Briefly . . .
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H.H. SHANKARACHARYA Jayendra Saraswati, Peethadiswar of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, visited Nepal "to offer his blessings to King Birendra on the occasion of His Majesty's silver jubilee accession to the throne and to the people of the only Hindu nation of the world," writes The Kathmandu Post. On the issue of unlawful proselytizing, the Shankaracharya said, "If these people are involved with social services, then they should stick to it and refrain from attempting to convert people's beliefs; there is no room for that in our society."

NEPAL WANTS MORE TOURISTS--half-a-million in 1998--and to reach its goal it's now marketing itself to Hindus as the world's only Hindu kingdom, hoping its thousands of Hindu sacred sites, such as Pashupatinath and its over 1,000 Buddhist monasteries, will lure more than just mountaineers to the Himalayas. Indian nationals comprised one-third of the 363,000 tourists who visited in 1995.

THE POETIC VOICE of 15th-century Saivite Saint Arunagirinathar now speaks in both Tamil and English in Songs of Divine Glory. As editor-translator S.M. Ponniah (My Turn, March 1997) prefaces, "This Book of Prayer consists of fifty devotional songs in adoration of Lord Murugan," and is intended to assist devotees in worship and to "rekindle interest in Tamil language, the root language and source of Tamil

Saivism."

HIS PERSONAL ASTROLOGERS uniformly predicted a long term in office for now ex-Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda. But one Bangalore astrologer, Ranganatha Desika, made a very contrary and uncannily accurate prediction published in India Today (March 31st edition) that the PM would exit office on April 27. He was just a few days off.

INDIA'S FUTURE MAY INCLUDE A SEAT on the United Nations Security Council under a new proposal adding five permanent and four non-permanent members to the 15-seat Council. Economically-thriving Japan and Germany are considered frontrunners for permanent seats; the remaining three would include one nation each from Asia (possibly India, the world's most populous democracy), Africa and Latin America. The four nonpermanent seats would be chosen from those three plus one from Eastern Europe. None of the new seats would have veto power.

CHIDAMBARAM, Lord Siva's glorious ancient temple complex (whose title deeds are held in the name of Lord Nataraja), remains targeted for takeover by Tamil Nadu government's Hindu Religious & Charitable Endowments Board. The hereditary Podu Dikshithars, or temple priests, won a March 12 interim stay in Madras High Court, temporarily halting government appointment of an Executive Officer, but the stay was issued on the condition that an accounting of temple offerings be submitted within 45 days.

AYURVEDA HAS OFFICIALLY ARRIVED in America. The California College of Ayurveda Center for Optimal Health is the first such college to win state approval to operate in the United States. "This is a momentous time in history," says founder Dr. Marc Halpern, "It marks the beginning of the formation of the profession of ayurveda in the U.S." Contact: 1117 A East Main Street, Grass Valley, California, 95945, USA.

THE POPULATION IMPLOSION is being ignored, says Ben Wattenberg, producer of the Public Television production "Think Tank." Why? "What government chooses to admit it's going to lose half its population in the next hundred years?" New demographic fertility studies show a downward trend in world population, in many cases to below the replacement rate (the rate at which population remains stable). "Birth rates are declining in Asia, South America and in third-world nations," says Wattenberg. "I think this is the biggest news of the century. I'm baffled that the story hasn't been universally disseminated. Fertility in China and India is coming down rapidly. At this rate, they will be below the replacement rate in another decade or two."

"RELIGIOUS FERVOR OR NOISE POLLUTION?" So asks the Associated Press over Calcutta's efforts to curb the often full-blast aural emanations from Hindu temples and Muslim mosques. Current unenforced federal guidelines limit the azan, or Muslim call to prayer and Hindu chants broadcast over loudspeakers to 55-65 decibels, slightly louder than a noisy office. Hindus say they can accept the noise abatement law if provisions are made for special festivals, such as the 10-day, all-night Durga Puja.

THE POWER OF PRAYER and its effect on heart patients will be scientifically studied at three American hospitals thanks to a grant from the John Templeton Foundation, which funds the annual Templeton Prize for contributions to religion. The two-year study of 600 people awaiting heart surgery is merely "to find out what happens."

Vedic Astrology, the new, Delhi-based, bi-monthly publication, subtitles itself "Devoted to Vedic Concepts of Astrology and Culture." "Indian astrology has always been an inseparable limb of Vedic culture. It has been labeled as the 'eye' of the Vedas, the repository of knowledge," writes editor Dr. K.S. Charak. Contact: Systems Vision, A-199 Okhla Ind. Area-I, New Delhi, 110-020 India. E-mail: rjhanji@giasdl01.vsnl.net.in.

BIRTH TIMING IS CRUCIAL in astrology, which is why more and more women are opting for "elective caesarean," consulting astrologers for an auspicious moment and then delivering the baby by C-section. "If instead of being born in the morning, a child is delivered in the afternoon, the planetary positions change. His fate alters accordingly," says New Delhi astrologer Ajay Bhambi. Astrologer Chakrapani Ullal was more cautious, "Purposely choosing a time of birth can, in fact, be a big mistake because there are not many really good astrologers who can take into account all the different aspects of astrology to make the best decision. Also, there is no really good time, because all time has a good part and a bad part." HINDUISM TODAY columnist Dr. Devananda Tandavan says if the C-section is medically required, then "a propitious time could be elected..." but he otherwise decries the use of surgery or drugs simply to choose a child's lagna.

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