■ *JA Wijayasinha*
*Special to The Nation*

**F**INALLY, COMPUTERS get religion. And with collaborators across Southeast Asia, an Indian technical wizard is mounting "Magic Strings", a multimedia show in which the Hindu goddess of music, Sarawasti, will convey a message of universal cultural and spiritual understanding.

Meet Ranjit Makkuni, 46. He's a sitar player and president of the Sacred World Foundation.

He's also the man who, while studying at the University of California, Los Angeles, teamed with fellow microchippers from Xerox to bring computer-aided design to the personal computer.

"Since people spend so much time interacting with the dull computer, we're trying to create a richer experience so that modern society still has culture in its life," he says.

"By putting culture back onto your desktop, you get to interact with beautiful objects, and that helps you remember your inner God."

Ranjit has produced enthralling digital shows on the Tibetan Thangka Buddhist paintings and Gandhi's teachings. "The Crossings" is an intensive multimedia history of the Ganges River and the ancient city of Banaras.

All have been displayed at leading



**HI-TECH AMBITIONS:** *Computer designer Ranjit Makkuni hopes to bring more compassion and kindness to society through his art. He's seen here with Thai artist Ittiphon Phatarachon.*

museums and won top international awards for promoting culture, peace and environmental protection.

For "Magic Strings" – forecast for completion in 2008 – Thai artist Ittiphon Phatarachon is helping out with a portrayal of Sarawasti as she wings from India to Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Bali in Indonesia.

"In Thailand we're looking at the notion of the *kinnaree*, the goddess bird who dances in heaven and connects to humans through music via the *chakras* of the body," Ranjit says.

"Because strings symbolise the vibration of the whole universe, and not just

music, you see the world as a vibration and understands how people can connect in harmony."

"The Electronic Sketchbook" of Tibetan Thangka paintings displays the original Buddhist works using multimedia. It explains in a series of mouse clicks the images of the meditating Buddha.

"The Buddha is an important cultural and spiritual learning tool because he teaches us the use of balance in controlling the mind, which is important for peace and harmony in life," says Ranjit.

"The Crossing" is currently on view at the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria, and is coming to Thailand's National Gallery from December 4 to 30. Showings are also slated for Chiang Mai, Cambodia, Laos, Singapore and Indonesia.

The project connects viewers to the living culture and beliefs that culminate in huge gatherings on the

Ganges in Banaras.

" 'The Crossing' explains how the celestial water, the Ganges, is the source of purification and is the medium of 'crossing' over between life and death, which is not feared," says Ranjit.

"It's important to keep people close to their culture as well as keeping nature alive, because without these spiritual supports, we in the material world are further away from God and our inner selves.

"After all, the world is finite – there *is* an ending," he says, "so let's create another planet by conserving our resources and maintaining important values that will encourage future generations to cultivate good qualities like forgiveness, compassion and tenderness with wisdom."

*For more information on Ranjit Makkuni's work, visit SacredWorld. com and CrossingProject.net.*