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Diaspora

INDIA

Techno Ganesha

Ganesh comes in many forms, but we bet you have never seen this one! This 28-inch-high bronze "Computer Vinayagar" is probably the first ever created. Elegantly crafted, He sits on a pedestal while typing "best wishes" on His screen with one hand. With the other hand--His left--He moves the mouse, which is not your ordinary computer rodent, but mushika, or Ganesha's mouse, upon which He normally rides. The sculpture was on display at a handicraft fair in Chennai in January. It was priced at ^{us}\$2,900.

USA

The Business of Blessings

On May 3, 2000, an article appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle business section about the California Hindu priest, Umashankar Dixit, who blesses high-tech companies. As a reward, he gets paid with a piece of the company--stocks and stock options. Dixit has received stock in 15 high-tech businesses he has blessed. Dixit, a priest at the Siva-Vishnu temple in Livermore,

performs these ceremonies to Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity. A few days prior to the article, Dixit blessed Avakai Information Networks whose CEO is Manjunath Kashi. Dixit received \$51 cash and 5,000 Avakai stock options. In an earlier blessing, Exodus Communications chairman, K.B. Chandrasekhar arranged for Dixit to buy 500 shares at opening price--netting Dixit a quick ^{us}\$12,000. He used the money to help build a temple in Bangalore, India

SRI LANKA

Temple Razed And Pillaged

In the midst of Sri Lanka's ethnic and religious war, many temples continue to function, most notably the famed Nallur Temple in Jaffna. But others aren't so lucky. The Siva temple at Tiruketheeswaram was hit hard. In 1991 the Sri Lankan Army occupied the temple and chased away the 1,400 temple priests, assistants and residents. Since then, most of the bronze icons have been

damaged or lost. The temple jewellery is also missing. The gold in the main Deity's third eye, neck and arms was pilfered. Most of the buildings were burned to the ground. The total loss is valued at ^{us}\$1.3 million. Already renovation has started, but much more money is needed.

Thiruketeeswaram Restoration
Society, 32 Ridgeway Place, Colombo - 04
Phone: 072.665613, 589463

USA

Hindu Backlash

The Southern Baptists are still smarting from the huge protest against their recent Hindu prayer guide [see January, 2000]. In an editorial article by Erich Bridges, in the Baptist magazine, The

Comission, he complains: "The uproar was a replay of the furor over the prayer guide for Jews in many respects--same misunderstandings, same clash over religious freedom of expression versus 'tolerance' (translation: 'silence'). But the new controversy grew into a tidal wave that's still breaking." Bridges [ebbridges@imb.org] quotes Randy Sprinkle, director of the Baptist's international prayer strategy, "The [Jewish prayer guide] broke in a few international spots, but the Hindu one just swept across like a wave. I definitely think it had a larger impact." Bridges concludes with a backhanded compliment, "The

extent of response shows the growing influence of Hindu philosophy outside its Indian home--particularly in the US. Hinduism prizes the ideal of many paths to God, a perspective that contradicts Jesus' claims but neatly fits the relativism that now dominates Western thinking."

USA

Harvard Homa

At about 5:30pm on April 13 around 50 students and faculty attended a Hindu fire ceremony held at Harvard

University, Massachusetts, in the center of the famous "Harvard Yard." This location, next to Harvard's Memorial Church, is the same spot where the commencement speaker gives the graduation speech. Co-sponsored by two Hindu student groups at the university, the fire ceremony hoped to promote awareness and understanding of Vedic culture within the school. The audience participated in the ceremony, offering cups of grain into the flames. "I have always been intrigued by the

Hindu religion," said Michael Zani, a student at the Harvard Business School. "This ceremony was an incredible display of ancient tradition and lasting faith. I found the experience memorable in its depth and meaning." The event was a great success, and the Harvard University newspaper ran a full-page of color photos of the ceremony.

THAILAND

The Elephant Picassos

Two year old elephant Nam Chong paints at Ayutthaya elephant camp, 60 miles north of Bangkok. Russian artist Alex Melamid (left) and a group called the Asian Elephant Art Project have introduced Thai elephants to painting. Elephants enjoy painting, choose colors thoughtfully and have an artistic sense to their work. Two more academies are opening. Paintings are sold in the US to support elephant projects.

USA

Temple Capstone Arrives

On June 15, 2000, the monolithic 12-ton granite stone arrived at its final destination, the San Marga Iraivan Temple in Hawaii (home of Hinduism Today). Its journey began in April, 1994, when it was first split loose from a South Indian quarry. At 17 tons and sitting in a pit ten feet below the quarry floor, it could not be lifted, so three carvers spent two months roughing out its shape until it could be removed and trucked to the temple's

carving site near Bangalore. Once there, it took 2,160 days to complete. Three carvers worked ten hours a day and dulled 324,000 chisels, that's 15 per hour. The finished base is 6 feet 7 inches square and 4 foot 3 inches high. Every inch of the surface is intricately carved. Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniaswami, his monks, devotees and neighbors gathered for its arrival. Just as the massive forklift set its wheels on the property, a gentle rain blessed the arrival. With the 120-foot by 60-foot by

4-foot-thick monolithic concrete foundation now cured and without a single crack, work on assembling the first-ever all-granite temple in the West has commenced.

India

Nataraja Shrine

Dr Karan Singh has built a shrine to Nataraja near Pondicherry. It stands on five acres of open land facing the sea. "It is the first temple built in the form of a pyramid," said

Dr. Singh, a prominent Hindu statesman and scholar. "It's a very unique shape, which was sacred to the ancient Egyptians. It's combines the ancient Egyptian tradition which is vibrant, with our own." The front section of the shrine has a motorized door that closes at night, making the Sri Karneswar Nataraj Temple a perfect pyramid. Dr. Singh has also built a Nataraja shrine in Virginia, USA, and a temple in Kashmir.

Technology

Live Blessings

Video conferencing is a great way of connecting gurus with their devotees who may live thousands of miles away. On March 28, 2000 Kanchi Centers and groups all over the world--in New Jersey, Washington DC, Chicago, Dubai, United Arab Emirates--participated in a live video conference with the Shankaracharya of Kanchi, Jayendra Saraswati, and his successor, Sri Bala Periaavaa. It was a huge success. Everyone

felt uplifted by the electronic blessings of the Acharyas speaking from South India.

Briefly...

The official Kumbha Mela 2001 dates for Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, are:

Paush Poornima, January 9
Makar Sankranti, January 14
(first main bathing day)

Mauni Amavasya, January
24 (second main day)

Vasant Panchami, January
29

Maghi Poornima, February
8

Mahasivaratri, February 21
(third main day).

Forty-five million pilgrims
are expected, with most
attending on one of the three
main days.

Playing violent video games
Doom, Wolfenstein 3D or
Mortal Combat can increase
aggressive thoughts, feelings
and behavior, say
psychologists. Dr Craig

Anderson, from Iowa State University of Science and Technology, and Dr Karen Dill, from Lenoir-Rhyne College, have concluded violent video games to be more harmful than violent television or films because they are interactive and require the player to identify with the aggressive character.

Home-schooled 12-year-old George Abraham Thampy, an Indian-American from Missouri,

US, won the National Spelling Bee by spelling the word, demarche--"a step or maneuver." The other two finalists, Sean Conley and Alison Miller, were also home-schooled, as was last year's winner--a potent testimony to the effectiveness of educating youths within their own home.

United States media coverage of religion doubled during the 1990s, but most religious news

dealt with political issues rather than matters of faith or spirituality, according to a new study conducted by the influential lawmaker, Rep. Sherrod Brown, has requested the chaplain of the US House of Representatives to set aside a day for a Hindu priest to deliver the invocation to open a daily session of Congress. The House chaplain can call upon the clergy of any religion, but has not previously invited a Hindu.