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USA

Iowa's First Hindu Temple

The ground breaking ceremony for the construction of Iowa's first Hindu temple was a smashing success and history in the making. On June 16 just three miles north of a town called Granger, according to a report by April Goodwin of the Des Moines Register, local Iowan Hindus participated in the event which included havan, sacred fire worship, puja, Hindu ceremony and a gaily decorated cow. The long-awaited construction of the impressively designed US $3 million Hindu temple/cultural center complex is scheduled to begin this fall and conclude during the spring of 2002. Of the 1,000 Indian families living in Iowa, about 95 percent are Hindu.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Hindu Monk on Mission

Swami Divyananda of the internationally-based Sevasharam Sangha has recently been transferred from Bharat Sevasharam, the Sanga's headquarters in Calcutta, to Trinidad. There, at the Trinidad Sevasharam established in 1951, he will strive to foster the spiritual, cultural and ancient heritage of India amidst the island's rich religious diversity. "We aim to promote sympathy, balance, good feeling and unity among the followers of different faiths so as to evolve a high sense of religion, goodwill and peaceful co-existence," he said. Sevasharam Sanga was founded by Acharya Srimot Swami Pranavananandaj Maharaj. The Sangha is a spiritual brotherhood of monks and selfless workers devoted to selfless service of humanity.

USA

15,000 Attend Cultural Festival

Never before have so many Northern California Hindu organizationsÃ who ordinarily rarely associate associated. It was the Hindu Sangam Cultural Festival, a grand event on July 22, 2001, in Milpitas, California. Event organizers, the overseas branch of the Vishnu Hindu Parishad, estimate that 15,000 people, representing 35 San Francisco Bay Area Hindu organizations, attended. This made the event one of the largest Hindu cultural gatherings ever on the West coast. The famed Anup Jalota lead bhajana, devotional singing, and more than 300 children presented a play based on the Hindu story, Ramayana. A free buffet of traditional Indian food was also provided.

INDIA

Bangalore Betty

Betty Coulter is a typical 21-year-old college grad from Illinois. She wears bell-bottom jeans and is a faithful fan of "Friends" and "Buffy the Vampire Slayer." Or so says Betty, if asked, while taking calls from Americans. Her real name would be difficult for those callers to pronounce: Savitha Balasubramanyam. Balasubramanyam is Indian. She is a member of a booming business trend in southern India that is saving Western companies millions of dollars and earning young college graduates here their first real rupees. When an American calls a toll-free number in the States to report a broken appliance or complain about the wrong sweater ordered from a catalog, the call may be routed to a friendly operator in India. Labor costs can be 70% cheaper than the same service in America. The money's not great, and these operators used to be scorned by Bangalore's

The operators in India don't say they are in India, because the companies want the customers to feel they are being taken care of a bit closer to home. As a result, each operator has to invent an American family history and keep up with American television, sports terms and learn, for example, that when a customer says the product was a lemon, he doesn't mean they shipped him a piece of fruit.

Not everyone likes the idea. Author Arundhati Roy said, "How easily an ancient civilization can be made to abase itself complete. You have to change your name from Arundhati to Annie and pretend that you're an American. It's a very fascinating phenomenon, the other side of religious fundamentalism." Whatever Roy thinks, Savitha and others are just thankful for a well-paying job.

CHINA

Hong Kong Hindu Camp

In an effort to consolidate and unite the hindusof Hong Kong, the local Hindu Swayamesevak Sangh gathers weekly to share among themselves and teach their children the countless attributes of their Hindu heritage. Together, they remember and extol their motherland, Bharat Mata. From April 13 to 16 , the Sangh held their 19th annual youth camp on Lantau Island, Hong Kong. Fifty teachers and students gathered for prayers, games vegetarian food and classes on dharma, Sanskrit, culture, moral

values and discipline.

BRIEFLY

AN INDIAN HANDHELD COMPUTER is being developed to aid the illiterate. Simputer, as it is called, reads web pages aloud in native Indian languages. Indian scientists and engineers are developing Simputer to help the poor and illiterate find out about aid projects targeted at them.

OVERSEAS DEVOTEES OF THESiddhi Vinayaka Temple in Mumbai can

now continue their worship in unbroken continuity. Lord Ganesha has gone on line at www.forindia.com. Ashok Nadkarni, the web developer for the site said: "We have e-mails thanking us from students now able to worship the Lord before going for exams."

TEMPLES IN SOUTH KOREA HAVE begun offering a special 49-day ceremony for women seeking forgiveness for the foetuses they have aborted. Nearly 40 per cent of all married South Korean women have had at least one abortion, according to a recent survey.

ANIMAL FRIENDS INSURANCEis a unique insurance agency that donates its net profits to animal welfare and rescue groups (info@animalfriends.org.uk). Recognizing that vegetarians suffer from less chronic diseases, the AFI offers a 25 percent discount to nonmeat eaters who purchase their policy.

MEDITATION DOES EASE STRESSaccording to a study in the American Journal of Public Health. A meditative practice called "mindfulness" has been shown to help people with anxiety disorders, chronic pain and depression. This is

the first such study to observe meditation techniques in people with high stress levels but without diagnosed psychiatric disorders.

GANESHA CHATURTHI WAS NOT quite the same this year in Mumbai. To avoid polluting the water, environmentally sound materials were used to construct the huge temporary Ganesha statues that were ceremoniously placed in the ocean.