



■ The cast of the 15-minute stage play which revolves around two families, one idle and the other active. The seniors, all amateurs, took over a month to memorise the lines, but they received a standing ovation when they staged the play in Sharjah last year.

## '4get-me-not' tours to help seniors fight Alzheimer's

FILIPINA AIMS TO HELP SENIOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS STAY ENGAGED IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES

DUBAI  
BY SHARMILA DHAL  
Chief Reporter

In what is an innovative initiative, a social enterprise committed to raise awareness about Alzheimer's Disease (AD) will soon launch exclusive tours for seniors in Sharjah.

Desiree O. Vlekkan, founder of the enterprise 4get-me-not, told *Gulf News*, "The special tours will be open to both senior residents and senior tourists and will cover different places and activities in Sharjah."

She said the aim of the tours is two-fold: "One to improve the quality of life of the seniors by offering them something to do and two, to promote tourism in Sharjah, which has been recognised as the first age-friendly city in the Middle East."

She added: "It will be a lot of fun as busloads of these 'kids' undertake the tours."

4get-me-not, which currently supports over 100 expat seniors aged 60 and older in the UAE, helps them stay motivated and active, a key factor to delay the onset and progress of AD, a genetic and age-related disorder



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Desiree O. Vlekkan | 4get-me-not

der that is characterised by loss of memory, speech and ability to do many tasks.

Desiree said she regularly plans outings for the seniors by taking them to places like the cinema or the zoo. "We've even been to the Rain Room in Sharjah, attended talent shows, pizza-making classes and played Bingo, which the seniors just love because they can be very competitive."

But topping all the cognitive activities is a stage play that the seniors have been trained to put up. "It's a 15-minute play and the seniors, all amateurs, took over a month to memorise the lines. But they are brilliant, when they staged the play in Sharjah last year, they received a standing ovation."

"Basically, the play is about two families, one idle and the

other active. It shows how lack of activity can lead to many lifestyle diseases, including diabetes and AD." The senior expats also visit their Emirati counterparts in geriatric wards and hospitals across the emirates.

### No medical breakthrough

A Filipina married to a Belgian, Desiree was prompted to start 4get-me-not when she noticed how her father would look quite lost and get agitated without any provocation.

She said her worst fears came true when he was diagnosed with early stage Alzheimer's in 2011. "Now my father-in-law too suffers from Alzheimer's. There is no medical breakthrough yet to cure this horrible disease. There isn't much information about it either. If there was,

families could be more vigilant to the early warning signs and be adequately prepared to deal with the phases of memory loss. So this journey of starting 4get-me-not has been very personal. I want to reach out to as many families and friends living with Alzheimer's, and let them know that there is hope — we can have control over how we cope with this disease."

She said 4get-me-not's approach to fighting Alzheimer's is non-pharmacological. "What that means is therapy, not drugs. The key is to learn more, do more, whether it's art, music, ping pong or any other activity that interests you. The idea is to build on your creativity and improve your daily life."

Desiree said seniors with the onset of Alzheimer's are often incognito. "There's a sense of guilt and shame. But families should bring them out in the open and help them stay involved, integrated and active."

She said 4get-me-not works closely with Alzheimer's Disease International, an umbrella organisation of over 80 Alzheimer's associations around the world and the World Health Organisation's regional office.

## Residents welcome long winter break

Most schools have announced holidays, coinciding with festive season, up to four weeks

DUBAI  
BY FAISAL MASUDI  
Staff Reporter

With UAE schools closed for the winter break starting December 13, families are looking forward to spending more time together.

The winter break will last from two to four weeks, depending on the curriculum of the school and approval from authorities.

Schools are allowed to shorten or extend breaks by around a week or so, as long as they maintain a minimum number of total school days in one academic year (around 180 days).

This weekend marked the start of the winter break for the 2018-19 school year, whose first term started in September. When classes resume in January 2019, students will start the second term. Indian schools will be starting their third and final term.

Most schools, including public and private schools following the Ministry of Education curriculum, will be closed for a month, reopening on January 13. Many other schools are reopening on January 6.

Parents welcomed the coming of a break after an "action packed" first term, saying it will allow children to rest and enjoy the cooler



■ Iram Rizvi

months with their parents.

"Three weeks off is perfect after an action packed first term of the school year. There have been a lot studies, exams and after-school activities. Children need a break and we parents get to spend good times together. The weather is good and we get to relax," said Iram Rizvi, an Indian mother of children enrolled at a British school in Dubai.

### Ideal break

Nina Chami, a Lebanese mother of children at a French school in Dubai, said the winter break is ideal as it leaves free time on either side of Christmas and New Year.

"I'm happy with a long winter break, it's no problem for us at all. It's needed for the children and the families; it gives you more freedom to enjoy the holidays [Christmas and New Year]," Chami said.

Filipina expat Lyzyl Adhikari, whose daughter attends a British school in Dubai, said: "The winter break is good because it covers the Christmas season." Her daughter's school reopens on January 2.



■ As the weather gets pleasant, families are making best of the parks in Dubai like this one at Dubai Creek Park.

## Teen bowled over by Mumbai Dabbawalas' business model

Indian boy joins 128-year-old food delivery service for internship

DUBAI  
BY SAJILA SASEENDRAN  
Senior Reporter

Dubai kids generally wish to learn entrepreneurial skills from corporate giants. But an Indian teen from here recently opted for Mumbai's Dabbawalas whose 128-year-old network is dubbed the world's best food delivery system sans hi-tech disruption. And he was completely bowled over by their service.

Roshan Prem, a year 13 student of Dubai English Speaking College, was looking at options to do internships to prepare himself for his future course in business administration.

He was inspired to visit the Dabbawalas [tiffin box delivery men] after his father Prem Ramachandran advised him to understand the nuances of an organisation that has been in existence since 1890. There are currently over 5,000 Dabbawalas who deliver over 200,000 home-cooked lunch boxes each day.

Roshan recently spent a day with the Dabbawala team — right from the time they picked up the lunch boxes from various houses, got it sorted using the alphanumeric code based on the location, helped them carry the lunch boxes and then was present at the final leg of delivery.

Roshan joined them in sorting the tiffin



■ Dubai student Roshan Prem with Dabbawalas in Mumbai.

boxes and shifting them to big trolleys to be taken to the railway station. At the station, the lunch boxes were transferred to wooden crates and taken to the railway platforms.

By the end of the day, what he learnt were timeless lessons in entrepreneurship, Roshan told *Gulf News*. "I understood that the whole system was all about teamwork, trust, perseverance, communication skills and resilience. The passion and dedication of Dabbawalas, 80 per cent of whom are illiterates or less educated, is something that amazed me."

## Lawyer pleads to acquit mum of bid to kill two sons, herself

Defendant claims she does not know why she tried to kill her two sons before suicide bid

DUBAI  
BY BASSAM ZA'ZA'  
Legal and Court Correspondent

A lawyer asked a court to acquit a mother of a bid to kill her two children and attempt suicide.

The 24-year-old Bangladeshi mother claimed that she did not know why she tried to kill her two sons before attempting to commit suicide when she entered a not guilty plea before the Dubai Court of First Instance in a previous hearing.

"The scenario in which prosecutors had described the purported crime to have happened in April 2017 was unreasonable and illogical. My client's confession is void because most of what she admitted contradicts the evidence," lawyer Maasouma Al

Sayegh of Dar Al Balagh Advocates and Legal Consultants argued in court.

The lawyer further contended that the verbal evidence contradicted the technical evidence, meanwhile prosecutors' evidence did not substantiate how the incident happened.

### Shock

The 39-year-old Bangladeshi father found his two sons motionless on their bed when he returned home from work and also found his wife [defendant] motionless on the floor with her wrists slit.

The father called his brother for help and then his wife and the two children were rushed to hospital. Swift medical intervention helped save the lives of the woman and the children.

Al Sayegh told the court: "Prosecutors failed to take the statement of the suspect's sister-in-law and did not inquire why the uncle transferred his nephews to hospital and left the suspect

bleeding at home for an hour without taking her along. The mother was said to have suffocated her children with a pillow and doing so did not leave any marks or bruises on a victim's neck. One of the children had bruises and injuries on his neck, so why didn't prosecutors try to find out what had caused those marks. The knife, which prosecutors had allegedly accused my client of having used to slit her wrists, was not recovered. Why was not it found?"

The lawyer also contended that the evidence at the house could have been altered since law enforcement officers arrived late at the crime scene — after things had been cleaned.

Al Sayegh told presiding judge Awad that the father waived his rights against his wife and mother of two children and that the uncle's statement contradicted that of the husband.

"We ask the court to dismiss the accusations against my client and acquit her," the lawyer said.