NEWS IN BRIEF
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NEWS IN BRIEF Satya Sai Baba narrowly escaped an attempted assassination at his Puttaparthi Ashram in India on June 6th. The motive for the attack by four student devotees of the guru was unknown. Sai Baba's personal assistant, Radhakrishna Swamy, and another devotee were killed fending off the attackers, who were armed with spears, swords and knives. Two other devotees were wounded. Police shot dead all four attackers. The Home Minister of Andhra Pradesh could only guess the students had some grudge against the ashram management. India's Supreme Court has effectively lifted a ban on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) by refusing to stay a lower court's rejection of a ban on the million-member Hindu revivalist organization. However, the Supreme Court will hear a government appeal of the state court ruling. The RSS was banned after a rally in Ayodhya touched off a wave of violence last December. "The lifting of the ban on the RSS has not only vindicated its pre-eminently just and patriotic stand, but exposed the utter hollowness of the politically motivated false charges leveled against it by the government," writes RSS General Secretary Shri H.V. Seshadri. Maharishi Vedic University (MVU) has been awarded "license to teach" status from the Russian Educational Ministry, one of only 50 universities in Russia to receive such a license. Over 800 students are learning the subjects of Vedic Science: Jyotish, Sanskrit, Ghandarva Veda, etc. The designation could also mean 500 more students could enroll at the campus in Nabereznye Chelney, an independent republic in Turkestan, Russia. TM plans call for 50 more such universities throughout the former Soviet Union. Use of traditional Hindu customs and gestures is being hotly debated in Bangladesh. Many in the Islamic state consider it un-Islamic to greet someone with a namaskar, to make the ulu dhani, a festive sound made by Hindu women, or to light mangal pradips, floating ceremonial lamps used by many to mark the Bengali New Year. Others say the actions are simply Bengali culture, not necessarily Hindu customs. Scientist Dr. Rashmi Mayur, tireless environmentalist and President of Global Future Networks in Bombay, was awarded the Spaceship Earth Award from the United Nations Association of the USA during Earth Day ceremonies in Long Beach, California. Dr. Mayur has also studied the violence in Bombay following the dismantling of the Babri Masjid, and says three elements were at the root of the 13 bombs which ripped that city in March, killing 400 people: "slumlords," "criminalized politicians," and "the religious leaders ... fundamentalists, with the arms imported from abroad." More insights are planned for a forthcoming book. A year-long recitation of the Thiriyambaga Gayatri Mantra was begun in May in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Chanting takes place in the home of first one devotee from 6am to 4am,

then from 4am to 6am at a common meeting place, than at another devotee's residence from 6am to 4am, and so on. 22,000 Indians residing in Hong Kong will have the option of applying for either Chinese or Indian citizenship after the British colony reverts to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Previously they would have become stateless, as Britain refused to grant them citizenship. The beauty of Fiji and other South Pacific islands is in jeopardy. A World Bank study, commissioned by the Fijian and other governments, cites deteriorating water quality, deforestation, poor farming, and loss of plant and animal species as areas of chief concern. "Although pollution and environmental degradation are generally worsening, they are reversible if policies are improved and implemented," the study states. A great muruga bhaktar, Arul Gnani Kalpakkam Adigalar Thiru Arulmuruga Soundararaja Swamigal of Tamil Nadu, is touring temples and giving discourses in North America. Contact: 121 East 14th Avenue, Apartment C, Columbus, Ohio, 43201, USA. Buddhist monuments at Sanchi and Satdhara in Madhya Pradesh are being preserved and studied, thanks to the UNESCO-Japanese Trust Fund for the Preservation of World Cultural Heritage. UNESCO will provide expertise in stone conservation and chemical treatment of monuments in cooperation with the Archeological Survey of India. The "pure food Campaign" is fighting the sale of genetically engineered foods with an international boycott. Among the products opposed (which are already approved by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration and can be marketed without identification labels) are potatoes containing chicken and waxmoth genes; tomatoes with flounder and tobacco genes, and yellow squash with bacteria and virus genes. Contact: Pure Food Campaign, 1130 17th Street NW, Suite 630, Washington, D.C., 20036, USA. Vishwa Hindu Parishad plans to train priests in rituals, scriptures, Sanskrit and discourse delivery to meet the specific needs of Hindus settled outside India. Additionally, VHP plans for Samajik Samarasta Varsh, or Social Harmony Year, include 900 new social service projects in those parts of India vulnerable to Christian missionaries. Sadhu-Mahatmas "will undertake Padayatras in remote areas for propagation of noble Hindu ideals...." A Mosque and Idgah destroyed by a mob angered over the slaughter of a stray cow were cleared of rubble and rebuilt within one day by the mostly Hindu villagers of Salempur, in rural Uttar Pradesh. As reported in the Telegraph-Calcutta, Salempur "could have taught a nation still grappling with the Ayodhya issue a small lesson or two." Believing their guru will be resurrected, devotees of Thakur Balak Brahmachari are refusing to allow his cremation. The 73-year-old spiritual leader of Santal Dal, which claims 90-million devotees worldwide, was declared dead from heart and kidney failure in May after 27 days in a Calcutta clinic. "He has only gone into a deep trance," says one administrator. Disciples say their guru went into a similar death-like trance for 22 days in the 1960s. Each day, thousands of prayerful pilgrims now pass by the chilled room containing his body. Indian fashion designers are looking to the past for their latest designs, which include traditional fabrics, colors and motifs, but with some thoroughly modern twists: Gujarat pichwai paintings and even the Khajuraho carvings of Madhya Pradesh are inspiring designs on dhoti pants and jacket; styles from different regions are being mixed and matched; and the traditional 9-yard sari is being teamed with a kurta and matching dupatta--even with pumps and a Peshwa cap. A Sriperumbudur priest and retired

air force officer says he will fast until death if the government pursues the building of a memorial to the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on the spot where he was assassinated. Varada Ethiraja says the site in Tamil Nadu, 22 miles from Madras, belongs to the temple he now oversees, adding that the government simply wants to make money from tourists. Many local residents, however, side with the government. Esteemed yoga teachers now available in the USA: K. Saraswathi Rao, former head of the Department of Yoga Studies at Andhra University, Vishakapatnam, South India, and her husband K.L.P Rao, who were both invited to demonstrate yoga at the Fifth World Telugu Conference in July in Long Island, New York. Contact: 34 Silva Terrace, Oxford, Connecticut, 06478, USA. Asiadventures of England has produced a short television program, "Aim High" on the positive contribution of the Asian community in Britain. Producer Rakesh Mathur says the "engaging, educational program will increase awareness and dispel myths about the ethnic minorities in Britain." In the program, Baroness Shreela Flather says a secret of her success is belief in the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. Contact: 6 Carolyn House, 95 Larkhall Rise, London SW4 6HR, United Kingdom.