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Hindus Help Katrina Relief

The Mata Amritanandamayi Center in the United States handed over \$1 million to the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund to aid hurricane recovery efforts in the Gulf Coast area of the United States. Swami Ramakrishnananda and Brahmachari Dayamrita Chaitanya, representing the M.A. Center, met former President Clinton on December 8, 2005, in his offices in Harlem, New York City, to present the check. The donation is one of the largest the fund, run by George Bush senior and Bill Clinton, has received from a non-government organization.

MALAYSIA

12-Year Rites Unveil Giant Murugan

The famed Batu caves of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, held its 12-year Mahakumbhabhishekam renewal ceremonies in November, 2005. The entire temple complex at the caves has been extensively renovated. Five shrines were consecrated. It was a testimony to the vitality of Hinduism at what is the highest profile center for Lord Murugan outside India. About 50,000 devotees thronged the congested roads to witness the Uthama Patchha (grand consecration) ceremony at the Sri Subramianiar Swamy Temple on November 13.

Seventy-four priests from India, Bangkok, the United States, London and Singapore, 10 singers, 18 musicians and 11 devotional singers all took part in this auspicious ceremony--the first of its kind in Malaysia. A giant TV screen was placed at the foot of the hill for those unable to climb the 272 temple steps. On January 29, 2006, in

step with a global trend of erecting colossal Hindu sculptures, the new 140-foot tall statue of Lord Murugan was unveiled.

USA

Gandhi on Campus USA

While the world news is focused on conflict, behind the scenes in our schools, universities, community organizations and dozens of nonprofit institutions, studies on peace and nonviolent conflict resolution are focused on raising a new generation that knows there is a better way. The Peace and Justice Studies Association, a national group based at Evergreen State College, Olympia, Wash., reports, as of January, 2006, that 300 undergraduate and graduate programs are in place. In 1970 there was only one. Sam Diener, co-editor of Boston's Peace Work Magazine, published by the Quakers, says that Dennis Dalton's book Mahatma Gandhi, Nonviolent Power in Action has become a required text in many courses. Shirley Armbruster, director of News Services, California State University, Fresno, explained, "The concept of the Peace Garden at Fresno State was born when a memorial for Mahatma Gandhi was dedicated on October 2, 1990. Gandhi was later joined by statues of Cesar E. Chavez and Martin Luther King. The Peace Garden sends a statement that seeking peaceful solutions to disputes, whether small scale or global, is an important and honorable undertaking."

EDUCATION

Getting Kids To Eat Right

US schools are starting to take the childhood obesity epidemic seriously. Some states and districts are banning junk food companies. In 2003, the Wisconsin's Appleton Area School district rejected a \$3-million dollar contract from Coca Cola to sell its products in on-campus vending machines. Schools are discovering that they can still keep much-needed revenues up by selling healthy products. Leafy greens, whole grains, flax-based energy drinks and healthful recipes devised by nutrition-smart chefs are fast replacing Doritos and Coke.

On another front, schools are increasing exercise--including yoga--for children at an age when pressure for academic scores and more screen time is keeping kids in their seats. Schools are making physical education mandatory again, as it was years ago, getting youths back to the recommended 60 minutes a day of moderate and vigorous activity. It's working. Well-fed, active children are getting better grades and experiencing fewer disciplinary problems.

BRIEFLY...

Hindu festivals are declining among the Adivasi tribal population of Gajapati district in south Orissa. The usual gala appearance of dancers on Makara Sankranti (January New Year festival) was absent this year. Many attribute the change to conversion to Christianity by 70 percent of the tribals of that area.

In a move to give priests and scriptures a fair deal, the Tamil Nadu Archakars (priests) Community Welfare Association met in January in Chennai to urge the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments department to reallocate their share of temple donations. It also asked for retirement pensions, priority to dependents to fill vacancies and consultation with the experts on Agama (Hindu scriptures) before taking major decisions regarding worship or consecrations in the temple.

A genetic study by scientists at the Central Forensic Science Laboratory in Calcutta has revealed that most present-day Indians are the descendants of early humans who began to arrive in India about 60,000 years ago. It suggests that modern Indians do not owe much genetic makeup to central Asians who arrived much later.

Another study on the impact of violent games supports researcher claims that such games contribute to aggressive, destructive behavior. Researchers at the University of Missouri-Columbia have measured reductions in healthy negative emotional responses to horrific scenes in players while "punishing " opponents in games. It is taken as an indication of desensitization to violence.

Canadian and Indian researchers report in a study published in the UK's Lancet medical journal that around 10 million female fetuses may have been aborted in India over the past two decades because of ultrasound sex screening and a traditional preference for boys which cuts across all of India's religions.