Diaspora
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Diaspora

CANADA

Prayer-free Politics

The custom of opening local city council meetings with the Lord's Prayer has effectively ended in Ontario, with the province's top court ruling that the practice violates religious freedom," reported the Toronto Star on September 25, 1999. This injunction, issued by the Ontario Court of Appeals, put a stop to a 100-year-old ritual of starting council meetings with Christian prayer. Justice Kathryn Feldman commented, "Just as children are entitled to attend public schools and be free from coercion or pressure to conform to religious practices of the majority, so everyone is entitled to attend public council meetings and enjoy the same freedom." Trinidad took note of this ruling and hopes to implement a similar law..

INDIA

Yes, Comrade Manager

Atheist marxists have won a legal battle over Hindu believers for administering some of the richest temples in Kerala. The Kerala high court dismissed a petition filed by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Kerala Temple Protection Council seeking to disallow irreligious politicians and government ministers from being on temple management boards. VHP leaders say they approached the court for "religious justice" because some of the biggest and richest places of worship, like Guruvayur and Sabarimalai, have been systematically

"mismanaged and misused by atheist politicians from Communist parties." "It is an insult to Hinduism that temples are managed by ministers and politicians who hate God and temple worship," VHP general secretary R. Ravindran said. Earlier last year the government amended a temple act by doing away with an age-old rule that required a signed belief-in-God declaration from board members. The VHP and other Hindu groups feel that the amendment was politically motivated as it ensures the ruling government fills vacancies in rich temple bodies with its own men.

THAILAND

Land Mine Injures Elephant

Motala was taking a break from her logging work near the Thai-Myanmar border one day in late August when she stepped on a land mine and severely injured her front left foot. Using enough anesthetics to knock out 70 humans, five surgeons and many helpers worked for three hours in tricky surgery to save the elephant. Some feared that the heavy doses of anesthetics would kill the 38-year-old tusker, whose health had already been jeopardized by the amphetamines her owner had given her to make her work faster. Before the operation, the medical team gave her a 50-50 chance of living. Now she is walking on three legs and in good spirits, according to her vets. Thais, who revere elephants as their national symbol, donated US$156,000 to help pay for Motala's surgery. A US company has offered to make her an artificial foot. But the trouble is not over. On October 13, 1999, disaster struck again. Two more elephants stepped on land mines along Thailand's border with Myanmar, fast becoming one of the world's most dangerous areas for the pachyderms. The new victims include a two-year-old male, Phlai Um-boon, and a 40-year-old female, Phang Pangkalu.

HIMALAYAS

High-Altitude Janitors

Every year thousands of daring climbers push their bodies and high-tech equipment up the tallest peak in the world, Mt. Everest. But the five out of six who return with their bodies (i.e., alive) leave their equipment behind--up to 15,000 pounds per expedition. The garbage includes old tents, ropes, oxygen bottles, cooking gear and glass. Some groups, such as the Sagarmatha Environmental Expedition (SEE), are not only bringing down debris (17,000 pounds since 1994), but also starting self-perpetuating programs that keep junk from accumulating. "Traditionally the sherpas carry the supplies and equipment up, then come back down empty handed," says Criss Naumann, who has coordinated the SEE effort at Everest base camp. "We said, 'We'll pay you to bring it back down.'" This has become so popular with the sherpas, that it may soon become an expected income, allowing local economic forces to keep the mountain clean.

SPACE

Somethings Out There

English astronomer DrJohn Murray, of Britain's

Open University, may have discovered a bizarre planet orbiting the Sun 1,000 times farther away than Pluto. With a perhaps six-million year orbit, it could figure in the great spans of time called yugas in Hindu astrology. Scientists think the planet may have been born elsewhere, as it is 3 billion billion miles out and orbiting in the wrong direction, counter to all the rest of the planets. For several years, Murray has been studying the peculiar motions of comets which are thought to come from a distant region of the solar system called the Oort Cloud. By analyzing the orbits of 13 comets, Murray detected the tell-tale signs of a single massive object that deflected all of them into their current orbits. "Although I have only analyzed 13 comets in detail," he told BBC News Online, "the effect is pretty conclusive." He has calculated the planet, several times larger than Jupiter, now lies in the constellation of Delphinus the Dolphin.

TELEVISION

Lakshmi on TV

The controversial goddess t-shirt [July, 1999] has shown up in a very unusual place--Warner Brother's hot new television series "Roswell."

Actress Majandra Delfino appears wearing not only the Lakshmi t-shirt, but a tulsi-bead choker as well. The show is about three teenage aliens who are discovered by their human friends.

USA

Hindu Cover Shot

India's changing culture made the cover of National Geographic's August, 1999, issue. The striking contrast of styles between mother Nakshatra Reddy and daughter Meghana headlined their take on "Global Culture"--the international merging of styles, fashion and attitudes across the world. Meghana's PVC catsuit, they explain, is "of her own design."

SINGAPORE

Stamping Out Disharmony

Three stamps were released by Singapore's post office on January 15, 1999, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the small nation's Inter-Religious Organization. The stamps are intended to further the goal of inter-religious harmony in the 3.9 million strong nation. The stamp's release came just in time for the January

16 and 17 World Religion Day, celebrated in over 80 countries. Hinduism is at the top of the nine constituent religions of the organization presented in order of founding. Singapore has worked hard to nurture harmony amongst its many peoples and faiths.

EUROPE

Catholic Desperation

On the eve of the Pope's visit to India, Catholic bishops from around the world gathered at a three week Vatican synod October 1, the first since 1991, to discuss a new evangelism campaign in Europe. The agenda called for the bishops to discuss "the progressive and radical de-Christianization and the paganization of Europe." In the first week, the need to retain and retrieve rapidly lapsing Catholics resulted in a suggestion by one bishop to enlist Catholic missionaries in Asia to come and help in Europe. The proposal reveals the depth of Church problems, as membership on the continent has slipped to 300 million out of 800 million inhabitants. Unused churches are being sold. It is ironic that the controversial visit of Pope John Paul II to India--to improve the fortunes of Catholicism

there--comes on the heals of a conference seeking to salvage the faith in its heartland.

EVOLUTION

Post-Darwin America

The Kansas State Board of Education got an earful about its decision to de-emphasize evolution in public schools. They'd like the children to be taught Biblical "creationism" (that God created the heavens and the Earth in six days), but a decade-old US Supreme Court ruling forbids that. Fortunately, there are enough objections from non-Christians to keep Darwin's "survival of the fittest" theory from being taught as fact. Fossils don't seem to prove Darwin quite right or wrong. Individual school boards have the option to teach or not teach Darwin, but statewide testing doesn't cover the subject. Hindus also hold that divine intelligence has guided the creation of species, but not necessarily in a week.

Briefly...

India is now the world's largest producer of milk, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization. India produced an

estimated 74 million tons. The US is second with 71 million tons.

The official dates of the Uttar Pradesh Kumbha Mela 2001 celebrations are as follows: Paush Poornima, January 9; Makar Sankranti, January 14; Mauni Amavasya, January 24; Vasant Panchami, January 29; Maghi Poornima, February 8; Mahasivaratri, February 21.

Cellular phones emit microwaves similar to a microwave oven, though at a slightly different frequency and much lower power. But because the brain is readily capable of absorbing such radiation, scientist believe cell phones may cause "hot spots" in the user's skull, damaging brain DNA, tissues and membranes. Frequent phoners are encouraged to use a corded earphone that get units away from the head, and the hands.

Sri Lanka Tamils are upset with government efforts to appropriate temple land in the Palaly area of northern Sri Lanka. The land, intended to expand an air base, includes the famed

Maviddapuram Kanthaswamy Temple and the Keerimalai Naguleswarar Temple. The All-Ceylon Hindu Congress protested to the government on August 31, 1999.

Buddhist monks and nuns of Myanmar (formerly Burma) are sneaking into Thailand to beg offerings of food. Shortages began when increased tension resulted in the border being closed in October. One Thai temple said 320 monks and 30 nuns had sought food and shelter there in a matter of weeks.

THE VEDAS

God's Word, Sages Voices

From him springs forth the breath of life, the power of thought and all the senses, space, wind, light, water and earth, the great supporter of all.

Atharva Veda, Mundaka Upanishad 2.1.3

Wherefore he who has crossed that boundary, and has realized the Self, if he is blind, ceases to be blind; if he is wounded, ceases to be wounded; if he is afflicted, ceases to be afflicted. When that

boundary is crossed, night becomes day; for the world of Brahman is light itself.

Sama Veda, Chandogya Upanishad 8.4.2

All the Gods in the heaven of Brahman adore in contemplation their Infinite Spirit Supreme. This is why they have all joy, and all the worlds and all desires. And the man who on this earth finds and knows Atman, his own Self, has all his holy desires and all the worlds and all joy.

Sama Veda, Chandogya Upanishad 8.12.6

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."