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A HINDU PRAYER recited by Pundit S. Ramakrishnan opened the Maryland state general assembly in the US. It was the first invocation ever outside the Christian-Judeo tradition, and the doing of Kumar Barve, the first assembly member of Indian origin. The US Congress also opens with a daily prayer, usually Christian, sometimes Jewish but only once of another faith--Islam.

JESUS WILL FOLLOW SHIVA and Rama into Indian television history this year when the state-run network, Doordarshan, long-known for serialized dramatizations such as the Ramayana, broadcasts a mind-boggling 100-part series on the life and teachings of the Nazarene. Even American television networks have never given Christianity's founder his own serial, although nondenominational angel shows have been doing well this season.

DURGA PUJA was celebrated throughout Bangladesh in late October. More than 20,000 ritual pavilions were erected this year, slightly more than last year. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina assured Hindus gathered at Dhaka's Dhakeswari Mandir, "You will have the equal right to practice your religion with full dignity and honor, and there will be none to interfere in it."

IF ONLY HINDUS had such a resource.... The government of Germany collects and distributes a "church tax." "At present, the two main Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations each receive roughly US\$5 billion a year in church tax," reports ENI Bulletin. But major tax reforms, planned for 1999, could reduce that income by a third, with disastrous impact upon the churches. Part of the problem is too many atheists from the former East Germany complaining about the tax.

MODERN AIR TRAVEL is threatening the ancient Khajuraho temple complex, in central India's Madhya Pradesh, which lies less than two miles from the airport. The shakti of the Deity is not all devotees are feeling inside the 900-to 1,200-year-old Siva, Vishnu and Jain architectural treasure. The vibrations of low-flying jets shake the stones enough to cause gaps between the blocks. "If the ancient monuments are to be preserved, the airport should be shifted a little away," warns Brijendra Singh.

EARTHSAVE'S 1997 catalog serves healthy portions of vegetarian and environment-related resources, everything from videos to books to t-shirts sporting the text of "How To Win An Argument With A Meat Eater." Contact: 706 Frederick Street, Santa Cruz, California 95062-2205 USA.

TIBETANS IN EXILE are applauding the Disney Company for backing a film about the life of his holiness, the Dalai Lama. "Principles have won, and we are ecstatic that Disney will continue its role in the production despite threats made by China that the entertainment company's plans of expanding into China would suffer," said a spokesman for the government-in-exile. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman

said singing the praises of the Dalai Lama "does not conform with reality." Meanwhile, the movie's director, actors and dozens of others have reportedly been "blacklisted," marked for denial of entry visas into Tibet.

THE POLITICS OF RELIGION is prompting the staunchly atheistic Communist Party of India (Marxist) to rethink its position on religion, which Karl Marx once called "the opiate of the masses." "We should no longer ignore Hinduism, in view of its popular appeal. Rather, Hinduism must be modified for the poor and the oppressed," said party secretary Chitrabrata Mazumdar.

"AHIMSA AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE in the new world order," and the "concept and practices of Hinduism-Buddhism-Shintoism" were among the themes discussed at the recent International Conference on the Great Religions of Asia, held in Kyoto, Japan. Attendees included 100 delegates from Bharat, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Myanmar, Korea and Japan.

HINDUS ARE DIVORCING MORE. Some say because it's easier to do since the Hindu Code Law was enacted. But that was 40 years ago, and the divorce rate has only soared in the last five. Why? Some speculate it's Western influences on Indian society; others say it's due to better educated, personally empowered women. Delhi is seeing 20 divorce cases filed each day. In America, 50% of new marriages end in divorce.

AN ILLUSTRATED BOOK on India, designed to celebrate Bharat's 50th year of independence, is being compiled by Arun

Narayan Toke, publisher of the multicultural children's magazine *Skipping Stones*. Contributions of artwork and stories from children and adults are invited. Contact: P.O. Box 3939, Eugene, Oregon 97403 USA.

LORD GANESHA'S MOVING among massive crowds is nothing new, especially during Chaturthi festivities in Mumbai or Pune. But to see the elephant God move through the crowds, you have to go to Uttar Pradesh, to Chandausi. "Marathi Ganapatis are static, while our Vinayakas are not," said Sarvesh Gupta of the Shree Ganesha Mela Parishad. "They are mechanized to move their limbs." Meanwhile, back in Maharashtra, one recent 18-foot murti of Ganapati immersed during the last annual parade was covered completely in 25-paise coins--60,000 of them worth US\$428.

BEWARE THE KARMA POLICE. A reporter recently saw a "Notice of Karma Violation" sitting on a colleague's desk which looked just like an official traffic ticket. Seeming pretty practical--for a joke--it advised, "In accordance with the laws of the universe and karma, you are hereby required to make immediate amends. Failure to comply will cause this already negative energy to come reeling around the planet right back into your life."

WE'LL ALL BE VEGGIE in another 1,000 years. So envisions Arthur C. Clarke, Sri Lanka's most famous foreign resident and science-fiction writer, in his new book *3001: The Final Odyssey*. London's *Sunday Times* says Clark forecasts "that humans will no longer raise animals for eating, and that vegetable protein has replaced corpse food, which, Clarke writes, was on its way

out at the end of the second millennium because of a disease that started first with cattle and then spread to other animal foods."

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