

## [NEWS IN BRIEF](#)

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THE SHRI MEENAKSHI TEMPLE Society celebrated the Maha Kumbhabhishekam of its beautiful facility in Pearland, Texas (near Houston) in July. Twenty-four priests were to have been brought in for the historic consecration, which also marked completion of the temple's rajagopuram, new sanctums and installation of new deities. Organizers called the week-long ceremony an "historic event not only for the Hindu community, but for all of America."

SWAMI NITYANANDASaraswati, disciple of Siddha Guru Baba Muktananda, is now officially known as Shrimat Paramahansa Parivrajaka-acharya Sri 1008 Mahamandaleshwar Swami Nityananda Saraswatiji Maharaj. The respectfully sesquipedalian title was conferred upon him in Haridwar in May by the Akhada Panch, Maharaji Swami Brahmananda and Shankaracharya Swami Vasudevanandaji of Jyotir Math.

A 108-KILOGRAM SOLIDIFIEDmercury Siva Lingam is being installed by Swami Pragyananda [see My Turn, page 3] in his Delhi temple. It is being made by an Ayurvedic doctor, Pankaj Pachouri who lives in Nagda, near Ujjain. The naturally liquid mercury is prepared with various secret substances causing it to become solid. When finished it will sit between the Gayatri Mata Deity and the image of Shirdi Sai Baba (both 5.5 feet tall). A sloka says that there is more benefit from the darshan of a mercury Lingam than from millions of other Lingams or billions of yagnas.

ACADEMY OF VEDIC HERITAGEin the UK has created a prayer book called Prarthana Pathi. It comes complete with audio cassettes by Ashit and Hema Desai of the devotional prayers, classical Sanskrit slokas, hymns, dhuns, aratis and ancient and contemporary Hindi and Gujarati bhajans. Swami Satyamitrananda said the four-language book (with English translation) "will immensely enlighten the younger generation." Sets are £18.50, plus shipping of £1.50 within the UK and £9.50 internationally. Contact: 19 Spencer Road, Harrow Wealdstone, Middx. HA 3 7AN,

UK.

MOTHER SADHANA, WHOSE efforts were pivotal in first bringing Swami Chinmayananda to the USA, left her body in March at age 65. Evelyn Vrat, affectionately known as Mother Sadhana, founded the World Seva Foundation and is remembered as a tireless exemplar of selfless service.

CROSS-BORDER JATHASARE not rare for Hindus of Pakistan and India. Tour organizer Surinder Kumar Billa has been leading over 500 pilgrims on one-month tours of India for over a decade and says visas are easier to obtain for pilgrimage groups than for individuals. Hindus of Pakistan say they are generally left alone to live in peace, except during communal unrest in India, when "we have to face the backlash here," says Krishnamal, a 40-year resident of Pakistan.

A "FEW" HINDU temples in Kashmir Valley were burned following the destruction of a Muslim shrine, admitted Internal Security Minister Rajesh Pilot. He told the Lok Sabha of the attacks to rebut charges by a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party that as many as 24 temples had been set on fire.

"THE VEDAS," A 104-EPIISODE series on the the world's oldest scripture, is being planned for worldwide television. The episodes will present "the entire range of Vedas and Puranas... in a dramatic, musical and easy to understand format" incorporating state-of-the-art special effects, says script writer Bhooshan Banmali. The mega-project is intended to meet "the upsurge of interest in Hindu scriptures and religious texts throughout the western world."

"HIMALAYA, an International Yoga Olympiad," will be held in Bangalore December 20-22, 1995, during the Third International Conference on Yoga Research & Applications. Declaring a world champion of asanas is not the goal of the yoga competition. Rather "it is felt that HIMALAYA should bring the idea of an olympic sport or a marathon peace run in the field of yoga..." Co-ed teams of five or less must perform asana, pranayama, kriya, mudra and bandha, as well as answer a theory paper. Contact: Vivekananda Kendra Yoga Research Foundation, "Spandana," Number 15, Bull Temple Road, Bangalore, 560 004, INDIA.

**THAILAND IS EXPERIENCING** a surge of popularity in the frenzied phenomenon dubbed "spirit possession" in which Hindu Gods from Ganesh to Indra to Vishnu "possess" an entranced devotee, who then shouts prophecies to the crowd. Indian priest Shriram Shukla is skeptical, saying, "We spend years together in worship and no God appears before us, but these Thais manage to see them in just a few sessions of devotion." The trend parallels a rise in popularity of Indian religious movies such as "Santoshi Ma."

**SOUTH AFRICAN HINDUS WANT** a greater role in their government. A memorandum to the nation's constitutional committee submitted by the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, affiliated with the South African Hindu Mahasabha, requests Diwali be a recognized national holiday for Hindus, that Hindu religious education be part of school curriculum, that the influences and contributions of Indians be included in South African history and that more Indian programming appear on radio and TV.

**HINDUS IN HONG KONG** are split over China's takeover in 1997. The Indian community of 20,000 controls an estimated 10% of the economy. Indians working as shopkeepers and migrant labor are worried they'll lose their jobs to Chinese. But Hindu leader Hari Harilela says there is no reason the transition should be detrimental to the business interests of Indians and other minorities.

**PROGRESS NEED NOT BE** expensive or polluting. In Bangladesh, the treadle-pump is saving farms and livelihoods. Invented by a poor farmer, the foot-operated device of metal cylinders, plastic pipes and bamboo levers costs only US\$30 and allows farmers to pump their own ground-water for irrigation instead of having to dig prohibitively costly wells or buy water from rich landowners. In a like display of cost effectiveness, Nepal's remaining trees are grateful for a \$20 smokeless stove that burns 66% less wood and uses excess energy to heat water.

**600 ADIVASI FAMILIES** in the Mandla district were reconverted from Christianity to Hinduism in a mass ghar vapasi, or homecoming ceremony, attended by 10,000 people.

**ASEAN HINDU YOUTH COUNCIL,**(AHYC) founded in 1993 in Prambanan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, is dedicated to strengthening brotherhood, solidarity and unity among Hindu youth. Contact: P.O. Box 101, 1030 Penang, Malaysia.

SAMACHARIS A BI-MONTHLY newspaper and only one of the services to the Indian community provided by the Philippine Indians Seva Foundation. Contact: 65 Magallanes Avenue, Magallanes Village, Makati, Metro Manila, Philippines.

RELIGIOUS REPORTING IS 1% of news stories covered by media in the USA, according to the Media Research Center, despite surveys indicating 97% of Americans say they believe in God. Seventy-percent are members of a church or synagogue, making the US faithful the most religious membership-oriented on earth. Only 67 of the USA's 1,556 daily newspapers have full-time religion reporters.

INDIA'S FIRST ELECTRIC CAR is a two-seater called Lovebird, designed and produced by Eddy Current Controls, Ltd. of Coimbatore. The non-polluting Lovebird is expected to have an operating cost, including replacement batteries, of 25 paise per kilometer.

"THE HINDU" IS AVAILABLE on an experimental basis on the Internet's World Wide Web. Weekly and then daily news updates are planned, as are all regular features of the Madras daily newspaper. Contact THE HINDU via computer at <http://www.webpage.com/hindu/index.html>.

"VIDYA DHANAM, KNOWLEDGE is wealth," is the motto of Hindu Vaarni Inc., an information-packed newsletter now available to subscribers in the New York area featuring articles, issues and events affecting Hinduism. Contact: Hindu Vaarni Inc., 32-22 103 street, East Elmhurst, New York, 11369, USA.

Healing