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Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः ॐ May Everybody Be Happy

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NEWS LETTER

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Dear Friends,

The Hindu Council of Australia had its Annual General meeting on 29th January 2007. It is heartening to note that its activities are increasing. We are very pleased to welcome the following two new member organisations:

- Hindu Society of Victoria, 52 Boundary Road, Carrum Downs, Vic 3201
- Shiva School of Meditation, 27 Tower Road, Mt Eliza, Vic 3930

This year again we participated with the Holi Sabha of Australia to celebrate the Holi Mela on 4th March at the Fairfield Show Ground.

We continue to take part in various multi-faith activities and are constantly being approached by various other organisations seeking Hindu view on various issues affecting multi-cultural, multi-faith Australian society.

Australians Donate Inc. is the peak national body for organ and tissue donations. We have issued a statement to support their activities to encourage all Australians to register for organ donation. It is a noble cause. It helps us to help and serve fellow human beings even after our death.

I look forward to your continued support. Please circulate this Newsletter amongst your interested friends.

Regards,

Dr A. Balasubramaniam

Chairman

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Hindu Youth Council of Australia

HYCA has been having regular meetings in the last quarter to share ideas. To date HYCA has created a community events calendar which highlights all the major events of all the existing

Indian organization in Sydney for the year 2007. HYCA has created an email address hycasydney@gmail.com for contact purposes.

HYCA has also come up with two possible community projects to be implemented. The projects are "Indian Student Support Network" and "Supporting Parents To Raise Indian Children In A Multicultural Australia". HYCA recently submitted the 2007-2008 Community Development Grants Program - Expression of interest to the Community Relations Commission outlining their request for grant to implement the project "Supporting Parents To Raise Indian Children In A Multicultural Australia"

At this stage HYCA would allocate more resources towards community based projects, though they would also collaborate with other organizations in their social events. There will be a discussion on a regular basis to take into account the new experiences and ideas.

Hindu Women's Council executive is pleased to inform that its application for the membership of the Australian Women's Coalition Inc. has been accepted. It will give the Hindu Women's Council a national recognition and help in their activities to further the cause of women in Australia.

Multi-faith representation



Mr Vijai Singhal at the Marrickville Council organised multi-faith get together.

Mr Vijai Singhal attended the multi-faith meeting organised by the Marrickville Council, where a number of community projects involving members of different faiths were discussed.

He also attended the interfaith meeting organised by the World Conference of Religions for Peace on 28 March at the NSW Parliament House.

Holi, The Festival of Colours

In a joint celebration of Holi and the Year of the Pig, Indians and Chinese in Sydney got together in a concert featuring classical Indian dances and Chinese traditional music inspired by the symbolism of the lotus and the phoenix. Kuchipudi dancer Vimala Sarma and the Sydney Sizhu Ensemble led by Tony Wheeler and featuring vocalist Chen Hong Yu and Zhao Ying Chun on the Erhu performed at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music on Saturday March 3, 2007.

The event was organised by the City of Sydney to celebrate the Indian festival of colours, Holi, and the Chinese New Year. The show was titled Lotus and Phoenix. The lotus is a symbol of beauty, perfection and spiritual purity in Buddhist and Hindu traditions and the phoenix is a symbol of good fortune and happiness in Chinese culture.

Vimala also performed the Lakshmi Pravesham, a dance celebrating goddess Lakshmi and prosperity. She ended with a piece invoking Guanyin, the Chinese goddess of mercy and a Bodhisattva.

Holi was also widely celebrated around the world. People from different faiths took part in the colourful Holi festival at a Krishna temple in Lahore amid beating of drums, dancing and dazzling lights. Christians, Muslims and Sikhs celebrated the event along with Hindus at the temple packed with Holi enthusiasts.

American children joined their Indian American friends in playing with colours at a New Jersey school. The school celebrated Holi for the first time. They found it both creative and fun-filled, playing with colours and face painting. Holi Sabha of Australia successfully celebrated the Holi Mela jointly with Hindu Council and other Hindu organisations on 4th March 2007 at the Fairfield Show Ground, in Sydney.

Sri Rama Navami Festival

This year, Sri Venkateswara Temple (SVT) in Sydney celebrated Sri Rama Navami as a larger festival, with dances/dramas from the

great epic Ramayana, Ram Bhajans, chantings and children's activities on Sunday 1st April, 2007 at SVT, Helensburgh.

The program began with the divine chanting of Vishnu Sahasranama, followed by Hanuman Chalisa. There was a wonderful treat from professional dancers of Sydney with dance and drama depicting the life of Sri Rama from epic Ramayana, in both Bharata Natyam and North Indian (Hindi) styles. Children came dressed as characters from Ramayana, a Hanuman, a Garuda, Sita, Rama or Lakshman.

Participants then settle down to devotional singing of North Indian bhajans (Hindi) and Carnatic styles led by top singers from the community. Families participated in Sita Kalyanam, the divine wedding of Sita and Sri Rama in a traditional ceremony conducted by Priests of the temple followed by archanas and prasadam. The community kitchen served variety of foods throughout the day.

NZ Hindu Conference

The 1st New Zealand Hindu Conference, a historic event for the Hindu community in New Zealand, will be held at the Hindu Heritage Centre, Mangere East, Auckland on 12 and 13 May 2007. Hindu Heritage Centre (HHC) is 8.5 acres of land and buildings (previously Te Wananga O Aotearoa campus) and is now run by Hindu Heritage Charitable Trust. The mission of HHC are to deliver services of education, self development, cultural development, sports development, and care for the elderly, youth and children; and to bring all like-minded organisations and institutions in New Zealand together to promote universal human value and co-existence.

The 1st NZ Hindu conference is not a religious or philosophical conference but a community conference. The number of delegates to the conference is limited to a maximum of 150. The organizers are overwhelmed by the response they have received so far. There will be participation from various government agencies, professionals, university staff, business leaders, Maori elders, and community and youth leaders.

The theme of the 1st New Zealand Hindu Conference is "The contribution of Hindu community to the national life of New Zealand". It will cover the economic, health, environmental, social and cultural aspects. This conference provides a platform for all the Hindu organisations/ temples/ like-minded groups to showcase their contributions to the New Zealand society. This will be in the form of

exhibitions on 'Contributions of Hindus to New Zealand society' and also 'Contributions of Hindus to the World of Science'. There are 6 paper presentation sessions and 3 workshops. The workshops will focus on issues which are common to all Hindu organisations, and also to the wider community, such as health and wellbeing, education and culture, social beliefs and family.

Australian Students Get Taste of Hinduism

Sydney, March 17, 2007: Hinduism, one of the oldest religions of the world, is now a subject of study at the University of Sydney. Julian Droogan, a lecturer with the department of studies in religion, will take a group of his students for a tour of the local Sri Venkateswara temple to introduce them to the vibrant, dynamic and colorful world of Hinduism. The tour will help them to understand the significance of art, architecture and symbols in the Hindu religion and culture, major Gods, their incarnations and the use of gestures and facial expressions, and the functions of the temple, according to Indian Link, an ethnic magazine. To understand how Indian culture and Hinduism are becoming significant in 21st century Australia, Droogan and his students will also hold a discussion with Brahmin pundits at the temple.

"With more travel to India, exposure to people of Indian heritage living here in Australia and to the Indian media, many Australians would now like to move beyond some of the known stereotypes and cliché of Hindu India (colourful 'fakirs,' caste and spiritual yogis) and attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the varied and complex cultures of Hindu and non-Hindu India," said Droogan. "In Europe, Christianity has become irrelevant because it is a fixed system, instead the West has embraced the philosophy of more - more cars, more houses, more holidays - but India has no desire to succumb to the European ways."

Japan's Hindu Linkages Still Alive

NEW DELHI, INDIA, February 17, 2007: Apart from the widely known fact that Buddhism in Japan has its origin in India, not many probably know that so many Hindu Deities surround the life of a Japanese. Speaking at a lecture titled "Hindu Gods and Goddesses rooted to Japan", Lokesh Chandra, the director of International Academy of Indian Culture, highlighted how deeply Indian religion and culture has influenced Japanese culture and tradition over the past centuries. He said that many temples across Japan are full of Hindu Deities. Chandra said Japanese couples who desire to have a beautiful daughter pray to Goddess

Saraswati even to this day. Saraswati is also believed as the patroness of writers and painters. "In ancient times, Japanese generals prayed to Saraswati to be victorious in war," Chandra told the gathering which was also attended by the Japanese Ambassador to India Yasukuni Enoki and his wife. Year 2007 is being celebrated as Japan-India Friendship Year to commemorate the 50th year of the cultural agreement between the two countries. According to Chandra, who has travelled to Japan many times to study the country's culture and tradition, Saraswati is also worshipped as the "Goddesses of the kitchen."

There is a suburban district in Tokyo named Kichijo, which traces its roots to "Lakshmi," the Hindu Goddess of Wealth. Lakshmi was propagated to China along with Buddhism in the ancient time, to be known as Kichijo in its Chinese form and then reached Japan as a Buddhist Goddess. Chandra also spoke extensively about how Sanskrit language has influenced traditional Japanese calligraphy. The Indian text was introduced into Japanese society many centuries ago. Japanese monks had to study Sanskrit in order to master Buddhism from original Indian scriptures and textbooks. Lord Ganesha in Japan symbolizes the joy of life that arises from the power rooted in the virtues of wisdom and compassion. There are roughly 100 temples dedicated to Ganesha in Japan, Chandra added. An 11th century Ganesha temple is the oldest among them. Together with Hindu Gods and Goddess, ancient Japanese society was also introduced to Indian dance forms and musical instruments. One can also see the Indian epic Ramayana in the traditional Japanese dance forms of Bugaku and Gigaku.

A special train connecting Buddhist circuit

New Delhi, March. 25 (PTI): Religious tourism in the country is set to get a boost with the introduction of a special train that connects several prominent Buddhist pilgrim centres in India and Lumbini in Nepal. Christened 'Mahaparinirvana Special', the train will be flagged off by Railway Minister Lalu Prasad on March 28 at the Safdarjung railway station here.

The train is aimed at promoting Buddhist tourism in the country and targets tourists from South East Asian nations like Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Sri Lanka. The train would cover religious centres like Bodhi Gaya, Nalanda, Rajgir, Varanasi, Shravasti besides Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri in a week. The fully air-conditioned train offers a complete package with facilities like plush

accommodation, food in star hotels and road travel by luxury buses, the officials said. Besides, the foreign tourists would also be helped in getting visa.

The train also offers attractive fare structure. From October to March the fare is USD 150 per day per passenger in first AC, USD 105 in second AC and USD 88 in AC three-tier. The fare is relatively cheaper during April-September. It is USD 140 per day per passenger in first AC, USD 98 in second AC and USD 80 in AC three-tier.

Thousands of Hindus vow to end caste divide

A campaign to end centuries of discrimination against 'low-caste' Hindus (Dalits) was launched by well-known Hindu spiritual teacher Sri Sri Ravi Shankar at a conference held earlier this month in Delhi, India.

Approximately 4,000 people ranging from leaders of social groups, Hindu holy men, Dalit Hindus and many others, gathered at an open air theatre in Pragati Maidan where they joined hands to launch this campaign.

An action plan was revealed consisting of providing spiritual and religious education to Dalit children as well as educating the general public. A statement quoted Ravi Shankar as saying: "Historically Dalits were on par with other Hindus. We need to make the present generation aware of this truth. The only solution to the problem of social discrimination is to educate people and make them realise that caste by birth is not sanctioned by religion.

"The current generation of upper castes is not exposed to the enormous contribution of the Dalits to Hindu religious literature. The conference will go a long way in clearing many misunderstandings between the communities."

The Guru explained that some great Indian minds belonged to such groups. "The authors of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Maharishis Valmiki and Vyas respectively, were Dalits," he said.

Another point on the action plan discussed an immediate end to the ban on the entry of Dalits into Hindu temples, a barbaric practice which is prevalent in some parts of India.

Regretting that despite several legislations, caste discrimination still prevails in rural India, he said that only a change of heart and mind

and a better understanding among communities can bring about social equality.

Ram Nagina Singh, President of the Akil Bharitya Bhumihar Samaj applauded the fact that "for the last ten years, the head priest of the second largest temple in India in Bihar, the Hanuman Mandir, has been a Dalit. It is ironic that a country, which inspired freedom struggles around the world, still shuns its own people in the name of caste."

"The fight to end social discrimination has begun and we will not quit until the people are united," Ravi Shankar promised.

You Call Yourself a Progressive, But You Still Eat Meat?

March 15, 2007: Eating a plant-based diet is an easy, cheap way to end animal cruelty and clean up the environment. Why, then, are so many progressives still clinging to their chicken nuggets? The report released this week by the world's leading climate scientists made no bones about it: Global warming is happening in a big way and it is very likely manmade. The U.N. report that came out soon after made a critical point: "The livestock sector emerges as one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global." And yet, so many environmentalists continue to eat meat. Why?

Being part of the solution can be a whole lot simpler - and cheaper - than going out and buying a new hybrid. We can make a huge difference in the environment simply by eating a plant-based diet instead of an animal-based one. Factory farming pollutes our air and water, reduces the rainforests, and goes a long way to create global warming. Yet for some environmentalists, the idea of giving up those chicken nuggets is still hard to swallow.

The author, in this long article, responds to a number of arguments one usually hears against vegetarianism. He writes, "We are a nation of animal lovers, and we all cringe in horror when we hear about cases like a dog being burned alive or tossed into freeway traffic. But chickens and pigs and other animals also deserve our compassion. They are all smart animals who feel pain and fear, yet they are treated just horribly, and sadly. There are no laws to protect them.

Newsletter compiled by Anusha Mahalingam