

KHAASBAAT

A PUBLICATION FOR INDIAN AMERICANS IN FLORIDA

MARCH 2021

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CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC – CURRENT STATUS

By M.P. RAVINDRA NATHAN, M.D., FACC



America is now well into the vaccination campaign for Covid-19 prevention and the process is accelerating. Already 75 million doses have been distributed and 65 million people vaccinated and many more will be vaccinated in the next three months. The good news is that the total number of daily cases, hospital

admissions and death rate from the pandemic are trending downward. The data from a study released recently from United Kingdom for the first time shows vaccination works in cutting

down deaths from Covid-19 by half. So, please take the vaccine as soon as you can get one. It is a much safer way to build immunity than becoming infected. Another important development is that we may need only a single shot (instead of the two currently given) for effective vaccination. Pfizer vaccine has been found to be 85 percent effective after the initial dose, according to one recent study, which means we can speed up immunizations even further but we are not yet ready to embrace the concept.

Yes, there are still difficulties to register and get the appointment for vaccination from the county health departments and pharmacies, especially for those under 65 years of age. But that will ease up soon.

Continued on page 16

COOKBOOK REVIEW

By NITISH S. RELE

"I Cook In Color: Bright Flavors from My Kitchen and Around the World" by Asha Gomez and Martha Hall Foose; 220 pages; \$32.50; published by Running Press; (www.runningpress.com)

She wants "to make your world not just colorful but wildly flavorful as well." And with her second cookbook "I Cook In Color," Asha Gomez achieves precisely that, "welcoming the vivid, color-filled world into your kitchen." Co-written with Martha Hall Foose, recipes in the book cover dishes from across the globe. There's "Passion Fruit, Lime & Grapefruit Grouper Ceviche," inspired by Gomez' trip to Peru; "Fire-Roasted Mackerel" (Puerto Rican and Indian fusion); "Catalonian Paella" (Spain); "Tandoori Masala Crawfish Boil" (Cajun meets Indian!); "Singapore Noodles" (originally from Hong Kong!); "Quail Ragu with Piccante Frantumato" (Rome); "Dry-Fry Pork Mince with Green Beans" (China); "Leg of Lamb with Za'atar and Dried Apricots" (Morocco), and many more.



Continued on page 4

MOTRING EXTRA – BENZ GT53 AMG SHIFTS LUXE SEDAN MARKET INTO OVERDRIVE

Test-drive review by NITISH S. RELE – motoringtampabay@gmail.com



OK, so it isn't quite as fast as the Corvette Stingray Z51 but this one can still fly! The "four-door, four-passenger coupe," as Mercedes calls its performance-oriented sedan, reaches 60 mph from a standing stop in a mere 4.4 seconds. Top speed is rated at 174 mph.



They're not earth-shattering numbers but still very impressive, one must admit. But after all, the 3.0-liter turbo inline-six engine with an integrated EQ starter-generator (located between engine and transmission) in the GT53 isn't just a run-of-the-mill. It was specially hand built by the AMG division in Affalterbach, Germany.

Continued on page 2

ASTROLOGY
What's in your forecast for March? Read what columnist Pankaj Kohli has to say.
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Dear Readers:

In an effort to highlight more community news, we request you to inform us about noteworthy professional accomplishments and also youth successes, academic or extracurricular.

Are you a talented writer? Send us your short essay, story or poem for consideration. Story ideas are always welcome. To community leaders planning activities, please let us know about them. Email editor@khaasbaat.com

Thanks to those who have recently subscribed or sent contributions. To subscribe, see page 2. As always, we welcome your suggestions, sponsorships and support. Checks can be addressed to Khaas Baat, 8312 Windsor Bluff Drive, Tampa, FL 33647. Payment can also be made via PayPal to PP ID: nitishrele@gmail.com

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WHO'S WHO

Khaas Baat is a monthly publication that has been in circulation since August 2004. Issues are direct mailed to subscribers and also are available at South Asian grocery stores and restaurants. It presents exclusive, informative and relevant news about the Indian American community in Florida to its readers.

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MARCH 12: MAHA SHIVRATRI
MARCH 21: NAVROZE (PARSI NEW YEAR)
MARCH 25: MAHAVIR JAYANTI
MARCH 29: HOLI

BENZ GT53 AMG

Continued from page 1

Step on the throttle of the all-wheel-drive luxury car to blast off with its 429 horsepower at 6,100 rpm and 384 pounds-feet of torque at 5,800 rpm. Mated to a slick and effective 9-speed automatic gearbox, the GT53 is equipped with a razor-sharp, electro-mechanical rack-and-pinion steering.



Suspension is handled competently by an independent multi-link system. Both ends have gas shocks and coil springs to improve ride comfort. Bringing the speed demon to a halt are AMG high-performance vented 14.2-inch brake discs. To vary the driving experience, this Benz comes in slippery, individual, comfort, race, sport, and sports+ modes.

Walk up to the GT53 and the first element that grabs your attention are vertical high-gloss chrome struts decking up the radiator grille, embossed with AMG badge and the familiar three-pointed star. Horizontal LED headlights decked with carbon fiber components please the eye. The lavish, elegant cabin is expected of any AMG-equipped Benz with dual auto a/c, Burmester surround sound system, wireless charge pad, illuminated door sills, panoramic sunroof, steering wheel-mounted shifters, and heated front seats. AMG enthusiasts will quickly notice the emblem imprinted on the seat backs. All materials and craftsmanship are top-notch.

Saddle brown/black Nappa leather upholstery covers the dash, doors and center console. A touchpad controls audio, navigation and phone infotainment on the large 12.3-inch display dash screen. A similarly sized screen displays the digital instrument cluster.

Base-priced at \$99,950 and topping at \$126,320 with options, the performance- and luxury-oriented GT53 packs a punch or two with outstanding handling and balance. If you have the dough, we can only encourage you to be a little swanky. After all, flaunting your success isn't a crime.

GT53 AMG
Tires: 255/45R19 front; 285/40R19 rear
Wheelbase: 116.2 inches
Length: 199.2 inches
Width: 81.5 inches
Height: 57.3 inches
Weight: 4,553 pounds
Fuel capacity: 21.1 gallons
City: 20 mpg
Highway: 25 mpg
Web site: www.mbusa.com

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Please help Raj

October 7, 2020, our 12-year-old son Raj was diagnosed with **CKD** (chronic kidney disease). He is in stage 5 and both of his kidneys are working less than 10%. He is now on dialysis 2 to 3 times a week and because of his young age, it makes him extremely weak. He was one of the most active kids, as he is a second-degree black-belt in karate and is involved in many school activities and sports, but now can't attend school. He now needs to undergo a **kidney transplant** as soon as possible to get back to his normal life.

We need your help, and we know it is a big thing to ask from anyone, but we are currently looking for a **kidney donor** who is a match and is willing to help us. Below are some of the requirements to be a kidney donor for him.

A living donor's kidney's life span is about 20 years, whereas one from a deceased donor is 10 years. In Raj's case, this will let him have a normal life until he is 32 before going through the process again. Importantly, the acceptance rate for a live kidney is greater and usually gives benefits almost immediately. A lot of great information on the process can be found on the Tampa General Website: <https://www.tgh.org/services/transplant/kidney-transplant/living-kidney-donor-program>

Please reach out to any of us for more information. Please share this and spread the word to your family and friends, and keep him in your eyes for a speedy recovery! Thank you!

Kidney Donor Requirements:

Blood Group:
O + or O -

Age:
Between 21 and 49

Health Factors;
Not diabetic
No known kidney issues

Contact info:

Radha Patnayakuni (mom):
patnayakuni@gmail.com
(813) 748-7235

Nehru Guntuku (dad):
gmvnkumar@gmail.com
(813) 995-4815

BECKWITH ELECTRIC'S DR. MURTY V.V.S. YALLA OF TAMPA BAY ELECTED TO THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF ENGINEERING



Largo-based (Tampa Bay area) Beckwith Electric Co., Inc., a business unit of Hubbell Utility Solutions, announced recently that Beckwith Vice President & General Manager Dr. Murty V.V.S. Yalla, has been elected to the National Academy of Engineering (NAE) "for contributions to digital protection and control devices for the grid."

Dr. Yalla earned a diploma in electrical engineering from Andhra Polytechnic in 1976; a Bachelor of Technology in electrical engineering from Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University in 1981; a Master of Technology in electrical engineering from IIT, Kanpur in 1983 (all located in India); and a Ph.D. in electrical engineering from University of New Brunswick, Canada in 1987.

From 1988 to 1989, Dr. Yalla taught and conducted research on digital power system protection at Memorial University in Newfoundland, Canada. After joining Beckwith Electric in 1989, Dr. Yalla held various leadership roles, including company president from 2005 through December 2020.

Dr. Yalla is the chairman (2015-2024) of the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC, Geneva, Switzerland) technical committee (TC95), measuring relays and protection equipment. He leads subject matter experts from 34 countries in the development of international standards in power system protection and control.

The NAE, established in 1964, is a private, independent, nonprofit institution that provides engineering leadership in service to the nation. Its mission is to advance the well-being of the nation by promoting a vibrant engineering profession and by marshaling the expertise and insights of eminent engineers to provide independent advice to the federal government on matters involving engineering and technology.

Election to the National Academy of Engineering is among the highest professional distinctions accorded to an engineer. The NAE is part of The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. It operates under the same congressional act of incorporation that established the National Academy of Sciences, signed in 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln.

The 2021 Class includes 106 nominees from the United States and 23 international members. The Induction Ceremony for Dr. Yalla will be held during the NAE's Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. on Oct. 3.

Further information about the National Academy of Engineering and the achievements of its distinguished members can be found at www.nae.edu

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Meenakshi Jain, M.D., FACOG



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Dr. Jain also specializes in
AXONICS and **INTERSTIM
SNM** therapy for urinary
and fecal incontinence.

Dr. Meenakshi Jain is a board certified Gynecological surgeon who has been certified as a **Master surgeon** in Minimally Invasive **Robotic Surgery** by the Surgical Review committee of USA. She also specializes in **Interstim** Neuromodulation therapy for management of Incontinence.

Her office provides a full range of office, outpatient and inpatient gynecological services.

She also offers many cosmetic procedures in her office like **Laser Hair removal**, **Thermage** for skin tightening, **Fraxel** laser for removal of wrinkles and skin discolorations, **I-Lipo** for body sculpting.

Her office now offers a new innovative minimally invasive painless office procedure for Vaginal rejuvenation called **MONA LISA TOUCH**.

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MONTHLY EVENTS	WEEKLY EVENTS
<p>SATURDAY, MARCH 06 (5:30 PM to 8:00 PM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MATA KI CHOWKI (Sponsor by: Parul and Puneet Gupta Family) <p>SUNDAY, MARCH 07 (5:00 PM to 6:00 PM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SHRI JHULAY LAAL JI PALAV <p>THURSDAY, MARCH 11 (6:00 PM to 5:00 AM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ALL NIGHT MAHA SHIVRATRI PUJA (Puja Timings: 6:00 pm, 9:00 pm, 12:00 am, 3:00 am) "By Reservation only" (Temple Timings: Morning - 9:00 am to 12:30 pm Evening - 5:00 pm to 5:00 am) <p>SATURDAY, MARCH 27</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SH. JAGANNATH JI PUJA BHAJAN (6:00 PM) HOLIKA DAHAN (7:00 PM) 	<p>EVERY MONDAY - 6:30 PM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SHIV ABHISHEK AND PUJA <p>EVERY TUESDAY - 7:00 PM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SUNDARKAND HANUMAM KATHA <p>EVERY THURSDAY - 7:00 PM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAI BABA SATSANG MAHA PRASAD <p>Pandit Manikya Sharma 813-484-9568</p> <p>Pandit Rushi Vyas 813-503-3388</p>

SAVE THE DATE

APRIL 17

- MATA DA JAGRATA

APRIL 13 to APRIL 21

- CHITRA NAVRATRI





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Complementing the recipes, which focus on cross-cultural flavors, rainbows of vegetables, gem-toned desserts and spice-forward twists, are eye-catching vibrant photographs. A native of Kerala, Gomez is also author of the 2016 "My Two Souths: Blending the Flavors of India into a Southern Kitchen," which was nominated as a finalist for the James Beard Award in the American Cooking category. She runs The Third Space culinary studio in Atlanta. "Trust your eyes," she writes. "If a food has an attractive color, chances are it's beneficial for you." Indeed.

Here are two recipes reproduced with permission:

Roasted Butternut Squash with Tomato-Ginger Gravy

A couple of nights a week, there's usually a sheet pan in my oven, lined with parchment paper and stacked with vegetables drizzled with olive oil, slathered with honey, and sprinkled with spices. I love making a meal this way. One pan to wash? I'm sold! This hearty squash in a fresh tomato puree, cooked down with caramelized ginger, makes for a perfect sheet-pan meal. It's simple and delicious all at once.

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

- 4 small butternut squash
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
- 4 tablespoons honey
- 2 teaspoons coarsely ground black pepper
- 1½ teaspoons pink Himalayan salt, divided
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons fresh ginger, peeled and finely grated
- 6 fresh plum tomatoes, pureed
- 2 teaspoons light brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh oregano leaves

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Line a sheet pan with parchment paper. Cut the butternut squash in half lengthwise from the stem down. I like leaving the stem and skin on for this recipe. Use a small spoon to scoop the seeds out. Using a paring knife, score the flesh side of the butternut squash horizontally and then vertically. Place the butternut squash on the sheet pan, skin-side down. Rub each half of the butternut squash with 1½ teaspoons of the butter. Drizzle the honey evenly all over the butternut squash and season them with the black pepper and 1 teaspoon of salt. Place the pan in the oven and roast for 20 to 25 minutes or until the butternut squash is fork-tender.

In the meantime, make the tomato gravy. Place a small pan over medium heat. Add the olive oil and ginger. Cook the ginger for 2 to 3 minutes until golden brown. Add the fresh tomato puree to the ginger. Stir in the brown sugar and the remaining ½ teaspoon of salt. Let the tomatoes cook down and reduce by half; this should take about 15 minutes. Serve the tomato gravy alongside the roasted butternut squash. Garnish with fresh oregano.

Crucian Curry Chicken

"Come to the island," my dear friend Chef Digby Stridiron teased, smiling at me as if my acceptance of his generous invitation to join him in the US Virgin Islands were a foregone conclusion. "The food, the lush scenery, the gentle island breezes," he continued, "you'll fall in love, just like I have." I'm not quite sure why it took me so long to take him up on it, besides the ongoing obligations of running my business, writing a cookbook, filing my newspaper columns, doing my advocacy work, and raising a son. Eventually, I did get around to saying yes. I excitedly packed my bags and went to meet him in St. Croix. What awaited me were

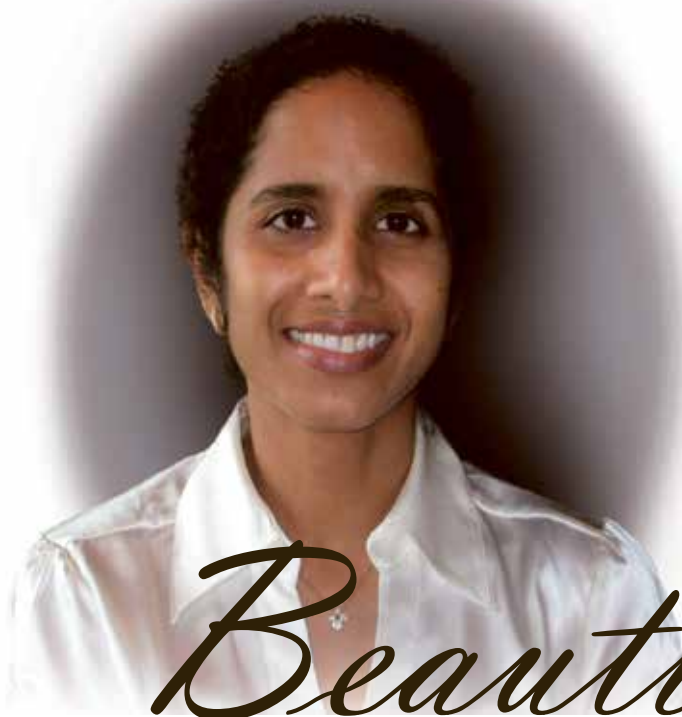
endless blue seas, the warmth of his home, and this saucy Crucian Curry Chicken, seasoned island-style with allspice, cumin, lime leaf, and coconut milk. Have some roti or flatbread on hand to scoop up all the scrumptious sauce.

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

- 8 boneless, skin-on chicken thighs (about 2 pounds)
- 1 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons coarsely ground allspice
- 3 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 2 tablespoons coconut oil
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 medium red onions, thinly sliced
- 8 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- ½ habanero pepper, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon coarsely ground cumin seeds
- 2 teaspoons curry powder
- 2 Makrut lime leaves
- 1 fresh or dry bay leaf
- 1 cup chicken broth
- ½ pound baby red bliss potatoes, cut in half
- ½ pound fresh or frozen pearl onions, cut in half
- 1 cup coconut milk
- ½ cup cilantro leaves

Season the chicken thighs with the black pepper, allspice, and 1 teaspoon of kosher salt. Heat a large pan on medium heat. Add the coconut oil and 1 tablespoon of the vegetable oil to the pan. Place the chicken thighs in the pan and brown on both sides for about 2 minutes on each side.

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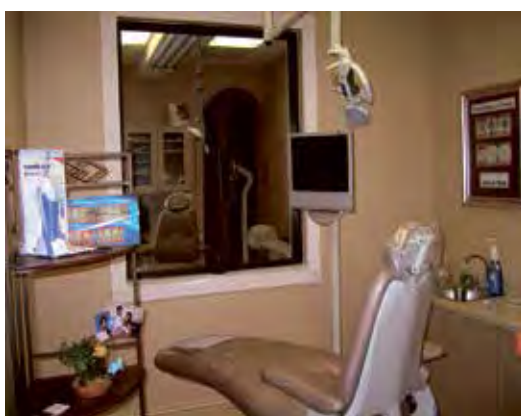
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MERGING YOUR MONEY WHEN YOU MARRY

By HAREN MEHTA



Getting married is exciting, but it brings many challenges. One such challenge that you and your spouse will have to face is how to merge your finances. Planning carefully and communicating clearly are important, because the

financial decisions that you make now can have a lasting impact on your future.

Discuss your financial goals

The first step in mapping out your financial future together is to discuss your financial goals. Start by making a list of your short-term goals (e.g., paying off wedding debt, new car, vacation) and long-term goals (e.g., having children, your children's college education, retirement). Then, determine which goals are most important to you. Once you've identified the goals that are a priority, you can focus your energy on achieving them.

Prepare a budget

Next, you should prepare a budget that lists all of your income and expenses over a certain time period (e.g., monthly, annually). You can designate one spouse to be in charge of managing the budget, or you can take turns keeping records and paying the bills. If both you and your spouse are going to be involved, make sure that you develop a record-keeping system that both of you understand. And remember to keep your records in a joint filing system so that both of you can easily locate important documents.

Begin by listing your sources of income (e.g., salaries and wages, interest, dividends). Then, list your expenses (it may be helpful to review several months of entries in your checkbook and credit card bills). Add them up and compare the two totals. Hopefully, you get a positive number, meaning that you spend less than you earn. If not, review your expenses and see where you can cut down on your spending.

Bank accounts – separate or joint?

At some point, you and your spouse will have to decide whether to combine your bank accounts or keep them separate. Maintaining a joint account does have advantages, such as

easier record keeping and lower maintenance fees. However, it's sometimes more difficult to keep track of how much money is in a joint account when two individuals have access to it. Of course, you could avoid this problem by making sure that you tell each other every time you write a check or withdraw funds from the account. Or, you could always decide to maintain separate accounts.

Credit cards

If you're thinking about adding your name to your spouse's credit card accounts, think again. When you and your spouse have joint credit, both of you will become responsible for 100 percent of the credit card debt. In addition, if one of you has poor credit, it will negatively impact the credit rating of the other.

If you or your spouse does not qualify for a card because of poor credit, and you are willing to give your spouse account privileges anyway, you can make your spouse an authorized user of your credit card. An authorized user is not a joint cardholder and is therefore not liable for any amounts charged to the account. Also, the account activity won't show up on the authorized user's credit record. But remember, you remain responsible for the account.

Insurance

If you and your spouse have separate health insurance coverage, you'll want to do a cost/benefit analysis of each plan to see if you should continue to keep your health coverage separate. For example, if your spouse's health plan has a higher deductible and/or co-payments or fewer benefits than those offered by your plan, he or she may want to join your health plan instead. You'll also want to compare the rate for one family plan against the cost of two single plans.

It's a good idea to examine your auto insurance coverage, too. If you and your spouse own separate cars, you may have different auto insurance carriers. Consider pooling your auto insurance policies with one company; many insurance companies will give you a discount if you insure more than one car with them. If one of you has a poor driving record, however, make sure that changing companies won't mean paying a higher premium.

Employer-sponsored retirement plans

If both you and your spouse participate in an employer-sponsored retirement plan, you should be aware of each plan's characteristics. Review each plan together carefully and determine which plan provides the best benefits. If you can afford it, you should each participate to the maximum in your own plan. If your current cash flow is limited, you can make one plan the focus of your retirement strategy. Here are some helpful tips:

- If both plans match contributions, determine which plan offers the best match and take full advantage of it
- Compare the vesting schedules for the employer's matching contributions
- Compare the investment options offered by each plan--the more options you have, the more likely you are to find an investment mix that suits your needs
- Find out whether the plans offer loans--if you plan to use any of your contributions for certain expenses (e.g., your children's college education, a down payment on a house), you may want to participate in the plan that has a loan provision.

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FRESHER STYLES FOR SPRING? YOU BET!

By KIRAN BAHL



It's time to spring forward! This month concludes winter and introduces itself all anew again in the form of spring, along with Holi too, the rainbow celebration of the new season!

Like Holi, Indian fashion has been including a

myriad of color palettes, particularly tonal looks, print mixes and a splash of whimsy. Let's look and feel the newer styles.

TONAL LOOKS: ONE SHADE ALL OVER

This look can be super simple and right on trend too. Pick a color. Now, dress head to toe in it. Done! It's especially easy with Indian ensembles, being they're already put together for you either in the form a sari in one color or a suit in another. Try a simple blue sari with blue heels and blue jewels. Or an orange palazzo suit, complete with matching dupatta. Feeling a bit more ambitious? Pick a color. Now, dress head to toe in multiple shades of that same color. So, a red sari with burgundy heels and magenta lips will shine and so will

a pink churidar suit with hot pink sandals and mauve lips!

This look can be harder to go with after years of conforming to the contrast is better than fully matching styles. But it's also a look that's refreshing after such a long time – give it a try for sure!

PRINT MIXES: GO BOLD

I've been seeing this look in American fashion too, where looks are being mixed up with several prints but still going together. What's the trick here without looking like you had nothing to wear so you mixed up whatever you had in your closet as your final 'look'?

Follow this super simple rule: Pick two or three different prints to match, but also make sure their palettes match up mostly too.

A tropical print sari in green, brown, black and white will look cute with leopard heels in brown and black. A polka dot lengha in yellow, blue, white and beige will pair up perfect with a striped dupatta in red, orange, yellow and beige. Furthermore, add on a chikankari choli in yellow and black – beautiful!

A SPLASH OF WHIMSY:

SARIS & BELTED BLAZERS

There's a new trend all over involving wearing

a sari or lengha along with a belted blazer or cardigan. It's a unique concept, attempting to replace the shawl/vested looks of seasons past. It's eye-catching and maybe worth a spin at the next big event. Just be sure the blazer isn't oversized. It won't work in Indian fashion as it does with its American counterpart. The belt can be thin or thick, with a logo or buckle. But keep it neutral or metallic toned. Overall, it's not a minimal look and too much will look overly amusing.

Try a gray sari with hot pink blazer and gold belt. Keep the pallu under the blazer for a clean look. For lenghas, a cream lengha with black cardigan and silver belt will look wow. Keep the dupatta the same, underneath. For a bolder output, shawl the dupatta!

It's a new season and with Covid-19 thankfully more stable, it's a time to get back out there and live your life! Enjoy spring, enjoy Holi! Stay safe, keep your masks on and, as always, remember to 'gro' with style!

Kiran Bahl of Gro Styles, an Indian Boutique (www.grostyles.com), can be reached at (813) 843-9040 or kiran@grostyles.com

FOOD BIODIVERSITY

By BHAVI NIRAV



Variety is the spice of life. Nutritionists have always advocated for multiple foods in our diet to ensure optimal health and well-being. Since diet/food quality has a substantial impact on people and the planet, variety can be easily substituted for diversity.

Food biodiversity is related to nutrients we get from high-quality diets from diverse sources. Various plants, animals and microorganisms cultivated and from the wild, is the key to human and environmental health.

There is a troubling shift of human diets from various species to processed foods and limited species. Humans can choose from 390,000 edible plant species, but more than 50 percent of global energy needs are met by four crops: wheat, rice, corn and potatoes. Twelve plants and five animals account for 75 percent of our global food supply. Uniform diets and limited food access translates to one in three people in the world with micronutrient deficiencies. In comparison, nearly 2 billion people are overweight or obese.

We are what we eat. According to a study published in Lancet, a low-quality diet is a leading risk factor for illness worldwide.

According to University of California-San Diego's researchers, the American gut project – the world's most extensive microbiome study consuming 30 different plants per week – yields optimal gut diversity leading to healthy diverse gut microbiomes.

The gut microbiome can significantly influence immunity, mood, inflammation and metabolic diseases. The more diverse gut microbiomes you

have, the healthier you are. There is a subtle but potent connection between biodiversity and nutrition.

Growing various crops leads to a better agriculture ecosystem, resulting in high soil health quality, ultimately benefiting the consumer by providing more nutrition per bite.

Eating biodiverse foods (at least ¼ cup each):

1. Be a risk-taker and try new fruit and vegetables each week that you have never bought or eaten before or rotate your choices. The more variety you eat the more agricultural diversity you support.
2. Cook 3-4 varieties of beans for soup, Mexican dishes, chili, etc.
3. Try different culture recipes for inspiration, including tofu, nori, beans/ lentils 3-4 days a week.
4. Experiment with different herbs to add new flavors to your meal.
5. Add color to your meal palette by eating something green, orange, red, purple and yellow throughout the day to get enough variety of micronutrients.
6. Eat from different food groups: nuts, seeds, whole grains, dairy, lean meat/meat substitutes.
7. Support local farmers by buying locally grown, heirloom produce.
8. Grow your vegetable garden to produce a variety of ethnic vegetables, herbs, fruits.

The key is to combine the food groups to achieve biodiversity.

To Our Health!

Bhavi Nirav is a certified Iyengar yoga teacher, Registered Dietitian/M.S., R.D., L.D., and can be reached at swarayog@gmail.com

Recipe of the month:

Baked Sprouted Mixed Bean Falafel

Ingredients

- Fava beans, Chickpeas, lentils 1/3rd cup each – soak and sprout
- Parsley – ¼ cup chopped
- Grated zucchini – ¼ cup
- 1 tbsp roasted chickpea flour
- Sesame seeds – 2 tbsp
- Onion red or yellow chopped ¼ cup
- Roasted garlic 1 tbsp minced
- Salt to taste (I use 1.5 tsp)
- Olive oil 1 tbsp + ¼ cup for baking sheet
- 2-3 tsp red chili powder
- 2 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp lime juice

Soak all beans overnight, drain and let them sprout. After the beans are grown, wash them and grind coarse. Preheat the oven to 375°F, drizzle ¼ cup oil on the rimmed baking sheet. Mix in all the above ingredients except for baking soda and lime juice. Add baking soda to the top of the mixture and lime juice and mix well. Take 2 tbsp of mixture and make flat patty 2 inches round, ½ inch thick. Put it on a baking sheet (at least half an inch apart). Turn once halfway through baking until golden brown.

Bake for about 25-30 minutes, depending on the size of falafel patties. Check with a fork to see if the inside is cooked well.

Serve with Tahini, za'atar and olive oil, red chili sauce and/or tzatziki. Possibilities are endless!

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U.S. CITIZENSHIP ACT OF 2021

By **DILIP PATEL**



The Biden administration unveiled its new immigration reform bill and it includes many good provisions for employment-based immigrants. However, most observers believe it is less likely the legislation will pass in its present

form than that smaller parts of the bill could move independently and gain bipartisan support, making every section potentially critical.

On Feb. 18, 2021, Representative Sánchez (D-CA) introduced the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 in the House. (An identical bill is expected to be introduced in the Senate by Senator Menendez (D-NJ) on Feb. 22). Both bills embody the legislative proposals that President Biden announced on his first day in office.

Some highlights of the proposals for employment based immigration are below – we will provide updates in future articles:

- Increase the worldwide level of employment-based immigrants from 140,000 to 170,000 and add to the ceiling unused

employment-based visas from fiscal years 1992 through 2020.

- Eliminate the per country limits, which have created very long waits for people born in India and China.

- Exempt spouses and children of family and employer-sponsored immigrants from the numerical quotas.

- International students with a Ph.D. in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields from a U.S. university would get green cards without numerical limits, and F students would be considered “dual intent” when applying for visas.

USCIS cancels 2020 changes to Naturalization Test

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services announced on Feb. 22, 2021 that it is reverting to the 2008 version of the naturalization civics test.

On Dec. 1, 2020, USCIS had implemented a revised and more difficult naturalization civics test (2020 civics test). The 2020 test increased the number of questions from 100 to 128, changed some of the answers and applicants had to correctly answer 12 out of 20 questions asked at the interview instead of 6 out of 10.

This is a direct result of the change from the Trump Administration to the Biden administration. USCIS states, “We determined the 2020 civics test development process, content, testing procedures, and implementation schedule may inadvertently create potential barriers to the naturalization process. This action is consistent with the framework of the Executive Order on Restoring Faith in Our Legal Immigration Systems, which directs a comprehensive review of the naturalization process to eliminate barriers and make the process more accessible to all eligible individuals.”

Applicants who filed their naturalization applications on or after Dec. 1, 2020, but before March 1, 2021, with an initial examination (interview) before April 19, 2021, will have the choice to either take the 2008 civics test or the 2020 civics test. USCIS will notify applicants who are affected by the change. If the initial interview is scheduled on or after April 19, 2021, applicants will take the 2008 civics test.

Dilip Patel of Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC, a board-certified expert on immigration law, can be reached at (813) 222-1120 or email dilip.patel@bipc.com

WHAT TO DO – AND NOT DO – DURING SUMMERS

By **ROBERT A.G. LEVINE**



Conventional wisdom suggests that attending a summer class at a prestigious university will help a student’s chances of college admission. Is this correct?

Like so many of these “is that how you do it” questions, the answer is “yes and no.” However,

the answer is “mostly no.”

Let us start by understanding a simple – but crucial – philosophy about college admissions. Here at UCA, our mantra is “build a person, not a resume.” Resumes do not create great applicants. Great people create amazing resumes naturally. It’s organic: a resume follows the person’s achievements, not vice versa.

Next, let’s understand that no rule fits all situations. Age and maturity change a lot during high school. For summer programs, if a student finishing 9th grade is mature enough to venture out into the world, and if that venture is valuable to the student, then our recommendation is “do it!” If a student finishing grade 10 wants to do something they already enjoy and do it more deeply than can be accomplished near home, or if they wish to try something new that is unavailable at home, our recommendation is again “do it.” Of course, both recommendations presume that the summer program is the best possible option for the student.

What about those finishing grade 11? Will a summer program make a difference? No. In fact, that program can actually diminish a student’s chances of acceptance.

Start by understanding that America’s best universities use a holistic method of evaluation. They look at everything

a student does (not just academics) and often grade each applicant in multiple areas (usually academics, activities and personality). How does a summer program fit into this evaluation?

If the program is a class, then it is likely considered to be an academic (intellectual) effort. In contrast to three or more years of grades, a short summer class is relatively unimportant in the evaluation of academic potential. Vis-a-vis a standardized test like the SAT or ACT, that summer program is not a universal piece of data that allows admissions officers to compare and contrast students fairly. Compared to original research ... well, you get the idea. Summer classes do not significantly alter an evaluation of a student’s intellectual abilities.

But what if the program is considered an “extracurricular activity” instead of an academic pursuit?

Our best universities evaluate non-academic activities using four factors: length of time, quality of performance, breadth of impact, and originality.

Let’s start with length of time. A one or two-week program is not very long in the grand scheme of life. If a short program is at the top of your list, then your resume has bigger problems!

The next part of the evaluation is performance. Few – if any – summer programs “grade” your work. How will a university know if you did a good job? Although colleges will know that you paid for a program, it is not evident that you even showed up at the program (or did anything noteworthy in it).

When considering impact, understand that colleges want to see you make a difference to others, not just improve yourself. Is a summer program at a prestigious university helping anyone but you? Maybe, but even

if you are making some impact during that short program, understand that admissions officers want to see broad impacts, graded by geography: international, national, regional and local. Are you changing the world? Not likely ...

Finally, great colleges want to see unique attributes in their selected students. Different experiences, philosophies and backgrounds make for valuable diversity on campus. When considering a summer program, ask yourself whether that program makes you any different than the other applicants who attend summer programs.

Yes, a few programs are highly regarded and require real effort and achievement just to get in, but in the vast majority of cases, the truth is that after 11th grade, attending a summer program does little to improve your chances of college admission. In fact, because you could use your time more wisely, spending time doing little to increase your odds is actually taking time away from more valuable pursuits (and thus a better resume).

But what are those valuable pursuits? One size does not fit all. At UCA, we don’t believe in pre-packaged plans. Rather, we work with our clients to help students personalize their paths by enhancing the trajectory – both depth and breadth – of things they already enjoy doing. After working with over 1,000 students, I can confidently say: that strategy works!

Robert Levine is the founder and CEO of University Consultants of America, an independent educational consultancy assisting students around the world with applications to colleges, universities and graduate schools. For more information, call University Consultants of America, Inc. at 1-800-465-5890 or visit www.universitycoa.com

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2021 REVAMPED CADDY ESCALADE GOES HIGH-TECH!

Test-drive stories by NITISH S. RELE motoringtampabay@gmail.com

The fifth-gen Cadillac Escalade has gone high-tech! In a big way, we must point out. The iconic full-size luxury SUV now is equipped with OLED (organic light-emitting diode) screen technology, which basically is light produced in response to an electric current. Three screens: a 14.2-inch instrument display behind the steering wheel; to the left, a 7.2-inch touch screen for driver information center; and a 16.9-inch infotainment screen in the dashboard; all use OLED and boast twice the clarity of a 4K TV! Audiophiles will love the 36-speaker AKG sound miracle, which can be heard via the ceiling, headrests and even the center console! Add the navigation system with augmented reality to the mix and you are in business!

For 2021, the Escalade continues with the previous 6.2-liter V-8 Ecotec engine, which cranks out 420 horsepower @ 5600 rpm and 460 pounds-feet of torque @ 4100 rpm. You can't find a smoother transmission than the 10-speed Cadillac engineers have installed in the luxury SUV. And the start-stop feature (automatic engine stop when the vehicle halts) ensures substantial savings in fuel and weight. A coil-over-shock front and a new independent rear suspension (replaces the traditional solid-axle) work well to absorb unpleasant road bumps or curves. Steering response with the electric power rack-and-pinion is swift and accurate. The Dynamic Fuel Management

ESCALADE (4WD)
Tires: P275/50R22 all season
Wheelbase: 120.9 inches
Length: 211 inches
Width: 81 inches
Height: 76.6 inches
Fuel capacity: 24 gallons
City: 14 mpg
Highway: 19 mpg
Base price: \$102,995
Web site: www.cadillac.com

system deactivates four of the eight cylinders for fuel savings. And if you need to haul a sailboat or another car, tow capacity is an astonishing 8,000 pounds.

You can recognize an Escalade anywhere, thanks to its mammoth presence (5-inch and 8-inch extended wheelbase and length respectively than previous) starting up front with the centered and familiar crest emblem in the Galvano chromed grille, flanked by new horizontal HID headlights. The Caddy truly shines in the cabin department with such creature comforts as tri-zone auto a/c, flip-down 12.6-inch DVD screens for rear passengers, panoramic sun roof, hands-free lift gate, 16-way power heated/cooled front seats, suede headliner and inviting dark auburn with black accent interior. The stainless-steel speaker grilles throughout are



eye-catching. Ingress and egress into the high-sitting vehicle is convenient, thanks to power retractable running boards (optional). The third-row seat folds via a power button in the cargo hold while the second-row seat moves fore and aft 5.5 inches.

Of course, the indulgence doesn't come cheap. Our Sport Platinum model with all the trimmings topped \$112,095. Don't be misled into believing that the nearly 5,500-pound vehicle lacks power. In fact, the gas pedal unleashes strong acceleration to make this a graceful, smooth and easy-riding companion. Now, all you need is an inflated bank balance to indulge yourself and the family.

HIGH-PERFORMANCE ECOBOOST MUSTANG LEAVES A LASTING IMPRESSION

It may not have the power of a GT, Bullitt or Shelby GT500 but the Mustang EcoBoost with the optional high-performance package will leave any potential owner thoroughly satisfied. As we were recently while testing out the 2.3-liter inline-4 turbo EcoBoost pumping out 330 horsepower @ 6000 rpm and 350 pounds-feet of torque @ 3000 rpm. Basically, it is a Focus RS power train. Add MagneRide adaptive dampers to smoothen rough surfaces, 19-inch Pirelli Corsa summer tires, and a 3.55 Torsen limited-slip rear axle, and you are in for a thrill of a ride! Standard was the seamless six-speed manual gear box. Drive modes in the fully-lined cloth convertible include normal, sport, snow/wet, track and drag strip.



That this is the ever-recognizable Mustang is evident as you stare at the long sculpted hood meeting a blacked-out grille with the offset tri-bar pony crest while 2.3L High Performance Package badges deck up on both front sides. And if you step back, you will admire the eye-catching three-LED bar sequential blinking signal light. The cabin is equally pleasing with the traditional dual-cowl-style dashboard and easy-to-toggle switches. Sync3, which accesses audio, telephone, nav controls via a voice command, 8-inch touchscreen tap or button click, is

MUSTANG
Wheelbase: 107.1 inches
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Weight: 3,758 pounds
Fuel capacity: 16 gallons
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Web site: www.ford.com

simple to use. Standard amenities include dual auto a/c, leather seats, manual tilt/telescopic steering column, power windows and locks, ambient lights, two USB ports and push-button start.

Dual front and side airbags, front knee airbags, side curtain airbag, rearview camera, four-wheel antilock brakes with electronic stability and traction control, front and rear three-point seatbelts, tire pressure monitor and daytime running light come at no extra cost.

The iconic Mustang is renowned for being exciting and nimble to engage with a cool and hands-on feel to the cabin. And it has always been sold at an unbeatable price. Same applies to the EcoBoost and the alluring high-performance bundle, which will impress even the hardcore GT and Bullitt fans.

REVAMPED SUBARU OUTBACK IS A SENSIBLE BUY

Is it a wagon? Or a midsize SUV? Really, it doesn't matter because the Outback leaves a lasting impression. More so now with a recent overhaul. The sixth-gen and five-seater Subaru boasts a solid ride with quick acceleration, superb handling and steering feel. Of course, standard all-wheel-drive system along with dual X-Mode traction management ensures outstanding balance in all driving conditions.

OUTBACK (ONYX XT)
Tires: 225/60R18
Wheelbase: 108.1 inches
Length: 191.3 inches
Height: 66.1 inches
Width: 73 inches
Weight: 3,884 pounds
Fuel capacity: 18.5 gallons
City: 23 mpg
Highway: 30 mpg
Base price: \$34,895
Price as tested: \$37,750
Web site: www.subaru.com



The Outback Onyx edition displays a larger hexagonal grille with front lower body cladding. Active grille shutters improve engine warm up, retain heat and ensure fuel savings. A twin cockpit with electroluminescent gauge displays for speedometer, tachometer, fuel and coolant temperature give the interior a rich ambiance. All new is the 11.6-inch tablet-style infotainment touch screen, the center of attention on the dashboard. Passenger volume is vast at 105.6 cubic feet while ground clearance is a laudable 8.7 inches. Other goodies include 10-way power driver and eight-way front-passenger heated seats, dual auto a/c, overhead sunglass holder, power lift gate,

60/40 fold-down rear seatback, auto start/stop and a roof rack with crossbars.

Standard safety features include dual front and side airbags, side curtain airbag for all three rows, driver knee airbag, EyeSight (adaptive cruise control, pre-collision braking, lane departure warning and lane keep assist), blind spot detection with lane change assist and rear-cross traffic alert, four-wheel

antilock brakes with electronic brake distribution and brake assist, rollover sensor, vehicle dynamic control, active front seat head restraints and whiplash protection, front view (180-degree view of front) and smart rearview monitors, tire pressure monitoring system and daytime running lights.

This redesigned and easy-on-the-pocket Subaru is a tempting midsize SUV. A standard all-wheel drive to maintain stability in untoward road/weather conditions, spacious cabin and, best of all, gas-sipping abilities should help seal the deal.



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HELP WANTED Live-in housekeeper needed for a professional family in Naples, FL. Separate room/ bath provided. General household work, including cooking, light cleaning, washing, etc. Text or call (443) 858-8587.

HELP WANTED Days Inn Motel in Saint Augustine, FL looking for housekeeping couple. Accommodation will be provided. Call Vijay at (904) 671-3147 or email daysinn2560@gmail.com

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HELP WANTED South Florida Base CPA firm looking for an Accountant with bookkeeping and tax abilities. Prepare bank reconciliations, sales & payroll tax filings, and tax returns for small companies and individuals.

Must be available to work in our Boca Raton office and have a good personality. Experience with an accounting firm is a plus. Knowledge of QuickBooks and/ or QBO a plus. Must speak Urdu, Hindi or Bengali. Please email resumes to jobs@advantage.cpa

HELP WANTED Help wanted in convenience store located near Tampa. Require experience to run store. We will help with accommodation. Please contact Andy at (732) 925-9250.

HELP WANTED Wyndham motel – now hiring. Looking for experienced professional couple to operate and manage Wyndham franchised motel in Sarasota. Will help with accommodation. Motel managing experience required. Call or text Ankit Shah at (732) 925-9250 or Ken Amin at (727) 597-0897.



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MARCH FORECAST

By PANKAJ KOHLI



ARIES / Mesha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (March 21-April 20) Mars Sign – Stars covered Ashwini, Bharani, Kritika (1st Part) Strong All material and monetary plans if executed properly may meet with success. Mid-month, Mars and Sun jointly erase health deficiencies, enemies on professional and personal front. Hold if you are planning

to invest in a new house, car or another financial investment. Addiction of any kind is a great danger to health; chances of falling into it are high.

TAURUS / Vrushabha (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Venus) - (April 21-May 21) Venus Sign - Stars covered Kritika (last 3 parts), Rohini, Mrigashira (first 2 parts)

Success in commercial ventures and completion of all pending projects are seen. Chances of rheumatism, cold or stomach ailments (hyperacidity, intestinal and digestion problems) are possible this month. Business partnerships and alliances are expected to flourish. Professionals in communication business, media, tutors, entrepreneurs and mathematicians may stand to gain.

GEMINI / Mithuna (Air sign, ruling planet is Mercury) - (May 22-June 21)

Mercury Sign - Stars covered Mrigashira (last 2 parts), Ardra & Punarvasu (3 parts)

This month is precious, convert every opportunity into success. Marriage and business alliances are possible. Positional strength of favorable planets blesses house of luck, success in job, speculation, business and overall professional setup. Unexpected positive developments are expected in business and in domestic setup. Professional elevation improves monetary conditions tremendously.

CANCER / Karaka (Watery sign, ruling planet is Moon) - (June 22-July 22)

Moon Sign – Stars covered Punarvasu (4th part), Pushya, Aslesha

Control speech and anger since some disturbance is seen in domestic affairs. Be wise with money, you can save a lot; in fact, monetary conditions become

better for some. Think before buying any expensive material possession. No job changes forecast for some time. Do not take hasty or emotional decisions. Be careful with personal and financial matters.

LEO / Simha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Sun) - (July 23-Aug. 22)

Sun Sign – Stars covered Magha, Purva Phalguni, and Uttara Phalguni (1st part)

Half-hearted actions without planning may cost dearly. Monetary gains continue. Job change is not recommended. Business partnership and marital alliances can take a back seat. Hurdles and obstacles slow down process of recovery. Positive time for financial professionals though rewards may come later than expected.

VIRGO / Kanya (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Mercury) (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

Mercury Sign – Stars covered Uttara Phalguni (last 3 parts), Hasta, Chitra (first 2 parts)

This is a cautionary month: Be careful with arguments or financial dealings. Monetary conditions don't seem to be promising at the moment. Job change is not suggested. Business partnership and marriage alliances must be postponed too. Few may suffer from liver complaints, anemia, piles or diabetes. Undue expenses on house, automobiles and electrical appliances are anticipated, so postpone any activity.

LIBRA / Tula (Air sign, ruling planet is Venus) - (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)

Venus Sign – Stars covered Chitra (last 2 parts), Swati, Vishakha (first 3 parts)

Money, finance, domestic happiness and peaceful conditions prevail all around. Health is great and you are confident of your actions. Try a few outings, picnics, social gatherings; they will give you joy and happiness.

SCORPIO / Vruschika (Water sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (Oct. 24-Nov. 22)

Mars Sign – Stars covered Vishakha (4th part), Anuradha, Jyestha

Be careful in partnership deeds or spousal relations. Guard against depression and feeling low; it is only in your mind. Maintain a low profile; arguments will only lead to more problems. Planetary

influences indicate increase in wealth, relations and happy domestic conditions.

SAGITTARIUS / Dhanush (Fire sign, ruling planet is Jupiter) - (Nov. 23-Dec. 21)

Jupiter Sign – Stars covered Moola, Purva Shada, Uttara Shada (first part)

Domestic and financial conditions need to be addressed. Do more efforts in every respect. Great time ahead; with money matters and finance, you will have more disposable income than expenses. Career changes for better placement are observed. Safeguard and protect yourself on personal level.

CAPRICORN / Makara (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Saturn) - (Dec. 22-Jan. 20)

Saturn Sign – Stars covered Uttara Shada (last 3 parts) Shravana, Dhanistha (first 2 parts)

You will feel happy, energetic and full of life despite obstacles. Your own efforts will make this month a happy one, so work on it. Professional development and elevation in job front is seen. This is a great time for professional growth.

AQUARIUS / Kumbha (Air sign, ruling planet is Saturn) – (Jan. 21-Feb. 19)

Saturn Sign - Stars covered: Dhanistha (last 2 parts) Satabhisha, Purva Bhadra Pada (1st 3 parts)

Domestic tensions and savings go low; tonal language will make many enemies. Better time starts later in the month. Positive news with regards to home and landed property is seen; also, new contacts will be fruitful. Overall professional and personal growth is seen.

PISCES / Meena (Water sign, ruling planet is Jupiter) - (Feb. 20-March 20)

Jupiter Sign - Stars covered: Purva Bhadra Pada (last part) Uttara Bhadra Pada, Revathi

Victorious attitude, pride, ambition, leadership traits are displayed in your attitude. You are self-motivated and self-inspired; do not let the spirit down. Your approach will help boost you and your family. Domestic happiness, material comforts and worldly pleasures are yours to enjoy. Expect good news.

For detailed horoscope analysis and chart reading, courtesy Pankaj-Astro Jyotish, call Pankaj Kohli at (905) 910-1441 or e-mail Pathofastrology@gmail.com

BUILDING AN AGILE CULTURE

By DR. KARYN MATHURA-ARTHUR



The rapid changes in our world (especially the Covid-19 pandemic) are defining a new phase, and there is a need for a more intentional and pro-active approach to leadership in organizations. The survival of every organization is growing marginally less reliant on how "efficient"

the business system compared to how flexible they are at handling change.

The pandemic has served as an eye-opener to many organizations on the dangers of sticking to a rigid "tested" system of management as embraced to preparing for rapid change. The world might have evolved from the Stone Age, but one thing remains clear: Only those who can adapt survive in the end.

Building an Agile Culture in your business should be a top priority for every organization – there is a system to doing so:

- **Understand existing processes**

What is there to change if you do not understand the model in which the organization is currently running? This has little to do with personnel, but more with how information, decisions, and other tasks are handled within the company. Agile Culture will most likely function better if it can be based on the existing structure.

- **Know that people run the system**

The traditional practice in most organizations is to recruit people or employ staff and absorb

them into a running system. In most cases, the individual may not be the best suited for the system, but they must "kill" their abilities and align themselves to the system. This system is the biggest killer of creativity and ingenuity in any organization.

"As a leader, it is important to not just see your own success, but focus on the success of others," says Sundar Pichai, CEO of Alphabet. Build the culture around real people, not systems.

- **Create physical enablers to support the culture change**

Many planned company culture have met their untimely end simply because they were too sophisticated for the tools available. And it was hardly a problem of money as it was a problem of creating the right environment to cater to the culture.

Do you need to isolate a team? Do you need to break physical barriers? Are there too many bureaucracies involved in organizational planning? These are all barriers to Agile Culture in organizations.

- **Imbibing new habits**

It is not equally bad to redefine an organization's mission and goals and relate it to the personnel. Read it, practice it, commit it to heart, do it, just anything to keep the excitement alive. A constantly hammered-on idea hardly loses its intensity in the heart of the faithful.

- ✓ Encourage the employee to "own" tasks and become more creative.

- ✓ Emphasize the importance of taking out key points from reviews and lessons
- ✓ Converge the organization's effort to relevant tasks and activities that promote the mandate.

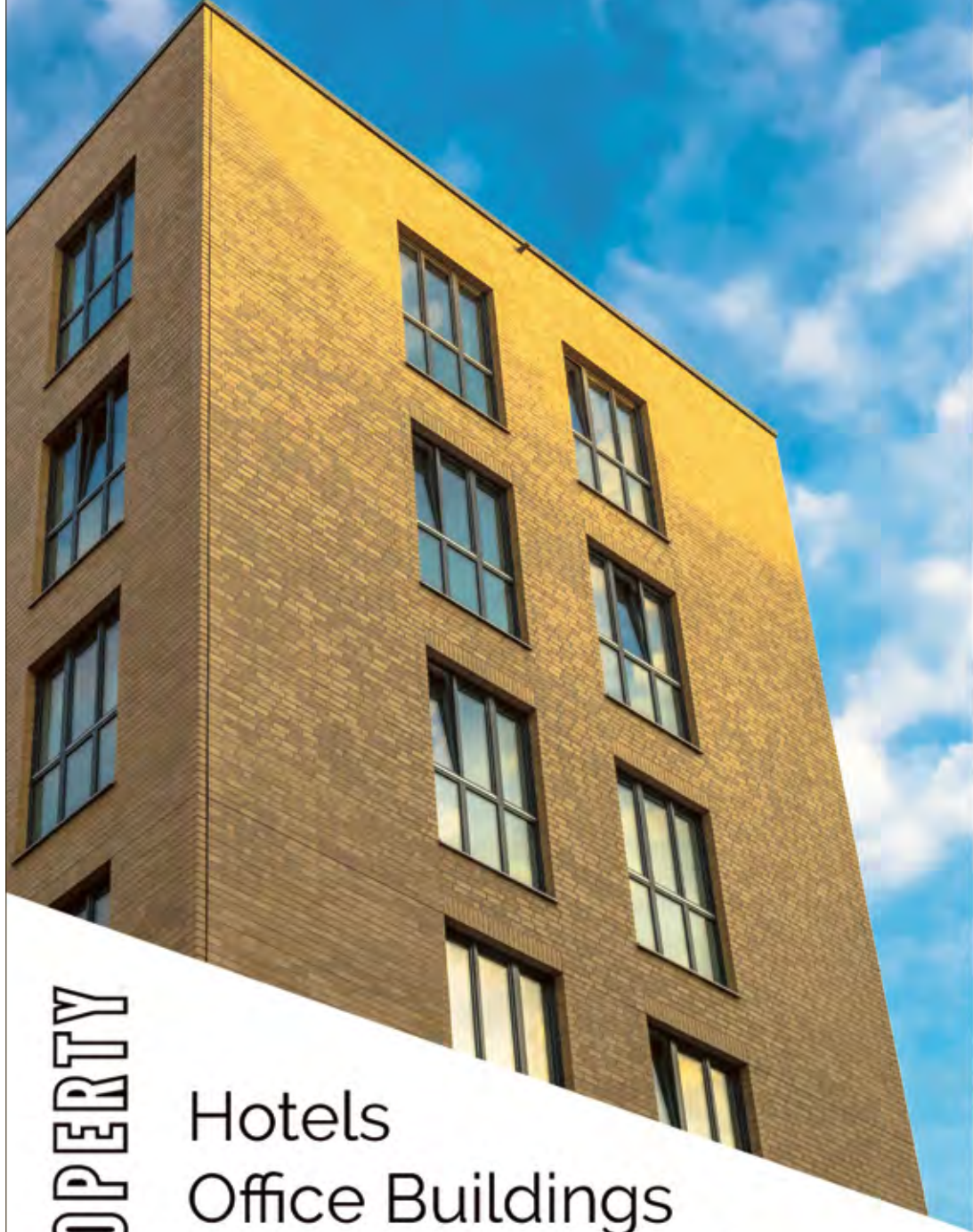
- **Continuous improvement through adjustments**

One beautiful thing about Agile Culture is that it does not follow a particular rule or path. It is random and adopts various processes until it gets to the one that works. There is almost no "rest" with agile leadership until the process becomes efficient.

Agile leadership has become the seemingly sensible way forward for businesses post-Covid-19. The rapid and acute impact on business process means the various layers of business management must become flexible and resourceful. Agile Culture means every level in the company would require adjustments.

Only organizations averse to continuous improvement will scorn at Agile leadership.

Dr. Karyn Mathura-Arthur is an agile implementation leader with experience in Operational Excellence, Continuous Process Improvement, Business Transformation, Process Engineering and Organizational Change Management across multiple industries (banking, insurance, healthcare, telecom, government, retail, etc.). For comments and suggestions, email editor@khaasbaat.com



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CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC – CURRENT STATUS

As per President Biden, "Anybody who wanted a vaccine would be able to get one by the end of July." And I understand that the federal government would begin direct shipments of vaccines to retail pharmacies soon. Because of the current severe winter weather conditions all over the U.S., there is bound to be delay in vaccination doses reaching the destination.

With more people complying with pandemic precautions and vaccination rate going up, we can expect a significant improvement in the new infection rate in next several months. But don't expect life to get back to normal soon. The reason: new variants of the viruses are coming. Earlier, we heard about the English, South African and Brazilian variants, which are all powerful, more infectious and tend to spread faster with capacity for more damage in the human body. In addition, more domestic variants of the virus are popping up. It's for this reason that the CDC recently announced new "updated mask-wearing guidance," emphasizing a snug fit and multiple layers of material as keys to mask effectiveness. Alternatively, one can wear the N95 mask that gives better protection or wear a double mask – "cloth mask over a disposable mask."

A common question asked at this time is, "Do the current vaccines, Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, protect us from these variants?" As Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist of WHO, said recently "We're still observing and our knowledge of anti Sars- Covid-19 vaccines is evolving. But at this point in time, most scientists believe that the vaccines in development and already been approved should provide protection against the variants because these vaccines elicit a fairly broad immune response, a host of antibodies and cell-mediated immune responses." That's a great relief.

Remember, once you catch the severe form of disease, even after you recover, symptoms can last for several months. "At least half of people who recover from it suffer neurological symptoms for months after," according to Sanjay Gupta, M.D. On top of that, a new serious "multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-A)" that occurs primarily in adults previously infected with the COVID-19 virus has been recently identified. MIS-A seems to manifest usually weeks after developing the infection, though some people may still have a current infection. Children who become infected with the virus generally have only a mild illness but in those who go on to develop MIS-C, some organs like heart, lungs and kidneys become severely inflamed. Fortunately, MIS-C is rare, and most children who have it eventually get better with medical care. The best way for prevention is to make sure your child doesn't get exposed to the virus. Follow the guidelines of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

I know all of us are suffering from "pandemic fatigue" and "confinement anxiety from the perennial lockdown," so it can be tempting to drop your guard, especially during these cold winter months. We just need to pull together and stay with the program till this is over. All of you are now aware of the Covid-19 prevention protocols. And vaccines are the only way to herd immunity and eventual pandemic control.

To be continued ...

M.P. Ravindra Nathan, M.D., is a cardiologist and Emeritus Editor of AAPI Journal. For further reading, "Second Chance - A Sister's Act of Love" by Dr. Nathan from Outskirts Press, can be found at www.amazon.com

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