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Diaspora

Young Swami Envisions New World Health

Swami Ramdev Maharaj has an ambitious and laudable mission to bring the health principles of yoga and ayurveda to the Indian masses and to the world at large. After years of sadhana, Swami established the Patanjali Yog Peeth and Divya Yog Mandir complex in Kankhal (near Haridwar, India). His rise in popularity has been spectacular; his open-air classes draw thousands. According to UK correspondent Krishana Gopal Dutt, "He is the most popular man in India!"

In April, 2006, Swami held a conference in Kankhal and announced plans for a 150-acre site 15 miles from Haridwar, to include a hospital, dispensary, university, library, accommodations for 4,000 and the largest kitchen in the world. Swami plans to fund the project with workshops abroad. He completed a six-week tour in the UK in July/August 2006, presenting his teachings simultaneously in English and Hindustani to huge crowds. The message is simple "To lead a happy life it is important to maintain good health, " through asanas and pranayama. For more see: <http://www.divyayoga.com/>

USA

Rights in the Workplace

Hindu women in the US who wish to wear their nose ring to work probably have the right to do so, on religious grounds. In recent times Christians and Muslims in America have been successfully putting their religion's rules for conduct into action in the workplace. Target Stores has accommodated Muslims' refusal to check out pork products, by giving them another job in the store. Walgreens is honoring some pharmacists' refusal to dispense such drugs as the "morning after " pill on the grounds that they are opposed to abortion. This latter issue is a sticky point of law; some states are requiring pharmacists to fill any prescription, while others are not.

Another large retailer, whose policy strictly limits jewelry and makeup worn by employees, allowed a Hindu woman to wear a nose ring but did not permit another employee to wear a tongue ring as part of her religion's requirement of daily suffering.

In another precedent-setting case, a Jehovah's Witness, whose faith forbids weapons, was awarded unemployment benefits after quitting his job because he was assigned to work on tank turrets.

INDIA/SRI LANKA

Controversy Rages Over Rama's Bridge

The land bridge between India and Sri Lanka, now underwater, is scheduled to be breached in the us\$50 billion Sethusamudram dredging operation to create a continuous navigational channel between East and West India and eliminate the 30 hours' sail time needed to go around Sri Lanka.

Hindus are protesting that the bridge is a sacred historical religious monument. Scientists and ecologists are concerned that the loss of Ram Sethu, which has provided a powerful dampening effect on tsunamis, will endanger India's coastline and that the enormous mineral and marine resources of the area will also be negatively affected. Others point out that an arbitrary border between India and Sri Lanka will impact local maritime communities on both sides who have heretofore moved freely in those waters. Navy and Coast Guard control will be much more difficult.

The project was initiated by the Indian government without scientific studies or public hearings. For more, google "Save Ramsetu."

SPACE

A Hexagon On Saturn

Nasa's Cassini orbiter cameras have captured images of a mysterious giant hexagon above Saturn's north pole. Spanning 15,500 miles--equivalent to the width of two planet Earths--the bizarre geometric feature appears to remain virtually still in the atmosphere as clouds swirl around it. The infra-red images show that the hexagon---which contains a smaller six-sided formation--extends about 40 miles down into the clouds. The six-sided shape is in stark contrast to the swirling, hurricane-like vortex at Saturn's opposite pole. Kevin Baines of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, said: "This is a very strange feature, lying in a precise geometric fashion with six nearly equally straight sides. We've never seen anything like this on any other planet. Indeed, Saturn's thick atmosphere, where circularly-shaped waves and convective cells dominate, is perhaps the last place you'd expect to see such a six-sided geometric figure, yet there it is."

USA

"No Meat for Me, Dad "

Dean winters told his family when he was just six that he did not want to eat meat: "I love animals a whole lot, and I really don't care for meat that much." His father, Harold, said, "At first, I kind of fought it and tried to get him to eat meat. But he was pretty solid about his convictions." Now, when mom and dad eat steak, Dean is served a protein substitute.

In its 2005 poll of young people, the Vegetarian Resource Group (<http://www.vrg.org>) in Baltimore reported that 3 percent of 8- to 18-year-olds are vegetarian (that is, they do not eat meat, poultry or fish/seafood.) Eleven percent of 13- to 15-year-old females are vegetarian. Among those over 18, 2.3 percent say they never eat meat. By the end of 2007 the number of vegetarians in the US will top 7 million.

Whether the reason is compassion for animals, awareness of the health dangers of meat eating or concern about the ecological impact of meat rearing, kids are in the know, and stand their ground in debates with mom and friends. It's also "totally cool" to be a veggie.

Parents are learning to cope. Professionals advise: Make sure your child gets her protein and calcium, keep the quantity of fat intake down, and your child will be just fine. Remember, a bad diet is a bad diet, whether it is burgers and fries or veggie pizza, potato chips and salad drenched in saturated fatty dressings.

GENETICS

The Basque Connection

Oxford university researcher Dr. Stephen Oppenheimer claims that three-quarters of Britons' genes were inherited from the Basques of northern Spain, who followed the receding glaciers north some 15,000 years ago to become the first inhabitants of the thawing polar desert. He states that the subsequent immigrations of Celts, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings and Normans "contributed no more than five percent to the gene pool."

If his findings are true, another popular belief becomes myth overnight, as Celts, Scots, Irish, Cornish and English are virtually all the same blood--and it's not Anglo-Saxon.

Some researchers contend that the genes of Europeans are too similar to make such a postulation. But one person has pointed out that Basque and Welsh, two of the oldest living languages, have marked linguistic similarities.

DNA research has similarly rewritten the history of India's peoples.

INTERNATIONAL

First Global Chinmaya Youth Camp

Prithiviraj from the UJK reports, "Soft morning sunshine and the warmth of the 1,008 names of Prabhu welcomed our hearts to a new day, a new year and a new beginning. Seven days, seven powers, one full week of contentment, love, devotion and understanding. Our first global Chinmaya Yuva Kendra (Chyk) intensive camp commenced with 70 youth doing Maha Vishnu pooja in early morning on the first day of the year 2007." Held during the last week of 2006 and January 1, 2007, the Chinmaya Youth camp in Coimbatore brought together 70 young people from all over the world. Prithiviraj says, "It was an unforgettable week of pure devotion and deepest inspiration. Each day Swami Swaroopananda, assisted by Br. Rishi Chaitanya, spoke to us about a different Deity. The intensive camp was truly inspirational, an amazing way to end 2006 and welcome the new year, 2007."

USA

Lord Ganesha at Macy's

From March 30 to April 14, 2007, macy's put on its 61st Annual Flower Show, "inviting visitors to 'Imagine India' and celebrate the county's vibrant colors, distinctive style, seductive sounds, delicious food and amazing flowers. From the opulence and grandeur of India's golden palaces, to the excitement of Mumbai's nightlife, to the intoxicating beauty of the spice markets, India is a country on the cutting edge that has maintained a strong connection to its rich history. In a salute to India's rich spiritual heritage, visitors are greeted by a 30-foot tall statue of Ganesh above the Geary Street entrance. A 75-foot curtain of lights serves as the backdrop to the beloved figure and puts on an impressive five-minute light show of color and blooms."

SOUTH AFRICA

Saranam Ayyappa!

In 1997, the pretoria bhajanai Mandram dedicated itself to building South Africa's first Ayyappan Temple. Devotees purchased 15.1 hectares of land and developed a prodigious plan for a traditional Hindu temple, along with a clinic, sports facilities, a youth center, a residence for the elderly, a spiritual library, auditorium, conference facilities and a crematorium.

In 2001, Dr. R. Kolapan, D. Dherman, K. M. Pillay and Njaanasagren Govender visited India and presented the plans to the Shankaracharya of Kanchi for His blessing and had them reviewed by world-famous temple architect Muthiah Sthapati. The temple is to be completed in July, 2007. The official opening for the Shree Ayyappaa Kshetram is planned for early 2008.

Briefly...

Priests are administering polio drops to children in the state of Bihar, India, where new cases of polio are being reported. "We are keen to wipe out polio, and we thought involving temple priests would be a good idea, as people trust and listen to them, " said Gopal Krishna, a senior Bihar health official.

The US Immigration Service is proposing changes to the R-1 religious worker visa which make it more difficult to bring religious workers to the country. See www.hinduismtoday.com/hpi/2007/4/21.shtml#1.

A fine new Hindu temple opened in Florida in March. Jacksonville's first Hindu temple, it will serve a congregation of 4,000 Hindus in the area. African rioters in Uganda targeted Indians in April in Uganda, stoning one man to death after an Indian firm, the Mehta Group, revealed a government-approved proposal to slash 17,000 acres of the Mabira rainforest preserves to expand sugar cane plantations.

Kashmir's 700-year-old Mangleshwar Siva Temple at Baba Demb was reopened after 18 years of closure. The event was the culmination of joint efforts between Pandits and Muslims in the area.

Swami Gokulanandaji, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Mission, attained Mahasamadhi on the morning of March 31, 2007. He was 79. Long-time head of the New Delhi RK Mission Center, he was a much beloved and widely respected spiritual leader throughout India.

The ISO 9001:2000 certificate was awarded to Malaysia's 100-year-old Sundararaja Perumal Temple in Klang, Malaysia, in recognition of quality of its religious, cultural and social services.

Ventria Bioscience, a California-based firm has received preliminary approval from the USDA to begin cultivation of rice containing human genes.