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## News in Brief

Sanskrit remains an elective subject within India's Higher Secondary Syllabus. The government wanted it removed, arguing that by allowing Sanskrit, other classical languages must be included, threatening India's governmental secularism. But the Supreme Court ruled otherwise, noting "the importance of Sanskrit for nurturing our cultural heritage."

Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Roman Catholics, Protestants and Jews all oppose the patenting of human genes and genetically engineered animals. 180 religious leaders have signed a joint statement imploring the US Congress to ban patents on any life form, which one clergyman calls "the usurpation of ownership rights of the sovereign of the universe." "It's a classic clash between science and religion, the conflict of the ages," said Georgetown University professor Lawrence Goshin, who sympathizes with biotechnology companies for whom genetic engineering-and patent protection for their work-is fundamental.

Azadirachta indica, India's versatile neem tree, is also facing the patent issue, with 34 patents already granted on assorted neem products (such as Monsanto's insecticide). The neem tree rose to world prominence in 1959, when scientists noticed that it was the one tree in the entire Sudan to survive a plague of locusts. Of course, the medicinal neem has been used extensively in India for centuries.

Hinduism and Islam are stable in Singapore, while other religions are seeing drastic shifts by conversion. A study by National University shows 95.5% of converts between 1980 and 1990 were young, educated Chinese converting from Taoism to Christianity. The study also noted most religious conversions happen between ages 10-39, and that more women than men participate in daily religious rituals.

Ayurveda is on its way to Trinidad & Tobago. Ayurvedacharya and former physician to the Olympic games, S.N.Tripathi, of the Academy of Ayurvedic Medicine, Toronto, plans to open a 50-bed hospital and training center near Port-of-Spain. Another 100-bed facility and training center is planned for Guyana.

Jagadguru Ramananda Acharya of Srimutt in Kashi opposes the idea of "liberating" temple-sites-turned-into-mosques, such as Kashi Vishwanath and Mathura, saying that "at this point" such action would "only complicate the Ayodhya issue." The Swami is also a member of the Ramalaya Trust, and says he is optimistic construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya will begin soon.

India has re-opened its embassy in Afghanistan after a 16-month closure. "Kabul is quite peaceful now, and we hope it will last," said Indian charge d'affairs A.S. Toor. India is the first nation to return its diplomatic mission.

Infanticide continues to rise, reports The Times of India, and fear of dowry payment remains the primary motivation. "Dowry has made an appearance in communities where it was not earlier present as an accepted way to get money," said Meera Kosambi, director of the Department of Women's Studies at Sanatana Dharma Trust University in Bombay. Most rampant in Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, the murder of infant daughters to avoid dowry crosses all socio-economic groups. With 869 female births to every 1,000 males, the United Nations reports India has 10-percent fewer women than would be expected.

Fighting religious discrimination in Britain is the mission of the Hindu Resource Centre in Croydon, Surrey, which provides free legal advice and problem-solving. A center for helping elderly Hindus is also planned for south London. The Commission for Racial Equality, meanwhile, is trying to enact legislation to make religious discrimination illegal.

Pubs and drinking are the latest yuppy rage among Indian students. So much so that multi-national liquor producers are aggressively marketing in areas like Bombay. Shareholders and pub owners love it. But Jatish Shah, who volunteers at a drug and alcohol abuse center, notes "the growing pub culture, coupled with social sanction, is contributing to alcoholism at an earlier age. Young people are switching from drugs to alcohol. The average age of alcoholics coming for help has dropped

from 35 to 28."

Indian history is being redefined as new understandings of Vedic astronomical references, geology and archaeology emerge. A seminar exploring themes such as time calculating and the Sindhu- Saraswati civilization will be held August 18-20, in Madras, sponsored by the International Society for the Investigation of Ancient Civilizations, Madras, and Bharatiya Itihasa Sankalana Samiti, Tamilnadu. Contact: Professor K.M. Rao, 20 Appakannu Mudali Street, Avnai Shannougam Salai Royapettah, Madras, 600 014, INDIA.

India's AIDS cases have doubled, a Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry report states. The main infection source continues to be heterosexual contact. A study of housewives in Bombay revealed a 1.07% rate of HIV-positive status-ten-times higher than the US average-with 97% of their infections attributed to husbands having sex outside the home. Indian Health Organization estimates project 30,000,000 cases by the year 2000, with 10,000 deaths daily.

One-quarter of all women aged 16-24 no longer eat meat in Britain, and twice as many women as men are vegetarian. So reports a Gallup survey done for Haldane Foods. The "Realeat Survey" notes 7-million people, 12% of the population, are either vegetarian, vegan or no longer eating red meat. That's 5,500 people giving up meat each week for the last two years.

The Ma Yoga Shakti International Mission celebrated inauguration of the new Yogashakti Durga Temple and Yoga Hall in late April. Her Holiness Maha Mandaleswar Ma Yoga Shakti Saraswati and other spiritual, civic and cultural leaders attended. Contact: 114-23 Lefferts Blvd., South Ozone Park, Queens, New York, 11420, USA.

The 1994 Vegetarians of the Year, proclaimed by the Bombay-based Vegetarian Society, are former Environment Minister Maneka Gandhi, who cites Mahatma Gandhi's wisdom that "good health and nonviolence are two sides of the same coin," and Dr. Bhikhu Jethalal of Toronto, who advocates yoga for stress reduction and a low-fat, vegetarian diet.

The Sringeri Sadhana Center will be formally inaugurated July 13th to 16th in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, at the site of the former Rajarajeshwari Peetham. Formed under the guidance of the Shankaracharya of Sringeri Peetham in India, the first program of the Center will be a Hindu Heritage Summer Camp. For more information, contact: Sringeri Vidya Bharati Foundation, RD 8, Box 8116, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, 18360. Phone 717-629-7881.

Smoking causes deforestation. The monthly journal of the Brahma Kumaris, Purity, cites a British report that "one tree has to be cut down for the manufacture of every 300 cigarettes." With 10 billion cigarettes sold annually in the US alone, that's a lot of trees.

Cigarette smoking is declining in the US, but growing elsewhere at 3%-per year-the result of strategic global marketing aimed mostly at adolescents. "It is unconscionable for the mighty trans-national tobacco companies to be peddling their poison abroad, particularly because their main targets are less developed countries," said former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Health, James Mason.

Indian wedding ceremony, a succinct guide for the "thirteenth sanskar," the Hindu marriage ceremony, includes explanation and answers to frequently asked questions, and is available for the cost of postage and handling. Contact: Rev. Madan Lal Gupta, Vedic Dharma Samaj, 9999 Palm Street, Bellflower, California, 90706, USA.

India's national bird is mayil, the peacock; her national flower is padma, the lotus; the national tree is vata, the banyan; national fruit, the mango-all are symbols sacred to Hindus.