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India

Kalahasti Tower Collapses

On May 26, 2010, at 8pm, the 500-year-old gali gopuram of the famed Siva temple of Kalahasti, about 36 kilometers east of Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, crumbled into a heap of rubble. A huge crack had been observed three days earlier, and authorities had evacuated the area anticipating the collapse. The seven-story, 135-foot-tall gopuram, built 500 years ago of clay and stone by Vijayanagar emperor Raja Sri Krishna Deva, had shown cracks and signs of decay for decades. One tourist even died from a falling rock. Civil groups had complained about the neglect. Despite the temple's huge revenues, authorities did nothing. Recent adjacent heavy machinery works and the intense rains of Cyclone Laila were cited as the final destructive factors. The main Siva sanctum was not affected. Plans have been mooted to rebuild the tower.

Netherlands

VU University Diaspora Chair Dr. Choenni

In 1873, the ship Lalla Rookh brought the first contingent of indentured laborers from British India to Dutch-controlled Suriname in South America. By 1916, 34,000 Bhojpuri-speaking Hindus from North India had settled there. After decades of turbulence, the Dutch granted independence to Suriname in 1975. One third of the population emigrated to the Netherlands, fearing that the new country would not be able to survive. Today, there are 160,000 people of Indian descent in the Netherlands and 135,000 in Suriname, where they are the majority.

In September, 2010, Dr. Chandersen ("Chan") E.S. Choenni, born in Suriname, was appointed to the Lalla Rookh Diaspora Chair at Netherland's prestigious VU University. The collective experience of Surinamese Indians, being pertinent to the global dialog on migration and integration, will now be officially studied and documented. Dr. Chan brings considerable expertise to his position, with a Master's in political science, a PhD in social science and many years of service in Dutch ministries and social service, welfare organizations and NGOs.

UK

New Temple's Unusual Icon

The Shree Sanatan Hindu Mandir, Wembley opened on May 31, 2010, after 14 years of work at a cost of over us\$24million. Built by the Vaishnava Vallabha Nidhi UK Branch, the exquisite limestone temple promotes itself as all-inclusive and includes 29 sanctums housing 41 gorgeous marble murtis. Carved according to the Hindu shastras (northwestern style), the temple is being hailed as a masterpiece. However, among the hundreds of figures on its ornate pillars is a carving of Mother Teresa. According to their website, her image (and that of other non-Hindus, such as Guru Nanak) "showcases the temple's universality." The temple's chief priest, Raj Pandit Sharma, said, "We also queried the inclusion of the carving of Teresa." It was implemented by an earlier Board of Trustee and already installed when the present management took over. "For a number of considerations," he said, "its removal was not tenable."

New Delhi

Hanuman Helps Visas?

The Chamatakarik Shree Hanuman Ji Ka Mandir in the narrow lanes of Neb Sarai is attracting hordes of devotees praying to have their visas approved for travel abroad. Rekha Jain, an astrologer at the temple, tells people to pray to Hanumanji and gives them a mantra. She says, "People think it is us who help get the visa, which is not true. It is just a temple where they can pray and ask for God's help." The phenomenon is now spreading to other Hanuman temples across India. India

Largest Metal Nataraja

The famed town of Swamimalai in Tamil Nadu has 200 families who have passed down the lost-wax tradition of cast metal sculpture for many centuries. Several years ago, when Varadaraj, now 32, discovered his own talents during his apprenticeship, he and his two younger brothers decided to form a company called Bronze Creative. Their main client has been another young start-up firm, Lotus Sculpture, run by Kyle Tortora, who began his business in his parent's garage in Connecticut, and has recently expanded to California. Working together, the two companies now supply some of the finest metal Indian artifacts available in the world.

For years, Varadaraj talked with Kyle about his vision of making the largest-ever bronze statue of Lord Nataraja. The work started this year, and it is shaping up to be a magnificent piece. Scheduled to be cast in late 2010, it will be 22-23 feet tall and weigh nearly ten tons. The base will display the 25 traditional forms of Siva. The price is tentatively set at us\$1 million.

Kyle points out that Tamil Nadu's lost-wax metal artisans are in trouble. Demand for their expensive, finely crafted work is down. Even Indians, formerly one-third of Swamimalai's business, are opting more and more for cheap, cookie-cutter sand-cast pieces. Commissioned work like this has become a lifeline for the ancient craft. So, when you choose to shop, go for the best and help save this art form!

Gujarat

Life Without Food or Water

Prahlad jani says he has lived for seven decades without food or water, having been blessed by a Goddess with special powers at a young age. In April of 2010 he agreed to be sequestered in an Ahmedabad hospital room for observation. Thirty medics from India's Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) attested that for two weeks he did not eat, drink or use the toilet. His only contact with liquid was to gargle and bathe.

Doctors scanned Jani's organs, brain and blood vessels and tested his heart, lungs and memory capacity. Other results from DNA analysis, molecular biology studies and tests on his hormones, enzymes, energy metabolism and genes will take months to come through. The DRDO hopes this data may help soldiers, astronauts or trapped people survive without nourishment.

"We still do not know how he survives," neurologist Sudhir Shah told reporters after the end of the experiment. "It is a mystery. But we cannot shut our eyes to the possibilities, to a source of energy other than calories." Prahlad is now back in his village near Ambji, Gujarat, continuing his yoga and meditation.

Temple Sciences

High-Tech Gold Gilding

Smart creations in TamilNadu now offers two gilding services: Pon Alayam (Golden Temples) and Pon Illam (Golden Homes), using a fascinating new system from the UK called Nano Composite Gold Deposit technology.

Copper sheet pieces, formed to stone carvings in the traditional way, are

processed in their Karaikudi factory. The copper surface is cleaned with ultrasound and demineralized water. Next, a layer of nickel alloy is applied. This is followed by cobalt-hardened gold which is 99.7% pure and is three times harder than pure gold. Then a 25-micron-thick layer of Nano Composite Electro Phoretic laquer is applied by electrolysis and heated in a special oven at 160 degrees centigrade.

Smart Creations' brochure says: "The lacquering done by us fuses with the base metal, providing an extraordinarily durable finish. This advanced process from the UK provides the ease of organic coatings while incorporating the superior surface properties of ceramics."

[SmartCreations](#) claims that only five grams of gold are required to gild one square foot of copper, with no wastage. They say the process is eco-friendly and uses no toxic chemicals. Gold usage can be minutely measured and certified, eliminating the disputes that often arise in the traditional process. The final product is touted as maintenance free, chemical resistant and corrosion resistant (tested against 250 hours of salt spray), with a guaranteed specific "life of gold sheen" period.

Health

Toxic Food Alert!

Many have resigned themselves to the widespread use of chemicals to grow food. "Without chemicals, the bugs will eat all the food, farmers will go out of business and we will all starve!" is the message from the agro-chemical industry.

Of course, this is not true. Chemicals breed chemical-resistant pests--"requiring" ever heavier doses of ever more toxic chemicals. Peaches now contain residues from over 60 pesticides, eight of which are known carcinogens. What may be a tolerable adult dose is a huge dose to a small child and a severe threat to a pregnant woman's embryo or fetus.

Buy local organic, grow your own, or at least find alternatives for the top toxic vehicles: strawberries, bell peppers, spinach, cherries, peaches, mexican cantaloupe, celery, apples, apricots and green beans. Instead of celery in your salad, use the relatively cleaner cabbage. For vitamin C, eat grapefruit instead of cherries. Google "pesticides in food" and get informed!

Briefly

The Himalayan state of Uttarakhand has granted official second-language status to Sanskrit and made grants to create 113 posts in 11 non-governmental Sanskrit colleges: 11 principals, 39 lecturers, 30 assistant teachers, 11 clerks and 22 workers.

In July, 2010, Kashmir saw the return of 100,000 Hindus of the Pandit community, who had fled their homeland in 1989 during a Muslim insurgency against Indian rule. Today conditions seem calm and even Muslim villagers are welcoming them back.

The all Ceylon Buddhist Congress plans to commence classes in Tamil for Buddhist monks, to create greater harmony between the two communities.

Two black granite statues worth us\$50,000 were stolen in June of 2010 from the Hindu temple in Capshaw, Alabama.

Poland is poised to have its first Hindu temple built by Indians and native citizens. The new "Hindu Bhavan" will house nine marble deities from Jaipur.