

## [DIASPORA](#)

Category : [July/August/September 2002](#)

Published by Anonymous on Jul. 02, 2002

## DIASPORA

## MALAYSIA

### Thai Pusam in Grand Style

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A seven-mile procession on January 27, 2002, from downtown Kuala Lumpur to the famed Batu Caves temple marked the beginning of Malaysia's famous Hindu festival of Thai Pusam. About seven percent of the country's 22 million people are ethnic Indians, most of whom are Hindus. This year more than one million Hindu devotees celebrated Thai Pusam at Batu Caves alone. They were joined by 100,000 visitors and tourists from a multitude of religions.

## INDIA

### The Maitreya Buddha

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It was in Bodhgaya in the Bihar State of North India that Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree 2,500 years ago. He was the fourth incarnation of Buddha and gave the world the Buddhist religion as we know it today. Now, to honor the coming of Buddha's fifth incarnation, a 500-foot statue of the expected Maitreya Buddha of loving kindness, destined to bring worldwide peace, is being erected in Bodhgaya.

The statue and its ancillary buildings, set in a park, are expected to be completed in 2005 at a cost of <sup>US</sup>\$195 million. Designed to last a 1,000 years, the statue will be a sculpted building constructed of steel and bronze. Its internals will accommodate prayer halls, shrines, religious art galleries and more.

## AFGHANISTAN

# Flying Veggie Rations

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Tens of thousands of food packets were dropped over Afghanistan during a war-time relief effort initiated by the United States shortly after the terrorist attacks on the twin towers of New York. These "Humanitarian Daily Rations" (HDR) were unique because they were completely vegetarian. Going veggie was the only way a team of cultural and nutritional experts could figure to accommodate the varied food restrictions of all the world's religions. Requiring quite a

bit of dietary flexibility for some recipients, each packet provides about 2,200 calories and consists of a day's ration of red beans, rice, fruit bars, peanut butter and strawberry jam. The US had some two million of these power packets stockpiled.

## NEW ZEALAND

## A Swami's Magic

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Swami Suddhananda works and travels tirelessly to bring the comprehensive spirituality of Vedanta to a variety of forums. He has become popular for his personal development seminars at universities and management associations in Indian and the US. The youth like him, too. During a three-week tour of New Zealand last year, he left adult audiences spell-bound, but the crowning feature of that trip was a youth camp that attracted 75 youths. Swami resides in Chennai at the Samvit Ashram, home of the Suddhananda Foundation for Self knowledge.

# USA

## Abuse Scandal Roils Catholic Church

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Hundreds of thousands of Hindu children in India are enrolled every year in Catholic schools by parents who assume such education is the best and most disciplined available. Today, however,

shocking revelations in the USA indicate parents of those children should be concerned. In February, the Rev. John J. Geoghan, age 66, a Catholic priest with a long history of pedophilia, was sentenced in Boston to ten years in prison for child molestation. Geoghan's case only showcased the slowly growing exposure of perhaps the Church's greatest secret: the sexual abuse of minors by some of its priesthood. The Linkup, a Chicago-based organization for victims of

clerical sexual abuse, claims the Church has paid out at least \$800 million since the 1980s to quell sexual scandals associated with its priests. According to a report from the Boston Globe, Geoghan alone has cost the Church ten million dollars in the settlement of some 50 child molestation cases over the past 30 years. During the investigation of Geoghan, 80 more priests were exposed on charges of sexually abusing children over the past 40 years in that one diocese alone. (There are 194 dioceses



in the USA.) Even now, as Hinduism Today goes to press, a bishop in Florida, Rev. Anthony J. O'Connell, has just resigned because of past sexual abuse. His predecessor, Rev. J. Keith Symons, was the first bishop in the USA to relinquish his position for sexual molestation of children. Catholic leaders worry that this escalating sexual fiasco may all but ruin their fragile future. Since the 1960s, applicants for the Catholic priesthood have declined sharply.

# AFGHANISTAN

## Wartime Worship

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Even the agony of war cannot stop multi-religious worship in bomb-ravaged Kabul, Afghanistan. At five ruined houses in the Afghan capital, 520 devout souls comprising 40 Sikh and 10

Hindu families continue to seek spiritual solace in communal worship. Although Sikhs and Hindus have always enjoyed a friendly relationship in India, here in Afghanistan they are further bound through the ravages of war by their common language, a need for worship and a primal sense of security born of human togetherness. Once prosperous merchants, bankers, moneylenders and currency exchangers, they

were uprooted from their homes and occupations in the early 90s as ruling Muslims reacted to the Hindu attack on the Babri Masjid in north India. When the Taliban came into power in 1996 and exerted oppressive controls, the Hindus and Sikhs kept secretly praying. Finally, in December of 2001, the government officially assured them they were a part of the Afghan family. Many of the 50,000 who fled the country want to return and are

watching carefully as the  
tenuous situation ebbs and  
flows.

USA

Sri Rudram in Atlanta

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Devotees attending the

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Hindu temple of Atlanta in Georgia are still talking about the Sri Maha Rudra Yagnam they held from August 31 to September 3, in 2001. During that powerful event, Sri Rudram, a much-revered propitiatory hymn to Lord Siva from the Yajur Veda, was chanted in unison 1,331 times. The ritual fire ceremony continued for four days without a break from four in the morning to ten at night.

# ITALY

## The Decalogue of Assisi

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In Assisi, Italy, during January, 2002, Pope John Paul III presided over The Day of Prayer for Peace in the World. At the

conclusion of the event, His Holiness released a decalogue of ten sanctified perceptions centering on a theme of world peace through world harmony. But twelve religions did not represent the kind of balance in numbers one might expect in a gathering espousing a spirit of brotherhood among peers. Of the 252



representatives present,  
100 were Christian  
(including 49 Cardinals),  
only six were Hindu, and  
three religions had just  
one representative each.

USA

Om Schooling

School teachers in San Francisco say yoga classes featuring postures and breath control exercises are working wonders to calm kids and keep them focused. Utilized in a half-dozen elementary and high schools in the Bay Area, the program has come to be known as "Om Schooling," a

take off on Home Schooling. Officially called ABC Yoga, it was originally developed by respected yoga teacher Tony Sanchez to help kids with asthma. While being careful not to discuss yoga's religious aspects, teachers explore its history and incorporate it into lessons on physics,

anatomy and geometry.  
"Yoga allows kids to  
become more aware  
and to grow into  
healthier adults," says  
Sanchez.

**BRIEFLY...**

**FIJI'S HIGH COURT HAS BANNED corporal punishment of children in schools, saying it's a breach of the Constitution, according to ABC Radio Australia News. The landmark ruling followed a submission from the Human Rights Commission**

challenging the  
practice.

PRAYER APPEARS TO  
HELP pregnancy,  
according to recent  
research at the  
Columbia University  
college of Physicians  
and Surgeons. A test

in which intercessory prayer was performed on half of a test group of 199 women showed dramatically improved pregnancy rates for those who were prayed for over those who were not. The report was published in the Journal of Reproductive

# Medicine.

**CHILD ABUSE causes permanent damage, according to a recent article by Martin H. Teicher in the March, 2002, issue of Scientific American. Teicher says exposure**



to early stress  
generates molecular  
and neurobiological  
effects that alter  
neural development  
and increases the risk  
of obesity, type II  
diabetes and  
hypertension, leading  
to a host of psychiatric  
problems, including a  
heightened risk of

suicide, and  
accelerated brain  
aging.

**SRI LA SRI DAVID  
BECKHAM**, a world  
famous soccer star,  
has Hindus in London  
upset that he and his  
family have been

depicted as Gods for a major exhibition of Indian-influenced art. Mimicking a famous "deity painting" of the Lord Siva family, Beckham is shown sitting four-armed like Lord Siva while wife Victoria and son Brooklyn are depicted as Goddess Parvati

and God Ganesha.  
Soon after, he broke  
his foot. Beckham is  
also being ridiculed for  
having his wife's name  
(misspelled) is  
tattooed in Hindi on  
his arm.

## OLD COMPUTERS

**BEING DUMPED** in Asia are releasing toxic materials into the environment, says a Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition report, called "Exporting Harm: The Hi-Tech Trashing of Asia." The report further states that electronic waste is the most rapidly growing

# waste problem in the world.