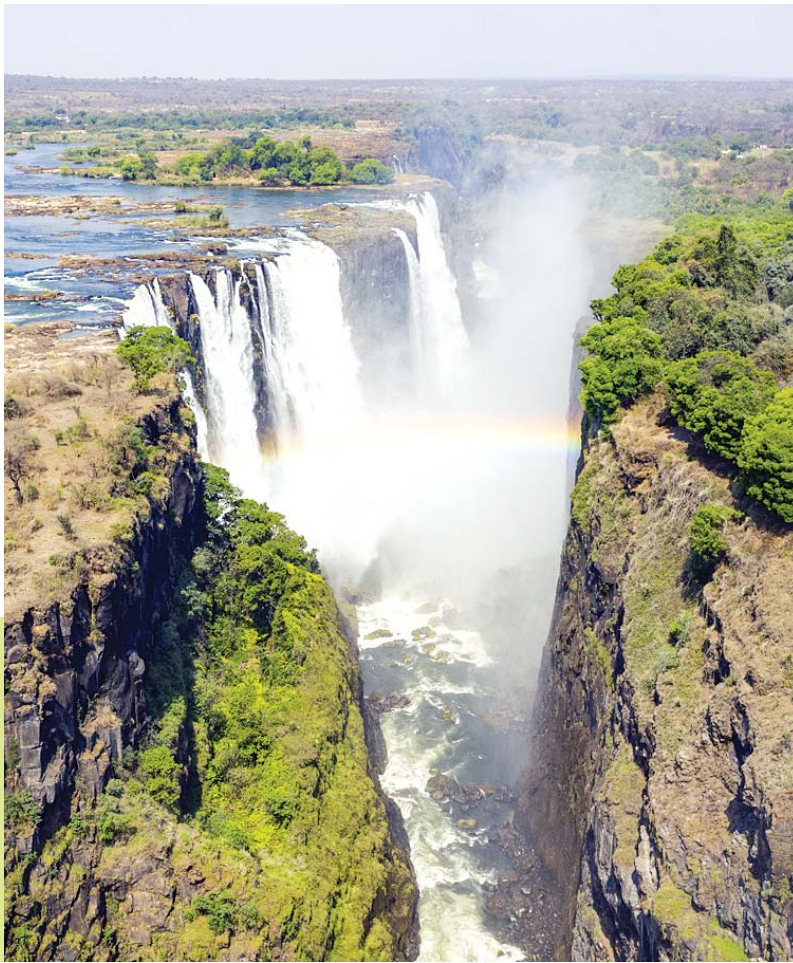




Significance of National Coffee Day

National Coffee Day, celebrated on September 29th each year, honours one of the world's most beloved beverages that fuels mornings and connects people across cultures. The day highlights the journey of coffee from bean to cup, recognizing the farmers, roasters, and baristas who make it possible. Beyond its rich aroma and energizing kick, coffee represents community, conversation, and creativity. Cafés and coffee chains often mark the occasion with discounts, special brews, and awareness campaigns on sustainable sourcing. National Coffee Day serves as both a celebration of taste and a reminder of the global effort behind every sip.



Dr. Lalit Mehta
(Ex Dean, Ex Director, K.J.S.M.C. Hospital and Research Center, Mumbai)

Year 1976, I and my wife both were posted at S.M.S. Medical College, Jaipur. Three of my colleagues had left the department to join teaching post at Medical colleges in African countries and were remitting good money to India. There was an advertisement in B.M.J. for vacant posts at Medical colleges of Tanzania, Nigeria, and Zambia. We applied for the same thinking to work for 2-3 years and to return back with good savings. We got job offer from Zambia and Nigeria. Zambia was peaceful country, though salary was less than in Nigeria. We accepted the job offer delaying for 6 months. There was no Passport office in Jaipur. We had to go to Delhi to submit our application for passport. This took 40 days after police verification. The passport was like a pocket book, having a hard card cover, our photo pasted and entries made by hand. Finally, departure date was fixed. After an emotional farewell by students and staff, we left for Lusaka-Zambia by Air India flight from Bombay. The flight was up to Nairobi and onward, connecting flight by Zambian Airways to Lusaka. We were granted foreign



exchange of 6 USD each. We were traveling for the first time leaving our country and beloved ones for unknown destination. Our flight landed at Nairobi Airport 3 hours late and could not get connecting flight to Lusaka. We were shifted to Hilton Hotel to wait for next day flight. All expenses for food and accommodation were paid for by Air India. We spent 10 USD to buy a new bag as our bag was damaged in flight. Next day, we landed at Lusaka Airport with two USD in pocket. Our friends came to receive us. They came the day earlier also to the Airport. University had made arrangements for our stay in a 5 star hotel till suitable accommodation could be made available to us. Our stay in hotel continued for 2 months before we could get a flat of our choice. Large British style bungalows with big compound were not suitable for us as we both were working and house break incidences were com-



The Saudi clerk in University checked our appointment letter, prepared service file and made a note on file in Arabic telling us that I should be paid more as per my qualification and experience. He gave the file in my hand and asked me to get approval from Vice Chancellor. Our conversation was through an Egyptian interpreter. In V.C. office, 10-12 people were waiting outside his room. After few minutes, a man came out and started checking our files and making notes on it. An Egyptian sitting next to me said that the man was V.C. himself and has signed my file for approval. We were amazed. No Bureaucracy, file moves with the person himself saving lot of time!

Zambia And Saudi Arabia

#DOWN THE MEMORY LANE



owned by Gujarati citizens settled there for more than 50 years.

They were well versed in local language. Their local house maids and boys could speak Gujarati fluently. Social life was good. Zambians were simple, fun-loving family people. They were mad about music, dance and soccer (football). Our houseboy would sing and dance while working. Their food was just one dish "Kshema."

Their customs were quaint for us. A Zambian girl would send a list of items for gift to be received from her friends and relatives before marriage. Hindu community was rich having their Association, Hindu hall, Temple and open ground for organising social activities like marriage, Navaratra Garba and Holi and Diwali festivals. On Sunday, an Indian film would be shown. A Drive-in-Open Theater was also there showing English films. Being Gujarati, we developed good contacts with local



The medical college was in a large compound. Non-clinical departments were in separate porta cabins having required facilities. There was a common coffee room where faculty members could meet for a cup of coffee before start of the day. The Hospital and Clinical departments were across the road.

Gujaratis. President Kenneth Kounda's adviser was a Gujarati priest and astrologer who invited us for lunch.

When everything was going on well, some of us applied for vacant posts advertised in B.M.J. at Saudi University Medical College, Riyadh. Salary was very attractive, no income tax and free housing was offered. Selection was done by University's London office. We and my wife got appointment letter telegraphically and were advised to join at Riyadh Medical College, proceeding via Cairo to get our work-visa from Saudi Embassy in Cairo.

We had to buy our own tickets, which would be reimbursed. We managed to get some USD from our friends. At Cairo, we stayed in a cheap hotel to report to Saudi Embassy next day. The Egyptian taxi driver was very friendly and helpful. At Saudi Embassy, there was long queue of visa seekers. My wife was wearing sari. The Embassy officer saw us from a distance and called us inside out of turn. He could speak only few

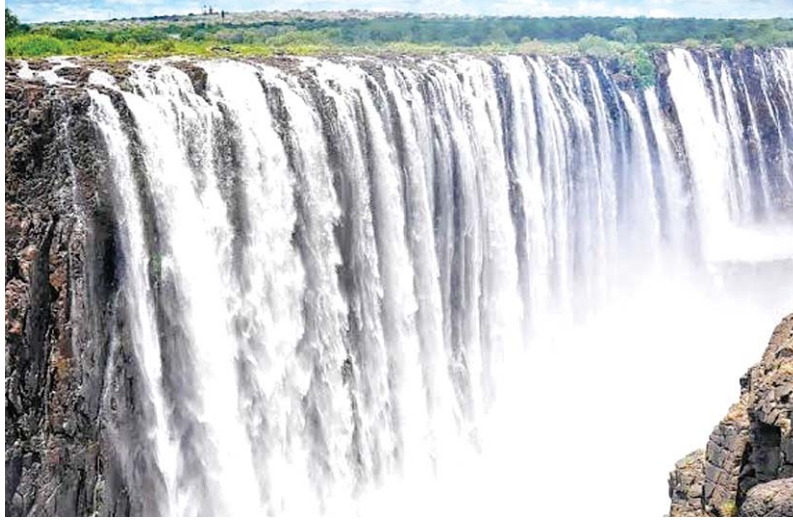
words of English. He checked the Telegram which we received from Riyadh. He said that you are Hindi and stamped our passport with work-visa. Next problem was to get a flight for Riyadh which was fully booked for next two days. We were worried as our USD were depleting. The taxi driver took us for local sightseeing which included Giza Pyramids, world famous Egyptian museum and mosques etc. The streets were congested and reminded us of Gopalji ka Rasta in Jaipur. Posters of Indian movies were seen at many places.

Finally we got flight after 3 days and reached Riyadh Airport. The staff at Airport was Saudi National having difficulty in conversation with us. Our luggage was checked for banned items like alcohol, religious, obscene or communist literature. We took a taxi for nearby affordable hotel. Next day was Friday and University was closed. In evening, we took taxi for city round. My wife was asked to sit on backseat and I was to sit near driver as male and female were not

allowed to sit together in public view.

The hotel menu did not have any vegetarian item except rice cooked in chicken soup. At our request, separate rice was served in our room, and not in dining hall. All males were wearing same type of ankle length Kurta and a head cover (Ghutra). Muslim women were wearing black-coloured Burqa of different styles.

Next day, we reported to the Medical college. It was a large campus having departments in individual villas. Two staff members, who joined a month before us, were from Jaipur and knew us. The Saudi



Saudis had vision and money to fulfill their dream life. Infrastructure development was going on very fast. Thousands of Koreans and Philipinos were engaged to construct wide roads, flyovers, double-storey road bridges, new airports, malls, markets, schools, colleges and hospitals. Skilled and semiskilled workers were in high demand.

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We were given a monthly salary in cash for initial expenditure. A man was sent to our hotel for payment and to get our luggage. We were allotted a furnished flat in University's new housing campus which was 15 kms away. The campus was of 600 flats in 40 building constructed by an Indian firm jointly with other agencies. It was having supermarkets and covered swimming pool. Most of the staff members and our friends from Jaipur were also staying there. The University's new building, colleges, library, Medical college and attached hospital were to start functioning within a year or two. Our friends from Jaipur helped us to settle and commute to Medical college till we purchased our own vehicle.

A bus was provided by University for female staff members to commute to Girls college. We developed good social circle with other Indian and Pakistani staff living in campus. Thursdays and Fridays were weekend holidays. Weekend diner parties of 10-12 Indian families together became a routine. There were no cinema halls but VCR cassettes of Indian, English and Pakistani serials were available on rent. Later on, we purchased a film projector jointly to watch 35 mm films available on rent. Saudis were fond of Soccer. Saudi team also participated in Olympics. Players were popular amongst youth.

We were informed not to have any religious functions in public and propagate our religion, though we could celebrate Diwali, Holi functions with our friends in our flat. Muslim ladies had to wear Burqa and were to be accompanied by a male member (even a 10 year old boy could do). Non muslim ladies had to dress with modesty

and could not wear dresses which exposes body parts (skirts, sleeveless blouses). Markets (souk) were full of foreign goods. Food items were subsidized and cheap. Hot rotis and tined vegetables made life comfortable. Imported fruits and fresh vegetables were plenty. Gold jewelry and biscuits were available in many shops. Petrol was cheap (8 anas per litre). Desalinated water was available 24 hours and was good for all purposes.

During prayer time, shops would put shutter down and owner to nearby mosque. We had to stand outside waiting for the shop to reopen after prayer. Friday afternoon prayer was an important ritual. King with his clan would lead the prayer in a big mosque in city centre. Outside the mosque, there was a ground where criminals were punished in public view. Decapitation and cutting of hands or flogging used to take place in this ground after prayer. My wife refused to watch this. As per Saudi courts, judgments for any crime have to be announced within 15 days and implemented immediately.



Saudis had vision and money to fulfill their dream life. Infrastructure development was going on very fast. Thousands of Koreans and Philipinos were engaged to construct wide roads, flyovers, double-storey road bridges, new airports, malls, markets, schools, colleges and hospitals. Skilled and semiskilled workers were in high demand. Cars of various models covered with layer of dust were sold in open grounds, got new showrooms. University's new building started functioning with attached colleges, library and hostels.

We shifted to new Medical college designed by German Architect and attached hospitals. Departments were fully furnished with individual rooms for staff, teaching material and laboratories. When I asked for an expensive microscope for research purpose, store keeper imported 3 microscopes thinking that other department may also ask for it. An Electron Microscope was also provided. We were granted financial support to present our research papers in International Conferences. Soon, my colleague, Dr. Singh, came from USA to join the department. We were four Indians in the department.

Other than University hospitals, Government and private hospitals came in existence. A National Guard Hospital, Military Hospital and Security Hospital, in addition to 500-bed General Hospital, were providing free health services. World class King Faisal Hospital was already there. My wife joined Security Hospital. At a time, we were 14 doctors from Jaipur working in different hospitals in Riyadh. Some others were employed in District Hospitals. Indian Embassy

was providing education (CBSE) to expatriates children while some children were admitted in expensive American Schools. Fees were paid by University. Initially, our salary in Saudi Riyal was paid in cash, a day before the end of lunar month. Later on, it was through banks. Any amount of SR could be exchanged freely for any currency of the world. There was no income tax, housing and electricity was free, annual leave was paid with airfare. The contract was renewed yearly.

Each year, Saudi King would go for camping in desert with his entourage of more than 100 members. A tent city would be created with all amenities, game with Falcon and traditional dance with swords was performed. During Ramadan month, city would look deserted in daytime and come to life during night with decorated shops busy with shoppers. Offices worked in night. Each year, more

than 1.5 million people come from different countries to perform Hajj at Makka Holly Kaba and Madina. Our Muslims friends were happy that they could perform Hajj. Non muslims were not allowed to visit Makka-Madina. We could watch Hajj rituals on TV at home.

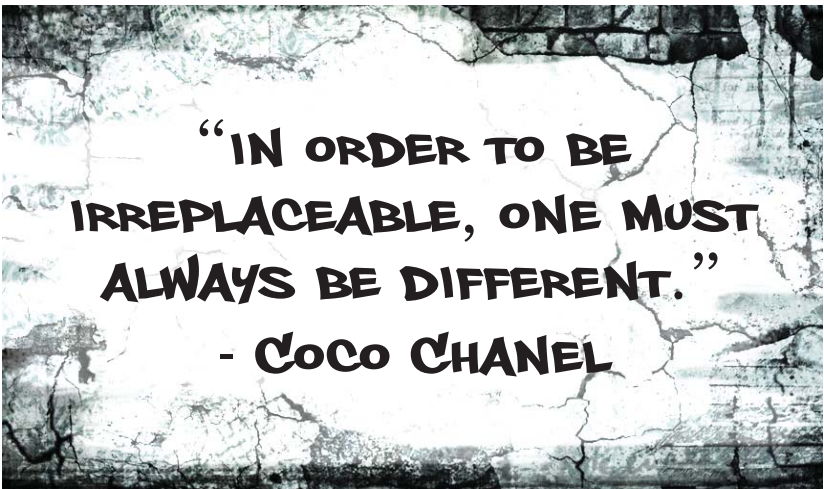
Indira Gandhi and Rajiv visited Riyadh in 1982. Indian Embassy arranged our meeting with them at the Kings Palace. She greeted us and gave a short talk. Later, on death of King Fahd, Abdullah became king. On his coronation, city was decorated. We were paid one month extra salary as gift. In 1991, there was Gulf war between Iraq and Kuwait. American troops made bases in Riyadh and Dhahran. Saudi Arabia was also under attack by Iraqi Missiles. There were blackouts at night. We were given gas mask to protect ourselves from gas attacks. A Siren would be sounded when a missile was launched from Kuwait occupied by Iraq. One of it fell near our campus.

At the end of 35 days war, we were paid one month extra salary for staying under stress, doing our job while others left for long leave. By 1995, we completed 17 years in Riyadh happily and now, it was time to return to India. While in Saudi Arabia, we could publish 20 research papers, travel to more than 30 countries, got experience of war times and saw a town transforming into a modern city keeping its heritage intact. Destiny has something else for us in India.

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THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

