Global Dharma
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It's not like they were wearing skin-tight spandex and form-fitting T-shirts common in US and European schools. But some girls at the Ashutash College in Calcutta weathered severe reprimands from the college principal for wearing the customary North Indian apparel salwar kameez to school. Subhankar Chakravorty, the pricklish principal, upbraided a second-year sociology student for wearing the salwar-which he considered indecent dress-telling her to only wear a sari to school. He has similarly criticized other girls. Incensed, and in tears, the girl took her story to the media and lodged a complaint with the Left Front (West Bengal is communist ruled) education cell. The cell sided with her, as did the opposition Congress I party womens' wing which demanded the principal's apology. The principal stood his ground and the issue bubbled up into a Calcutta-wide brauhaha. Most women artists, intellectuals and careerists in Calcutta condemned the principal. One pointed out, "The salwar kameez is accepted by the orthodox Muslim community which is definitely more particular in hiding a woman's body. In no way can it be termed indecent."

One of the college girls said, "Salwar kameezes are as decent as his dhoti kurta. Will the principal impose a dress code on the male students as well? How about asking them to wear dhotis and kurtas?"

Promising Venusian Future for India

In a brief interview with renowned Hindu astrologer Chakrapani Ullal-who lives in Southern California-Hinduism Today asked how the future of India looked. Chakrapani, without benefit of a formal chart, prognosticated: "India is passing through the Venus period. Four years have already passed in this period out of 20 years, roughly. Within the next 16 years, therefore, we can say this country will come out of its problems completely. And then it begins to grow. Because immediately after the Venus period the sun period comes. The cultural activities, the religious activities, the dharmic activities begin to gradually expand. "And

wealth becomes a part of it. India will be able to compete in the matter of wealth with a Western country like America for awhile. Mainly because of the cultural values. The cultural values in the Western country is to make things happen. They want to make things happen. Succeed. So there is always a power behind people who have ambition. That type of ambition doesn't work for bringing wealth to people who want to bring more happiness and harmony in their lives. So they are trying to integrate many things together. "

Rethinking Fiji's Sunday Business Ban

The Sunday ban in Fiji-forbiding organized sports and business-is facing opposition from former advocates. The ban, costing lost business and tourist revenue, has been quietly opposed by Hindus since its imposition by the military government in October of 1987. Touted as a way to counter resistance and maintain law and order, the Sunday ban was rigorously supported by most-but not all-within the powerful Methodist Church of Fiji. Among the early opposition was Rev. Josateki Koroi, who has since left the Methodist Church, and now says the Sunday ban is un-Christian and "meant only for military and political purposes." Further opposition is coming from Rev. A. Cakau of The Assemblies of God church, who says the government should not impose Sunday restrictions on people with different beliefs. "We cannot force these things on the people. We just have to accept it," he said.

US Christian Teens Take Vow of No Sex

Associated Press recently ran a story on a blooming trend among Christian teens to publically take of a vow of chastity until marriage. A few Hindu institutions in the US have implemented similar spiritual commitments among their teens, but many more could follow suit. The AP story: No sex, please, we're teenagers. In a rebellion some church leaders hope heralds a new sexual revolution, tens of thousands of young men and women across the country have signed covenants vowing to remain chaste until marriage.

By July, organizers of the "True Love Waits" campaign hope half-a-

million teens will have signed on, filling out enough pledge cards to stretch from the Capitol to the Washington Monument. Adam Allen, 15, of First Baptist Church in Houston, said the campaign offers a long-awaited opportunity for public redemption

to teens portrayed in the media and by some government officials as having out-of-

control libidos. "Kids are taught that they're just animals and they're going to have sex-just use a condom," Allen said. "I'm willing to stand by God." At a summer camp in Oklahoma, more than 13,500 teens embraced the program. One, Traci Bixler, said she does not have a boyfriend, but already has written a sealed letter to her future husband telling him she loves him enough to wait. "I am very excited about the prospect of God having someone for me."

Teens say the campaign is partly a protest to being portrayed in television, movies and music videos as sex-obsessed, and the distrust of an adult society where even the surgeon general advises girls to take condoms on dates. In a youth culture that has always prized being different, chastity is regarded as "awesome," some teens say. "It gives you a good reputation," says Jennifer Sleep, 16, of Houston. The text of the chastity pledge taken by "True Love Waits" teens: "Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, those I date, my future mate, and my future children to be sexually pure until the day I enter a covenant marriage relationship."

Trends: The Rapid Spread of HIV Seriously Threatens India

The World Health Organization (WHO) has begun sounding Southeast Asia's AIDS alarm. It warns that the area already claims 63% of the world's AIDS cases, has an HIV growth rate that may soon match Africa's, and that India has manifested a million known HIV cases in just a few years. According to an article in the News-India-Times, July 23, 1993, the WHO sees India as particularly vulnerable, for these reasons: * Promiscuity in both urban and rural areas has been rising dramatically. In 1991, 25% of Indian prostitutes were found to test HIV-positive. Just one year later, the figure rose to 40%-400,000 carriers transmitting, day after day.

* After wide testing, the WHO concluded that 18% of all blood circulating in India is infected. A majority of blood banks are not licenced, and those that are, are not tightly regulated.

* There is a general lack of interest, response or initiative from all levels of Indian society, as well as poor management of funds meant to counter the disease.

* Poor hygenic conditions in many sectors make fertile fields for the spread of HIV-especially if it turns out, as many believe, that it is transmittable by casual contact.

Unless drastic measures are taken soon, the article concludes, large numbers of young people will soon disappear from the work force, hospitals will become swamped, collapsing an already fragile medical infrastucture, and social, economic and political turmoil will ensue.

Readers are invited to share information and ideas with Trends, Hinduism Today, 1819 2nd St, Concord, CA 94519 USA.

A Renunciate Doctor of Yoga Leaves Planet Earth

Like a meteorite whitely burning out in a late night sky Shri Brahmananda Sarasvati yogically died at 11:01pm at his woodsy Ananda Ashram in upper New York. Several devotees were with him, surprised that he had actually quit his body, as his health was more robust than usual. At 70-ish he was a neurosurgeon, psychiatrist, yoga scholar and tantric mystic all compressed into a frail body with a woolly beard and lead-piercing eyes. The mahasamadhi was brought on by congestive heart failure, the final bodily denouement to a challenging last decade-a stroke in 1984 suddenly immobilized the right half of his body...and erased his memory. Three languages, an encyclopedic gnosis of yoga, and even the names of his cherished students were gone in a millisecond. Thankfully, the memory regenerated, but with many of his mouth muscles paralyzed, speech became a heroic effort, and sounded alien. Select devotees eventually learned to understand him, and communicate his thoughts. Shri Brahmananda viewed the stroke as a type of samadhi: "In the form of a stroke, it was final enlightenment." And he continued through dictation a prodigious output of teachings on the quest for Self-Realization.

By the mid 1950s Shri Brahmananda (then known as Dr. Ramamurti S. Mishra) had gained renown in the East and West for his dual expertise in Western medical science and yoga. Two books he wrote then became classics: Fundamentals of Yoga and The Textbook of Yoga Psychology. In 1958 he founded the Yoga Society of New York, still continuing his medical career, and birthed a series of yoga societies and

ashrams in the US and Canada through the '60s. In 1966, he quit practicing medicine and left the US. Later he returned and as a doctor of acupuncture steered a number of his ashrams into holistic health (including ayurveda)-still a part of his ashram's teaching services. In 1984 he took sannyas from Swami Gangeshvarananda. Ananda Ashram is forming a trust to publish the voluminous material he dictated over the past decade. England

Matchbox Toy Monsters Out

Matchbox Toy company in England was hit by a silver bullet (used to kill werewolves) when the British branch of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad strongly contested the inclusion of Ganesha and Kali in the Matchbox's Monster In My Pocket collection. Matchbox immediately pulled all the Monster units from store shelves and stopped production of the Ganesha and Kali, issued a public apology and printed a point-of -sale brochure explaining the company's insensitive error in misrepresenting the Hindu deities.Ukrine

Yoga vs. Nuclear Radiation

In a moving letter written to Yoga Journal magazine Ukrainian yogi Andrey V. Sidersky tells how yoga is ameliorating the effects from radiation exposure when the Chernobyl nuclear power plant melted down. Sidersky writes, "Everything is soaked with radiation. The immune system is undermined. One who practices yoga can fight it. That is why yoga is so important here. My blood is still impure, due to radiation, but not as much as it could be. We are approaching death much more quickly than the rest of humanity. Those who practice yoga have a much better chance to get ready."India

Plucking on the Mini-Vina

The vina-a fretted instrument with 4 main playing strings-is considered the oldest instrument in Hindu history, but has gone through many mutations across the millennia. Originally, as described in the Vedas. it was a simple lyre. Today the 31/2-foot long vina has been miniaturized to 2-feet long by V.S. Rangarajan of Madras. He based his innovation on a temple carving depicting Saraswati holding a very small vina. Rangarajan has publically performed on the mini-vina, but is most looking forward to receiving acknowledgement from the Sangita Sabhas music academy of Madras.