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Diaspora

INDIA

First Daughter Loves India

Chelsea Clinton celebrated the Hindu festival of colors, Holi, with the royal family of Jodhpur during her March visit to Jaipur, India, along with her father, US President Bill Clinton. She preferred to play the curious observer in the festivities, only receiving a small dash of color on her forehead. The India press took note that the Stanford undergraduate is a vegetarian by choice, and enjoyed such Indian vegetarian delicacies as appan with vegetable stew at the Imperial Hotel in Delhi. One report published in the Indian Express said she planned to visit yoga teacher Daya Vyas for a class and advice, but there was no mention of this from any of the Western reporters following the immense presidential entourage.

INDIA

Sun Worship

When the world partied on January 1, 2000, there was at least one oasis of calm and sanctity on the planet. When the first rays of the sun touched the waters of the Bay of Bengal off the shores of Pondicherry, South India, it was greeted with the traditional Sanskrit chant of the twelve names of the sun. At exactly 6:34 am participants and onlookers--a total of 10,000 people--chanted "Aum" three times in unison. Then 3,000 school children, assembled along the entire marina, performed Surya Namaskar, "sun salutation," a famed series of

twelve yogic poses. Fifty students of the Yoganjali Natyalayam, a local yoga and dance school, lead the massive drill. Yoga instructor Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani orchestrated the event by training the physical education teachers in 60 government schools, who in turned trained sixty students each.

ENGLAND

Forced Marriage

Pleas from distraught brides forced into marriages against their will has prompted the British government's Home Office to set up a special investigative unit. The complaints have come mostly from Muslim women, but also from Hindu and other Asian minority communities. The Home Office is sensitive to the cultural issues involved and stated in a letter to Hinduism Today, "The Home Office has no wish to challenge the tradition of arranged marriages, which has operated successfully for a very long time. But the government's policy is that forced marriages are wrong and will not be tolerated." The unit will work with local community and religious leaders as well as foreign governments to stem the practice of nonconsensual marriages. A call for comments on the BBC website:(newsvote.bbc.co.uk/hi/newsid_665000/665132.stm) provoked a range of responses. One US Hindu said, "I don't see why a government need interfere in something they don't even understand." More common was this opinion, also from a Hindu, "I fully support any legislation towards the same." T. Gill of UK said, "The few forced marriages I know of have been terrible for the girls."

UGANDA

Mass Suicide

On March 17, 2000, fire was set at a church in Kanungu belonging to the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God. At least 330 people inside, including 78 children, burned to death in the blaze attributed to gasoline, a bomb or both. It was not clear whether Joseph Kibwetere, the cult's leader was among the dead, or escaped before his followers burned to death. Uganda's Catholic bishops condemned the deaths as "barbaric, most regretable and unacceptable in the Catholic faith." The cult drew heavily on Roman Catholicism, as sect leaders included several defrocked Catholic priests and nuns. The bodies, many burnt beyond recognition, were buried in a mass grave at the site. Police have disbanded the sect's other facilities.

ENGLAND

Hindus in House of Lords?

Tony Blair's Reform Committee recommended that England's minority faiths, including Sikhs and Hindus, get representation in the House of Lords. The Prime Minister's sweeping reforms already abolished more than 650 hereditary peerships, as members are known. Blair argued that the posts had become meaningless as many of the

once-powerful peers had fallen into hard times, some even landing in jail. In the old system, the Church of England's 26 senior bishops automatically held seats, but under a controversial proposal announced in January, other faiths will now be included. Roman Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu religious leaders may be given a seat, gaining official recognition and prestige previously allotted only to the Church of England. According to the Indian Express, "the move is in line with Prince Charles wish to be 'defender of faith,' rather than 'defender of the faith' [as royal head of the Church of England], should he become king."

THAILAND

Arrest That Elephant!

Since the beginning of March, 2000, elephants have been banned from roaming the streets of Bangkok. They are a hazard to traffic--and traffic a hazard to them. Elephants traditionally were used for logging in rural areas, but now these jobs are scarce, due to massive deforestation. Now the trainers and elephants roam the city begging from the passer-bys. The ban was declared when most elephants were out

of town for a theatrical spectacle showing the traditional method of catching wild elephants. It remains to be seen how well it can be enforced.

RUSSIA

Religious Oppression

Russian Hindus and many other religious minorities across the country are one by one being called "destructive cults," and "totalitarian sects," then banned by the state, according to a report received by Hinduism Today. Organizations which were registered have to reregister under new federal laws. Many are failing the new requirements, and if they lose official status, registered property and financial accounts may be seized by the state. Many Hindu and Buddhist organizations have been singled out. Mormons and other small Christian sects have also come under attack in reforms believed to be instigated by the Orthodox Russian Church fearful of losing their traditional congregation.

CARIBBEAN

Spiritual Cruise

Fifty-three pilgrims joined Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami for a 10-day voyage on Holland America Lines through tropical waters from March 25 to April 4, stopping at six nations. "Caribbean Innersearch 2000" included intensive daily meditations, color healing, metaphysical study of Sanatana Dharma and hatha yoga. The high point was a pair of rare receptions in Trinidad, where thousands of Hindus met and honored Gurudeva, the publisher of Hinduism Today. Pandit Narendra and wife Ashwinee Ragoonanan were the principal organizers of a morning event, and Sat Maharaj engineered another at the Maha Sabha. In Martinique, Innersearchers met locals of Indian origin, now significantly Frenchified. On Dominque they offered Hindu support to the native Carib tribe. In August of 2001 Gurudeva plans a 12-day cruise through Northern Europe. For more information: email innersearch@hindu.org.
www.innersearch.org.

NETHERLANDS

PORTED TO DUTCH

Some articles from Hinduism Today are now translated into Dutch and republished in a new magazine, Hindorama. Soven and Amritha Sivanand inspired this addition to the full-color journal and are the final editors and translators of our portion. The magazine primarily targets the Hindustani people originally from Suriname and aims to help build a multicultural society in the Netherlands. For subscription info contact: Sampreshan, Postbus 61035, 2506 AA DenH Haag, Netherlands. tel:070.365.46.88 email: info@sampreshan.nl

Briefly...

Amnesty International has released to the world a stern advisory of Nepal's potential to be

another "human rights disaster zone." They warned that the Communist Maoist insurrection is poised to erupt into a full-scale regional conflict, yet the world community is paying little attention.

The planning has officially begun in Trinidad and Tobago for the World Hindu Conference 2000, being held from August 17 to 20 under the auspices of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Contact: Sri Ravindranath Maharaj, Hindu Prachar Kendra, No. 1 Mercline Drive, Longdenville, Old Road, Enterprise, Chaguanas, Trinidad. Web:

www.worldhinduconf2000.org

Indian archaeological experts will help Vietnam restore the famous seventh century Hindu Cham temples in central Vietnam damaged and neglected during years of war. The Cham temples have been declared a world heritage site by UNESCO. Indian defence minister George Fernandes offered to use the ^{us}\$2.5 million Vietnam owes India as a grant dedicated for restoration of the

temples.

Indians rank second highest on the "happiness barometer"--just a ways behind the Americans according to a 22-nation, 22,500-person survey by Roper Starch Worldwide. As many as 46 percent of Americans surveyed said they were "very happy" with their overall quality of

life. Indians came next at 37 percent, ahead of the British, French and other Europeans. China came in at nine percent; Russia held last place with three percent. The findings indicate that money and material goods alone do not ensure happiness.

Hindus were outraged by racist remarks in one

episode of HBO's hit mafia series, "Sopranos," that aired April 9, 2000, according to a report from www.hinduunity.org/press.html. In the show, Tony Soprano, the main character, thinking he contracted an illness at an Indian restaurant, utters a foul curse at a "Six-Armed Goddess."