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Diaspora

Fiji

Christian Condone's Attack

Fiji Hindus were outraged over a dipavali-day break-in at the Soni Samaj Temple in Nadi. Several Deities were smashed, others were stolen. Damages totaled US\$25,000. Fiji's Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, condemned the vandalism as "beastly. If it was performed by any Christian Methodist, we are all ashamed." A second temple break-in on November 14 escalated tensions. Hindus were stunned when Wesleyan Mission secretary, Sakeasi Butadroka, actually justified the attacks during an interview with the Fiji Sun: "This is God Jehovah's way of showing nonbelievers that it is time they turn away from worshiping statues." He said Hindu festive activity--meaning Dipavali--and work on the Sunday Sabbath, were an offense against Christianity. "I am not at all surprised at the recent spate of temple break-ins," he concluded. To date, no one has been arrested, nor have other Christian leaders in Fiji or elsewhere issued statements rebuking Butadroka.

A crucial international October historians' conference held in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, reexamined ancient Indian history. It resolved that "Recent archaeological discoveries have fully established that there was a continuous evolution of civilization on the Indian subcontinent from about 5000 bce, that remained uninterrupted through 1000 bce;...no scope

whatsoever to support an 'Aryan invasion' theory. The term Arya in Indian literature has no racial or linguistic connotations." Vested interests in Western academia protect the old theory, which permeates millions of books and contemporary Indian social theory. In 1995, one of the India's most knowledgeable and objective historians, Shiva G. Bajpai, said, "the data against the invasion theory is speculative." After recent investigation he told Hinduism Today, "I am now convinced. There was no invasion. I may present the findings in a new framework at the next World Sanskrit Conference in Bangalore."

RELIGION/POLITICS

Whoops!

Buddhist monks were unwittingly used to channel money to the Democratic National Committee (NDC) at an April fund-raiser at the Hsi Lai Temple in California, according to reports in Time magazine and the Wall Street Journal. Strangers gave ten monks and nuns \$42,200 cash, requesting them to write checks to the Party. In doing so they risked the temple's tax-exempt status by appearing to support or endorse a political candidate. The NDC kept the money. In a similar case, the NDC returned a \$350,000 contribution by Yogesh Gandhi, founder of the Gandhi Memorial International Foundation, because he had no visible source of the funds.

CROSS CULTURAL

Gap--Om de Cologne?

The Gap inc., a giant San Francisco-based chain store (us\$2 billion annual sales), has launched a line of products with six new scents. One of them, "Om, a simple union of sensual musk and spiritual incense," has some Hindus

incensed. A unisex perfume designed by Indian expert Braja Mookherjee, Om is used in vegetable soap, lotion, shampoo, shower gel, massage oil and eau de toilette. HT's independent survey thought the scents "cheap." H.M. Iyer, California, said "Om is sacred....Would The Gap dare call a perfume 'Ten Commandments' or 'Allah'? The Gap should rename its perfume;...not pollute a highly profound and spiritual concept."

EDUCATION

Mahavidyalaya

A project in South India may prove to be a major player in the resurgence of Vedic education for traditional Hindu priests and pandits. The Veda Vedantha Gurukula Mahavidyalaya, under the chancellorship of the Sankaracharya of Sringeri, His Holiness Sri Sri Sri Bharati Tirtha Swamy, will be "the first of its kind in the world, an institution of excellence bringing together Vedic education and facilities for interaction with modern science." The institution seeks to "replicate ancient Maharishi ashrams" and is located on the Krishna River near the remote Venkataya forest reserve in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. A kula guru or Vedic teacher and his wife and family will live with students in an austere setting and teach a traditional curriculum of basic Sanskrit, shastras, ayurveda, astronomy, astrology and more. Dwellings for nine residents each will be built in groups of ten around a central well. A parishad will be three such groups surrounding a community center. The completed 1,500-acre center will have 16 parishads, a small hospital, a research center, a supporting township, dairy, farm, monastic quarters and, across the river, a 200-acre forest meditation sanctuary for reclusives. The prospectus and financial projection for the project reveal a massive and finely tuned plan. Contact: M.H. Avadhani, No. 35, 7th Ave., Ashok Nagar, Chennai, 600 083, India.

ECOLOGY

Tree Energy

The common willow tree properly cultivated can produce five to ten times more wood per acre than any natural forest. Experimental plantings of hybrid plants by the State University of New York are demonstrating that, farmed on sufficient scale, the wood is an economical and clean-burning alternative to oil for generating electricity . The trees are cut back every three years, then regrow rapidly from the stumps.

Workers of Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram gathered in Jagadhari, Haryana, in September to review the work and goals of India's largest organization benefitting tribals. The three-day conference of more than 600 was presided over by Ashram president Shri Jagdeo Ram Oraon. Among the ashram's most successful efforts is the Punargaman homecoming program which has brought thousands of tribals back to Hinduism from Christianity.

Kalyan Ashram has more than 1,000 full-time workers engaged in 7,000 service projects across the tribal areas of India. The 50 million tribals of India have suffered from years of neglect and marginalization by established Hindu society and predatory conversion efforts by Christian missions. The ashram's literature states, "Even after decades of planned development, the forest-dwelling vanavasi ekes out a pitiable existence, easy victim to disease, indebtedness, land alienation and exploitation. It is this voluntary organization, having its roots in this soil of Bharat, that can sincerely embrace these people as of our own blood, rather than as objects of sympathy or museum pieces." Contact: Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, 35, Chanchal Smruti, G.D. Ambekar Marg

Wadala, Mumbai, 400 031 India.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Cave Drawings

In Bhimbetka's caves of Madhya Pradesh, India, over 700 rock shelters were recently discovered. The shelters were inhabited by man during the Neolithic Age, making them more than 10,000 years old. Paintings found in over 500 caves are an invaluable record of early India. They depict hunting, dancing, music, horses, elephant riders, animal fights, household scenes, bisons, tigers, lions, elephants, deer and other animals. In some caves, religious and ritual symbols are found. The ancient artists used red and white pigments, and occasionally yellow and green.

CULINARY ARTS

Spice Boom

Mustard, ketchup, salt and pepper were your only choices in many American restaurants and homes 20 years ago. But by 1994 each American was consuming 2.7 pounds of herbs and spices, up a pound from 10 years earlier. Sharda N. Singh, spice store owner in Arlington, Virginia, says, "Every year you see the difference." He now imports tons of goods each month to satisfy the demand for exotic, health-giving savories. Considering, for example, that one ounce of nutmeg will season 3,000 donuts, "tons" is truly an incredible amount of spice!