Diaspora
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African Council Mobilizes

In early June, 2003, Shri Muljibhai Pindolia, president of the Kenya-based Hindu Council in Africa (HCA), toured Hindu institutions in the West African nations of Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria. He sought to mobilize Hindu institutions to form national bodies that would join the HCA for continent-wide coordination. He began the tour in Accra, Ghana, praising Swami Ghananand Saraswati, head of Ghana's Hindu Monastery, for his excellent work. Of the 12,500 Hindus in Ghana, 10,000 are, like Swami himself, indigenous Africans. The leaders of Ghana's Hindu institutions were enthusiastic about Pindolia's plan. It was proposed that the Accra national body could be the coordination center for Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Chad. Muljibhai then went to Togo and Benin, ending his tour at Lagos, the former capitol of Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and home for most of Nigeria's 25,000 Hindus. Gathering all Hindus in Africa's 53 nations under one umbrella is a daunting task, and Pindolia's hands-on, personal visit approach to his organizational efforts were widely appreciated.

USA

Poona Grad Makes It Big In Dilbert

Daily, millions view Scott Adam's hilarious, contemporary Dilbert cartoons, widely syndicated by United Media. Now, with the 2003 unveiling of a new character, Asok, a Poona Institute of Technology graduate, Dilbert has pushed the "smart Indian software engineer " profile beyond the walls of information technology halls into the halls of humor.

In an interview with Mantram magazine, Mr. Adams says that half his social circle is Indian and that Asok's character was loosely based on one of his Indian co-workers at Pacific Bell. Now he is getting a lot of mail from Indian fans from around the world. Mail also comes from an audience that knows nothing about India's IIT, but thinks Asok is from the Illinois Institute of Technology.

BALI

New Year Silence in Bali

Hindus witness the new Year's arrival with a celebration of the sacred. Dates vary among communities. In Bali, the New Year checks in on the spring equinox and is observed with a day of total silence and purification called Nyepi. On March 21st this year, by law, all Balinese, including Muslims and Christians, set no fires, turned on no lights, did not go to work or leave their homes or make any noise. Tourists were also required to stay quiet, and even the airport was closed from 6am until 6am the following day. Only hospitals, electrical, water and telephone services operated. The Bali electoral commission honored the tradition by shutting down all campaigning for four days prior, removing party banners from the streets where only the sarong clad taskforce, Pecalangs, were allowed--to enforce the Nyepi rules.

SOCIETY

South Asians Front, Center

Newsweek's March 22nd society feature story, "America Masala, " was yet another manifestation of the synergy between Hindu homelands and mainstream American culture. It profiled successful, powerful influentials-- "A new generation of South Asians is transforming the cultural landscape of America. They bring together the best of the East and the best of the West." Included were not only the success stories of doctors and software engineers, but also a new breed of South Asians in a diversity of fields: art, show business, finance, cuisine, banking, writing, US politics and more. In subsequent letters to the editor, South Asians expressed their appreciation for the coverage, but also pointed out that South Asians still have a

large marginalized US population that has yet to taste the success portrayed in the article. Also, especially since 9/11, discrimination and racial violence against South Asians are still realities that aren't so rosy. Another Asian wrote that credit also should be given to the US itself: "These achievements would not have been possible but for the fact that this country--like no other--has valued, encouraged and rewarded hard work, talent, ideas and innovation. God Bless the United States of America."

TRANSITION

A Great Soul Moves On

On February 10, 2004, one of mankind's great lights, Dr. Rashmi Mayur, traveled on to the inner worlds, in Mumbai, India. A passionate, compassionate voice for Mother Earth and her people, he will be sorely missed. He was the Director of the International Institute for Sustainable Future--a futurist, environmentalist, educator, scientist, conservationist and more. A walking database of statistics on society and the environment, and a powerful orator, he was advisor to leaders of nations, a globe-trotting star at hundreds of conferences, teacher of tens of thousands of children and champion of Earth and her underprivileged millions. His dream was: "We can hope that what we do makes a difference. Our purpose is to dedicate our lives to regenerating the Earth and building a new human order. A new earthly order where every child--no matter where--will experience joyful existence, happiness in unity with the universe, and the ecstasy of being a pilgrim in the eternal march of evolution."

EAST AFRICA

African Hindus Serve God in Women's Prison

Hindus in Kenya continue to set high marks for social outreach programs. On March 8, 2004, International Women's Day, the Hindu society of Kenya joined together with the Prisoners Care Programme, a Kenyan NGO, to visit Nairobi's Langata women's prison. They brought much needed supplies, toiletries and personal health care items that would otherwise not be available to prisoners. The prisoners

celebrated the visit by putting on a fashion show for their guests featuring handmade-in-prison clothing.

USA

Modern Day Gurukula

More and more Hindus in the West are making the winter holiday school and work break a time for quality family time and spiritual deepening. A most impressive example was Adhyatama Chaitanya's Vedanta Retreat held from December 23, 2003, to January 2, 2004, at Sadhu Vaswani Center in Dracut, a suburb of Boston. With snow and ice outside, on the inside the fires of teaching, worship and sadhana were kept burning by 100 devotees, including babies and elders. It was a joyful, all-family, gurukula-style intensive under Adhyatma Chaitanya's dynamic spiritual leadership--an extension of his Kerala-based Ma Arsha Maitri Niketan. Daily worship, yoga, pranayama, Adhyatmaji's lectures, meditation, cooking and eating together, questions and answers brought about life-changing transformations and new vision for all the participants. See their website for more: www.arshavani.org

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ENVIRONMENT

Greening The Eateries

Greening ethnic restaurants (GER) is a California project targeting 180 San Francisco Bay Area ethnic restaurants to reduce energy and water use, pollution and solid waste. It was started by Ritu Primlani, 30, director of the non-profit Thimmakka's Resources for Environmental Education (TREE). Primlani was born in India and infused with environmentalism by her father, a botany professor at Benares Hindu University. She received her Masters at UCLA. "Restaurants are the greatest consumers of energy per square foot, more than any other US industry. They are also the largest producers of recyclable and compostable solid waste (generally 83 percent of their solid waste is divertable)." Restaurant owners are responding positively because they save money by complying with energy and recycling regulations. What one lady and a team of volunteers can do--in the first year, 44 cooperating restaurants saved 163,000 kilowatt hours of energy and over

two million gallons of water; 342 tons of solid waste were diverted from landfills and owners saved about $2,172 a year. Primlani estimates that nearly 107,000 pounds of CO_2 were saved from being released into the atmosphere.

FESTIVALS

Festival of Colors Grows

Holi, also known in some communities as "Phagwa, " was always big in India, especially among North Indians. But this year the Hindu spring festival, spearheaded by Caribbean Hindus, drew tens of thousands in Queens, New York. And, in South Africa, where the tradition had nearly died, Gujaratis celebrated Holi throughout the country. In this conflict-ridden period, the Holi spirit of burying the past, setting aside all differences in a riot of color, overcoming hatred with joyful play, letting go the old to embrace the fullness of faith in nature's youthful emergence, is seen by many as yet another much needed Hindu contribution to a world in conflict.

BRIEFLY...

Florida appeals court has made an important decision for US Hindu leaders to note: that the town of Surfside violated the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act when the town tried to take away the legal rights of two Jewish synagogues to stay in the business district. The Act, which applies also to Hindu temples, states, "No government shall impose or implement a land use regulation in a manner that treats a religious assembly or institution on less than equal terms with a nonreligious assembly or institution."

kabul cremation-ground challenges have been resolved for Afghanistan's minority Sikh and Hindu community. With prompting from an Institute for War and Peace report, Kabul municipal leaders decided to provide a large plot in Pul-i-Charkhi, about 12 kilometers east of the capital, so the small community can perform its cremation rituals.

In a victory for women's rights, in March, Delhi High Court judge Justice Vikramajit Sen made history by ruling that, "(upon divorce) as much as one half of the husband's earning should be divided equally among the other members of the family. The archaic rule (of allowing only 1/5 of the husband's disposable income as alimony) was a vestige of a bygone era."

Dr. bala v. manyam was appointed in April to represent ayurveda on the National Advisory Council for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, a consultative body to the US National Institutes of Health. This is the first time ayurveda has been included.

North American Sikhs flew 150 birs (holy books) of Sri Guru Granth Sahib on a chartered plane from Amritsar to Canada to replace old and tattered copies in Gurudwaras across the continent. Treated as the holy guru, each book had its own seat. No other cargo was allowed.

The US justice department filed a complaint against the Muskogee, Oklahoma, Public School district for suspending an 11-year-old Muslim girl for refusing to remove her head scarf, alleging that their suspension violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution. Schools have been successful in banning gang clothing symbols because they are able to show "compelling interest " in reducing lawlessness in school. But no compelling interest was shown for the head scarf. The outcome of this case will also apply to future attempts to limit expressions of Hindu religion by students, such as wearing a bindi.

Dr. Anuradha Bose, of the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, said in a study in The Lancet Medical Journal, that family conflicts, domestic violence, failed romances and mental illness have pushed the suicide rate of young people in southern India to the highest in the world. Suicide accounts for one-half to three-quarters of all deaths in young women and a quarter of deaths in young men in the region. Suicide is a leading cause of death in 15-19 year olds worldwide. In 2000, an estimated 815,000 young people worldwide took their own lives.