Global Dharma
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EDUCATION/YOUTH
120,000 Pray For Brain Power

Malaysia's 13-year-old educational enhancement group, the Sri Murugan Center, reached an unexpected high-water mark this summer when 120,000 Indian parents and students joined its Pilgrimage for Education at Batu Caves, Lord Muruga's most sacred temple in Malaysia. The movement was formed in 1981 by concerned professors and 42 students joining to uplift the flagging academic standards among Indian students by strengthening religion and personal discipline. At that time 20% of students admitted to the University of Malaya Arts proved academically deficient. Today the Center runs over 300 centers with 2,500 volunteers tutoring 25,000 students. The non-profit organization charges the astoundingly low fee of US$14 per month for three hours of classes on Saturdays (2 to 5pm) and all day on Sundays (8am to 5pm).

Though the pilgrimage was "not a religious celebration," one of the Center's cardinal principles states: "Faith in religion is crucial to success in education." The Center's logo is the child form of Lord Muruga teaching the significance of Pranava Om,the Primal Sound, to his father, Lord Siva. Center leader, Dr. Thambirajah, known for his motivational lectures, advises students to apply holy ash and pray to God before

their studies each day.

SERVICE
Krishna's Grace Feeds Grozni

In grozni the war torn chechen capital, 400,000 free hot meals have been distributed by the Hare Krishnas since March, 1995. On October 5th Prime Minister Khadjiev pledged 320 million rubles (us$60,000) to Paul Turner, international director of Hare Krishna Food for Life, ISKCON's food relief agency, to continue the program which was on the verge of running out of funds. With a cold Russian winter approaching, "we reached the point that we couldn't handle the need," said Stanislav Lesovoy, known as Sukhanda Dasa (above left amidst Grozni ruins). "More and more people were depending on us. Thanks to the Chechen government, we can continue for a few months more." Hare Krishna Food for Life, the world's largest vegetarian relief program, operates in sixty countries.

ISLAMIC RELATIONS
Rising Stakes

In holy mathura, the birth place of Sri

Krishna, a mosque, the Shahi Idgah Musjid, shares a back wall with a Krishna temple. All India braced for another Ayodhya-like clash when the Vishva Hindu Parishad announced an August 18th Mathura yagnaand parikrama (parade around the site). In the face of a government ban, a massive security net and political pressures, the VHP changed its plans and held the rites several miles away. But they succeeded in mobilizing media attention. In an interview with The Pioneer on Sunday,VHP President V.H. Dalmia said, "The VHP will not compromise, because 30,000 temples were destroyed by Muslim rulers. Of them we are only demanding three [Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi] These are as important to Hindus as Mecca and Madina are to Muslims."

MOTHER SPIRIT
Shakti Sangha

September's fourth world conference on women in Beijing closed with ambiguous results. The remarkably huge turnout of

40,000 NGO's consolidated a women's world lobby strong enough for the UN and national governments to take seriously. In drafting the final declaration women of the world have called upon governments to deal with the global problems of domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape and bride burning. Women are getting men to see their plight as integral to the international human rights agenda.

The conference also crystalized sharp dichotomies. American women decried the fact they may only earn $100,000 for the same job that pays a man $140,000, while Indian women railed that developed nations couldn't promise a penny to deliver primary education to inpovershed girls in their country. Conservative Christian and Islamic contingents struggled with advocates of the aggressive modern feminists' agenda.

Strident discussions were held over "sexual rights" such as "orientation" (lesbianism), the right to premarital sex, abortion without parental consent--liberties that some see as threats to society's traditional religious and family-value systems. Other delegates thought basic concerns such as primary health care for women in Africa were marginalized by these discussions. Many said the show of feminine power will amount to little if governments don't take action.

CROSS-NATIONAL

Who is Lord of the Neem

Who owns the neem tree's pesticidal powers? W.R. grace, a Florida-based company that in 1992 filed an US patent for Neemix,a non-toxic pesticidal neem seed extract, thinks

they do, at least in the US. But others don't think so. On September 14th, a petition asking to revoke the patent was presented to the US Patent and Trade Mark Office. The petition was signed by more than 100,000 Indians and over 225 agricultural, scientific and trade groups from 35 nations, including Dr. Vandana Shiva, president of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy in India, and Dr. M.D. Nanjundaswamy of Karnataka's Rajya Raitha Sangha (a powerful farmer's organization). Jeremy Rifkin, president of the Foundation on Economic Trends, heads the protest. He says, "The international challenge to W.R. Grace's patent marks the opening round of a global confrontation between traditional cultures and

transnational corporations for control over the rich genetic resources of the planet." Dr. Shiva calls the Grace patent on neem, used by Indian farmers for millenia, "piracy of the Third World."

WAR

Lankan Tragedy

Sadly, war has escalated on the beautiful island nation of sri Lanka, an ancient home to Hinayana Buddhism, Hindu temples and sages. As of November 28th, the Sri Lankan army had, under heavy resistance, penetrated deep into the northern Jaffna penninsula in what it hopes to be a final attempt to roust armed Sri Lankan Tamil

separatists. Advance warnings of area-wide shelling tactics by the army have led to a massive civilian exodus from the tiny, once placid sanctuary of orthodox Saivism. Reports say 500,000 Tamils have moved out of Jaffna but cannot move freely to the South. They now form refugee camps in grave danger of destruction by disease and famine. At press time, reports indicate the Sri Lankan Army had captured Nallur and surrounded the main city, Jaffna. The Sri Lankan Army says that the most revered Hindu temple in Sri Lanka, the Nallur Kandasamy temple, remains intact despite heavy battle in the area.

TRENDS
Lord Ganesha--A Global Celebrity

Lord ganesha's inexplicable, inexorable publicity campaign is mounting. Though He focused his recent milk miracle very much on the Hindu community, His darshan has been penetrating deep into the Western world for several years. He was featured in a recent Broadway play. Books such as Ganesha, The Auspicious...The Beginning,by Shakunthala Jagannathan and Nanditha Krishna, Bombay, reveal His symbolism and mythology to the world.

Ganapati, Song of the Self,by John A. Grimes, from State University New York Press, 1995, is a scholarly, spiritually-inspired analysis of the mysterious elephant-faced God. August, Niche Media, Philadelphia, USA, released a CD-ROM for children called The Story of Ganesha. New Ganesha Temples are going up in Norway, Montreal, Canada and Germany. What is most remarkable might be described as Lord Ganesha's "inner outreach" program to those who known nothing about Him. Tripti Kenzer, operations manager for the Pacific Spirit company told

Hinduism Today: "Annually we distribute 5 million copies of our Mystic Tradercatalog to a market of people who I would say are on an inner quest. We consistently sell Ganesh sculptures, baticks, prints and masks to people who don't know anything about Ganesha or Hindu philosophy. They are just attracted to the image. Even our staff gets excited when we open a box of Ganesh images. We had set a Ganesha statue next to a computer in the warehouse, and someone thought to move it because it might be in the way. But that night she had a dream,

and Ganesh told her He did not want to be moved!"

FOOD/HEALTH
KFC Finds a Foe

Fast food chains based in the US are facing stiff resistence to entering India despite new open-door economic policies. In September, in Bangalore, India's first Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet was closed for six hours by local authorities claiming the food was a health hazard. In November, in Delhi, the second KFC was closed on

sanitation grounds after a probe appealed for by the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (National Awakening Forum). Economic nationalists want to protect Indian business. Environmentalists and farmers cite the detriments of grain consumption by cattle for meat production. Nutritionists point to the US's high rates of obesity, heart disease and cancer (relatively low in India) caused by meat and fried foods. All are battling to keep KFC, McDonalds and Pizza Hut from gaining ground in India.

BANGLADESH
Where Ganga Meets the Sea

Bangladesh is sacred land. ancient home to inspired bengali mystics, Himalayan siddhasand the site of 68,000 temples. Here the holy Ganga, mighty Brahmaputra and Megha rivers meet the Bay of Bengal. Hinduism Today tried for years with little success to get Bangladesh news. Finally,

this year news began coming in from dedicated Dhaka correspondent, Shyamal Chandra Debnath (right).

* Durga Puja, the biggest of Bengali festivals, was grandly celebrated throughout Bangladesh. From September 30 to October 1, old Dhaka was flooded with devotees. The biggest attraction was the Kumari Puja (right) in which a young virgin girl is worshiped as the living image of the Goddess. Hindus, Muslims and

Christians shared in the joyous celebration at the Ramakrishna Mission in Dhakeswari.

* Many Bangladesh temples and sacred river ghats, face closure. The pilgrimage site of Langalbandh on the Bramaputra, with its numerous ashrams for sadhus, is begin effaced as local shopkeepers and industrialists forceably occupy the ancient tirtha. Hindus are appealing to the world to lobby for their

protection in Bangladesh.

SCRIPTURES
Sino Ramayana

The 13th international ramayan Conference will be held in China from April 26th to 29th, 1996, under the auspices of Shenzhen University, in cooperation with the Vishwa Sahitya Sanskriti Sansthan. The organizing power behind the decade-long

international focus on the epic is general secretary Lallan Prasad Vyas (second from left in the photo). Scholars from 20 countries are expected to attend to continue the international propagation of the Ramayana'smoral and artistic values.

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He who knows the fine-drawn thread of which the creatures that we see are spun,who knows the thread of that same thread--he also knows Brahman.-- Artharva Veda Samhita 10.8.37