diaspora
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UNITED KINGDOM

Amrit Lalji Wins Nose Ring Case

After being asked to remove her barely visible nose-stud at work in the VIP lounge of British Airways Terminal One, Amrit Lalji, 40, refused to comply. Even though she told her Eurest food service employers that it had religious significance and signified her married status, she was sacked in September, 2007. Taking up her case to be reinstated, the Hindu Council UK (HCUK) issued statements to the media and to the GMB-British General Union, who supported her campaign. Dr. Raj Pandit Sharma, HCUK's executive member for Hindu Ceremonies told the GMB: "For females the piercing of the nose as soon as puberty, or before marriage, is stipulated in Hindu scriptures such as Sushruta Samhita (Chikitsa Sthana, Chapter 19). In the religious context, at marriage the bride is considered to be the personification of the Hindu Goddess of Fortune, Lakshmi, this transformation being achieved by the sixteen beautification processes known as shodash shringar." Eurest quickly recanted, saying her dismissal was an error. Amrit returned to work in October.

AFGHANISTAN

Cremation Under Attack

During the 1996-2001 taliban regime, muslims took land away from the Hindu-Sikh community near their cremation grounds outside of Kabul. Last September, local villagers tried to prevent a cremation there, issuing death threats against Sikhs who were preparing for a funeral at a temple in the south of the city. In response, 100 men marched into the city with the coffin, first to the presidential palace and then to the United Nations compound. Police escorted them back to the temple. "The villagers who grabbed our land now say we can't perform our ceremonies. They say we should stop cremating our dead here, " said Diah Singh Anjan. "The police came and detained six of them, and we performed our ceremony."

TRINIDAD

Hindus Hit by Hate Crime

In August, 2007, Trinidad's famous Siewdass Sadhu Shiva Mandir, Waterlook, was vandalized by Christians, who reportedly shouted, "We have the blood of Jesus. You are idols." They destroyed the life-sized murtis of Krishna, Ganesh, Hanuman and Mother Durga and attempted to set the temple on fire. A national Hindu symbol of religious perseverance and freedom, the temple's founder, Siewdass Sadhu, spent 17 years carrying building materials to the off-shore temple site.

Hindus were shaken by the attack. Satnarayan Maharaj, secretary general of the powerful Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, urged Prime Minister Patrick Manning and he National Security Minister, Senator Martin Joseph "to take positive initiatives to halt any signs of racial or religious eruptions in the nation.What has happened at the temple is an assault on the religious freedom of the people of Trinidad and Tobago."

SRI LANKA

Thangamma Honored in Sri Lanka

On August 13, 2007, dr. Thangamma Appakutti received the Hindu Renaissance Award from Hinduism Today for five decades of religious leadership. A brilliant speaker and organizer, she has been instrumental in inspiring the Sri Lankan community at home and abroad to maintain their Hindu heritage and identity. Born January 1, 1925, in Jaffna, she has dedicated herself to the development of Saivism and Tamil language. She became the trustee of the Tellipalai Thurgaiamman Temple thirty years ago. The Jaffna Saiva community bestowed the title "Thurga Thuranthari " for her services, which never ceased, even during difficult times of war. She founded and administrated the Saiva Tamil Research Library, Sivathamilchelvi Annai Illam (an elderly home), Sri Thurga Devi Annachathiram (a food-giving charity) and the Thurgapuram Women's Home (a girls' orphanage).

The Sri Lankan government Social Service Ministry conferred the title "Kalasuri " on her in 1991 and the Jaffna University conferred her an honorary doctorate in 1998 for her work in education and religion in Jaffna.

In Tamil, Thangamma means "golden mother." Indeed, Dr. Thangamma Appakutti lives up to her name.

TRANSITIONS

Sri Chinmoy Passes On

Internationally renowned spiritual teacher and ambassador of world peace, Sri Chinmoy, died of a heart attack in the early hours of Thursday morning, October 11, 2007, at his home in the small suburb of Jamaica, Queens, New York. Sri Chinmoy was born on August 27, 1931, in a small village called Shakpura, in Bengal, India. Orphaned at the age of 11, he went with his six brothers and sisters to Aurobindo Ashram in South India, where he spent the next 20 years in intense prayer and meditation. Heeding an inner call, he traveled to the United States where he arrived on April 13, 1964, and began to work at the Indian Consulate. He consequently made New York City his home, while serving truth-seekers on an international scale. Respected and loved worldwide, Sri Chinmoy manifested his philosophy for world peace through a wide array of activities focused on transcending our human limitations and through his worldwide

humanitarian aid services.

REUNION

Chinmaya Mission Opens New Temple in Reunion

On September 9, 2007, the Chinmaya mission of Reunion conducted the kumbhabhishekam of its temple dedicated to Sri Vigneshwara and Sri Sundara. It was also the official inauguration of the Mission's new seat of activities at Quartier-Francais, marking the culminaton of 32 years presence and service on the French island. Swami Chinmaya first visited in 1977. Swami Pranavananda Saraswati started misson work throughout the island in 1982. Land was acquired in 1996; and 11 years later after much hard work and sacrifice, a new Hindu center is born.

USA

Mandir Execs Meeting

In August, 2007, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America conducted the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC) in Edison, New Jersey. Over 200 representatives from 97 temples and Hindu organizations of US, Canada and the Caribbean converged to collectively deliberate on the evolving social, religious, cultural and spiritual needs of the 2.2 million strong, confident, diverse and vibrant Hindu-American community.

Delegates unanimously adopted a resolution for consideration by temple boards: 1) to commend the US Congress for allowing a Hindu prayer in the Senate; 2) to work together and with the government to ensure Hindu temples' eligibility to recruit religious workers under the new R1 visa rules, 3) to adopt and promote Hinduism Today's Hindu History Lesson, in the US school system.

CANADA

Edmonton Hindus Prevail

Hindus in Edmonton, Canada, achieved a victory for dharma in getting offensive statues of Ganesha removed from a public square. Here is a first-person report from Canadian Hindu and attorney, Aran Veylan. "Since there was no existing Hindu umbrella group, we invited the presidents and priests of the six Hindu organizations and a few prominent Hindu elders to a meeting on September 8, 2007. A letter was prepared and amended until we had unanimous approval. It was signed by everyone who attended. Between September 9th and 17th, we collected a petition with more than 700 signatures at the temples.

"The letter was addressed to the mayor. The morning of September 18th, separate packages with the letter, the petition, a photograph of the most offending statue and a copy of of Hinduism Today containing an article on the controversy were personally hand delivered by the Hindu spokesperson named in the letter to the mayor, 12 city councillors as well as the President and CEO, Chairman of the Board and the Communications Manager of the responsible administrative arm--the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation (EEDC)--and the General Manager of the Shaw Conference Center.

"The mayor immediately ordered the statues to be removed. On the 19th it was front page news and on the 20th the story was carried on local and national TV, radio and newspapers.

"We did not criticize the artist in any way. We did not feed the public debate by writing letters to the editor responding to other letters or defending our position. The statues were physically removed on September 22nd."

The EEDC president and CEO wrote: "Please accept our apology for any unintentional offence these sculptures may have created for some members of the Hindu community."

USA

Hiding the Swastika

Barracks shaped like a swastika, built in the 1960s at San Diego's naval base, went unnoticed until the advent of Google Earth aerial views. San Diego's Anti-Defamation League objected to the shape and the Navy agreed to comply with landscaping and roof-top camouflage that will cost US taxpayers $600,000.

BRIEFLY...

The promotion of the wildly successful 3d animated kids' movie "Bal Ganesh " has been tied into a marketing campaign channeled through fifty McDonalds Happy Meals outlets across India. Children can get branded Bal Ganesh merchandise and can play with and have their photos taken with a McDonalds' Bal Ganesh mascot. Some Hindus are concerned that a religious Deity has been co-opted for commercial purposes through a non-vegetarian chain.

In September, 2007, a Bihar state official cited one of his subordinates, Lakshman Mishra, for violating a new dress code issued in August by wearing a red tilak dot on his forehead. Mishra refused to remove it and Anil

recommended him for suspension. Mishra says he has worn the tilak on his forehead at work for 30 years, and it is his religious right to do so. In support of his cause nearly all of his colleagues arrived at work on Friday wearing red marks in protest. Unions threatened mass action.

Delhi's 1,600-year-old iron pillar yielded vital clues to Indian metallurgist Ramamurthy Balasubramaniam and his former student Gadadhar Sahoo of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), who have developed non-brittle phosphorous-iron alloy that is corrosion resistant, even in concrete.

UK christian ministers Reverends Tim Jones and Simon Farrar declared that yoga is a "sham, " a "false philosophy " and "unchristian " when issuing a ban on yoga classes in their churches. The Hindu Council UK is investigating whether their comments violate the 2006 Equality Act, which bars discrimination in providing goods, facilities and services--in this case, renting out church facilities for yoga classes.