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A Monthly News Digest

Vishwa Hindu Parishad Ban Lifted

In 1992, three days after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India, the government imposed a two-year ban on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, one of five organizations then declared unlawful under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. The ban against the VHP was finally lifted on June 20th after High Court Justice Ramamurthy delivered a 129-page verdict, saying that government law enforcement agencies failed to present material evidence of a direct causal relationship of its claim that inflammatory speeches by VHP leaders directly contributed to the destruction of the masjid and subsequent rioting.

The news brought predictable reactions. Sukumar Muralidharan, writing for New Delhi's Frontline, called the verdict "an unmitigated tragedy." Others predicted that VHP activity would catalyze future unrest in Bharat. The VHP was jubilant, immediately launching an ambitious expansion campaign to raise 100 million dollars through recruiting 1.5 million life members and training 10,000 Hindu missionaries. The VHP of America announced the Ekatmatra (Unity March) for July and released a global statement: "We hope that the government will not ignore the Hindu voice and work towards the resolution of long-standing Hindu demands such as a common civil code and restoration of Hindu places of worship."

Religious Violence Rising in Russia

ISKCON Media Release

In Rostov-na-Donu (Southern Russia), June 22, at 7pm a gang of 25 men stormed the ISKCON's Rostov Hare Krishna temple. The attackers wore camouflage-style army uniforms and ski masks and brandished army shovels and wooden clubs. Forty Hare Krishna devotees, including women, who had gathered for evening worship were beaten and bloodied by the gang. Spiteful of the Indian saris worn by female Krishna devotees, one of the attackers tried to disrobe a Krishna woman while shouting, "You are Russian. You should not wear this foreign dress." After 15 minutes of violence, the thugs escaped unchecked, leaving many Krishna devotees laying on the floor in their own blood. Several were hospitalized. One of the victims, Edward Ustinov, 25, suffered a fractured skull and may not survive. Others had broken ribs, hands and heavy concussions.

Anuttama Dasa, ISKCON's Washington-based communications director, says, "With the increase of radical nationalism as well as widespread social and economic dissatisfaction among the former Soviet peoples, persecution against religious minorities is definitely on the rise in the CIS."

The raid was not an isolated incident. On April 18, a gang of 20 men attacked the ISKCON temple in Yerevan, Armenia, where other religious groups have been harassed, including Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of the Holy Spirit, Baptists and Bahai. Persecutions rose after the Armenian Apostolic Church was proclaimed the National Church of the Armenian people.

The Hare Krishnas have been active in the former Soviet countries since 1971. ISKCON was officially recognized in the USSR in May, 1989. Today, ISKCON has over 100 temples and 80,000 members in the CIS.

A Call for Spiritual Rashtra from Wales

Report by Rakesh Mathur, UK

The non-Hindu Principality Publishers in Wales promoted Bharata Mata's spiritual nationalism in a recent issue of their humanist magazine, Liberty, capturing the interest of Wales' large Indian population. They say the Bhumi-Sukta, book XII of the Atharva Veda, shows Hinduism to be an enriched form of humanism. It is a way of life, which does not admit narrow nationalism. Thus a Hindu has no wish to rule the world but seeks a position compatible with the dignity of a guide because he is

destined to lead the world with the Veda light.

According to Liberty, "Hinduism is based on reason. It is not a pretended divine dictation. It is free from intrinsic aggression. This makes it a natural way of life, free from perversion, prejudice and passivity, raising it to a message of hope, hilarity and humanity."

Hyderabad Engineer Digitizes the Vedas

Mr. R.V.S.S. Avadhanulu, Deputy Director, Computer Facility of the Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences, --Hyderabad has designed a computerised database for Krishna Yajurveda Samhita. It constitutes the first segment of a computerised "capsule" to provide instant access to India's Vedic legacy. HT's Delhi correspondent, Rajiv Malik, was present when the database was demonstrated to India's President, S.D. Sharma, in April.

Talking to UNI, Mr. Avadhanulu said the project was estimated to cost at least Rs. 40 lakhs, encompassing massive data collection and verification with maximum accuracy. The database will run a lisp language for processing Sanskrit. The project is run by the voluntary, Ahmedabad-based Veda Bharati organization. The entire computer "capsule" will host many kinds of information and functions including: 1) the ability to locate any mantra and provide exhaustive information relating it to grammar, physics, mathematics, medicine, arts and linguistics; 2) display Vedic text in all languages; 3) use multimedia to chant the mantras; 4) incorporate optical disk technology; 5) bring together on disk hundreds of volumes of Vedic literature; 6) give global access to the corpus of Vedic knowledge.

The motivation for the project arises from the urgent need to preserve the Vedas. Mr. Avadhanulu said it was unfortunate that the country was now left with only 13 branches of the Vedas comprising about 20,000 mantras and a few thousand sentences of prose. In ancient times there were 150 branches with millions of mantras.

Contact: R.V.S.S. Avadhanulu, Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, INDIA

Trends to Watch: Saving our Languages

God * Bhagawan * Allah * Kane * Parameshwar * Jehovah * Yakomba * Shiong-Doi * Kami * Anutu * Dewa * Leza * Khuda * Kalunga * Atua * Iswar * Deus * Mungu * Nzame * Bog * Mod * imo * MawuLoba * Zambe * Shido * Ruba * So * Gudib * Dieu * Hera * Jumal * Penu * Ramwa * Kishemanito * Gott. God's names in 36 languages, half of which may be lost forever.

Michael Kraus, professor of linguistics at the University of Alaska, predicts that 90% of the world's 6,000 languages may disappear in the next 100 years. Speaking at the July symposium in New Mexico, USA, that brought 200 linguists together to discuss "Language Loss and Public Policy," he said that 5-10% of languages now spoken can be considered safe (for the present). Half of all human languages are endangered because they are not being passed on to children by their parents. "Linguistic diversity is just as important as biological diversity," he said. Losing any language impairs "the web of intellectual life we require for our very survival. It's an unnecessary tragedy."

The global expansion of cyberspace through internet, television and CDROM is putting pressures on the next generation to learn a few common global languages. If four youths in Hong Kong, France, New Delhi and San Francisco want to access the same information and have an exchange on the World Wide Web, they seek a common medium which network providers are happy to offer--English. Increase in air travel has also broken down geographic walls that once protected ethnic languages.

The trend has brought global alarm and plenty of action. In Hawaii, education in the native language is gaining strength. Malaysia made a decision in 1973 to switch entirely to the Malay language throughout its educational system. Subsequently, many graduates were unable to function in the world of international commerce that is so important to the country's development. English was reintroduced as a subject. Malaysia appears to have achieved some measure of success in finding a balance. A great technical drive is on to overcome cybernetic barriers to non-Roman alphabets. Japanese Kanji was a notable success. Indian languages are being rapidly launched with Hindi and Tamil taking a lead.

But Jane Hill of the University of Arizona said the best way for language to be taught "is at a very early age, in the home, by primary caretakers. If a community is dumping its language problems on the schools and not teaching the language at

home, that is when you have a problem."

Shining 450-Year-Old Raja Patasala Fulfills Vedic Dharma

Kumbakonam's Raja Veda Kavya Patasala was founded by Govinda Dikshitar (1519-1634), ancestor of the late Shri Chandrasekhara Sankaracharya and a royal counsellor in the court of three successive sovereigns of the Nayak dynasty of Tanjore. Over his 120-year lifetime amidst his political career he maintained strict brahmanical observances and founded the Raja Patasala on the banks of the Kaveri River. It is one of the few patasalas in India which teaches the Rig, Yajur and Sama Vedas. The 130 boy vidyarthi (students) from the Smartha, Vaishnava and Madhwa brahmin castes are taught by ten adhyapakas (Veda teachers, right) and seven teachers of Tamil, English and math. Boys are admitted between ages seven and ten and undergo a six-to-twelve-year course, receiving free room, board and clothing. The certificate of Vedabhushanam takes 6-7 years, Veda Visakshana takes 8-9 years and Veda Praveen takes 9-12 years. After this, they may continue to deeper studies of Vedanta, Tarka, Vyakharana, Shitya and Jyothisha. Graduates are in high demand overseas. Many have been sponsored by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

The patasala has suffered a common problem: non-payment of rent by endowment land tenants. It went through years of penury and still functions with insufficient funds. In the late fifties, M. S. Subbalakshmi donated the proceeds from her concerts for two years (roughly us \$3,000.00) Without this, the patasala might have closed. Under the guidance of Shri Chandrasekhar Sankaracharya, a formal syllabus was developed and the patasala began to flourish. The atmosphere is family like. M. Pitchai Krishnana (15) says, "When we go home during vacation, we miss the school. The patasala is our home, and we tear back the first day school reopens. I am not here because of poverty, or any domestic problem or inability to cope with education standards elsewhere. I came here only because I wanted to study the Vedas." Sundar (9) says, "We are taught English here. I don't miss TV at all." "Our Gurus are like father to us," says Shri Subramanian (19). Contact: Dr. V. R. Lakshmi Kantha Sharma, Raja Veda Kavya Patasala, Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu INDIA.

Report by Gowri Shankar, Madras

India: 8,005 Carats of Holy Rubies

Bangalore's 63-year-old G. Vidyaraj discovered ten years ago that the family's four shaligrams (sacred stones) were among the world's largest uncut rubies. The "Rajarathna" (2,475 carats) and "Neelanjali" (1,370 carats) are listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest star and double-star rubies, respectively. His "Ravirathna" (below) is 3,600 carats, almost 3 pounds and the fourth is 650 carats. Classification regulations apply. If the stones get classed as

antiques, they may be worth \$1.8 billion. But they may be required to stay in India. Vidyaraj hopes to sell them and invest the money in charitable trusts for cancer, aids, retarded children and old-age homes.

America: India's Style to Hook US Audience

Tony Award-winning director, Dan Chumley visited India last year and was enthralled with bharata natyam's mudras and abhinaya (expression) and the melodramatic style of Jatra theatre in Bangladesh. Chumley wants to incorporate India's outdoor mass entertainment style in a presentation of Shakespeare's "As You Like It" for the outdoor audience of 2,000 plus at California's Free Shakespeare in the Park shows. "The quick eye movement in bharata natyam, the expressive villain and the comic walk in kathakali give energy to a play," he says. "Villians and heros still come to life in this ageless style of tremendous breadth and scope."

Canada: Magnificent Maple Leaf Mandir

Sanatana Dharma in North America set down another root when the Hindu Sabha of Brampton, Ontario (25 miles from Toronto), Canada held the grand opening ceremonies for its giant new mandir, on June 17 and 18. The Sabha started satsangs in 1975 with only five families. Pressures of growing attendance led to the purchase of a 25-acre site. The nearly completed 32,000-square foot temple holds 2,000 worshippers. Three fulltime, well-cared for priests serve a congregation of 1,600 families. Nearly debt free, the Sabha has spent 2.6 million dollars with one million left to go.