Diaspora
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Diaspora

KENYA

Massive New BAPS Temple

Africa's largest Hindu Temple was inaugurated in August at Nairobi, Kenya, by H.H. Pramukhswami Maharaj. It's even larger than his famed temple in Neasden, England. Four days of celebration included a huge six-mile parade through town witnessed by 15,000 local people and which attracted major coverage by Kenyan newspapers and TV, as well as the BBC and CNN. The majestic Shree Swaminarayan Mandir is the masterpiece of the Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), an organization with over a million followers in the tradition of the 19th century Vaishnava saint, Lord Swaminarayan. The main structure is made of yellow sandstone hand-carved in India. Inside, everything is made of native African woods--camphor, mahogany, mvull, Mt. Elgon teak and meru oak--sent to India for carving and then returned. Also on the property is a state-of-the-art hall that will accommodate up to 30,000 people and an exhibition center whose theme is harmonious living. The temple and facilities are open to people of all religions and creeds. Ten thousand devotees attended the final Deity installation.

USA

Grave Move?

The Self-Realization Fellowship's campaign to reentomb their founder, Paramahansa Yogananda, has thrown them into

the spotlight. After Yogananda reportedly died of a heart attack in 1952, he was buried in Forest Lawn Glendale, the famous resting place for countless movie stars. Daily visitors make the tomb probably the most visited grave there. SRF's plan is to move the grave to their headquarters atop Mount Washington in Los Angeles. Opponents are fearful that the planned huge shrine will turn the tranquil hill into a busy tourist attraction. Residents on the hill are concerned about increased traffic.

CONCLAVE

Dharma Sansad

On August 28-29, Hindus gathered at the peaceful 250-acre Barsana Dham ashram near Austin, Texas, for the Dharma Sansad-1999 organized by the Vishva Hindu Parishad of America. According to Dr. Mahesh Mehta, one of the founding members of the VHP of America and a former president, "The ultimate objective of the Dharma Sansad is to enrich the American culture by blending the Hindu spiritual heritage with the scientific and technological culture of USA. The Dharma Sansad in Barsana Dham will go down in the history of American Hindus as an historic event, because some very important resolutions were adopted under the guidance of our revered Dharma Gurus." These resolutions included suggesting the celebration of at least one common festival where people from all temples in a community join together, plus a plan to form a network of all temples across America. Youth participants resolved that each of them will enroll in at least one temple and become an active member.

LEADERS

New Hindu Presidents

Both Singapore and Guyana now have Hindu presidents--bringing to seven the number of Hindu heads of state (including India, Nepal, Fiji, Trinidad and Mauritius). President Sellapan Ramanathan of Singapore and President Bharrat Jagdeo of Guyana were sworn in just two weeks apart. Both new presidents entered into office under unusual circumstances. S.R. Nathan, as Singapore's president is known, was the only nominee for the mostly ceremonial post and automatically became president when no valid objections were raised. Executive power in Singapore is held by the prime minister, Goh Chok Tong. Guyanese president Bharrat Jagdeo was selected for the position by the former president, US-born Janet Jagan, when she resigned because of heart ailments. She in turn got the post when her Guyanese husband, the previous president, died. At 35, Jagdeo is one of the youngest heads of state in the world. He holds full executive power under Guyana's system of government. He is a respected economist and entered politics at age 13.

INDIA

Johari's Great Departure

On August 20, 1999, Harish Johari left this world, bequeathing a cultural legacy that has inspired and will uplift people for generations. He knew from his own astrology that this was a difficult period in his life. He died at age 65 from leukemia, cancer of the blood. He accepted his passing with grace, refusing to deter death with drugs or radiation treatment. He was a gifted artist and able composer, a popular expounder in both lectures and books on the healing arts, astrology, yoga, tantra, numerology, gemstones, massage and cooking. His many books include Ayurvedic Massage and Birth of the Ganga, a stunning collection of paintings done with Pieter Weltevrede, his Dutch student and friend of 20 years,

who was at his side when he left this Earth plane.

ART

Musical Brotherhood

When we sing, we are one soul singing, even though we are in two bodies," say brothers Pandits Rajan and Sajan Mishra. The famed Banaras musicians learned music at a young age from a family packed with talent. Today they are the foremost exponents of the Banaras style of singing. In July they performed at the FÃªte de la Musique celebrating the reopening of the World Trade Center in New York. Host Johnathan Hollander, a famed choreographer noted, "Lucky are we to cross paths with these special men through whom we can experience and revel in the brilliance and purity of India's great musical and spiritual traditions."

FESTIVALS

Toxic Colors

A cloud cast a shadow over the joyous Holi celebration after India's National Botanical Research Institute discovered the toxic effects of the synthetic colors used during festivities. Their solution is to use natural colors in next year's Holi, the celebration of the end of winter. "We have already developed a technique for preservation of fresh flowers that maintain their natural colors," said Dr. P. Pushpangadan, director of the Institute. Flower petals of a few common plants would be dried, then crushed into a powder. He also said that the extraction would not only give an opportunity to use safe colors, but would also generate jobs in rural areas.

INDIA

CAD Carving

Kiran Trivedi of Ahmedabad carves stone temples with computers, reducing construction time from several years to just around a year. "I started this work as an experiment two years ago," he told India Today. "Today I still can't believe that it has succeeded so well." Inspired by the success, the now famous Trivedi is building a us$2.3 million Jain temple in San Francisco, California. It all started during a visit to Italy three years ago. He bought a computerized machine which helped in carving European sculptures. With creative innovation he adapted the $341,000 tool to create Indian temples. Now all he has to do is feed in drawings, and the computer carves the piece. Though high-tech, the machine doesn't replace skilled artisans, as it does only 85 to 90 percent of the work. In fact, now Trivedi employs 200 sculptors--more than twice the workers he had before acquiring the machine.

USA

Eat Less, Live Longer

Animals that eat less may live up to 50 percent longer, says a study done by Tomas A. Prolla and Richard Weindruch of the University of Wisconsin. It showed that the genes that normally deteriorate with age tended to continue functioning in a youthful way when mice were given 24 percent less calories. The diets all contained healthful levels of vitamins, minerals and proteins; only the calories were reduced. This creates a condition of undernutrition (not

malnutrition) that not only increases the lifespan, but suppresses most of the effects of aging as well.

Briefly...

Warner Brothers agreed to edit the orgy scene in the controversial film "Eyes Wide Shut" before its British premier after Hindu groups protested the Bhagavad Gita background music. No change has been made in the US version. India has banned the film.

The Xena Warrior Princess episode "The Way" is being rerun with a few editing changes, including the scene where Xena "headbutts" Hanuman, in an attempt to appease upset Hindus. An introductory declaration and statement by the stars at the end explain to viewers that the show had no intent to denigrate Hinduism.

Want to look old fast?"Refined sugar," is best, says Canada based Dr. Udo Erasmus. "Sugar causes the skin to age almost as much as smoking, and if it is not burnt up during exercise,

it turns into fat."

Mick Jagger's Hindu marriage to Jerry Hall has been ruled null and void both in England and in Bali, where they were married 20 years ago. The rock singer's marriage, the judge said, was never registered, nor recognized by the community and therefore not a legal marriage. The lucrative business of Hindu wedding ceremonies for non-Hindus has been criticized by some Balinese.

Mukesh Rai of Ventura, California, a vegetarian, sued fast food giant Taco Bell when they gave him a "beef burrito" instead of the "bean burrito" he ordered. The brahmin was aghast and demanded Taco Bell pay for a trip to the Ganges for purification. The judge said Rai failed to prove he actually ate the beef burrito and dismissed the case.

THE VEDAS

God's Word, Sages Voices

May God, who in the mystery of his vision and power transforms His white radiance into His

many-colored creation, from whom all things come and into whom they all return, grant us the grace of pure vision.

Krishna Yajur Veda, Svetasvatara Upanishad 4.1

Wherefore he who has crossed that boundary and has realized the Self, if he is blind, ceases to be blind; if he is wounded, ceases to be wounded; if he is afflicted, ceases to be afflicted. When that boundary is crossed, night becomes day; for the world of Brahman is light itself.

Sama Veda, Chandogya Upanishad 8.4.2

The spirit of man has two dwellings: this world and the world beyond. There is also a third dwelling-place: the land of sleep and dreams. Resting in this borderland, the Spirit of man can behold his dwelling in this world and in the other world afar. And wandering in this borderland, he beholds behind him the sorrows of this world, and in front of him he sees the joys of the beyond.

Shukla Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.3.9

The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, sruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1,200 bce), Bible New Testament (100 ce), Koran (630 ce) or Zend Avesta (600 bce). Four in number, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 bce.

Who Is a Hindu?

"Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and the realization of the truth that the number of gods to be worshiped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of the Hindu religion." B.G. Tilak's definition of what makes one a basic Hindu, as quoted by India's Supreme Court. On July 2, 1995 the Court referred to it as an "adequate and satisfactory formula."