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Diaspora

PHYSICS

Real Slow Light

Danish Physicist Dr. Lene Vastergaard Hau and fellow scientists achieved the slowest-ever speed for light, a mere 38 mph. The team, working at the Rowland Institute for Science in Cambridge, Massachusetts, shot a laser through a Bose-Einstein condensate, a unique form of matter predicted in 1925 by Albert Einstein and Indian physicist Satyendra Nath Bose (born in Calcutta in 1894). Hau's group supercooled rubidium atoms to the near-record low temperature of 20 billionths of a degree above Absolute Zero (273.15 C--deep space is a hot 270 by comparison). The strange properties of the Bose-Einstein condensate may lead to new forms of ultra-fast computers, night vision glasses and ultra bright laser light projectors.

ENGLAND

Marriage by Arrangement

On January 25, 1999, 23-year-old Carla Germaine met Greg Cordell, 28, for the first time--moments prior to their wedding. This was not a scene out of ancient India, and while it was arranged by the Birmingham radio station BRMB, it was no stunt. Church of England leaders protested the arranged marriage, complaining in a letter to station director Julie Fair, that the project reduced a wedding to "a media event." But BRMB went about its task with all the meticulousness--not to

mention the methodology--of a doting Hindu father locating the perfect husband for his daughter. A panel of judges selected 12 finalists from over 200 volunteers. The finalists underwent in-depth interviews and psychological testing. Their family and friends were interviewed and--surely with advice from local Hindus--their astrological charts examined for compatibility. The judges concluded Greg and Carla were the best match. Fair defended the experiment, "Marriages should be based on common values and attitudes rather than short-lived attraction. This is a real attempt to look at all the elements that make a marriage work and apply them responsibly." The couple gets a free honeymoon in the Bahamas, and free apartment and car for a year.

USA

Utah Temple

In the midst of Mormon territory slowly manifests the new Sri Ganesha Temple of Utah. And its doing it with substantial monetary support from this conservative Christian sect headquartered in this western US state. For years 300 Hindu families have come to the home of Indra and Neelameggham to worship the image of Lord Ganesha destined for the temple. Once the group reaches 90% of their ^{us}\$450,000 goal, the Mormon Church, in its program to encourage multiculturalism, will add \$25,000. Augmenting normal donations is the sale of "Vandana," an excellent CD of Hindu devotional music sung by Vanita Shrivastava and Poonam Mathur, and a book and tape of chants.

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www.sriganesh.faithweb.com

MAURITIUS

Enter His Dream Temple

Ajay Bhushun Cahoolessur, a staunch Siva devotee, has built and opened the Shiv Shakti Mandir in the small Mauritian village of Bon Accueil, according to a report by Sunil P. Gopal. Shiv, as he is popularly known, is priest of the new temple. He relates, "I have always dreamt of building a temple which would be different from the existing ones, where religious teachings would be propagated and prayers made daily, where the shattered souls would find solace...."

Cahoolessur has performed many religious austerities, including sleeping on a bed of nails for five days at the Parmeswari Ananda Nilayam Temple, in the small village of Nouvelle France,

Mauritius. He ate and drank nothing. He also slept on a bed of seven sabers at the Kalimaye temple and was pulled 25 miles on a chariot, while he lay on 21 sabers, from Bon Accueil to Grand Bassin. Shiv comes from a very modest family and during his youth faced serious health problems that the doctors said were incurable. At 17, Shiv celebrated the sacred festival Mahasivaratri. "I witnessed the power of Lord Siva. I felt like being reborn. On that day, I made a vow to lead the life of a celibate. I also promised to myself that I would work tirelessly, with dedication and sincerity, for the spiritual upliftment of my brethren through regular penance and sacrifice. After I became religious, I was completely cured," Shiv told Hinduism Today.

INDIA

Tulsi Stamp

Acharya Tulsi (1914-1997) is honored on his 84th birthday anniversary with a special Indian commemorative three-rupee postage stamp, first day covers and special cancellation. Acharya Tulsi, born in a Jain family at Ladnun, in Rajasthan, India, was a famed social reformer. At eleven, he was initiated into asceticism and at twenty-two was ordained and appointed head of the Svetamber Terapanth order. Acharya was a philosopher, writer of more than 50 books, poet, singer, scholar, orator and advocate for women's rights.

By Prakash Mody, Canada

SINGAPORE

Buddhists Join Thai Pusam

According to Vincent Goh, pictured above, many Buddhists celebrate Thai Pusam, as Buddhism traces its roots to India and Hinduism. These three, Goh, Jason Yong and Teng Chee Seng, with freshly shaven heads, are about to perform kavadi, a penance offered to Lord Muruga. It consists of carrying a heavy decorated wooden arch (like a portable shrine) and often piercing the tongue and cheeks with small silver spears or hooks. The festival is celebrated yearly in January/February by hundreds of thousands of devotees--Hindu and non-Hindu alike--in Malaysia and Singapore on a grander scale even than in India. It was the first kavadi for Goh, 32, and Yong, 37, and the third for Teng, 27. Chinese, Malay and even white European Hindus are not an uncommon sight at Malaysia's huge Thai Pusam festival at Batu Caves.

NEW ZEALAND

Multicultural Festival

At the lakeside multi-cultural Festival in Takapuna, New Zealand, groups from Bangladesh, Ireland, Korea, the Philippines, Nepal, Goa and Samarkand (Uzbekistan) entertained the audience with national song and dance displays. In this outdoor festival, Vinoja Moorthy delighted the picnicking audience with traditional bharata natyam dances.

TRINIDAD

India's Prime Minister Visits

Thirty years of gestation, and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Cultural Cooperation was finally started February 2, 1999, with the prime ministers of India, and Trinidad and Tobago. The institute will be funded entirely by the Indian Government. It will promote Indian

culture, performing arts, language and cuisine. It will also organize exchange visits of scholars, intellectuals and performers. "The artists and scholars of our two countries need facilities and classes in areas like Indian music and dance," said the prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Thirteen countries have centers today, but another dozen countries with more than 100,000 Hindus still need one, including Singapore, Fiji, Netherlands and France.

TIBET

No Religion?

China has launched a three-year propaganda campaign aimed at stamping out religion in Tibet and ending support for the Dalai Lama, said the Tibet Information Network (www.tibetinfo.net/). Tibet television explained, "It is an

important measure to strengthen the struggle against separatists, to resolutely resist the Dalai clique's reactionary infiltration and to help peasants free themselves from the negative influence of religion." A party secretary in Tibet said, "We need to indoctrinate the peasant on the Marxist stand on religion."

BANGLADESH

Groundwater Poisoned

The largest poisoning in the world is going largely unnoticed in Bangladesh. More than half of the country's wells are contaminated with arsenic, which occurs naturally in sediments. Perhaps one-third of the country is exposed. Arsenic poisoning is undetectable in its

early stages and takes 8 to 14 years to become visible. The effects vary from skin pigmentation and development of warts and ulcers, to skin, liver and renal deficiencies, and eventually cancer. The World Bank has approved a ^{US}\$32.4 million loan to help the project that will provide alternative water supplies and emergency medical relief to people living in areas where arsenic-contamination rages. It will also give low-cost solutions to the problem with shallow wells, ponds with filters, handpumps, rainwater catch systems and more. Similar natural poisonings by toxins, such as lead, infect South India.

SOUTH INDIA

Priest Class

There are about 600,000 active priests in remote regions of Tamil Nadu with little or no institutional training. Vishwa Hindu Parishad is now helping tutor the pujaris, as they are known, in free 15-day residential camps. The first course to improve their skills was in 1990. Up to now more than 1,200 pujaris have attended. Local leading swamis have regularly visited to give their blessings to the participants.

SRI LANKA

Elephant Tails

Elephants are killed in Sri Lanka for their tail hairs due to an ancient legend that says it gives man the power of the animal. Nandana Atapattu, deputy director of the Wildlife Department, said he has seen more than 100 elephant carcasses in the past three years whose tails had been cut or the hair removed. A single strand of elephant hair could sell for up to 2,000 rupees (^{us} \$29).

THE VEDAS

God's Word, Sages' Voices

Brahman, Prajapati, Dhatir,
the worlds, the Vedas, the
seven sages and the fires,
prepare for me a blessed
path! May Indra be my
refuge, may Brahman be
my refuge, may all the
Gods be my refuge! May
the Gods united be my
refuge!

ATHARVA VEDA

19.9.12

I take refuge in the Word as
the Rig Veda, in the Mind as
the Yajur Veda, in the
Breath as the Sama Veda. I
rely on sight and on
hearing. In me is the power
of speech full of vigor. I
inhale and exhale deeply.

YAJUR VEDA 36.1

In Him exists neither action nor organ of action; no one is found His equal or superior to Him. His supreme power is revealed in manifold forms; inherent to his nature is the working of his strength and wisdom.

KRISHNA YAJUR VEDA,
SVETASHVATARA
UPANISHAD 6.8

The atman pervades all like

butter hidden in milk; He is
the source of
Self-knowledge and ascetic
fervor. This is the Brahman
teaching, the highest goal!
This is the Brahman
teaching, the highest goal!

KRISHNA YAJUR VEDA,
SVETASHVATARA
UPANISHAD 1.16

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."