Diaspora
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# Diaspora

## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

### Miss Universe Goes Hindu

Hindu cultural themes inspired contestants at the 1999 Miss Universe pageant on May 26 in the Capital city of Trinidad and Tobago. Contestants visited the "Divali Village," a town lighted with lamps to recreate the Hindu festival of Divali, and the famed Siewdass Sadhu Temple in the sea in order to get a first-hand view of the country's Hindu culture. The contestants entered the temple with covered heads, sang bhajans and offered prayers, according to Hinduism Today correspondent Anil Mahabir. Miss Russia reportedly fell in love with Goddess Lakshmi. It was perhaps the first time during a Miss Universe pageant that contestants were exposed to so many aspects of Hindu culture. There were no protests on the scale of the 1996 demonstrations against the Miss World contest in Bangalore, India. Foreigners who viewed the pageant, including sponsor Donald Trump, expressed delight over the content of the cultural program, which showcased the harmony of the ethnic mix of the country. The 1999 title was won by Miss Botswana, Mpule Kwelagobe, her country's first contestant, succeeding 1998 winner Wendy Fitzwilliam of Trinidad.

## MEDICINE

### Death by Pills

A study published last year in the Journal of the American Medical Association estimated that 106,000 hospital patients

die and 2.2 million are injured each year in America by unintended, adverse reactions to prescription drugs. Medications are themselves becoming a danger to public health, and since there are so many drugs out there "the potential for drug to drug interaction is far greater that we saw 10 or 15 years ago," said Dr. Jeannette Chirico-Post, the chief of staff at a hospital in Rhode Island.

As an experiment, the Institute for Safe Medication Practices, asked 307 hospital pharmacies to fill ten different drug orders that had killed patients in 1998. Some contained an overdose, while others called for two drugs that were deadly in combination. "The results were outrageous," he said. Only four of the 307 pharmacies detected all ten lethal orders, even those with computer systems designed to stop this sort of disaster. "Outside of working in the operating room," said Dr. Chirico-Post, "dispensing a drug, giving a drug to the patient, is one of the most dangerous things we do."

TRINIDAD

Reparations

The Maha Sabha of Trinidad and Tobago wants US$2 billion in reparations for injustices to Hindus during the colonial era. The former British colony's government did not legally recognize Hindu marriages, therefore making the children legally illegitimate and not entitled to the property of their parents. As a result, the property of many families went to the State. Also, promises of land or return tickets to India were not fulfilled. A similar claim is being made by the local African community for crimes suffered during slavery. The Hindu case may have significant legal merit as actual contracts of indentured servitude are involved.

## SKEPTICS

### Need a Million?

Like to finally make some cold cash from your hard-won psychic abilities? If you can manifest objects, heal the sick, or even just guess the suit and number of a hidden playing card, go straight to James Randi's web page at randi.org/. The famed magician and ruthless skeptic is prepared to pay cash, "more than us$1,100,000, to anyone who can actually demonstrate something supernatural." He asks that the power or ability be clearly defined in advance, as well as what would consitute success or failure. So far he's had 200 preliminary applicants, mostly healers or dousers, all of whom failed his test.

## FIJI

### New Hindu Prime Minister

The first Hindu Prime Minister of Fiji, Shri Mahendra Chaudhry, was sworn into office on May 19, 1999. Many feared a repeat of 1987, when racial animosity ran high between the Fijians of Indian origin, who make up 44% of the population, and

the indigenous Fijians who make up 50%. Twelve years ago an Indian-majority government was elected. Army Colonel Sitivini Rabuka was not happy with the government, fearing it meant Indian domination of the native Fijians. He led a coup to oust it and took over the government himself, first as military ruler and later as elected Prime Minister. What followed was a period of economic and racial chaos that caused such a negative international image that Fiji was removed from the Commonwealth. Later, after apologies, and amendments to their Constitution making it more multiracial and allowing for a Prime Minister of any race, Fiji returned to the Commonwealth. Voters in May of this year ousted Rabuka and brought Chaudhry into power. Tension is easing and people seem to be content, especially in light of the best sugar cane harvests in years. Chaudhry said that he will steer the country clear of

racial politics and focus on creating a multicultural nation.

NEPAL

Everest

Fifteen-year-old Arbin Timilsina came within 328 feet of being the youngest person to scale Mount Everest. He ended his ascent of the world's tallest mountain on May 5 due to pain in his eye from the high altitude. He stopped about 13 hours after begining his final approach to the summit. He was accompanied by two Nepali Sherpa climbers. The youngest person to climb Everest, also from Nepal, was Shabmu Tamang, 17, when he made it to the top, exactly 26 years before. One hundred thousand Nepalese school children contributed to Arbin's expenses in a nation-wide campaign. In other Everest news, the body of Englishman

George Mallory was found 2,000 feet below the summit. But there was no way to know if he had made it to the top during his 1924 attempt.

BELGIUM

Dioxin Disaster

An entire nation became vegetarian overnight in what is probably the largest poisoning scandal of recent times. Almost all meat and dairy products were yanked from supermarket shelves across Belgium on June 2. Dioxin, one of the most potent cancer-causing substances ever discovered, had entered the food chain through contaminated animal feed. Even one part per trillion is hazardous. The scandal broke when a television station reported that fat laced with dioxin was used to make poultry feed. Belgium's health and farm ministers resigned when

it became clear to the public they knew about the dioxin for a month before it became public. Then the government itself was ousted in the June 13 elections. All chickens and cows were killed on a thousand affected farms. The problem has yet to be solved, with European countries and the USA still banning imports from Belgium. Dioxin is a byproduct of manufacturing processes involving chlorine. Once it enters the environment, it becomes ever more concentrated as it moves up the food chain, and there is nothing that breaks it down.

USA

Blind Books

Four hours a day Damara Shanmugan of La Mesa, California, works diligently to print Hindu books in braille for the blind.

Currently she is working on Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's new 1,400 page book, Merging with Siva. It will be divided into 20 volumes. She is finished with the first four.

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AUSTRALIA

Face to Face

This conference has changed me to the extent my parents could only have dreamt of changing me," said one youth after the National Hindu Conference held on April 3 and 4. Over 700 youth attended the Sydney event, whose theme was "Hindu values in the home." In one session, parents and youth had separate discussions to voice their concerns and

opinions. They then met together. Simply put, the youth put all the blame on the parents for blindly following Hinduism, and the parents blamed the youth for not listening. Youth were frustrated with parents' doing puja worship at home without knowing the full significance or explaining anything to the youth. The parents complained that youth do not want to participate in family pujas and don't attend temple service as a family. Somehow all the discussion released some sort of blockage, with one youth concluding, "Finally, a religious conference that I could understand and relate to. After 20 years, I can now say that I am a true Hindu." A book on traditional observances, The Hindu Home, was released.

USA

# Christian Coalition Collapses

A much feared force in American politics has fallen upon hard times. The once powerful Christian Coalition, led by evangelist Pat Robertson, has lost its status as the conservative Christian voice of America. This is the same Pat Robertson who visited India and announced on his "700 Club" television show a few years ago that "Of all of India's problems, one stands out from the rest: idol worship, which has put a nation in bondage to spiritual forces that have deceived many for thousands of years." Members are leaving, debts are increasing and in June the Internal Revenue Service of America ruled them not entitled to tax-exempt status, as they were effectively functioning as a branch of the Republican Party. Prior to the slide beginning in 1996, the Coalition had markedly influenced American politics, especially at the local level where they

got conservative Christians elected to key posts such as school boards.

THE VEDAS
God's Word, Sages Voices

He lives as long as he lives. Then when he dies, then they carry him to the fire. His fire, in truth, becomes the fire; fuel the fuel; Smoke the smoke; flame, the flame; coals, the coals; sparks, the sparks. In this fire the Gods offer a person purusha. From this oblation the man arises, having the color of light.

SHUKLA YAJUR VEDA, BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD 6.2.14

As threads come out of the spider, as little sparks come out of the fire, So all the senses, all the worlds, all the gods, yea, all beings, Issue forth from the Self.

SHUKLA YAJUR VEDA, BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD 2.1.20

In heaven there is no fear at all. Thou, O Death, Art not there, nor in that place does the thought of growing old make one tremble. There, free from hunger and from thirst, and far from the reach of sorrow, all rejoice and are glad.

KRISHNA YAJUR VEDA, KATHA UPANISHAD 1.12

Without beginning art thou, beyond time, beyond space, thou art He from whom sprang the three worlds.

KRISHNA YAJUR VEDA, SHVETASVATARA UPANISHAD 4.4

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."