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Published by Anonymous on Jun. 02, 1994

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A Monthly News Digest

Global Forum Plans For Next Meeting

"The World Assembly for Reconciliation," an elite gathering of political and religious leaders, is planned for this summer in Jerusalem, according to Akio Matsumura, Global Forum Executive Director. The Global Forum is a unique, high-concept attempt to bring together religious and political leaders. Matsumura explained, "We like to look at human issues in terms of spiritual values and physical values at the same time, to encourage people to transcend barriers and taboos and take a step forward for the next generation." The Forum's first general assembly was in Oxford, 1988, the second in Kyoto in 1993. Regional meetings have been held at Moscow and Rio during intervening years. Hindu religious and political leaders have been present for each meeting.

Matsumura went to Jerusalem in December at the invitation of the Minister of Culture for Israel (a member of the Global Forum), the new mayor of Jerusalem and the Grand Mufti. He told Hinduism Today, "They were very receptive to the idea, as they perceived the Global Forum as a neutral ground from the political point of view."

The agenda of the meeting is to be "Global Healing;" the location selected to encourage the growing resolution of 50 years of Jewish/Muslim conflict over the formation of Israel. "It will not be a large conference for political and security reasons," explained Matsumura, "but will have a high quality of people-politicians, religious people, artists, scientists and media, probably 100 to 150 total. We are looking for 'fresh faces' to join, in addition to past participants. We plan a meditation at the wailing wall, a mosque and church, which are symbolic things for the holy land. We want to explore how to transcend barriers to prepare for the next

century."

Matsumura added, "We encourage participation by Hindu leaders to our event," and invites suggestions for delegates. "We are in a dilemma how to pay for air and hotel expenses, particularly for people from third world countries. We had to turn down many people for the Kyoto event." Contact: 304 East 45th Street (4th Floor), New York, New York, 10017, USA.

Solution for England Temple Dispute?

The Bhaktivedanta manor dispute in England appears to be slowly moving toward resolution. ISKCON has acquired land behind the manor, which houses a Krishna temple, for an alternative access road. This may resolve the bitter battle with the Hertsmere county council who have sought to close the temple to the public, citing the problems caused by 25,000 devotees converging several times a year on the small village of Letchmore Heath. Villagers also fear a drop in land prices if devotees start to buy up the area. The manor was given approval years ago only for use as a theological college. In granting the road access, the council also has to approve the expanded use-something they are under no obligation to do. On March 16th several thousand Hindus marched in front of the Britain's House of Commons to protest the possible closing.

Singapore Caning Debated in USA

Fulfillment of dharma requires one to respect and obey the laws of what ever country one happens to be in. Unfortunately, tourists and expatriates-especially Americans-often consider themselves above the law of the country they happen to be visiting. Take the case of 18-year-old Michael Fay of Ohio which has made headlines across the USA. He is to be caned by the Singapore government for spray painting cars and other acts of vandalism in the city-state. Many Americans-including President Clinton-pleaded for leniency. Singapore retorted that their country has a safe society with an enviably low crime rate compared to the USA. It also rightly claimed its sovereign right to deal with criminals according to its own laws, without favoritism.

The debate has shed light on a host of discrepancies about crime and punishment in the Western nations. The USA will execute criminals (by noose, firing squad, electric chair, gas chamber or lethal injection) but looks upon flogging as cruel punishment, liking it to torture. School children can be legally paddled in 23 states-and 500,000 were in 1991. The last state to outlaw flogging (Delaware) did so only in 1972 (their last flogging was in 1952). Since 1977 the US has executed five men who committed their crimes when they were juveniles. The act of vandalism is coming to be regarded as not a boyish prank, but the first step in the breakdown of law and order which society should deal with in a harsher manner-a realization reflected in the fact that while 52% of Americans disapprove of the caning punishment, fully 38% endorse it.

Finland Hindus To Build a Temple

Preparations are underway to build an ambitious Vedic temple in the Nordic countries. Dr. Shankare S. Gowda is working on a \$400,000 project to build a Vedic center in Helsinki, the capital of Finland, in Northern Europe.

The project, which is expected to be completed by 1996, will include a temple, auditorium, Vedic gallery and library. There are special sections for cosmology, ayurveda, dance and musical art and, finally, a vegetarian restaurant. Finland has a population of 4.8 million, but Helsinki also serves neighboring countries such as Russia (it is near Leningrad), Estonia and Sweden. The Vedic center proposes to preach the science of Self-Realization through the knowledge of the Vedic scriptures in these regenerating areas. Recently a committee was formed to expedite the fundraising and acquisition of a large building for the Vedic center. Contact: Dr. Shankare S. Gowda, Mimerkinkuja 4 A 12, FIN-02100, Espoo, Finland.

By Rakesh Mathur, London

Astrologers and Astronomers Alike Await Comet SL9's July Collision with Planet Jupiter

The shattered comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 (SL9) is expected to collide with Jupiter

in July, 1994. The leader of the train of 21 comet fragments should hit on July 16 and the last on July 22. This is the first such event observed by man in recorded history and is sparking excitement among scientists and concern among astrologers. Were it to hit Earth, it would probably destroy all life on our little planet. Noted astrologer, Chakrapani D. Ullal did not find anything in his research on comets hitting planets, but says, "It is looked at as an omen affecting mostly heads of state, also religion and holy people, but not really holy people. It will have similar effects as Rahu conjunct Jupiter, which happened last in 1987-88, when all the spiritual people, priests, gurus got into trouble. It may also take the form of more health problems requiring surgery. The results will not be strongly seen until six months later, in 1995." On April 24, with the full moon conjunct Jupiter, a Sri Maha Rudra Yagna was held at the Palani Temple in South India and also at Kauai's Siva temple to mitigate effects in advance by invoking Jupiter's powers of spirituality, love and religious leadership prior to the cosmic collision.

Presently SL9 is actually orbiting Jupiter (comets usually just orbit the Sun). Scientists guess that two years ago tidal forces broke up a single mass into the present train of fragments, the largest of which is possibly 2.5 miles in diameter, that will enter the Jovian atmosphere at 130,000 mph, one after another. Five seconds after each entry, the comet fragments will "stop/dissolve" under aerodynamic stress, turn to gas (30,000degreesK) and explode with the energy of 200,000 megatons of TNT. The giant fireballs will be on the dark side of Jupiter, not visible from earth. Forty minutes later, impacted sections of the atmosphere will enter the visible, sunlit side.

Trends to Watch: India's Investment Boom to Boost Her Into a Leading Economic Growth Position

A leading US financial publication, Fortune Magazine, recently stated, "With the Indian economy expected to grow three times faster than economies of Europe or the US, leading investment experts are citing the Indian investment market as among the world's most promising in 1994....Unlike China which has less than 25 stocks on its exchange, India offers over 7,000 companies on its well developed stock markets. What is most amazing, however, is the reverse flow in the flight of capital. For the first time since independence, nonresident Indians have enthusiastically invested up to \$2 billion in the Indian market in a single year."

The March Economist, from UK, comparing India and China, concluded, "China

started its economic reforms in 1978...India started again in earnest only in 1991. [Today] the flow of foreign money into India demonstrates investors' new interest. Some \$1 billion poured into Indian stock markets in 1993, most of it in the second half of the year. Of course, China is in a different league: in 1993, it attracted \$15 billion worth of direct investment." The Economist described investors' wariness about China's political future with an inevitable battle for succession to come after the departure of 89-year-old Deng Xiaoping. Whereas "India settled the question of political succession in 1947. Religious riots and sporadic secessionism notwithstanding, Indian's democratic system is secure.

"Foreign businessmen are also attracted by the institutional depth which India has and China does not. India has a well-developed legal system and courts that enforce it with reasonable objectivity. It has a modern financial system, with stock markets on which over 7,000 firms are listed and a regulatory system that, prodded by recent scandals, is developing into one foreign investors feel they can trust. India is solid, but has yet to unleash its entrepreneurial potential."

Mr. International-Vegetarian

Mr. International (left) Andreas Cahling, of California, is a complete vegetarian. The "Vegetarian Times" [April 1994] showcased "meatless" body builders, including four-time Mr. Universe winner, Bill Pearl and actress, stunt woman, Spice Williams, who all testified that meat protein was not a muscle building requirement and reported that toxins from excess of protein leads to joint pains and other health problems. Besides health, Ms. Spice Williams says, "You start cleaning your body out, become more spiritually aware, become closer to the environment. You elevate yourself to a different level and think, 'What are we doing killing these animals?'"

Siva's Holy Night

Outside of India, annual Mahasivaratri celebrations are developing dynamically. In the California Bay Area alone, over 30 institutions held functions on Siva's sacred night, some on the Indian calendar date and others on the astronomically correct local date. Some celebrated both days, just to be sure. More are staying awake the entire night despite work schedules. For Hindus of Trinidad (left) Mahasivratri is the most important festival after Divali. On March 10th-11th, tens of thousands of

devotees participated in the holy rites of Sivabhisheka at numerous temples on the islands.

Dancing with Siva Goes to India

The Honorable Tamil Nadu Minister of Social Welfare, Tirumati Indira Kumari (photo, right) presided at the official release of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami's latest book, *Dancing with Siva, Hinduism's Contemporary Catechism* on March 27th, 1994 at the Dr. Radhakrishnan Salai in Madras, saying, "This book is surely going to change the lives of those who read it and through them the lives of others." Hailed by readers in numerous countries as the finest English book on Hinduism available, a second printing is slated for summer and discussions are in progress for Marathi and Serbic (Russian) translations.