Diaspora
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PHILOLOGY

Sikh Stamp

Canada Post released a 46-cent stamp commemorating the Sikh Khalsa's 300th year of existence and the 100th anniversary of Sikhism in Canada. The artistic stamp was welcome recognition for Canada's large Sikh community. But by stating, "Sikhism is both a nation and a monotheistic faith," postal authorities unwittingly stepped into the independence movement which seeks to carve a nation out of India's Punjab state. Canada Post later apologized, saying they had no intention of taking sides in the controversy.

USA

Big Temple

Construction has begun on what will be the largest traditional Hindu stone mandir outside of India in modern times. The Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), creators of the famous Hindu temple in Naesden, England, has aquired 30 acres of land in Chicago for the project. They expect the "Shree Swaminarayan Mandir & Cultural Complex" to be a perfect marriage of architectural beauty and modern technology. Jagdish Sharma, Consul General of India, said it will be "something all Americans as well as Indians can share and be proud of." Limestone and marble, likely from Italy, will be sent to India, carved and then shipped to Chicago. Like Naesden's masterpiece, the temple

will feature extensive displays, programs on Hinduism and yoga, anti-addiction campaigns, and more.

USA

Anniversary

Devotees of Swami Satchidananda will gather at his 600-acre Yogaville ashram in Virginia July 23?25 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Swami's ordination as a monk. Swamiji is a Hindu minister, a master of yoga, a global spiritual teacher, ambassador for peace and a world leader of the interfaith movement. At his Satchidananda Ashram, he built LOTUS, the Light of Truth Universal Shrine, a stunning lotus-shaped building housing shrines to all the world's faiths. Swami Sivananda, his guru and founder of the Divine Life Society, inititated him into the ancient order of sannyasins in 1949.

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NEPAL

A Communist Nepal?

As Hindu Nepal embarks on the third democratic election of its modern history, an armed Maoist insurgency trying to overthrow the Hindu constitutional monarchy is finding increasingly fertile ground in the mountainous, undeveloped countryside. Masked rebels with primitive guns, curved daggers and Maoist doctrine are moving among remote villages, extorting food from residents, looting banks and businesses and seeking recruits among the disenchanted poor. The insurgency, which began three years ago in remote, backward regions, is creeping closer to the nation's heartland.

Over 800 people have died in encounters since 1996. Moaists have a stronghold in nearly 35 of Nepal's 75 districts. Their presence is felt almost in every corner of the country. The Maoists boycotted the parliamentary poll on May 3 and May 17, and intimidated others to not vote--all in hopes of demonstrating their growing power by a low turnout. But with a strong army presence in rebel areas, there was a 60 percent turnout on the first day. The Nepalese insurgents are led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal, known as Comrade Prachnanda, the "Furious One." A communist takeover in Nepal would not only eliminate the only Hindu country in the world, but pose serious security concerns to India.

INDIA

Milk Scam

An estimated 2.6 million gallons of synthetic milk is produced and sold every day in western Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Haryana, according the India Tribune. They report, "Liquid detergent, caustic soda, shampoo, urea, white paint, white paste, vegetable oils, hydrogen peroxide, formalene and sodium sulfate are mixed together in a washing machine." The questionable concoction is then supplied to hotels, colleges and hospitals in as many as 20 districts of western Uttar Pradesh. Although authorities know about the open circulation of this "poisonous mixture," they seem to be helpless in the face of suppliers' political connections. It is believed that half of the milk consumed at the recent Kumbha Mela at Hardwar was synthetic. In an article in India West, the agriculture minister of India was quoted as saying, "India has become the largest milk producer in the world by producing 18 million tons of milk, to surpass the US." But how much came from a cow?

ALABAMA

Mistaken Circumcision

Mr. and Mrs. Sreenivasulu Punna were horrified to find that their son, Bharat, had been circumcised the day after his birth on September 6, 1995, even after they had repeatedly asked the staff not to perform it. Outraged, they sued East Alabama Medical Center for malpractice, claiming Bharat was circumcised against their wishes and counter to their religious practices and beliefs. According to the court file, Mrs. Punna had signed a release allowing the hospital to perform a circumcision. But, argued attorney Gregory Morgan, because of language difficulties "Mrs. Punna was not aware of what she had signed." Hindus do not practice circumcision, Morgan stated, explaining that it is a distinction between Hindus and Muslims in their native culture. He stressed that when the family returns to Hyderabad, India, they "will suffer further public humiliation and ridicule." The Punnas are seeking an estimated $950,000 in damages.

CRICKET

Swami's Yorker

The Jagadguru of the Puri Mutt, Swami Nischalananda Saraswati, is asking people to stop using cricket balls because they are made of cow's hide. An article in The Week says manufacturers respect the Shankaracharya's religious sentiments for the cow, but said there are no suitable substitutes. There is a plastic ball made for practice, but it is not allowed in test matches under International Cricket Council law. Nischalananda asks why, in this age of super synthetic materials, a suitable substitute can't be invented. It wouldn't be a small market--the Sports Goods Promotion Council said three percent of India's leather production--1,125 cows a day by one calculation--goes to make cricket balls!

(for the cricketly challenged, a "yorker" is a ball thrown to hit the ground at the batsman's feet, pass under his bat and hit the wicket)

AUSTRALIA

Aussie Temple

Ten tough years of fundraising and discussions, never split the Hindu community of Accolade, South Australia, into competing factions--unlike many other would-be temple-builder groups. Temple vice president S. Selvakulalingam told Hinduism Today's publisher, "We have now come to a compromise after four years of soul searching and have just bought a church to renovate into our temple."

SENIORS

Centenarians

Ask M.I.T. math professor Dirk Struik about the secret to living a long life (he's 104), and he comes up short. "I've lived this long because I didn't die," deadpans Struik. "I have good friends. I'm healthy. Above all, I'm active." Those are important factors in living long and staying healthy, say two Harvard scientists who studied more than 100 centenarians to try to unlock the secrets of longevity. Though only the genetically blessed can live more than a century, researchers say they have identified some factors that could help everyone extend life. "The trick is not staying young; it's aging well," said one of the scientists, Dr. Thomas Perls. The other, Margery Silver, added that even though most have had difficult lives, they "handle emotional stress incredibly well and use humor all the time." They also are good at facing mental challenges, and they eat moderately. Perls and Silver found no specific diet or education factors significant to living over 100. There are

64,000 centenarians in the US, according to the Census Bureau. By 2050, that number could surge to between 500,000 and 1 million, predicts Perls.

ADVERTISING

Tobacco: the Fight Is On

Not only did The New York Times recently ban advertisements for cigarettes, cigars and other tobacco products in its pages, anti-smoking ads like the one at right are appearing in the North American media. The Times, perhaps the world's foremost newspaper, imposed the ban, the first by a large US paper, because of concerns about the harmful effects of smoking. Times spokeswoman Nancy Nielsen said, "We don't want to expose our readers to advertising that may be dangerous to their health"--and they're willing to let go of the ads' $10 million annual revenue. More than a dozen smaller US newspapers refuse to publish tobacco ads. "Poster Child" (right) appears on the British Columbia's Ministry of Health web (www.tobaccofacts.org), part of a tough government anti-smoking campaign. As smoking has become unglamorous and uncool in North America and Europe in recent decades, tobacco companies are looking to India and the rest of Asia for new, less-informed buyers of these harmful products.

THE VEDAS

God's Word, Sages' Voices

A part of Infinite Consciousness becomes our own finite consciousness,

with powers of discrimination and definition, and with false conceptions.

He is in truth Prajapati and Vishva, the source of creation and the Universal in us all.
This spirit is consciousness and gives consciousness to the body: he is the driver of the chariot.
Krishna Yajur Veda, Maitri Upanishad 2.4-5

Go, my breath, to the immortal breath. Then may this body end in ashes!
Remember, O my mind, the deeds of the past, remember the deeds, remember the deeds!
Sukla Yajur Veda, Isha Upanishad 17

When a person here is deceasing, my dear, his voice goes into his mind;
his mind into his breath; his breath into heat;
the heat into the highest Divinity.
Sama Veda, Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.6-7

Like the waves in great rivers, there is no turning back of that which has previously been done.
Krishna Yajur Veda, Maitri Upanishad 4.2

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."