Briefly . . .
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DUE TO HIT TV AIRWAVES IN INDIA, "Om Namah Shivaya," a multi-part television serial "totally based on Lord Siva," was ready for release in November. The ambitious work is produced by Creative Eye Limited and directed by film actor Dheeraj Kumar. He explains, "It starts from the inception of the world according to the Hindu culture and religion." It should get heavenly ratings.

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU, but you can let it earn interest until you come back for it. "Reincarnation accounts" are being set up by a Liechtenstein-based firm, Prometh, which refers to such long-range planning as "seed capital for your next life." The minimum investment is $130,000, and must be claimed within 23 years of your death. And yes, to claim it, you must be able to answer some very personal questions.

ONE-MILLION CHILDREN ARE DEAD, injured or displaced due to Sri Lanka's thirteen-years of civil strife--a quarter-million of them under the age of five. The figures are from a two-year study by the U.K.-based group "Save The Children" as reported to the UN.

NAVARATRI FESTIVITIES, including late-into-the-night garbha dancing, cannot be restricted by legislation, even by the city

council of Edison, New Jersey. Civic leaders in Edison, an area boasting the heaviest concentration of Indian immigrants in the US (20,000 families), imposed a nightly curfew on the month-long Navaratri activities, which annually draw 4,000 people to an industrial park. A Federal judge ruled the restrictions unconstitutional. "This is indeed a landmark judgment, [acknowledging] a religious practice different from the Western-Judeo-Christian tradition," said Vivodh Z.J. Anand of the Indo-American Society.

KNEELING BEFORE GOD is one thing; making the six-mile journey up the steep steps of Tirupati temple in Andra Pradesh on one's knees is quite another. A 30-year-old devotee did it to fulfill a vow to Lord Venkateshwara after a prayer was answered that his father's knee problem be cured. The tapas took 14-hours to complete. Devotees of the Lord of the Seven Hills also now find a rare treat as they wend through the long lines toward darshan of Lord Vishnu: displays of rarely seen ancient and priceless gold jewelry and ornaments gifted by such historical figures as Sri Krishnadevaraya.

THE UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE ("Diaspora," December, 1996), a visionary attempt to bring the world's various and distinct religions together in a spirit of daily cooperation for the global good, "could be the church of the Antichrist," or so posits the arch-conservative Catholic Family News. Their 10,000-word article condemns the respected initiative as a plot by communists and Masons to create a single one-world religion and thus destroy the Catholic Church. It attacks interfaith harmony as misguided New-Age syncretism promoting a pantheistic "occult religion of Satan." It states that the true mission of the Catholic Church is not to bring peace to

the world, but to bring the world to their faith. They conclude, "Only the Catholic religion…can bring peace." Hmmm!

DAMN THE OPPOSITION, THE DAM IS ON. The Observer newspaper reports authorities in India will pour $4.2-billion into the Sardar Sarovar Dam project in Madhya Pradesh to see it completed by the year 2002; this despite court challenges and the outcries of environmentalists.

"HAVE SOME PIZZA, AND BY THE WAY, now you're a Christian." The Massachusetts Department of Social Services recently received complaints after an evening of free pizza, games and prizes staged for 200-young low-income housing residents. Bussed to the Anchor Baptist Church, the kids soon found the food and fun were only after the sermon and the baptisms. Two young Asian boys, ages 12 and 9, said they didn't know what was happening when they were being converted from Buddhism. The Church's pastor says the parental consent form included permission "to participate in all aspects of the service." Christianity Today reports, "A police investigation concluded church officials broke no criminal laws by baptizing the youths."

SOME OF GANDHI'S ASHES have been returned to his great-grandson, Tushar Arun Gandhi, after sitting in an Indian bank vault since 1949. He intends to scatter them over the Ganga River. Most of the ashes were spread in sacred rivers of each state of India after the Mahatma's death. Another portion is kept at the Lake Shrine of the Self-Realization Fellowship in Los Angeles.

THERE IS NO DIRTIER JOB, but someone has to do it. They're called scavengers--those who collect human excreta for disposal--long considered the lowest work of the untouchables. But their champion is Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak, founder of Sulabh International, who is dedicated to liberating the scavengers from an "unhealthy and subhuman occupation." Sulabh has developed public toilets which generate biogas from waste and converts that to electricity. They've built 61 plants to date. Sulabh is also saving lives--over 50 infections can be transferred to humans via excreta, and "the highest number of deaths in India are from diarrheal diseases," according to Dr. Pathak.

IS SUGAR VEGAN? Not always. How On Earth reports that as raw sugar is refined to whiteness, charred animal bones are sometimes used in the purification and decolorization process. And by the way, brown sugar, they report, is actually just white sugar with molasses added.

MONGOLIAN BUDDHISM is in renaissance. After enduring the deaths of 110,000 monks and the destruction of most of its 746 monasteries, Mongolia ousted communism in 1990, and began restoring its faith. "One of these monasteries, Erdene Khambyn, is now being rebuilt by Dawa, the granddaughter of one of the executed monks," reports Share International. Dawa hid the temple's hand-made statue of Maitreya Buddha for 60 years. Now it and photos of the Dalai Lama are centerpieces of the reconstructed temple.

THE US-BASED Hindu Students Council has now formed a Community Action Network to counter, and educate people

about, misinformation about Hindu culture, religion and institutions. Contact: HSC, C6 Honeybee Court, Cockeysville, Maryland, 21030, USA, or email: jsc-can@hindunet.org

Briefly is compiled from press, TV and wire-service reports and edited by Ravi Peruman, award-winning radio journalist at KGO in San Francisco.