Diaspora
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New Temple in Perth

After 20 years of planning, hard work and fundraising, the 6,000 Hindus of Western Australia now have a temple in the beautiful, remote city of Perth. The grand consecration of the Perth Hindu Temple was held on September 8, 2005. The huge, 13,000-square-foot structure, based on the Smarta theology, contains shrines for Ganapati, Siva, Shakti, Vishnu, Subramanya, Navagraha and others. The vision to encompass the needs of all Hindus of all denominations required a large facility--a financial challenge for the small community. Blessed and encouraged by many visiting saints through the years, the group persevered through ups and downs for two decades to achieve their goal. It is another triumph for Hindus in far off places. See http:/www.hindu.org.au

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CANADA

Museum with A Message

Leaders of the Vishnu Mandir, Richmond, Ontario, Canada, have manifested a brilliant initiative to bring awareness of Hinduism to the local community and younger generation through the hi-tech Canadian Museum of Hindu Civilization. Built at the temple complex at a cost of 5 million dollars and completed in 2004, the 17,000-square-foot museum is already getting rave reviews from local community high school groups and Canadian visitors. Dedicated to world peace, the museum focuses on Hinduism's teachings of nonviolence and tolerance. With video screens installed next to displays and a multimedia presentation center underway, it is a cutting-edge, modern approach to promoting positive awareness of Hinduism in the West and educating a new generation of Hindus born outside India. For information and directions see: http:/www.cmohc.ca

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USA

1,000 Youth Worship Ganesha

The 2005 Ganesha puja conducted by the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) for children in Northern California on September 9 brought a record number of participants. Over 1,000 children and youth did puja with the support of 2,000 families at three venues: Sunnyvale, Fremont and San Ramon. Youngsters now look forward to the annual event with eager anticipation.

It is a testimony to the success of the American extension of India's RSS. Disciplined, organized and on the move, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, USA, now has 90 chapters with 15,000 families participating in weekly, monthly and annual events across the country.

SINGAPORE

Religion's Big In Singapore

The straits times of Singapore carried out a 2004 religion survey of 622 residents in the city. Its July report on the results revealed that, despite the hi-tech secular culture of the city, religion remains strong, with 86 percent saying they follow some religion. Over half of these devote time daily to prayer, meditation and reading of religious books. Of the total population, 42.5% are Buddhists, 14.9% Muslims, 14.6% Christians, 8.5% Taoists, 4% Hindus, 0.6% other and 14.8% with no religion. The percentage of Christians has gone up, with the majority of converts to new independent protestant churches coming from the Chinese community--a phenomenon which concerns mainstream religious organizations, sparking new approaches for outreach to their own youth.

FRANCE/UK

Rama Shoes Removed From Market

In May, 2004, the French fashion group Minelli manufactured and sold shoes in France decorated with the image of Lord Rama. When this was discovered, Hindu Human Rights and the Hindu Forum of Britain mounted a protest. At first the French company was silent in response to the onslaught of phone calls and letters, which only further enraged Hindus. A month of pressure followed, including a protest march in front of the French embassy in London. Minelli finally relented, removing the shoes from shelves and proffering a letter of apology. The letter was sent to the Hindu Forum in Britain, along with 500 pairs of the shoes.

Hindu Human Rights leaders were now faced with the responsibility of destroying the shoes. As they carried the sacred image of Lord Rama, they could not simply throw them in the dumpster. Suggestions on what to do ranged from burning, chemical removal of the image, to putting pairs of the shoes in temples for worship as sacred paduka. It was finally decided to peel off the image while chanting "Jai Shri Rama, " immerse those images in the Ganges and burn the shoes amid chanting of slokas to Lord Rama.

USA

Small Community Completes Temple on 35 Acres in Iowa

Long time contributor to hinduism today, the late Dr. Prem Sahai, years ago purchased 35 acres of land in Iowa, near the Des Moines River about 30 miles north of Des Moines. He donated the land to the Hindu Temple and Cultural Center of Iowa. Seven years later a band of 750 families completed a $1.5 million temple there and held the consecration rites in June of 2005, conducted by 11 priests from all over the US. The main Deity is Balaji. They have two full-time priests, one from Karnataka and one from Delhi. Plans are in the works for a separate Indian Cultural Center. See http:/www.iowatemple.org

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TRINIDAD/AFRICA

Charismatic Pundit From Trinidad

Pundit Munelal Maharaj, singer, preacher and author from Trinidad, along with his talented wife Naveeta, is inspiring Hindu crowds in other nations--connecting with a contemporary one-to-one personal style. "We take young people from where they are and not from where you want them to be. I use music, jokes, discussions on AIDS, drugs. It's a fusion, a synchronous undertaking." Their 2005 tour of South Africa was a big hit, and he has been invited back in 2006. His USA/Canada camps are packed. See http:/www.punditmunelal.com

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SWITZERLAND

Disembodied Animal Food?

New Harvest, a Washington, DC-based nonprofit, http:/www.new-harvest.org, is developing lab-grown meats that may replace the present method of raising animals in confined conditions. They claim that one cell from an animal, grown and multiplied in a culture, could supply the world's annual meat supply. Methods for producing cultured meat include growing the cells on small beads, which would result in processed products like hamburger or chicken nuggets; and growing them on thin, flat membranes to approximate the look and texture of beef steak. The group says that food-borne pathogens like salmonella and listeria could be better controlled and that there would be no need to slaughter animals that supply the cells. The planet would benefit, too, since the greenhouse gases created by modern animal agriculture would be greatly reduced. Many animal advocates, including the US Humane Society, are in favor of cultured meat, which could be available by 2012. Still, one vegan said: "While cultured meat could certainly mitigate the ethical, environmental and health concerns behind the vegan choice, I doubt hard-core ethical vegans are going to eat it. I know I won't." Nor would we!

USA

Katrina Relief By Hindus

Sewa International, in concert with the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, helped coordinate hundreds of Hindu volunteers, small temples and Indian-American organizations during post-Katrina relief work in Houston, San Antonio and Atlanta. In

less than a week after the hurricane, they raised over $100,000 for relief. Houston alone had 150,000 evacuees. Over 240 Sewa volunteers from all over the country fed people in shelters for an entire day, breakfast, lunch and dinner. Other services included assembling hygiene packets for evacuees at the Houston Astrodome and finding alternative accommodations for those staying in hotels and motels. Tech professionals helped set up the Astrodome Community Technology Center, which enabled people to register themselves and find their kin online. You can help Sewa with their relief work. Go to http:/www.sewausa.orgto learn what you can do.

BRIEFLY...

Debunking AIP (Aryan Invasion Propaganda) is going mainstream. BBC's website now carries an excellent article on the faults and dangers of this scientifically untenable theory that promotes racism and distorts Hinduism. We recommend Hindus use this article to protest the continued promotion of this theory in school textbooks. Go to http:/www.bbc.com, click on Religion and Ethics, Hinduism, History.

Indian scientists believe that as CO2 emissions increase, the ancient glacier in Nepal that feeds the holy river Ganges may melt down before the end of the 21st century. Nepal is home to the Himalayan mountain region whose glaciers contribute to the water supply for millions of people in the area. Many of its glaciers are turning into lakes whose waters threaten downstream villages. Nepali consumers create 20 times less CO2 than American consumers. Campaigners in Nepal want rich nations to pay for damages they have caused to the climate. If the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) turns the mountain chain into a world heritage site, then in theory all the member governments may be responsible for the damage.

In Septemeber, 2005, Madurai Meenakshi temple released all but one of its 60 parrots to the wild. Only a single bird was kept to maintain the tradition of keeping parrots, sacred to Goddess Meenakshi. The birds were set free following requests from animal welfare organizations and state forest department officials. Priest Chonandaram said, "The tradition of keeping parrots has been continuing for the past 100 years. It was painful to see them fly away. But the birds, known for their tremendous energy, who could copy whatever you told them, will be happier now, than living in cages."

FEMA's decision to reimburse churches and other religious organizations for relief work after hurricane Katrina has come under scrutiny. It raises concerns about the separation of religion and government, political expedience and accountability. Hindu organizations considering accepting such government grants are advised to read the article by Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, a Christian, president of The Interfaith Alliance, the national non-partisan advocacy voice of the interfaith movement. See www.tompaine.com and search for "Keeping FEMA Out of Church."

In October, 2005, the UK Armed Forces appointed their first Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh chaplains, recruited with the help of representatives from the various faiths. Their names are being withheld until they complete training.

The second conference of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha was held in Mumbai on October 16-18, 2005. This body of ordained Hindu leaders set forth resolutions on three major issues relating to the sense of self-esteem and health of Hindu society. They are: the control of temples by governments treating them as merely public charitable institutions and not as places of worship and cultural value to Hindus; the rampant religious conversion that is taking place unabated without hindrance from governments; and the unjust reverse discrimination to which Hindus are subjected by organs of the State in the country under a wholly untenable pretext of secularism. A full report will appear in our next issue.