Diaspora
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Diaspora

JAPAN

Curry Patent Withdrawn

No need to worry over curry. The Japanese company House Foods Corp., a maker of spices and prepackaged curry, is not trying to seal one of the world's favorite flavors up in a patent, contrary to a report in a British newspaper. They just wanted to patent one special process. But we might not have noticed anyway, since the sweet Japanese curries are distant kin to Indian cuisine. "If you ask me, I would say Japanese curry isn't even curry," said the owner of an Indian restaurant in a posh part of Tokyo.

ISRAEL

No Spanking

Israel's supreme court ruled on January 25, 2000, that corporal punishment, including spanking, of children by their parents is never educational and always causes serious harm to the child. This makes Israel the tenth country to ban corporal punishment. Yitzhak Kadman, head of the National Council for the Child, declared that the ruling established a precedent and "finally recognized the right of children not to be exposed to violence of any kind, even when those who use violence make excuses for it, saying it is 'educational' or 'punitive.'" The court was ruling on a appealed case of a mother who hit and slapped her children and, in two specific cases, struck her daughter with a vacuum cleaner and

punched her son in the face, breaking his tooth. Two of the three justices rejected the appeal, allowing punishment of the mother. Justice Dorit Beinisch wrote, "We are living in a society where violence is spreading like a plague. If we allow 'light' violence, it might deteriorate into very serious violence. We must not endanger the physical and mental wellbeing of a minor with any type of corporal punishment. The message is that corporal punishment is not allowed.".

MALAYSIA

Lord Muruga's Thai Pusam

Nearly a million people gathered for Thai Pusam celebrations on January 21, 2000, all across Malaysia. One of the most popular pilgrimage temples for this festival is Batu Caves, a Murugan citadel located in a huge limestone cave on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. It was in 1892 that two Tamil devotees first made the difficult trek up the ancient limestone hill and planted a vel, a metal lance symbolizing Lord Murugan. Kavadi, a penance offered to the God, is the highlight of festivities celebrated by Hindus and non-Hindus alike. It consists of carrying, in a procession, a heavy decorated wooden arch (like a portable shrine), often with the tongue, cheeks and body pierced with silver spears or hooks.

GREECE

Pagan Protest

A small but passionate group of devotees of the Gods of the ancient Greek religion claimed it was sacreligious to mix the old temples with celebrations marking 2,000 years of Christianity. They threatened to take the Culture Ministry to court if it allowed Christian hymns to be sung on New Year's Eve inside the 2,500-year-old Parthenon, a temple to the

Goddess Athena. Nikolaos Tziotis, secretary of the Committee for the Recognition of the Greek Religion of the 12 Gods, said, "It is the greatest blasphemy for songs of another religion to be heard there, and we will not allow it." The Culture Ministry did not cancel or significantly alter the extravaganza, but did shift the location away from the temple, marking a small but significant victory for the Pagans.

ANIMALS

Cow Cruelty

The slaughter of cattle in India is a sad story no one wants to hear. But the horrible death marches and ghastly slaughterhouses have found their way to the cover of PETA's quarterly Animal Times. Ingrid Newkirk, president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, returned to her childhood home to investigate for the story. She was horrified at what she found. "When I was growing up in India, images of happy cows were everywhere. Not that they had it easy, but there was a remnant of Gandhi's reverence for life. Today, under heavy Western influence, it has vanished. I found a thriving trade in beef and leather that meant starvation, thirst, beatings, broken bones and cruel slaughter. There is no single culprit for the suffering: Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Jains are all involved." Constitutional prohibition of cow slaughter and laws preventing cruelty to animals are regularly ignored by corrupt officials.

PETA Headquarters:
501 Front St. Norfolk, Virginia 23510 USA

USA

New York's Y2K Parade

Balanese dancers participated in the monumentalNew

York millennium parade by carrying two huge hands representing those of Lord Brahma. Their parade section passed by at the moment Bali itself entered the new year.

AFRICA

Sudan Hindus

Originally from Gujarat, India, over 1,000 Sudanese Indians inhabit small communities across the whole of Sudan. The first Indian settlers arrived in 1860 and slowly brought over their families and friends. By 1956, there were 3,000 Hindus, but political upheavals caused many to flee. Today's community is comprised of 70 percent Jains and 30 percent Vaishnava Hindus. Together they have formed the Omdurman Indian Club, a community center and temple located near Khartoum, the capital city. They gather there regularly to celebrate the festivals of Divali, Janmashtami, Ram Navami, Maha Sivaratri, Navaratri and more. On January 26 each year, the children put on a cultural performance. The community also runs three schools. The one in Omdurman is taught in English, with Arabic and Gujarati as required studies as well.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

PM Sings Hanuman Chalisa

Basdeo Panday, Trinidad's first Hindu Prime Minister, charmed the massive 50,000 person crowd at January's "Puja 2000," when he burst into a popular Hindu song to Lord Hanuman. According to D. Parsuram Maharaj of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, which sponsored the event, "Hanuman Chalisa," though popular, is complex and comprised of forty verses in Hindi. Only the practised and accomplished can render the Hanuman Chalisa without criticism. Never before has a Prime Minister even attempted to pray with the Hindu

community in such a real and emotional manner. By the second verse the crowd joined in. As the Prime Minister shouted at the end "Prem se bolo, Hanuman Ki Jai" ["Sing with love, Hail to Hanuman"] the crowd of thousands joined with him in a single voice that would have been heard for miles away. Thousands of Hindus performed Hanuman puja at 108 altars set up at the Debe Recreation Ground all through the day.

USA

Wife Abuse

Immigration laws have changed to help battered immigrant wives, according to Neena Bohra, a lawyer and member of the Michigan Asian Indian Family Services. The specifics are rather technical, but the changes in the law address the situation where a man who has already become a citizen brings his wife to the US. Previously, after two years, both would be required to sign documents with the immigration service attesting to the validity of the marriage. Then the wife could receive permanent resident status. The fact that both spouses had to sign for the wife to become a permanent resident made it possible for a husband to not only batter an alien wife, but threaten her with deportation if she reported him. The Violence Against Women Act changes this and allows a battered spouse to petition for legal permanent residency, without the abuser's assistance or even knowledge. For further information contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800.787.3244 or Neena Bohra at 313.388.1019.

USA

God Conference

Over 1,200 people came to a conference to talk about

God. February's "God at 2000" at Oregon State University presented seven top religious scholars including Marcus Borg, Diana Eck and Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu. Each described how they saw the Sacred, and how that view has changed with changes in culture, science, technology and their own spiritual experience. Though intended to address the Jewish/Christian/Muslim view of God, Harvard Professor Diana Eck devoted most of her talk to her time in India and how studying Hinduism deeply affected her view of God. Organizer Borg said all seven speakers shared a similar and very mystical understanding of God.

Briefly…

Since so many people in India like to copy American trends, they might like to know what they are in for. The breakdown of the family has proceeded so far in the US that an astounding 41% of young women give birth to their first child while still unmarried. With the divorce rate over 50% of marriages, the possibility of creating a stable family is more challenging than ever.

The indian government has ordered that drugs sold in the country will have to be labeled "vegetarian" or "non-vegetarian." The order came from Maneka Gandhi's Ministry of Social Justice. The order also also bans the use of gelatin capsules and prevents the use of animals in regulatory testing.

The famous ladoo sweets from Lord Venkateswara at Tirupati

are about to become high-tech, produced by a specialized German-engineered ladoo-making machine. Labor problems brought an increase in complaints about the ladoos.

Hindus in India were shocked by a controversial report in The Kansas City Star newspaper that Roman Catholic priests in the United States are dying from AIDS-related illnesses at a rate four times higher than the general population. The most likely explanation--sexual activity on the part of the supposedly celibate priests--causes less stir in America. Here the Catholic Church has already paid out hundreds of millions of dollars in court judgements as a result of cases involving priest misconduct with children under their care.

The first crematorium in North America designed for Sikhs and Hindus will feature windows through which up to 2,000 people can watch the body burn to ashes in a large auditorium. It also allows the designated next of kin to light the funeral furnace fire. The crematorium, scheduled to open later this year in Delta, British Columbia, Canada, is specifically designed to accommodate the religious and social needs of the over 200,000 Hindus and Sikhs in Greater Vancouver.