermatology at University Hospital in Uppsala, Sweden.

Dry, flaky scalp

Dandruff can be seriously embarrassing - it is definitely not an accessory you want to wear with a little black dress during the holidays. Those little white flakes can also be the result of stress and anxiety.

Strands that break off easily

Your hair is made of a protein called keratin, and a lack of protein in your diet can weaken tresses to the point that they snap. Vegans or vegetarians may be especially at-risk since meats are one of the most common sources of protein. If you're certain you're getting enough protein, the damage may be caused by heat and over styling.

Fashion health hazards

There are enough hazards around without us adding to the list, but unfortunately that is what many of us do in the name of fashion and moving with the trend. Here, we list some of the trendy wears that you believe makes you look hip, but in fact is causing more damage to your body and health.

SKINNY JEANS

Skinny jeans may be fashionable, but wearing skin-tight denim and other close-fitting trousers can have health repercussions for both women and men. For men, wearing tight trousers can cause overheating of the testes, lowering sperm count and causing fertility problems. For women, wearing skinny jeans can increase your chances of developing thrush. Furthermore, squeezing into skin-tight trousers can cause nerve compression, leading to tingling or numb thighs.



HIGH HEELS

Once reserved for special occasions, women are now increasingly opting to wear heels on a daily basis, which could lead to a whole host of health problems. Regularly wearing high heels can cause poor posture, put pressure on your joints, and lead to a range of conditions including arthritis, hammer toes, back pain and tendon injuries – and that's before you take into account any heel-related accidents! Minimize damage by limiting your heels to 1.5 inches for daily wear and wearing insoles to help reduce the pressure on joints. Swapping to wedges will also give you more support.

FLIP FLOPS

While they may look more comfortable – and less dangerous – than high heels, flip-flops can also generate their fair share of health problems. In fact, in the UK the NHS reportedly spends £40 million a year treating injuries caused by wearing flip-flops. As wearing flip-flops offers no arch support or heel cushioning and forces you to adapt how you walk, the casual footwear can lead to joint pain, shin splints and orthopaedic problems. As with heels, flip-flops have their place, but they are better reserved for the beach and replaced with more supportive shoes for everyday wear.



SLIMMING UNDERWEAR

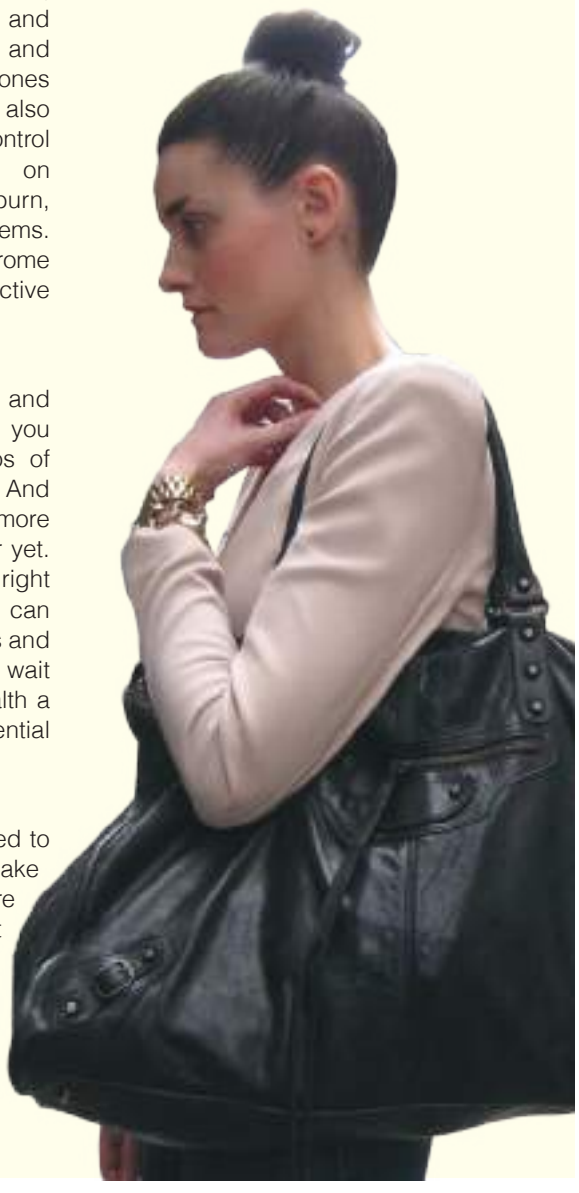
Slimming underwear (or control pants) are a big seller, endorsed by many a celeb and loved by ladies everywhere. However, while they may pull in all your lumps and bumps and help you look streamlined and leaner in your favorite dress, Bridget Jones style tummy-control underwear could also affect your health. Similar to a corset, control underwear puts increased pressure on the stomach, often leading to heartburn, breathing problems and digestive problems. Conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome can also be worsened by such restrictive underwear.

OVERSIZED BAGS

With the rising number of gadgets and accessories many women haul around, you could be carrying around several kilos of weight on your shoulders every day. And the bigger the bag you invest in, the more you will fill it with stuff, making it heavier yet. While you may not feel the effects of this right now, lugging around a heavy handbag can eventually lead to serious back problems and neck pain as well as poor posture. Don't wait until the damage is done – do your health a favor and try clearing out all non-essential items and switching to a smaller bag.

BRAS

While we are not suggesting you need to ditch your bra entirely, it's important to make sure that, if you are wearing one, you are wearing one that fits. It is thought that more than 70 percent of women are wearing the wrong bra size, and this can lead to a range of health problems including back, neck and breast pain, breathing difficulties, poor posture, skin irritation, circulation problems and even irritable bowel syndrome. Breast size can change over time so, rather than guessing your size, make sure you get measured to ensure you are getting the support you need.



In South Korea, the Republic of SAMSUNG

So sprawling is Samsung's modern-day empire that some South Koreans say it has become possible to live a Samsung-only life: You can use a Samsung credit card to buy a Samsung TV for the living room of your Samsung-made apartment on which you'll watch the Samsung-owned pro baseball team.

Samsung is South Korea's greatest economic success, and, more recently, the subject of major controversy. Economists, owners of small- and medium-size businesses, and some politicians say Samsung no longer merely powers the country but overpowers it, wielding influence that nearly matches that of the government.

Debate over how to curb the size and power of Samsung and other family-run conglomerates has become the key issue in South Korea's Dec. 19 presidential election, with polls showing that about three in four voters say they feel negatively about the country's few behemoth businesses. Candidates are sparring over how far to go to constrain them.

Samsung draws the greatest scrutiny because it is by far the largest chaebol — the Korean term for corporate groups that were jump-started with government support — and because it is wildly prosperous as the rest of the economy slows down. The conglomerate contributes roughly a fifth of South Korea's gross domestic product.

Some Koreans call the country "The Republic of Samsung."



Famous globally for its electronics, Samsung would be one of the largest conglomerates in almost any country. But within its tiny home country, the size of Virginia, it acts more as a do¬-everything monolith, building roads and oil rigs, operating hotels and amusement parks, selling insurance, making not only the world's best-selling smartphone, the Galaxy, but also selling key components to Apple for the iPhone — even as the two battle in a series of lawsuits.

In its domestic market, Samsung is far ahead of Apple. Only one in 10 South Korean smartphone users has an iPhone. (Samsung holds about 33 percent of the global smartphone market, while Apple accounts for about 17 percent. In the United States, Apple controls 34.3 percent of the smartphone market.)

Critics say Samsung elbows into new industries, knocking out smaller businesses, limiting choices for Korean consumers and sometimes colluding with fellow giants to fix prices while bullying those who investigate. They also see in Samsung the picture of closed-door wealth, a family affair in which Chairman Lee Kun-hee is passing power to his son. "You can even say the Samsung chairman is more powerful than the South Korean president," said Woo Suk-hoon, host of a popular economics podcast. "Korean people have come to think of Samsung as invincible and above the law."

A reversal of opinion

That sentiment has intensified in recent years, a period during which Samsung has obstructed price-fixing investigations — drawing only minor fines — and seen its chairman indicted for financial crimes, only to receive a presidential pardon "in the national interest," as a government spokesman put it.

South Korea ranks poorly among democratized countries in corruption rankings, and the traditionally cozy ties between government and the biggest companies were widely seen as the enabler of the country's economic rise.

Contact lenses that display text messages

You wouldn't dream of checking text messages or responding to email in the shower -- it's much too risky for your smartphone. But doing such tasks may soon be possible, as new technology will let you see information, such as a text, using special contact lenses.



Belgian researchers are developing a spherical curved LCD display that can fit onto contact lenses. While other attempts have fallen short in the past, this technology could cover an entire lens worth of text, images and other visuals.

There's also a more practical use for these contact-lens screens: adaptable sunglasses. Similar to transition lenses for eyeglasses, the contact lenses would darken on exposure to light, to protect from the sun's rays, for example.

Obama tops Twitter highlights for year 2012

An election victory tweet from President Barack Obama -- "Four more years" with a picture of him hugging his wife -- was the most retweeted ever, but the U.S. election was topped by the Olympics as the most tweeted event this year. Obama's tweet was retweeted (repeated) more than 8,10,000 times,Twitter said as it published a list of the most tweeted events in 2012. (2012.twitter.com/)

"Within hours, that Tweet simultaneously became the most retweeted of 2012, and the most retweeted ever. In fact, retweets of that simple message came from people in more than 200 countries around the world," Twitter spokeswoman Rachael Horwitz said.

Twitter users were busiest during the final vote count for the presidential elections, sending 327,452 tweets per minute on election night on their way to a tally of 31 million election tweets for the day.

The 2012 Olympic Games in London had the most overall tweets of any event, with 150 million sent over the 16 days.

Usain Bolt's golden win in the 200 meters topped 80,000 tweets per minute but he did not achieve the highest Olympic peak on Twitter. That was seen during the closing ceremony when 115,000 tweets per minute were sent as 1990s British pop band the Spice Girls performed.

Syria, where a bloody civil war still plays out, was the most talked about country in 2012 but sports and pop culture dominated the tally of tweets.

Behind Obama was pop star Justin Beiber. His tweet, "RIP Avalanna. i love you" sent when a six-year-old fan died from a rare form of brain cancer, was retweeted more than 220,000 times.

Third most repeated in 2012 was a profanity-laced tweet from Green Bay Packers NFL player TJ Lang, when he blasted a controversial call by a substitute referee officiating during a referee dispute. That was retweeted 98,000 times.

This was the third year running that the microblogging site published its top Twitter trends, offering a barometer to assess the biggest events in social media.

Great gadget gifts

Nobody can ever have enough storage space, especially while on the go. For that reason, this little handy storage device will make a great convenient gift for anyone; it also works as a trendy key-fob.

When it comes to backing up, the more is always the better. That said, even the most careful user would appreciate the Seagate Backup Plus portable drive, and they can also use it as an expansion of the computer's storage space, making this device an excellent gift when you're just not sure what to buy.

These stylish, messenger bags and backpacks have padded laptop pouches that keep your electronics accessible, yet secure. Bonus points: You can customize the packs' fabrics and colors online to give the gear its own unique look, and even find bags that charge gadgets on the go. Packs ship quickly and Timbuk2 stands by a lifetime guarantee.

The Nexus 7 is small, comfortable, and thanks to Android 4.2 has plenty of useful functionality like multiple user accounts and lock screen customization. If you're shopping last minute, it's hard to beat such a high quality $200 tablet.

Shopping for a lover of all things media - from books, to movies, to music? Don't have much cash to spare, but still want a quality product? Look no further than the 7-inch Kindle Fire HD. For $200 it packs in tons of book and audio-book features, games, as well as strong support for movies and TV shows.

Why change a good thing? The three-year-old 650 is Logitech's new "entry-level" Harmony, and it is a still fantastic deal for something that can seamlessly replace all other remote controls, making your home entertainment system as easy to use as possible.

A wildly flexible wireless headphone/mic set, the Astro A50 is primarily targeted at gamers, connecting easily to an Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, or gaming PC, with a built-in mic that activates automatically when flipped down into position. It works fine for music as well, with volume and tone controls built right into one of the ear-cups.

Apple fans have long sung the praises of the large touchpads on MacBook laptops or the standalone Magic Trackpad. Windows 8 finally supports a decent set of touch gestures, and Logitech is wisely getting out in front of this trend with a large, glass-covered pad that pairs well with Windows 8, but also supports custom gestures.

Smartphones can work great for navigation, but you need a good mount to keep them in view of drivers. The iMagnet uses a magnetic clamp that makes it very easy to place and remove a smartphone.





The stories you missed in 2012

India & Pakistan trade away

The conventional wisdom holds that India and Pakistan, which remain locked in conflict over everything from the disputed territory of Kashmir to the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks, while pointing dozens of nuclear-armed missiles at each other, are not going to cut a permanent peace deal anytime soon. This year, however, the perennially feuding neighbors finally notched several key positive developments that had nothing to do with borders, nukes, or terrorism. In short, both sides may be realizing that political tension is bad for business.

Economic activity between the two bitter enemies has long been pitifully minimal. Until now, that is. In 2009, only 1 percent of India's trade was with Pakistan, and only 1.7 percent of Pakistan's was with India. A total of one customs post is open along their 1,800-mile border. But that has been changing. Trade between the two countries increased ninefold to $2.7 billion between 2004 and 2011 and is likely to increase further after the signing of several key trade agreements this past September.

As part of those deals, Pakistan agreed to phase out its "negative list" -- hundreds of items that cannot be purchased from India, supposedly for security reasons. India, meanwhile, promised to reduce import duties on Pakistani goods. Indians, for example, will now be able to enjoy Murree beer for the first time since Partition. (Yes, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has its own brewery.)

But the biggest boost may be yet to come. The two longtime enemies also agreed to open up a key checkpoint at the Attari-Wagah border crossing, and Pakistan will grant India "most favored" status by the end of this year, meaning that it must be accorded the same treatment in trade policy as other countries. In another big move, India also loosened its visa requirements for Pakistani travelers. (In 2009, India issued fewer than 52,000 visas to Pakistanis, a number that is expected to increase dramatically under the new regime.) All told, an Indian industry group estimates, the changes will allow bilateral trade to increase to $8 billion in the next two years.

Brazil becomes an immigration destination

In a monumental shift that is roiling the country's politics, Brazil has switched -- for the first time in decades -- from being a net exporter to a net importer of people. The development, confirmed in recent government statistics, has been driven by a number of factors related to the country's explosive economic growth of recent years: South Americans and Asians flocking to the world's sixth-largest economy, Brazilian expats in countries like the United States returning home for more abundant jobs, and the European economic slowdown that is seeing a wave of Portuguese headed to work in the former colony (more than 50,000 got visas just between January 2010 and June 2011).

But with the shift has come political controversy over who should be allowed to enter the country. The numbers tell the tale: At the beginning of 2012, there were approximately 2 million foreign nationals living legally in Brazil and an estimated 600,000 undocumented immigrants. The interest from foreigners is an economic opportunity for Brazil -- which has an estimated shortage of between 200,000 and 400,000 qualified professionals in fields like oil, mining, and technology -- but it is also a political challenge.

The Copyright war goes 3D

It was a breakthrough year for 3-D printing, a technology that could be as transformative this decade as the Internet was in the last one, creating thrilling new opportunities for both consumers and producers. As with all disruptive innovations, however, the benefits are not likely to come without controversy, and the disputes have already begun.

Three-dimensional printers, which mold objects out of wax or plastic polymers according to digital instructions, are getting more advanced -- and cheaper. With simple versions now selling for as little as $1,000, proponents predict the technology will usher in a new class of amateur "makers," enabling consumers to seize back the means of production from corporations, and bring renewed prosperity to U.S. manufacturing. But the printers are also raising the possibility that physical objects from toys to kitchen appliances to weapons will be as easy to copy and share as songs or movies.

This is already taking international copyright law into unknown territory. A British game company recently sent a cease-and-desist order to a 3-D printer owner who was making physical copies of objects from the popular board game Warhammer, and a designer in the Netherlands who recently printed a physical version of the famous "Penrose Triangle" optical illusion has sent a "takedown notice" to Thingiverse, an online repository of 3-D printer design codes, for sharing his design online for anyone to download for free. Further raising the stakes, the Pirate Bay -- the controversial Swedish file-sharing site that has been the target of lawsuits around the world -- announced this year that it is starting a new service to share 3-D printing designs.

The questions raised by 3-D printing go beyond copyright. How can it be made environmentally sustainable? (Plastic has to come from somewhere.) Can we control the distribution of designs for dangerous objects like guns and knives? Will 3-D printers kill manufacturing jobs? These printers are going from toys for techies to must-have consumer products. But before we can reproduce the latest Barbie, kitchen knife, or iPhone at home, some tricky moral and legal debates still need to be resolved. Makers, meet the lawyers.

The end of the Indian call center

For years, the Indian call center has been the ultimate globalization cliché. The armies of young, overeducated Indians providing round-the-clock tech support and customer service have turned up in dime-store novels in Mumbai, sitcoms in the United States, and blockbuster films like Slumdog Millionaire. But India may not be the king of the call center for much longer.

In fact, as of this year, more Filipinos than Indians now work in call centers. Operating costs in the Philippines are cheaper, and some U.S. executives say American customers find Filipinos' speech easier to understand than the British-inflected English spoken by Indians. Companies including AT&T, JPMorgan Chase, and Expedia have all hired call centers in outsourcing's emerging power.

Brazil, Mexico, Vietnam, and several Eastern European countries are also cutting into India's market share of the outsourcing sector, which according to some estimates has fallen from more than 80 percent to around 60 percent. India's lead appears secure in some types of outsourcing -- software coding, for instance -- but the signs for the future do not bode well. Outsourcing giant Infosys cut its hiring from 45,000 last year to 35,000 this year, and Tata Consultancy Services cut its recruitment by 20,000.

Moscow on the Med

Tiny Cyprus, like many countries in Southern Europe, has needed bailouts to keep its economy afloat during the eurocrisis. More often than not, however, it has turned to Moscow rather than Brussels for the cash, raising concerns about whether one of the European Union's more recent members is more oriented toward East or West. Russia gave Cyprus a $3.1 billion loan in 2011 and, as of this writing, is considering ponying up another $6.2 billion, equivalent to more than one-third of the country's entire economy.

Cyprus was a controversial case when it joined the EU in 2004, because of both the dispute over the island's Turkish-dominated northern half and its status as an opaque haven for Russian investment. Indeed, recent years have seen increasingly close ties between the two Orthodox Christian countries. Part of the attraction is practical: Moscow imposes fewer conditions on its loans than the austerity-insistent Europeans. But Russian-educated President Demetris Christofias, the only communist leader in the European Union, is also staunchly pro-Moscow in his foreign policy and a frequent critic of NATO.

Both sides clearly see the arrangement as a win-win, and with 6 billion euros needed to fill a budget gap before 2015, Cyprus is looking for help from whoever will provide it. But it could well backfire as Europe reconsiders whether it should have admitted Cyprus into its club in the first place. After one failed round of negotiations aimed at resolving the dispute with Turkey, German Chancellor Angela Merkel couldn't have been clearer: Cyprus, she said, is a "problematic country" that should not have become an EU member.

Oil in Central Afria. What could go wrong?

In recent years, international campaigns have highlighted the role that "conflict minerals" such as coltan, used in many electronic devices, have played in perpetuating violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its neighbors, but there's a potentially even more dangerous conflict brewing now that Congo is apparently sitting on an awful lot of oil.

How much? The region's oil fields may contain as much as 6 billion barrels -- the area's largest oil discovery in decades and worth about 28 times Congo's entire GDP at current prices. British oil firm Soco secured permission from Congo's government this year to survey the find inside Virunga National Park, near Congo's border with Uganda. If significant deposits are confirmed, the country's hydrocarbons minister says, Congo could amend its laws to allow drilling there, even though Virunga is Africa's oldest national park and a haven for rare mountain gorillas.

The Island dispute you haven't heard of

The world has focused this year on the feud between Japan and China over a series of small, uninhabited rocks in the East China Sea. But thousands of miles to the west, another island dispute is brewing.

Both Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) claim sovereignty over the Arabian Gulf island of Abu Musa, home to about 2,000 people, and two uninhabited islands nearby. The dispute dates to 1971, when the islands were under the control of the sheikhdom of Sharjah. The Shah of Iran, seizing on the power vacuum left by the British withdrawal from the region, sent troops to seize Abu Musa and its lesser neighbors. A deal was eventually reached under which Sharjah, now part of the UAE, would maintain sovereignty, but Iran would have the right to base troops there. Now, the UAE claims Iran has violated the agreement by increasing its military presence and building infrastructure, including an airport, on Abu Musa. This is no mere symbolic turf fight. The islands are located near the massive Mubarek oil field and stand astride a strategically important location at the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 percent of the world's oil supply passes.

