Briefly . . .
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THE QUEEN APOLOGIZED for the 1919 massacre of 379 unarmed Indian protesters in Amritsar during her 1997 visit to India. At a state banquet in New Delhi, she admitted that there had been some "difficult episodes" in Britain's past, of which Jallianwala Bagh--site of the massacre--was a "distressing example." She and husband Prince Philip earlier placed a wreath at the Jallianwala Bagh memorial in Amritsar, where tens of thousands of Sikhs gave her a warm welcome. Philip, whose father-in-law, King George VI, was the last "Emperor of India," also took a barefoot tour of Gandhi's ashram near Ahmedabad.

AMERICAN CHARITIES GOT A SCARE in September when a Texas judge ordered a Southern Baptist Christian Church to hand over $27,687 donated by a bankrupt church member to the man's main creditor. The judge's ruling rested on the contention that the man had given the money to the church "without receiving a reasonably equivalent value in exchange." The judge apparently saw no "value" in the church's religious service. If it stands, the law puts all charitable contributions at risk of having to be returned one day. The shocking ruling is under appeal to higher courts. A law has been introduced in the US Congress to protect churches (including Hindu temples) and charities from such claims. In the Texas case, the creditor defended the decision, "The money he paid to the church was my money, not his money. If someone had robbed me and

donated the money to the church, would the church have to return the money? Yes."

IMPROVEMENT IN DIET--mainly by reducing meat and increasing vegetable consumption--could prevent up to 40 percent of all the world's cancer, according to a massive analysis of 4,500 studies by the American Institute for Cancer Research and the World Cancer Research Fund. Largely as a result of health concerns, the number of vegetarians in Britain has doubled in recent decades and now stands at eight percent.

THE LIBERAL "R-1" VISA provision allowing up to 5,000 visa slots for nuns, priests, religious brothers, lay preachers, religious instructors and missionaries to work in this country at the request of US-based religious organizations is close to approval as a permanent part of US immigration law. US Hindu organizations have used the relatively easy to qualify for visa to bring monks, priests, musicians and others to America.

INDIA'S SUPREME COURT has denied the traditional sevaks, temple attendants, of the famed Jagannath temple at Puri a share of the money from hundis, collection boxes, installed in the temple. They ruled the collection of the offerings was a "secular" activity which belonged to the domain of the state-run temple management. Most Hindu temples in India, but not Christian churches or Muslim mosques, are run by state-appointed boards and administrators, and not by hereditary trustees or boards elected by temple devotees.

FIJI WAS READMITTED to the Commonwealth ten years after it was expelled at the behest of India, following a military coup. Their recently adopted constitution no longer discriminates against the country's large Indian population. Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka has formally approached India to restore the diplomatic and economic links between the countries which were cut after the coup.

THE SEARCH FOR THE PERFECT SPOUSE is going out of this world on board the Cassini space vehicle now headed toward Saturn. The European Space Agency allowed thousands of messages from earthlings to be packed aboard the Huygens probe, which will be launched from Cassinni onto Titan, Saturn's largest moon. One is a request for a "tall, handsome alien, romantic, if possible."

THE "LAST PAPERS OF MAHATMA GANDHI" which were stored for 50 years by V. Kalyanam of Chennai and recently donated to the Indian government are now available to the public at the Nehru Museum in New Delhi. The unique collection contains rough drafts of some of Gandhi's famous speeches, and letters with his frank assessments of various issues, including partition.

THAILAND BUDDHISTS HAVE FOUND a unique method of saving the country's trees from illegal logging. The Northern Farmer's Network "ordained" thousands of the trees and wrapped them in the orange robes usually worn by Buddhist monks. There is no word on the method's success.

THE ORIENTAL INSURANCE COMPANY of Kerala has entered into an agreement with the All Kerala Elephant Owners Association to insure, yes, their elephants. The policies are a kind of combination of auto and health insurance, providing coverage for collision liability as well as the elephant's illness or death. Kerala has 570 elephants owned by individuals, temples and the state forest department. A shocking 162 have died in the last decade, a factor in the new coverage.

THE BLASPHEMOUS LIBEL LAW of Trinidad [see December 1997 issue] is indeed a formal part of English Common Law and protects in Britain, just as it does in Trinidad, only Christianity from "scurrilous" attack. UK Muslims attempted to use the law to stifle Salman Rushdie and his Satanic Verse's book, but were refused by the court on the grounds the law protected no other religions. One expert said this was only natural as England was an officially Christian country. The law would appear to stand in violation of the guarantee of equal religious freedom in the UN Charter of Human Rights.

THE WORLD'S MOST ANCIENT MUSICAL instrument is a 43,000-year-old flute found in the Slovenian Alps in Europe in a Neanderthal hunting camp. The spacing between the second and third holes made in the bear thigh bone is twice that between the third and fourth, meaning the flute could produce whole and half tones. Cleveland State University ethnomusicologist T. Temple Tuttle believes the hole spacing would most likely match the South Indian system, rather than the Western diatonic scale, according to a report in Scientific American. A second expert believes the complete flute (drawing above) had at least six holes and was some 37 centimeters long. Neanderthals are ancient inhabitants of

Europe believed displaced by modern humans tens of thousands of years ago.