Diaspora
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SINGAPORE

Lady Leads Temple Funding

"Since the goddess we are worshiping is a lady, we ladies also have a part to play," Mrs. Kalyani Ramasamy, 48, told a Straits Times reporter, explaining her work in fund raising for Singapore's new Sree Maha Mariamman Temple in Yishun. Her part went from proving to men that women can do it to captaincy of a nine men and five women committee that raised 3.2 million Singapore dollars in just three years. The men on the management committee--on which she was a founding member--"challenged me to raise funds from prayer events, and I did. Slowly, I won their confidence." Mr. S. Karuppiah, 59, says, "We have no problems with her at the helm. She has very good ideas, especially when it comes to raising funds."

MAURITIUS

Elderly Home on Sacred Soil

Meenatchee home will be a warm, idyllic refuge in the winter years for 48 poor men and women (eventually 96) who have no family. Mainly for Hindus, the home complex lies on the 13-acre grounds of the Sockalingum Meenatchee Ammen Temple in Port Louis. With a backdrop of chiseled volcanic mountains and its architecture lying along a green river, the home is designed for peaceful occupation. Spacious rooms house 12 people each. A dining hall, recreational/TV room and a large outdoor sitting area each contribute to a comfortable lifestyle. Wheelchair paths cross to the temple, which is being refitted for the disabled. Guest Hindu spiritual teachers will provide instruction and inspiration to the residents. A building committee of five men, coordinated by Dr. C.M. Pillay, raised US$100,000 for the project.

BANGLADESH

Mutt's Cosmic Gita Push

Serving up the Bhagavad Gita's lofty message to the estimated one million

Hindus visiting a famous shrine of Sitakunda on a hill in southeastern Bangladesh is Swami Tapanananda Giri Maharaj's mindful mission. The elderly swami, still robust in health and speech, is head of the Sankara Mutt (monastery), built near the holy site. Pilgrims who sojourn at the mutt can listen to "the perpetual recitation of the Gita" and receive food and medical supplies. Its grounds extend for many acres, much of it wild and untouched. There is now a dairy farm, vegetable gardens and orphanage. Swami Tapanananda is seeking international architectural help to develop "the Sankar Mutt and Mission, which will take over the social activities." The swami told HT correspondent Shyamal Chandra Debnath, "The mutt works for integrated yoga for mankind, revealing cosmic consciousness." The mutt presently has 13 branches in Bangladesh and abroad. Swami continues to draw new young renunciates onto the path of God Realizaton and service, "The Mutt will fly its flag forever. We welcome disciples who have an aim to sacrifice their lives for mankind."

EDUCATION

India Studies at Stony, US

In 1995, 700 students at Stony Brook State University of New York petitioned for more Indian studies. In 1996 the faculty and Indian community raised over $100,000 for a center which opened in April 1997 under the leadership of Prof. S. N. Sridhar, Director of the Center. University president Shirley Strum Kenny called it an "extraordinary" synergy of student activism, faculty dedication and community support. In cash-barren university budget land, SUNY administrators were delighted and responded, providing teaching faculty and a fully equiped facility on the fifth floor of the library. Courses include Indian Civilization, Religions, Languages, Social Sciences and more. Prof. Kamal Sridhar says, "Courses are full, including half non-Indians."

UNITED NATIONS

Multi-Faiths Bless UN Head

A united faith rite called a "Solemn Interfaith Service of Commitment to the Work of the United Nations" welcomed the new United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan in April. Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Jewish, Christian, Jain, Sikh and Native American clergy offering prayers at St. Bartholomew's Church in New York. The event opened with the empowering conch shell call of 107-year-old Swami Bua. Kofi Annan was given a peace award and said, "As Secretary-General, I look to religious leaders for help and inspiration in my work, to help me not lose sight of our long-term goals of

peace, development, justice and human rights."

HISTORY

True Thomas?

The Christian Legend of Saint Thomas carrying Christianity to India's southwestern shores and dying there a martyr is being downsized and rewritten in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Ishwar Sharan, author of The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple, successfully demonstrated to the editors of the illustrious reference that the St. Thomas-in-India legend is highly suspect. Sharan pointed out that the legend was created by three Christian scholars with no historical evidence, relying solely on "Thomas romances." Sharan cited another Christian researcher--Bishop Stephen Neill--as a prime debunker of the apocryphal theory. Agreeing to a future revision, an EB representative stated in a letter to Sharan that the Britannica's entry on St. Thomas did indeed "place too much emphasis on the unlikely scenario of his traveling to, and being martyred in India."

USA

China's Rama

The 14th International Ramayana Conference, May 23-25, was held in Houston in the rodeo state of Texas, USA. Scholars from five continents participated. Star scholar Professor Jin Ding Han of China has translated Tulsidas' Ramachritmanas into Chinese. Braiding Indian and Chinese ethicists, Jin compared Confucian teachings to the Ramayana. Many non-Hindu countries of South East Asia boast a strong tradition of Ramayana scholarship.

THE VEDAS

God's Word, Sages' Voices

There are five great sacrifices, namely, the great ritual services: the sacrifice to all beings, sacrifice to men, sacrifice to the ancestors, sacrifice to the Gods, sacrifice to Brahman.
Shukla Yajur Veda, Shatapata BRahmana 11.5.6.1

Nonviolence is all he offerings. Renunciation is the priestly honorarium. The

final purification is death. Thus all the Divinities are established in this body.
Krishna Yajur Veda, Prana Upanishad 46-8

All that God does shall win our praise. We magnify His name with hymns, seeking boons from the Mighty.
Rig Veda 1.42.10

The rites of oblation, O lovers of truth, which the sages divined from the sacred verses, were variously expounded in the threefold Veda. Perform them with constant care. This is your path to the world of holy action.
Atharva Veda, MandUkya upanishad 1.2.1.

Pursuit of the duties of the stage of life to which each one belongs--that, verily, is the rule! Others are like branches of a stem. With this, one tends upwards; otherwise, downwards.
Krishna Yajur Veda, Maitreya Upanishad 4.3

Keen of mind and keen of sight, free from sickness, free from sin, rich in children, may we see you rise as a friend, O Sun, till a long life's end!
Rig Veda 10.37.7

He is the never-created creator of all: He knows all. He is pure consciousness, the creator of time, all-powerful, all-knowing. He is the Lord of the soul and of nature and of the three conditions of nature. From Him comes the transmigration of life and liberation, bondage in time and freedom in eternity.
Krishna Yajur Veda, Svetasvatara Upanishad 6.16

Verses are drawn from various sources. Those taken from The Vedic Experience by Prof. Raimon Panikkar are available at
www.HinduismToday.kauai.hi.us/ ... /Dir-New.html#VedExp.html