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Ganesha Rules Paris for a Day

The Manicka Vinayakar Alayam, Paris, France, held its 9th annual chariot festival on September 5th, 2004. The following day le Parisien newspaper ran a big article on the event, saying: "There never were so many people, 12,000 last year and 20,000 this year; it is surpassing Chinese New Year in notoriety." The temple was founded in 1985 by Sri Lankan refugees, shortly after the war broke out in 1983, making it one of Europe's oldest Hindu temples. French law requires non-Christian places of worship to have no visible profile, and the small temple is tucked away inside an otherwise nondescript building. But small locations have never constrained the power of Hindu Gods. When Lord Ganesha comes out for His annual Paris parade, He goes upscale big time, drawing Hindus from all over Europe, as well, a large contingent of European descent, both curiosity seekers and those who have been to India and have fallen in love with Hindu culture.

WASHINGTON, DC

President Bush Meets Hindu Leader

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar met President Bush on May 7, 2004, when he participated in the Bush Administration's Faith Based Initiative. President Bush invited him into the Oval Office, embraced him and said, "I'm very glad you are here, and please keep us in your prayers." President Bush then asked to have his picture taken with the Hindu guru.

Along with other faith representatives, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar later participated in a

prayer meeting presided over by President Bush. He, Indian-American representatives and Indian Embassy officials also joined other religious leaders at a reception hosted by Republican Representative David Dreier of California who said, "He is obviously a great spiritual leader.... This is something we need to pursue, so that there is an understanding of differences that exist."

INDONESIA

A Funeral Fit For a Queen

On July 24, 2004, the souls of Tjokorda Istri Niyang Muter and 52 villagers were released in a mass cremation in Bali. She died at the age of 94 in May, 2004, the last of the 11 children of Bali's old King of Ubud, Tjokorda Gde Sukawati. She went from the royal palace of Ubud in a huge, decorated, nine-tier-tall tower weighing 11 tons and carried by 180 men. Street cables had to be removed to allow the tower to pass. Upon reaching the cremation grounds, her body was carried down a bamboo ramp and put inside a model of a black bull and placed on the pyre.

Her cremation was considered an auspicious time for other Balinese to cremate their relatives. On the other side of Ubud, 52 villagers were cremated at the same time, some of whom had died four years earlier and had to be exhumed for the occasion. For Balinese it is a time to celebrate the fulfillment of their sacred duty and the release of their ancestors' spirits so they are free to reincarnate.

TRINIDAD

A Hindu Hero

A monument to Mahant Ramdass was unveiled at the El Dorado Shiv Mandir, Trinidad, on September 21, 2004. Sat Maharaj, secretary general of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS) and Kumar Sammy, president of the Mandir, performed the unveiling ceremony. Fondly known as "Kutia Baba " by the villagers, Mahant Ramdass came to Trinidad as an indentured laborer in 1889. He was

recognized as a spiritual soul and leader at an early age. In 1926, another immigrant, Moorgan, invited him to build a temple on land that Moorgan had obtained. Ramdass built the Draupadi Mandir which later became the Shiv Mandir. He conducted pujas, distributed prasad to the children, and officiated at weddings, bhagawats and various rituals. Loved and revered by all, his name spread far and wide as a healer and resolver of domestic disputes. He never took money for his services. He passed away in 1975, having left a rich legacy. The monument was made in recognition of his pioneering religious ministry that was the forerunner of the SDMS, which today has 160 religious and 60 educational institutions and has branched out into social welfare activities.

USA

A New Generation of Leaders

July 20-25, 2004, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad held its annual Hindu Heritage Camp for the Hindu children of Houston, Texas. The campers totalled 138, from ages 7 to 17--53 high school students, 47 middle school and 38 elementary. Held annually for two decades, twenty years ago it was run entirely by adults. Gradually older campers were given more responsibilities. The 2004 camp was a milestone: all the counselors were college students. Co-directors Shishi Bhutada, who just graduated from college and Ronak Shah, still in college, were veteran campers who wanted to give back to the Hindu community. Ronak said, "As a camper, I gained so much, learning about our rituals. It gives youth an opportunity to be with others of the same upbringing and make friends for life."

SWITZERLAND

Siva Dances At CERN

In 1975, Fritjof Capra made Nataraja into a modern-day scientific icon when he wrote in Tao of Physics, "The dancing Siva is the dancing universe, the ceaseless flow of energy going through an infinite variety of patterns that melt into one another." It was only fitting that the Lord of Dance should finally come to Geneva to preside, in June, 2004, over CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research--with a staff of 3,000, the world's largest particle physics laboratory. The two-meter-tall Nataraja was a gift from India's Department of Atomic Energy to celebrate its long association with CERN. The CERN presence of the Lord of the Dance of energy takes on global dimensions when you realize that here, in 1990, Tim Berners-Lee and his colleague, Robert Caillau created a set of simple protocols:-- "http " "html " and "www "--which let scientists use the Internet to share data. Siva's new home is the birthplace of the World Wide Web.

PUBLICATIONS

Praying for Namarupa

Most magazines received here at Hinduism Today each week end up in recycle in a few days. So it is a bright,

rare day when we see a publication that rivets our attention and draws us back to read each and every page and proves worthy of your reference library. Such a one is the fledgling Namarupa, Categories of Indian Thought published by Robert Moses and Eddie Stern only two times a year. Their stated editorial goal is to "present articles that shed light on the incredible array of Darsanas, Yogas and Vidyas that have evolved over thousands of years in India's creatively spiritual minds and hearts." The first two issues are filled with high caliber, in-depth essays, interviews, photos and artwork with editorial and production values that make Namarupa a real keeper. But excellence doesn't pay the bills. The magazine is, at this stage, a labor of love and devotion and supported by donations. We have seen a lot of publications come and go over the years. This is one that we hope will live on. Help infant Namarupa get onto its financial feet. Subscribe today. For a look at the first two issues' contents, and to subscribe, go to: <http://www.namarupa.org>

ENVIRONMENT

Marketeers Target Vegans

The middle of the bull's-eye is where you want to focus your marketing, and then you expand your messages around that. If you draw these concentric circles, the middle of the bull's-eye right now is the vegan, " says Bob Kurilk, vice president of marketing for the automobile website, Edmonds.com. Automobile manufacturers are vying for a new market. Toyota Motor Corp. does not even offer leather seats for their Hybrid Prius. Mercedes-Benz plans for a "non-leather package, " available in 2005. Ford Motor Co., under attack for its gas-guzzlers, ran an eight-page advertisement in the New Yorker boasting that their hybrid Escape SUV had an eleven member team of vegetarian designers led by a vegan.

Michelle Vadeboncoeur, who moderates several chat lists devoted to the Toyota Prius, said the question of whether the hybrid car has any leather in it comes up about once a month. In one chat session she wrote: "Some people might be past the whole idea that an animal had to die for your leather seats. However, what about the environmental impact of raising that cow? Trees had to be cleared. Land that could have raised food crops was used for animal feed."

Even though vegetarians only make up just 1.5% of the

US population and vegans hardly register at all, if you please them and you reach the real market. Joe Marra of the Natural Marketing Institute says,

"The incidence of people being aware of issues like cruelty to animals is much higher." The firm's research shows that more than a quarter of the adult US population, 56 million, say they choose based on what is "healthy and sustainable." This wider, affluent group spends \$226.8 billion annually on alternative products. It shows that a few people, standing on principle can make a difference.

NEW YORK

Himalayan Art On US Stage

After eight years of work on a new building to house the finest collection of Himalayan art in the world, Donald and Shelly Rubin opened the Rubin Museum of Art, September, 27, 2004, in New York City, with a full week of festivities. While Buddhist art predominates, Indian consul, Mr. Rabindra Nath Panda, observed that the

RMA "magnificently represents the scope and achievements of Himalayan Hinduism."

BRIEFLY...

Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogiji, 75, known as Yogi Bhajan to thousands of his adherents worldwide, passed away on Wednesday, October 6, 2004, following complications due to heart failure. He died at his home in Espanola, New Mexico, surrounded by family and friends. Back in 1968, when he first arrived in the West, he announced he had come "to create teachers, not to gain students." By bestowing the science and philosophy of yoga and meditation, he gave "Baby Boomers" an alternative to the prevalent drug culture. He called it the "3HO" (happy, healthy, holy) way of life. Through his efforts, Sikh Dharma was legally incorporated in the USA in 1971. The president of the governing body of Sikh Temples in India, Sant Charan Singh, called him the "Siri Singh Sahib," Chief Religious and Administrative Authority for the Western Hemisphere. He was given the responsibility of creating a Sikh Ministry in the West by the Akal Takht, the Sikh seat of religious authority in Amritsar, India, and was honored with the title "Bhai Sahib" by the Akal Takhat

in 1974.

Privatization of cremation grounds is proving successful in Delhi. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi had turned over Digambodh Ghat to the Arya Samaj Lodhi Road Society a year ago. Today the formerly dilapidated grounds have been cleaned up and people are satisfied with the services of the new staff. The MCD still issues death certificates.

The hindu council of UK is spearheading a campaign for people to sign an anti-conversion petition to be presented to the UN High Commission for Human Rights and the United Nations General Assembly. The petition will request that proselytization must be eliminated in the interest of promoting world peace and harmony and respectful coexistence of all religions. For more information contact: kksharma54@aol.com

A visit by RSS spokesman Ram Madhav to the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Advanced Study of India, USA, in October, 2004, sparked protest. A letter of objection to CASI's invitation of Madhav was signed by five Penn professors. It carried

misinformation about the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the world's largest service organization and in turn sparked rebuttals by US supporters of the RSS.

Prof. David Crystal, one of the world's leading linguists, predicts that Indian-style English will soon become the most commonly spoken form of the language globally.

Marriage ages in India have changed.

<http://www.medindia.net> says that, prior to 1951, the average age of men was 20 at marriage and women 13. In 1991, the men's age was 24 and the women's 19.

The Tamil Nadu government has decided to withdraw the decision of the previous NDA government to take over the ancient hill shrine of Lord Arunachaleswarar at Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu and put it under the jurisdiction of the the Archaeological Survey of India. That decision would have hit the livelihood of thousands of local people dependent on trade on the streets around the temple.