News in Brief
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One million Hindus attended a Ashwamedha Yajna held by the Gayatri Parivar in Patna, India. The five-day event included hundreds of thousands of women dressed in yellow walking in procession from the Ganges to the ceremonial grounds. They were led by 1,008 virgins carrying Ganges water in pots. The Vedic yajna, which was performed in ancient times by Lord Rama and the Pandavas, is to promote the prosperity of the nation.

The Canadian Council of Hindus is holding an "International Conference on Saivite Philosophy and Shiva Worship" July 1 to 3 in Toronto and 9 to 10 in Montreal. Papers on Saivite philosophy and worship are invited, as well as recommendations for workshops and speakers. Delegates are expected from dozens of countries. Contact: CCH, PO Box 22092, 45 Overlea Blvd, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4H 1N9.

University of Pennsylvania is conducting an unusual conference bringing together representatives of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism (Dr. Karan Singh), Islam and Judaism with top television executives and professors from communications schools to "set practical guidelines for innovative and socially responsible conduct of international religious groups, the television and cable industries and educational establishments, and to explore the dynamic global telecommunications transformation." Contact Kirby F. Smith, Office of University Relations, South 1B, 3624 Market Street/2615, Philadelphia, PA, 19104, USA.

Hindu businessman Easan Katir filed this short report from England: "I needed to have a document notarized today, so I went downtown to a Notaries Public office in the City of London. The notary pulled out a little black Bible for me to swear on. I told him I am a Hindu. Without batting an eye, he pulled out an identical-looking little black Bhagavad Gita, and I swore the notarial oath with my hand on that. The notary said, 'There are many ways to bind one's conscience, and we try to serve all equally. That will be pounds18.00, please.'"

Used syringes, possibly contaminated with AIDS-tainted blood, are being resold in Pune, India, for the celebration of Holi. Children use them to spray colored water on others as part of the festivities. Hundreds of thousands of syringes retrieved from local hospitals have been sold. Pune has 15,000 HIV-positive cases, and contracting the virus from blood left in the syringes is a solemn possibility. In other AIDS-related developments, doctors in Punjab have identified truck drivers as the principal carriers of HIV virus in the state. They pick up the disease from prostitutes in Bombay and New Delhi. In Amritsar HIV positive blood was found at three large blood banks. "Huge amounts of blood were utilized from these banks to treat victims of terrorist violence during the past few years," stated The Pioneer newspaper-the impact is unknown.

RSS workers in Tamil Nadu on a temple protection patrol apprehended the leader of a gang of thieves who have been involved in 500 cases of idol theft and three murders. Despite the formation of a special police unit to hunt them, the gang had eluded authorities for years.

US cigarette manufactures continue to look overseas-especially to India-for new markets as the US Congress considers a "sin" tax of up to $1.25/pack to cut the number of smokers and help pay the medical cost of the 400,000 Americans who die yearly from smoking-related diseases. Says an analyst at the Wall Street firm of Kidder, Peabody, "As poor countries get richer, they smoke more American cigarettes. That doesn't change until they get rich enough to worry about their health. And that's a long time off."

Western firms are finding Asia a convenient market not only for cigarettes, but also for toxic waste. Australia, Canada, Germany, Britain and the USA collectively shipped 5.4 million tons of toxic waste between 1990 and 1993 to Asia, including Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and India. Simple mislabeling of the material is usually enough to circumvent these countries' laws against such imports.

Kumaraswami Dikshitar has founded the Spiritual and Veda Agama Academy in New York state "to promote the worship and philosophy of the Saiva, Pancharathra and Vaikhanasa Agamas, especially the temple worship." He is publishing a bi-monthly newsletter called Veda Agama Sudha. Address: 450 Albany Shaker Road, Loundonville, New York, 12211, USA.

The reformist National Aryan Youth Council in New Delhi has begun a campaign against the "sex and violence culture" of Western TV now being delivered by satellite to millions of Indian homes. The campaign started after three members of a family in Calcutta were murdered by teenage schoolchildren who had watched an American television program that showed a similar incident. The group is led by Swami Agnivesh. "If the small city-state of Singapore can ban satellite and cable TV, why can't India stop this onslaught?" he asked.

Want to surf the information superhighway for resources on vegetarianism? Internet, Usenet, Compuserve, Prodigy, Delhi and other on-line electronic services have conference forums and resource files from recipes to ethics. The Vegetarian Resource Group has a list of these services. Write them at PO Box 1463, Baltimore, Maryland, 21203, USA, or contact on the internet at bobbi@explorer.clark.net.

Swedish courts have sided with a Hindu family to allow them to spread the ashes of their dead in a local river. Boras city officials opposed the practice on the grounds it fouled the environment. But the court, after considerable study of local maps, ruled the ashes could be scattered in the Viskan River, which empties into the North Sea.

Three-hundred astrologers met in New Delhi in December for the National Conference on Futurology and Astrology sponsored by Bharat Nirman. They recommended a minimum code of moral conduct and technical ability be established for those practicing astrology. They also advocate the promotion of studies to support the scientific basis of astrology, and for universities to have permanent astrology departments. Contact: M.C. Bhandari, 4, Synagogue St., 2nd Floor, (Facing Brabourne Road) Calcutta 700 001, India.

Ayurvedic medicine is being promoted in Holland by the SRYA-School for Research in Yoga and Ayurveda. The school was founded in 1993 by Acharya Sri Chandrasekhar and Anil Kumar Mehta. Contact: SRYA, Tulp 13, 2671 ZC Naaldwijk, The Netherlands.

The Tibetan Aid Project is ambitiously assisting tens of thousands of displaced Tibetans in keeping Tibetan heritage alive despite the occupation of their country

by China. They have shipped 20,000 texts and 75,000 reproductions of art to Tibetan monasteries and nunneries throughout Asia. Among their dozens of innovative support programs are: "Sponsor ten cave retreatants for a year; tea for 100 monks for a month; whitewash a stupa; support five lamas for three years; sea ship sacred texts." Contact Tibetan Nyingma Relief Foundation, 2910 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, California, 94702, USA.

New Vrindaban leader Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada has declined a government plea bargain and will stand trial again in August for mail fraud and racketeering. A 1991 conviction on these charges was thrown out by a federal appeals court on the basis of irrelevant testimony being introduced which may have swayed the jury. Bhaktipada's co-defendant, Terry Sheldon, has accepted a plea bargain in which he will be convicted of conspiracy in the 1986 murder of a dissident devotee and be sentenced to five years in prison. The New Vrindaban community was excommunicated by the American ISKCON organization in 1987.

Worldwide Guide to Unusual Events, to be published in 1995, is seeking writers to provide information on cultural, religious or musical events in India. The book will be "a valuable tool for travelers seeking exciting annual events around the world." Contact: Thomas Clynes, 2820 East Grand Boulevard, Detroit, Michigan, 48211,USA. Phone (313) 871-1328