Diaspora
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Diaspora

CHINA

Hindu Priest Goes to China

The Shankaracharya of Kanchi Peetham in Tamil Nadu, India, received an official invitation from China to come over the wall for a visit. As Hinduism Today was going to press, China's International Association of Friendly Contact was fixing a date for the precedent-setting event to occur in October of this year. In his seven-day visit, the paramacharya is scheduled to meet President Li Peng and other top Chinese leaders. It is not known why the Chinese extended this invitation to a major Hindu priest. The government has previously refused a visa even to the Catholic Pope. This is the first invitation ever extended to a religious figure by rulers who regard religion as a hindrance to progress.

USA

A Bit of SightFor the Blind

Damara Shanmugam sits patiently at her computer four hours a day printing out braille transcriptions of importantHindu literature on her us$2,500 Romeo RB-25 Embosser. She began this unique service five years ago when she returned from India where she personally witnessed the plight and need of the blind there. Determined to help, she established the SHIVA Braille Foundation, dedicated not only to transcribing and printing, but to many other services for the blind as well. Current projects include teaching braille, promoting surgery for the blind and helping to develop blindness prevention programs in India. She is also braille printing each issue of Hinduism Today. The only other magazine printed in braille on a regular basis is Reader's Digest, she says.

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TAMIL NADU

In Praise of Ramakrishna

In the small village of Rajapalayam in Tamil Nadu on December 24 and 25, 2000, the unobtrusive hamlet's routinely peaceful atmosphere was spiritually innervated with reverent inspiration as devotees of

Ramakrishna and Swami Vivikananda gathered together at the Ramakrishna Mission's Eighth State Conference. The honorable guests were Swami Smarananda Ji Maharaj, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur in Calcutta, and Swami Gautamananda Ji Maharaj, head of the Chennai Mission. Many other RK swamis were also in attendance at the day-long event which featured lectures, bhajan, a meditation and children's cultural performances.

AFGHANISTAN

Mistreatment of Hindus

Jews in America are outraged at the similarity between the Taliban's recent discriminatory action against Hindus in Afghanistan making them wear Hindu identification stickers and the horrors they experienced just before the Holocaust when they were forced to wear the yellow star with the word "Jude" scribed on it. On June 13 the US House of Representatives passed, by a 420-0 vote, a bipartisan,

non-binding resolution condemning the Taliban's anti-Hindu edicts. New York Democrat Gary Ackerman proposed that House members wear a badge saying: "I am a Hindu" on the day the Taliban edict came into force. "On that particular day," said Ackerman, "we will all become Hindus, so that the minority Hindus in Afghanistan will have a source of strength."

SINGAPORE

Religious Harmony

Representatives of different religions celebrated Peace and Harmony Day in Singapore earlier this year as part of an event organized by the Inter-Religious Organization of Singapore. According to M. Nirmala, senior correspondent for The Straits Times, Singapore's leading newspaper, such outward appearances might erroneously

imply that all is well among the multiplicity of faiths that live and work together in Singapore's tiny, fast-growing techno-society. Nirmala reports that there is "a minefield of religious sensitivities lying just beneath the surface…." To help preserve the delicate balance between the various religions, the Religious Harmony Act was enacted in 1990. The greatest threat to inter-religious harmony is coming from the escalating and competitive conversion efforts, mainly by Christians and Muslims.

USA

McDonald's Meats Trouble

One of the world's leading burger chains is again in the news, and perhaps in court this time over french fries. A class-action lawsuit for unspecified damages, filed in Seattle on the first of May by

Indian-American lawyer Harish Bharti, claims McDonald's USA willfully misled customers by lacing its french fries with beef flavoring while stating they were fried in vegetable oil. When word of the suit reached India, militant Hindu activists stormed a McDonald's restaurant outside Bombay, causing thousands of dollars in damage, even though McDonald's fries sold in India are prepared using no meat

flavoring. McDonald's announced in 1990 that its US restaurants would use vegetable oil instead of beef tallow to cook french fries. Today, however, they are asserting that they never claimed their fries were vegetarian. The list of US ingredients sites "natural flavor" which MacDonald's says includes a "miniscule amount of beef extract". The US Food and Drug Administration does not requird food producers to list

specific ingredients contained within natural flavors.

USA

Soy Solutions

Soy and most

soy-basedproducts are nutritional powerhouses, according to Monique N. Gilbert, author of Virtues of Soy. Soybeans are the only plant food that has all of the essential amino acids our body requires, making it a "complete protein." Soybean products are usually cholesterol-free, high in fiber and rich in vitamins and minerals. Here are some of soy's properties and how they

can positively affect you. Soy's protein lowers cholesterol and decreases blood clotting, which reduces the risk of heart attack and stroke. It improves blood pressure and promotes the development of healthy blood vessels, which boosts the immune system and lowers the risk of hardening of the artieries, heart disease and high blood pressure. It protects the

body from many digestive related cancers, such as colen and rectal cancer. It helps alleviate many menopausal and PMS symptoms. It also regulates and controls diabetic conditions and kidney disease. In the ayurvedic medical system of India, soy is used as a demulcent and diruetic.

UNITED KINGDOM

Riots of Race

Trouble is brewing inthe small, formerly peaceful borough of Oldham in northwest England. Community leaders of the

textile manufacturing town with a population of 221,800 have appealed for calm after hundreds of Asian youths clashed with police during a night of rioting in June of this year. At least 20 officers were injured and 17 people arrested. Nearby Manchester Police described the battle as "sheer carnage." Following weeks of racial

tension, the riot allegedly began when a gang of white youths attacked some Asian homes. Youth worker Ashid Ali, chairman of the Oldham Bangladeshi Youth Association, said that far-right organizations had been trying to provoke violence for weeks. "Unfortunately," he said, "all of the UK will look at this as being a riot

between the police and Asian youths, when it was clearly sparked by white youths." Reports do not specify who the "Asians" are. In the UK Hindus and Muslims from India usually get categorized together as one group. In this case the only named "Asians" were Muslim. In an earlier racial incident in another city, Muslim and poor white youth fought with

more prosperous white and Hindu youth.

FIJI

Fiji's Secret Fear

Now, almost a year after George Speight led a coup attempt in Fiji, some Indians are still paying a high price. At the beginning of the attempted insurrection, 343 Indians fled to a "sanctuary camp" established in 1979 for persecuted Indians in Fiji by Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Today,

156 still live there because they are afraid to go home. Although the coup officially failed, sometimes ruthless Speight supporters still abound.

Briefly...

Folks were surprised when a 20-year FDA study classified many commonly used herbs like ginseng and even garlic as unsafe. What happened? It takes expensive research to determine whether an herb is ok. Since herbal remedies cannot be patented, there is no financial incentive for a

manufacturer to invest money to study something others can imitate without cost. Without research, most herbs have been classified unsafe by default.

The Israeli Boombamela in Ashkelon, Israel, on

April 22, 2001, was a great success. Over 30,000 Israelis gathered for four days at Nitzanim Beach on the Mediterranean to celebrate this innovative festival modeled loosely after the Kumbha Mela.

A 55-foot tall Sri Radha Krishna Temple in Auckland, New Zealand, is nearing completion as Hinduism Today goes to press. It is scheduled to open in June.

There's an elephant band in Lampang,

Thailand. On April 23, Richard Lair conducted an orchestra of 12 elephants to rave reviews. Lair hopes the CD of the performance will draw attention to the tragedy faced by Thailand's domestic elephant population.

A massive monument to Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore was consecrated in Moscow, Russia, on May 9, 2001, in celebration of his 140th birthday. Considered one of India's greatest literateurs, Tagore is also loved in Russia, where he is compared to Leo Tolstoy.

The National Museum of Art in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, is now featuring an unmatched collection of bronze and stone statues. But Ganesha icons are attracting special attention. They are being worshiped. The museum has provided shrines to accommodate

devotees.

A Russian blacklist issued in Moscow, Russia, on May 12, 2001, by the Russian Orthodox Church names eight India-based religious organizations as harmful sects. Included

on the list are ISKCON, Ananda Marga and the Brahma Kumaris.