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Australia

Shots Fired into Temple

Violence at Australia's oldest temple, the Sri Mandir Temple, in Auburn, Australia (near Sydney) was raised to a shocking level when eight rounds were fired on the temple at night on March 19, 2011. The temple's CCTV cameras captured images of two men on foot in balaclavas firing the shots.

The temple's priest, Jatinkumar Bhatt, who lives on the site, said he had been harassed by youths in the past but he was scared by the shooting. "I have a family as well, three kids and my wife," he said. "Throwing eggs and bottles at the temple is an ongoing process but these bullets really put us in a panic."

The president of the Council of Indian Australians, Yadu Singh, said the shooting was a sign that attacks on the temple were becoming more serious. There were no worshippers in the building at the time of the shooting--unlike an incident last November when two windows were smashed by people armed with metal bars. "The bottom line is that something needs to be done, because it is not a one-off event," Singh said. "We have a right to exist. We have a right to practice our religion."

The temple was established in 1977. In 2001, a new building was erected with a contemporary design. The temple's main Deities are Radha Krishna. Other Deities include Ganesha, Lord Ram, Sita and Laxman, Hanumanji, Sri Nathji, Mahavir Swami, Shirdi Sai Baba, Jhulelal Bhagwan, Lord Shiva, Shankar/Parvati Parivaar, Amba Mata and the Navagrahas.

See www.srimandir.org

India/The World

Hot Trend: Past Life Regression

Modern hypnotism began in the early 1800s and drew in part on the Hindu teachings on breath control and concentration. Age regression is one of its forms, used in theory to uncover and release early life experiences that may be the underlying cause of present day mental and even physical ills.

Hypnotic implant of suggestions is widely accepted, but age regression remains highly controversial. If the hypnotherapist takes you back to your birth and then asks, "Where were you before you were born?" are the details revealed from an actual past life or a fantasy of the incredibly creative dream power of the human mind released from the fetters of distraction? Whatever you may believe, there is plenty of clinical evidence that it works. People are being healed. Past life regression has become a huge growth industry. With a Hindu majority population that believes in reincarnation, India now has over 150 practitioners.

Whether it's in the privacy of a conservative psychologist's office, on stage on Oprah or India's hot reality show "Secrets of Previous Lives" or at a Past Life Regression Party with your friends, there are hundreds of hypnotists ready to help you release the memories at the root of your phobias. Debate over the practice is hot, which may be a good thing. Scientific auditing would root out fraud but also verify the facts in many cases and push the truth of reincarnation even farther forward in global awareness.

Cambodia

War Threatens Siva Temple

Cambodia's famed Preah Vihear Siva temple is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Sadly, one of its wings collapsed under Thai military bombardment in February. The temple lies right on the border between Thailand and Cambodia. A 1962 international court ruled that the temple belonged to Cambodia, based on early French maps. But Thailand claims the area surrounding the temple. A Khmer Rouge refuge for three decades, the temple was opened after they surrendered, only to find itself at the center of another military skirmish early this year. Tensions still run high and the fighting continues, as everyone prays for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Tamil Nadu

Stainless Steel Stitching Saves Temple

The gopuram of Tamil Nadu's famed 1,250-year-old Siva temple, Kailasanathar, was on the verge of collapse. Rural Education and Conservation of Heritage (REACH Foundation) got involved. With three-foot wide cracks, replacement of stones would have been challenging and perhaps even dangerous. REACH recruited Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IIT-M) a premier engineering institute, for advice. IIT's team analyzed the structure and deemed the cracks to be "non-progressive." Instead of manipulating the structure, the cracks were "stitched like cloth." Corrosion resistant high-chromium content stainless steel rods are placed at intervals spanning the cracks. They are anchored with epoxy, immobilizing both sides of the crack. which is then filled. Twenty locations were "sewn" together. See REACH's site: conserveheritage.org

United Arab Emirates

Faith Runs Deep in Dubai

Just three days away from India by ship, Dubai has a long history as a trading gateway between India and the Persian Gulf. Ships coming through the Strait of Hormuz find a calm, protected port at Dubai. As far back as the first millennium bce, Dubai's pearls were renowned all the way to China. Hindu gold and textile merchants thrived in ancient UAE. Since the discovery of oil, UAE has become one of West Asia's most developed nations. The 1963 population of 93,000 grew to 5.7 million by 2009. Nearly two million are Indian nationals, including 33,000 millionaires and legions of workers, who collectively send 5 billion US dollars a year back to India.

A relatively liberal Muslim state, UAE is tolerant of other faiths. You may practice Hinduism freely at home. But there is only one Hindu temple in the whole country, Dubai's Shiva/Krishna Mandir (built in 1958), to serve the Hindu population, estimated to be around 700,000. If your living space is a labor camp bunk, you won't have your own private shrine. To get blessings and a spiritual boost, you must stand in line for hours with ten thousand other faithful for a moment of darshan to make your weekly hook-up with the Divine.

Transitions

Beloved Artist Pai Passes On

When Anant Pai launched the Amar Chitra Katha series in 1967, it was an instant hit. He was a visionary who helped millions of children delve into the fascinating treasure trove of Indian sacred stories, mythology, history and legends through

comics. The shy but affectionate man became a legend in his own lifetime. He signed handwritten letters to his young fans as "Uncle Pai." He died on February 25, 2011, at the age of 81 after a massive heart attack.

The Amar Chitra Katha series left an indelible mark on Indian popular culture. Uncle Pai started the series after a stint with The Times of India. He was motivated by a TV quiz in which contestants rattled off answers related to Greek myths but didn't know the name of Rama's mother. Most publishers were skeptical, but Pai persisted and the series finally began with the launch of the first title, "Krishna." He lent it the auspicious Indian touch by titling it number 11.

The early years were tough--there are anecdotes of Pai personally setting up display racks in restaurants. But today, Amar Chitra Katha sells about three million comic books a year in more than 20 languages, and has sold over 100 million copies since its inception. Pai is survived by his wife Lalitha. The couple did not have any children, though Pai was adored by millions of young readers. See:

www.amarchitrakatha.com

excerpted from an article in The Times of India

Education

Shankara Math's New School

One of few Hindu schools of its kind, Kanchi-puram's new Sri Kanchi Maha-swami Vidya Mandir at Rajakilpakkam, outside Chennai, offers academic as well as religious studies. V. Shankar, a Mumbai-based businessman who initiated the project, explains, "Students will be taught Vedas and Puranas every morning and evening, academic studies during the day and finish their school work before going to bed." Only Brahmin boys are accepted into the residential patashala, but girls may enroll for the academic studies program. Studies will be overseen by Kanchipuram's Shankara Math in affiliation with the Central Board of Secondary Education. The Kanchi Shankaracharya, Sri Jayendra Saraswati, inaugurated the new school on March 16, 2011. See:

www.srikanchimahaswamividyamandir.org

Briefly

India's traditional knowledge Library (TKDL) database will soon be online to pull the plug on brand and copyright claims of yoga teachers outside of India. Once the database is launched, patent offices across the world will have a reference point to check for asanas claimed by a yoga guru. Dr. V. P. Gupta, creator of TKDL, notes by way of example, "All the 26 Bikram's Hot Yoga sequences have been mentioned in Indian yoga books written thousands of years ago."

While there have been claims that conversions have expanded the Christian population in Nepal to two million, the number is likely closer to one million. But the concern is not all hype. There has been an proliferation of evangelical and Pentecostal churches, which are now found in all 75 districts of the country. Researchers have identified 2,500 Christian places of worship in Nepal.

ENVIRONMENTALISTS IN MUMBAI are jumping with joy after the Bombay High Court ruled that Deities created for immersion must be made of environment-friendly materials, such as soil, paper and natural colors. Plaster of Paris components and chemical colors, which are dangerous pollutants of wells, rivers and the sea, are not allowed.

Tirupati temple banked 2,590 pounds of gold in February, 2011 in exchange for government-issued, interest-bearing gold certificates. Last year it deposited 2,370 pounds of gold.