DIASPORA
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Netherlands Apology for Smoking Ganesha

Dutch Hindu watchdog group, Agni, succeeded this past July in getting MTV Networks of Belgium to remove from circulation a piece entitled "Festival Report" which included a six-armed Ganesha. In His hands are a guitar, bag of french fries, microphone, cigarette and beer cup, with the sixth hand in the traditional position of blessing. Ganesha was removed from all the network's TV commercials and promos. Head of MTV operations, Michel Dupont, apologized and promised to be more discriminating in the future.

FRANCE/REUNION

Initiation Formalizes Hindu Identity

Swami Advayananda Sarasvati writes from France's Reunion Island: "On Guru Purnima, July, 2003, twenty-three devotees (children and adults) received mantra diksha in front of Shri Varasiddhi Jnana Ganapati and Shri Medha Dakshinamurti at our Arsha Vidya Gurukulam. It was held to help the Hindus of Reunion to come back fully to Hinduism. Most of them think that there is no communion ceremony for their children and are turning to the Catholic Church for communion. We wanted to prove the contrary! Each person had to declare their Ishta Devata, and according to this choice, we gave a simple mantra to help them develop their faith in Sanatana Dharma. We want to show the Hindus of Reunion that Hindu Dharma is not only penances such as kavadi and walking on fire. We want them to know that there are also some samskaras that accompany the devotees from birth to death."

ENGLAND

Blunkett Meets Ram

One of UK's oldest temples, the Shree Ram Mandir of Southhall, Middlesex, received its first visit ever from a British minister of state. British Home Secretary, David Blunkett, was welcomed with garlands on September 4, 2003. After a tour, cultural presentation and scriptural recitation, Blunkett praised temple leaders for the temple's much-used resource center and diverse array of community services.

SCIENCE

Black Hole Booms B Flat

In September, NASA released a report on a 2002, 53-hour, Chandra X-ray observation of the central region of the Perseus galaxy cluster, located 250 million light years from Earth. Observed were ripples in the gas that fills the cluster, evidence for sound waves that have traveled hundreds of thousands of light years away from the cluster's central black hole. Echoing the primordial vak of the Vedas, Perseus is chanting Aum at B flat, 57 octaves below middle-C, "a sound much too deep to be heard." This first detection of sound in deep space has scientists excited. It may solve the mystery of why these gases (which should be cooling, collapsing and forming stars) remain hot. They speculate that the sound generates energy that keeps the gases in a molten state.

AFRICA

African Hindus Serve God in Humankind

Under the leadership of Dr. J.K. Patel and Shantibhai Shah, the Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh conducted their 23rd free medical camp in a decade in Kenya in March, 2003. Leaving early in the morning on the 30th from Nairobi, 28 doctors, 8 pharmacists, 11 dentists, 100 volunteers, 7 from the Kikuyu Eye Unit and 2 from the diabetes institute, converged at the Central Primary school in rural Kitui. About

3,000 patients received general health care, along with 400 dental extractions and five minor surgeries. Eye exams were performed and 200 received free reading glasses. The one-day event also involved instruction in health care and lifestyle to prevent disease during the coming year. It was another great success in fulfillment of "Service to man is service to God."

USA

Indian Restaurant Serves Free Food During Major US Blackout

On August 16th, 2003, New York lost power but dharma still shined brightly when the small Indian restaurant, Madras Mahal, owned by Nitin Vyas, offered free food to New Yorkers stranded without cash. With ATM machines off and credit cards useless, most restaurants shut down. A greedy few took the opportunity to gouge the public with price increases. But Nitin gained only spiritual merit and community appreciation for bringing the Indian tradition of anna dana (charitable feeding) to the world's capital of self-interest and profit. He served rice, channa-bhatura, salad and tea on the sidewalk.

CANADA

Ganesha's Annual Parade and Bath

A temple's annual brahmotsavam festival is a powerful time for the whole community, with elaborate ceremonies taking many days. The flag is raised and the Deity is paraded through the streets to bless the community. In Toronto, city officials sanctioned a full public parade for the Varasiththi Vinaayagar Temple. It was a testimony to the religious strength of the Sri Lankan community that the temple had 15 priests conduct full-scale ceremonies the likes of which are rarely seen outside India or Sri Lanka. The last day is the "Holy Waters Festival, also called the "Water Cutting ceremony. Lord Ganesha was invoked to bless the waters through a little boy who represented Bala Ganesha. He was bathed in a tank of water which substituted for a river or ocean which is normally used if nearby. Of Toronto's large Asian population, 200,000 are Tamils, who have 20 large temples and five Tamil weekly publications. Visit www.vinaayagar.com and view the photo

galleries to see Hinduism in full bloom in North America.

USA

Cow Couches Feed Cows

Helga Tacreiter fell in love with cows while working on farms. A lightning storm killed a small herd leaving only six calves. God had spared them from lightning, so Helga vowed to spare them from man. They became her "family." But how to feed them on minimum wages? She got the inspiration to sew giant life-sized cow couches. It worked. Sales of her "Cow Cowches " has enabled her to maintain her cow sanctuary.

One recent new resident was raised in 4-H by a teenage girl who later became a vegetarian. She tracked her cow friend to a slaughterhouse where she put a rope on the cow and took her away. That cow now lives with Helga. See http://www.cowch.comfor more uplifting stories.

NEW YORK

NY "Ruff Yoga

Many of our readers are concerned over yoga's slide into realms beyond authentic Hindu sadhana. Well, take a deep breath and put a leash on your exasperation--now we have "doga classes in New York for dog owners wanting to de-stress their canine companions. Don't laugh, doga instructor, Suzi Teitelman, says, "Yoga came from the animals. It's natural instinct. Books on the subject are forthcoming. Google "Ruff Yoga for the full wonderment.

USA

Hallmark Takes Up Dipavali Theme

With over 50% of the world's greeting card market share, the high-minded, distinctive, 93-year-old Hallmark Cards Inc. brand name introduced three new Dipavali cards in 2003. It was yet another testimony to the broadening penetration of Hindu culture into the Western world mainstream consciousness.

Briefly…

HUNDREDS OF DALITS ("untouchables ") in Bangalore, Karnataka converted to Buddhism on October 14, 2003. The "dhamma " initiation involved a renunciation of Hinduism and a 22-point oath to Buddhism. Speakers said the Dalits suffer under the Hindu caste hierarchy and this move restores their self-respect.

EIGHTEEN MILES FROM BAKU, the capital of Azerbaijan, a predominantly Muslim former Soviet Union republic, there is a rare Hindu temple dedicated to Jwalaji, the Goddess of Fire. Built in 1713, forgotten for decades, it is now a tourist attraction.

IN OCTOBER, BIHAR PRISONS went all veggie. State Jail Minister Basawan Bhagat announced, "The prisons have decided to stop providing nonvegetarian food to prisoners. High-quality rice, dal and vegetables will be provided." Bihar was the only state left in India that gave meat to prisoners.

"THE ENGLISH CLASS SYSTEM "(http://www.hindu.org/publications/) by Sankrant Sanu, is an eye-opening analysis of "a class system based on knowledge of the erstwhile colonial language, which in the case of India is English…" A must read for understanding the effects of colonialism on Indian society.

ON OCTOBER 16TH, 3,200 MEN walked across hot coals during the annual Shakta

festival of Thimithi at the Sri Mariamman Temple, South Bridge Road in Singapore. The penance for the Goddess has been performed annually since 1840. Only men are allowed. About 5,000 people watched the ceremony.

FIJIAN HINDUS CONTINUE TO BE subjected to violence. In September, during Dipavali celebrations, the Naga Baba Kutti temple of Raralevu, Nausori, was burnt to the ground. Arson is suspected. Area residents were in tears as the temple had been there since 1905, established by a priest from India. Several Hindu temples have been similarly raized over the years. The fire followed only one month after another temple-burning in Korociriciri.

AN ABRIDGED VERSION OF THE Vedic Wedding Ceremony, translated by Swami Veda Bharati, includes only the most important steps, cutting the time to 55 minutes. A complete traditional wedding can take from four hours to four days. It is available at www.hinduismtoday.com/hpi/hpi_ ... edic_Wedding_Ceremony.htm

ENVIRONMENTALISTS AND CLIMATOLOGISTS are deeply concerned that the Himalayas' 15,000 glaciers are receding faster than those in any other part of the world, with possible disastrous results, locally and globally.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IS STILL legal in Tamil Nadu schools. The suicide of 14-year-old Ram Abhinav, allegedly beaten by his mathematics teacher, has led the Human Rights Commission to highlight the issue.

IN SEPTEMBER, INDIA'S SUPREME Court ordered the Central and the state governments to seize unlicensed ultrasound machines being used for pre-natal sex determination, in the ongoing battle to end widespread female feticide.