

[Briefly . . .](#)

Category : [May 1998](#)

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A REPORTED PROPOSAL BY THE British pop group Spice Girls to perform in front of a 1,000-year-old Hindu temple, known for its erotic sculptures, has sparked outrage among Indian artists and conservationists. Geeta Chandran, classical Indian dance exponent, said the show should be stopped because it would undermine the sanctity of the temple in the central Indian town of Khajuraho. "The eroticism of Khajuraho is part of the larger Hindu view of the cyclicity of life. The Spice Girls' profile does not match that of the temple. Eroticism without spirituality becomes pornography."

DEBATES OVER CLONING escalated recently when Chicago physicist Richard Seed announced he would try to clone a human. US senators quickly introduced legislation that would ban publicly or privately funded cloning of human cells. Meanwhile, Scottish scientist Ian Wilmut, cloner of the sheep, Dolly, admitted to a remote possibility of error. Dolly shocked the world because she had been cloned from a cell of an adult sheep--meaning a human could be cloned from, say, a piece of hair. Since Dolly's mother (her twin? clone?) was pregnant when the cell was taken, Wilmut said, "there is a remote possibility the cell came from her fetus instead." Scientists have been able to clone mammals from fetal cells for two decades. Using that method, US researchers have cloned a small herd of genetically engineered calves in Texas.

DECISIONS ON NEW NATIONAL labeling rules for US organic foods--a \$3.5 billion industry--were delayed in February with protests that products produced or processed using irradiation, genetic engineering and sewage sludge fertilizer could be allowed by the rules to be labeled "organic." Carl Pope of the Sierra Club complained, "If the proposed rules are adopted as written, consumers will lose all faith in the 'organic' label." That green symbol above isn't meant to label organic food. It has been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration for red meat packaging. It means the meat has been irradiated to eliminate harmful microorganisms. Purists are aghast at the misleading symbol, as they consider irradiation with all its hazardous side-effects to be about as far from "organic" as one can get.

BRITAIN'S 1.5-MILLION-STRONG Muslim community smiled in January when Education Secretary David Blunkett agreed for the first time to state funding of Islamic schools. "It marks an important step in New Labor Party's promise to build an equal, inclusive society," said Iqbal Sacranie of the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs. Britain has for years funded Christian and Jewish schools. Are Hindu schools next?

BRITISH AIRWAYS now wears a sari, and Meera Mehta helped them put it on. In an effort to defreeze their stiffness, the popular airline is painting traditional designs from across the world--a tartan from Scotland, an Egyptian tent panel, a sari from India--on the tails of their planes. Airline bosses flew to Paithan, India and found a colorful sari styled by Mehta. A designer for 22 years, Mehta, 47, says, "This is even better than having someone wear it."

TWO US PHYSICISTS presented a new study based upon photographs taken aboard NASA's Polar spacecraft as further proof of their 11-year-old theory that thousands of house-sized ice comets disintegrate in the Earth's atmosphere each day and are the source of most of the Earth's water. The revolutionary theory is pooh-poohed by opponents who claim the photographs show nothing but camera noise.

ALARMING STATISTICS PUBLISHED by the New York Times show 500,000 US kids use Prozac and other anti-depressant drugs. Only one in a hundred children ages two to nineteen eats a diet meeting minimal government standards. Instead of receiving the recommended ten percent of calories from fats and sugar, youth receive 40 percent. A report from India states that urban Indians likewise follow a highly malnourished diet far overloaded with sugars, oils and fat.

OVER 7,000 PEOPLE FROM ACROSS India guffawed together January 11 to celebrate "World Laughter Day." Participants ranged from little children to old men and women who assembled in Mumbai's Mahalakshmi Race Course. Laughter Club International, which organized the event, said the participants believe laughter is an effective therapy to ease tension and stress.

INDIA'S CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IS being urged to provide immediate relief for 32,000 Reang tribals forced out of their homeland, Mizoram, in January by the Mizoram Students Association, a Christian-backed militant group. Terrorists burned houses, destroyed crops and assaulted Reang women. The tribal community fled to bordering villages, where they are

now living in miserable conditions. Over 40 people have died so far of hunger, cold and disease.

IN AN ATTEMPT TO PROMOTE TAMIL, the Tamil Nadu government recently ordered temple puja ritual be conducted in the local Tamil language. Presently, most mantras are chanted in Sanskrit, the traditional language of the Gods. A committee has been formed to assure that each translated word is purely Tamil, with no Sanskrit influence--likely an impossible task, as there are so many Sanskrit terms in Tamil.

AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE RECEIVED major coverage and favorable opinion in a Denver, USA, newspaper. A huge page-one photo showed Shashi Mehti, the groom, and his bride, Soudhamini, having a feet washing in a traditional wedding ritual at a Hindu temple. The couple was introduced by Soudhamini's sister via the Internet, but the match was not approved until horoscopes were shown to be compatible. The article's author, Jean Torkelson, attended the wedding. She commented that "the couple was awfully happy Sunday. When they were united in a Hindu ceremony of petals, fire, water and thrown rice, it was enough to give romantic chance [that is, love matches] a bad name."

LEADERS OF NINE WORLD FAITHS met with the World Bank's president in London mid-February for talks on poverty and development policies. The meeting brought together representatives from the Bahai, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Taoist religions to discuss how respect for different cultural values and faiths could be incorporated into development programs.