

## [Diaspora](#)

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# Diaspora

## ASTRONOMY

### Pluto, a Planet No More?

Poor Pluto--its days as one of our solar system's nine major planets may be numbered. Astronomers are thinking about reclassifying the relatively puny planet, either calling it a "minor planet" or lumping it in with an entirely new class of objects. Western astrologers may have to adjust their charts, but not the jyotish practitioners of the Vedic system, who chose not to include the distant Pluto upon its discovery in 1930, as did their Western counterparts. With a diameter of only 1,440 miles, Pluto, the planet farthest from the sun, is smaller than Earth's moon. "For at least 20 years, it's been obvious that Pluto doesn't fit," said University of Maryland astronomer Mike A'Hearn, of the International Astronomical Union. While other "major planets" have roughly circular orbits, Pluto carves out a sweeping ellipse that frequently takes it closer than Neptune, planet number nine from the sun. A'Hearn wants to create a new class of objects for ice balls that orbit beyond Neptune and call them Trans-Neptunian Objects. Pluto would be Trans-Neptunian Object No. 1. Brian Marsden of the union's Minor Planet Center wants to see Pluto classified as a "minor planet," of which there are thousands, then make it take a number. The prized number 10,000 will probably come up next month. "It's not a demotion" for Pluto to be referred to as the 10,000th minor planet, Marsden insisted. "It's an honor." Right.

## INTER-RELIGIOUS

### Seeta Eliya

A project by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Tourism to build a temple to God Rama at Seetha Eliya near Nuwara Eliya in the island's hill country has met strong resistance from forty Buddhist organizations. Seetha Eliya is believed by Hindus and some Buddhists in Sri Lanka to be the spot where in ancient times Lanka's King Ravana kept Lord Rama's wife, Sita, as his prisoner. The ministry hoped to increase India's annual tourist traffic, which is now 400,000. Some Buddhist leaders asserted that the temple is a ruse for India to increase its influence over Sri Lanka. In a related controversy, a Buddhist monk criticized the long-standing practice of Sinhalese Buddhists' worshipping Hindu Gods in shrines attached to Buddhist temples.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Super Corn

No more do the farmer's corn plants need to stand by helplessly as insects ravage their stems and ears. Monsanto, the world's largest producer of pesticides, genetically engineered a corn variety called YieldGard, that, astonishingly, produces its own bug-killing toxin, "bt." The advantage is obvious--no need to spray the crop with dangerous pesticides, thereby saving money and lessening damage to the environment. But there's a problem. The more that insects are exposed to a pesticide, the more rapidly they evolve resistance to that pesticide. They become superbugs like the mosquitoes resistant to DDT. There is a proposed solution for corn, which is to plant plots of pesticide-free seed beside the bt corn where the insects can live without the environmental pressure necessary to accelerate their evolution into superbugs. Monsanto thinks those plots need to be 20% of the total crop. Concerned scientists--and there are a lot of

concerned scientists--say it should be 40%. The bt-corn problem is just the latest in the highly controversial field of genetically engineered and subsequently patented crops. Farmers in developing countries such as India may embrace the new seed with little understanding of the possible disastrous long-range consequences.

## NEW YORK

### Visionary Priest

Sinniah Sivanesan and 38 fellow pilgrimaging members of the Sivathondan Center of Toronto, Canada, were deeply impressed in late December with the Rajarajeswari temple in Rochester, New York. There they joined 70 other devotees for ceremonies honoring the great sage of Sri Lanka, Siva Yogaswami. They attributed the temple's high vibration to its priest, Haranji, originally from Jaffna. After a vision, he gave up his profession as an architect to become a full-time priest. Sivanesan says Haranji is running a marvelously modern temple with full and enthusiastic participation of young and old alike.

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## SOUTH AFRICA

### Half-Race Is a Full Success

Through the streets of Durban, 1,000 people ran in a historic Hindu marathon promoting peace and unity. South Africa's inaugural Hindu Half Marathon and Fun Run was organized by the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), patterned after the UK Hindu half-marathon. Banana leaves, colorful saris, garlands, bright saffron-colored flags, a Sanskrit prayer and the breaking of a coconut preceded the starter's pistol. When the runners

eventually surged forward, the jovial spirit lasted the entire race. Mahlodi Tau (23), non-Hindu and a sixth-year medical student, came to meet people "and have fun together. I'm here to enjoy myself and be part of the camaraderie," said Tau. "After all, breaking cultural barriers is as significant as breaking records." Ranjith Ramlakhan, Julia Knowler and Mary Mwelase, all from different ethnic backgrounds, "met for the first time during the run and ended up completing it together," smiled Ramlakhan.

While hundreds pounded the streets in designer running gear, a few tackled the race in saris. Entire families--including babies--joined in the five-km Fun Run. In fact, three-month-old Pooja Premraj was the "first baby finisher," thanks to Mom! Devotees and elders at local Umgeni Road Temple, adorned in lily-white dhotis, manned a watering-station while chanting and singing Sanskrit hymns and bhajans.

For the record, the race was won by internationally renowned South African marathoner, Willie Mtolo. "The course was fantastic and the organization was very efficient. Everybody's really excited about the Hindu Marathon and I hope that it is held in future years," marvelled Mtolo.

A post-race cultural performance showed the huge crowd of spectators that Eastern art and race are firmly rooted in the rich tapestry of South African culture. In the true Hindu spirit, all proceeds from the entrance fees will be used in local seva activities. South Africa's first-ever Hindu Half Marathon was a resounding success.

## PUNJAB

### Villagers Save Crash Victims

A Gurudwara and a few hundred Sikh villagers made all the difference for the over 250 injured and 150 dead passengers involved in one of the most disastrous rail accidents of recent times. On November 26, 1998, at 3:15am in Khanna, India, the Frontier Express derailed. Cars spilled on to the next track. Two minutes later, a speeding mail train from the opposite side smashed into the derailed train. Within minutes the Khanna Gurudwara began announcing the disaster, calling upon able-bodied men and women to help the victims. Hundreds came immediately. The villagers assumed charge of the relief operations as the official relief team joined a full two and a half hours later. The strong hands of the Sikhs broke open the doors and iron grills. Women repeatedly lit bundles of paddy straw from the nearest fields to warm the wounded. When the villagers found injured and dead women exposed, they untied their turbans and placed the cloth over them.

## ENGLAND

### The Dome Dispute

Britain's Christians are complaining that the "Spirit Zone" of the <sup>us</sup>\$1.25-billion Millenium Dome currently under construction in London is too secular, hardly fitting for an exhibit occasioned by the 2,000th birthday of their religion's founder. And they don't like the 200-foot half-man, half-woman centerpiece sculpture--a common image in Hinduism signifying the non-sexuality of the soul. In response to the complaints, a new section has been dedicated to the life of Christ, but Christians in general, and the Church of England in particular, have provided scant monetary support. The wealthy Hinduja family has offered to donate millions of pounds. "We firmly believe that multicultural understanding is the biggest problem

of the world," said Mr. Hinduja.

## SPAIN

### High Puja

The December celebrations held by the Darjeeling Ashram of Leonardo Olazabal Amaral in Spain occur every seven years. "The Festival of New Group of World Servers," based on the teachings of Theosophist Alice Bailey, included pujas, meditations and meetings aimed to "promote love and service to all."

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BEDIA SPAIN

## USA

### Ganesha Sails To Alaska

At the auspicious moment of 1:08 pm, January 13, after a sea voyage of many weeks, a 760-pound statue of Lord Ganesha arrived in Anchorage, Alaska, to be the Deity for the state's first Hindu temple. The statue was commissioned and gifted to the temple's 21 founding families by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, publisher of hinduism

today. On June 26, he will formally bless the Deity at the conclusion of his week-long travel-study program to Alaska by cruise ship (email [search11@mail.idt.net](mailto:search11@mail.idt.net) or write ht for more information on the program). The Anchorage Daily News devoted nearly a page to the arrival. They quoted a delighted Ramya Subramanian, "The temple's going to provide me with an anchor, it will center me." The Deity has been placed in a hall rented from the Anchorage Church of Religious Science for now, until money is raised to acquire land and build a temple. The following Saturday, a fundraiser attended by not only Hindus but local Sikhs and Muslims brought in <sup>us</sup> \$3,300, and the next day 30 people came for the temple's first puja.

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KERALA

Sabarimala Disaster

On January 14, 1999, IN one of the

worst-ever tragedies at Lord Ayyappa's hill shrine at Sabarimala in India's southwestern state of Kerala, 63 devotees were killed. Pilgrims had gathered on a hillside during the famed temple's annual pilgrimage to watch the makara jyothi, or celestial light festival. As they departed, a rope meant to regulate the crowd snapped. A stampede ensued pushing people off a 30-foot cliff. Seconds later a landslide buried some, while others jumped great heights to get out of the way. One police officer said, "There was panic all around, people were screaming. Most people died because they tried to rush down the hill." Safeguards for the large crowd were inadequate, and an investigation is underway. Pilgrimages can be dangerous, and to die on one is considered an auspicious way to die.



## MARKETING

### Hindu Design

Lubna Abu-Osba of Anderson Lembke ad agency of New York, thought the posters of Kali, Siva and Ganesha her friend brought from India were "cool-looking images." The result? "Improve Office Karma," her ad for a multi-purpose Agfa scanner/copier. The popular ad is now running in 20 countries. It's the latest in a series of Madison Avenue ads with Hindu themes, selling everything from clothes to cars.

## THE VEDAS

### God's Word, Sages' Voices

Glorify thou Brihaspati, the scatheless,  
who must be praised with hymns,  
sweet-tongued and mighty, to whom as  
leader of the song, resplendent, worthy of  
lauds, both Gods and mortals listen.

## RIG VEDA 190.1

He who is source and origin of the Gods,  
the Lord of all, Rudra, the mighty sage,  
who produced in ancient days the Golden  
Germ--may He endow us with purity of  
mind!

KRISHA YAJUR VEDA, SVETASVATARA  
UPANISHAD 3.4

Great are the Gods who were born from  
Nonbeing, yet men aver this Nonbeing to  
be the single limb of the Support, the  
great Beyond.

ATHARVA VEDA 10.7.25

God Ishvara has maya under His control. He is all-knowing, the first cause of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the world. He takes the form of the sprout of the world [i.e., the seed from which the world grows].

## SHUKLA YAJUR VEDA, PAINGALA UPANISHAD 1.4

As the God evoked Faith from the mighty asuras, so may my prayer for the generous worshipper be accepted!

RIG VEDA 110.151.3

The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, sruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1,200 bce), Bible New Testament (100 ce), Koran

(630 ce) or Zend Avesta (600 bce). Four in number, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 bce.

## Who Is a Hindu?

"Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and the realization of the truth that the number of gods to be worshiped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of the Hindu religion." B.G. Tilak's definition of what makes one a basic Hindu, as quoted by India's

Supreme Court. On July 2, 1995, the Court referred to it as an "adequate and satisfactory formula."