Briefly . . .
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AUSTRALIA'S PRIME MINISTER, Mr. John Howard, opened consecration ceremonies at the Mandir Society of Australia's Maha Kumbhabhishekam for the Sri Vishnu Siva Mandir on June first. Foundation stones for the mandir in Canberra had been laid four years earlier. An estimated 10,000 Hindus attended the event.

SRI VIDYANANDAGIRI SWAMIJI, Peethadhipati of Sri Vyasasramam in Andhra Pradesh, is on a USA tour until September. He is the successor of Sri Malayalaswami, who founded Sri Vyasasramam in 1926. The progressive ashram's schools teach Sanskrit to women and members of all castes. It has 45 celibate men and women in separate residences and runs medical facilities and orphanages for over 400. USA contact: Mahipal Karkaralal, phone 810-879-4685.

SIVA IS NOW WORSHIPPED IN OMAN, in what is reportedly the first temple of its kind in any Islamic country. Hindus have also been given cremation grounds. Oman's Sultan, Al-Khubus, has even granted citizenship to a Mr. Khimji, a Hindu businessman. Oman's first non-Muslim citizen. He was also honored with the Arab honorific title for headman or senior clan leader and is now "Sheik Bhairamji Khimji."

SCORES OF SACRED TEMPLE TANKS have fallen into disuse and are now dry or dilapidated eyesores at too many Hindu temples in Chennai. "While some of them lost their scenic appeal years ago, a few are on the verge of losing their ground, too, due to rapid urbanization and encroachments," reports The Hindu. Multi-story buildings now hide many lovely tanks from view and have even cut off the flow of natural rainfall that keeps them full and clean.

THE TAMIL EXODUS from Sri Lanka continues unabated. Over 1,500 refugees have settled in or near Kerala's Thiruvananthapuram district. In Europe, Lithuanian officials report unrest at a camp housing over 600 illegal immigrants, including Sri Lankans. Italy continues to intercept refugee-laden boats off its Calabrian Coast. Paris, with its long-established Tamil community, is now home to over 60,000 Sri Lankan Tamils. "Because Pondicherry was a French protectorate, the earlier arriving Indian Tamils didn't need visas to travel to France," sources told hinduism today. The Refugee Council in London is urging a United Nations review of the Sri Lankan situation.

FIJI'S CONSTITUTION will be "altered to remove discriminatory provisions that bar Indians from political power," reports The Economist. With hundreds of amendments recommended to Parliament and approved by Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka, Fiji could one day have an Indian PM. By October, Rabuka hopes Fiji will return to membership in the Commonwealth, from which it was barred pending the return of political freedoms.

THE OZONE HOLE over the North Pole is growing--or more accurately, thinning. The World Meteorological Organization reported Earth's protective ozone layer was 15 to 25% thinner in March of 1997 than in 1996. It predicts that internationally-agreed-upon cutbacks could mean the ozone loss will peak between 2001 and 2005. Chemical propellants and refrigerants such as chlorine and bromine are blamed.

BROTHER MARVIN IS WORLD MUSIC incarnate. The Trinidadian of African descent wears a kurta and Nehru hat, speaks of "Mother India" and sings Hindi and English lyrics in a hit song called "Jahaagi Bhai," or "brotherhood of the boat." It's about the common experience of African slaves and indentured East Indian workers with "music of distinctly Indian origin," writes Anil Mahabir, who says Brother Marvin's following in Trinidad and Tobago is "massive."

MEDIA'S FOCUS ON BRIDE BURNING paints India as a dangerous place. But if statistics can be trusted, a study by Hindus Against the Abuse of Women

presented at the Second International Conference on Bride Burning and Dowry Deaths in India puts USA in the lead of familial femicide. It says USA murders of women committed by "intimate relations" are 15 per year per million population. The rate in Pakistan is 6.44 per million. India's is 6.25 per million. The study says excessive need for control and greed may be the underlying causes, not cultural or religious factors. India recently passed a law making husbands and in-laws guilty until proven otherwise if a bride dies within the first year of marriage. Since then, the rate of women killed by intimate relations dropped by more than 50%.

CHINA IS POISED to impose its own rules on the "search for and selection of young children considered to be the reincarnated souls of the 'living Buddhas' who reside in Tibet's temples and monasteries," reports Reuters. Attributed to a religious affairs official in Beijing, the report stated "such rules would help to combat the influence of the Dalai Lama, Beijing's greatest rival for Tibetan loyalties."

HIRE A PUJARI…or press the "play" button? Temple priests in Madhya Pradesh say "they are being edged out of business by the electronic media. Their services are increasingly replaced by tape recorders, videos and televisions," reports the Times of India. Lamenting that their children are choosing other professions, pujaris are now asking the government to help preserve their priestly training and job security at the 12,000 state-managed temples.

SUBJECTS OF THE WORLD'S ONLY HINDU kingdom are well served by Diyalo, North America's Nepalese Community News Magazine.The quarterly publication from Toronto has news, essays, trekking, entertainment and children's features. Contact: Mr. Sharad Subba, 3-9251, 15 Avenue, St. Michel, Montreal, PQ H1Z 3P4, Canada.

AUSPICIOUS TIMING ISN'T JUST FOR HINDUS… France's best-known astrologer, Elisabeth Teissier, reveals in her book, Under the Sign of Mitterrand, how the late French president (just like Ronald Reagan) "…realised astrology was a useful instrument of power," and relied on her for the timing of referendums, addresses to the nation, even readings on when

Saddam Hussein would pull back his troops during the Gulf War.

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