

[News in Brief](#)

Category : [January 1995](#)

Published by Anonymous on Jan. 02, 1995

News in Brief

The traditional pottu may be worn by girls in Malaysian schools, as long as they are not overdone. Two Catholic schools had attempted to prohibit Hindu students from wearing the forehead mark, but Ahmad Farouk Abdul Majid, state Education Department deputy director, said, "If the students overdo it by wearing them large, principals can forbid them. But no school official can prevent students from wearing the pottu as long as they follow the guidelines."

Religious fervor and festivals continue unabated at the Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil in war-torn Northern Sri Lanka. While many other temples have been destroyed in the civil war, Lord Muruga's home near Jaffna has been spared, and recently saw tens of thousands devoutly celebrate the temple's annual 24-day festival.

The Arun Valley dam project "will ruin the biologically-rich and culturally-diverse" valley in remote Nepal, according to Korinna Horta, an economist with the Environmental Defense Fund. Horta contends that the dam and road construction project, to be funded by the World Bank, will violate the Bank's own rules regarding displacement of people and protection of the environment. One senior World Bank official has already resigned over the project, which is favored by Nepal's government because of the income the dam is expected to generate.

Asia's rice farmers are learning pesticide use does more harm than good—the exact opposite of what they've been taught for the last 30-years by the International Rice Research Institute. The reversal is based on a 4-year study by the same institute entitled "Pesticides, Rice Productivity and Farmer's Health" which noted diseases among farmers who used pesticides at two to three times the rate of those who did not, and at a prohibitive cost. Spraying is now being taught as a means of last resort to farmers in the Phillipines, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Puja With Protest was the decision of the Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad on September 2, 1994, for the celebration of that troubled country's biggest Hindu religious festival, Durga Puja. Last year the festival was essentially boycotted to protest attacks on Hindus and destruction of temples in October 1990 and December 1992 following Hindu/Muslim confrontations in Ayodhya, India. The Parishad resolved to hang banners and posters at the festival sites to remonstrate the "deteriorating communal situation" and the failure of the prime minister to respond to demands for reconstruction of damaged temples and compensation to Hindus who lost property and possessions.

Female infanticide is responsible for nearly 50% of 12,000 infant deaths recently studied by the government of Tamil Nadu, despite a pledge two years ago to end the practice. Indian women continue to have tests to determine the sex of unborn children, though such tests have been outlawed. Both practices transcend caste and economic status, and sociologists trace both trends to the financial demands of dowry system abuse.

Yoga is stretching throughout Russia, now that it has been decriminalized. The International Ishta-Yoga Retreat, held in September in Crimea, Ukraine, attracted participants from as far away as Vladivostok to learn the Mantra, Mudra, Kriya, Yantra and Dhyanam practices of Ishta Yoga. "I really did not realize that yoga was illegal in the former Soviet Union until Perestroika, five years ago. One of the students said her teacher was jailed for just teaching yoga stretches," said yoga teacher Rod Stryker. "Considering that, the retreat really gave participants access to sacred tools."

Despite 519-inches of rain per year, villagers in the world's wettest place, Cherrapunji, in northeastern India, can't irrigate crops, must walk miles for drinking water, and can only bathe once a week. USA's Washington Post recently reported, "With improved road networks, increasing population pressures on the land, and the spread of Christianity-which prompted many tribal people to abandon their beliefs in sacred forests-the surrounding tree cover that helped preserve the rain-battered topsoil is vanishing at what some environmentalists consider alarming rates." The director of the Geological Survey of India, Mr. P.K. Guha-Roy, lamented that "In the dry season it takes on the appearance of a semi-arid desert."

Don't forget the 2,000,000 devout Hindus of Pakistan. That is the message of Pandit Madan Lal Gupta of Vedic Dharma Samaj, who regrets that Hindu organizations and religious leaders have little contact with or interest in the temples and Hindus of Pakistan, favoring instead to visit the US, England and Canada. Pakistan's Hindus are appealing for a katha parchar, a group of travelling bhajan singers and musicians, to come to Islamabad and Karachi, and say the government of Pakistan will vouch for their safety. Expenses and books for distribution are being offered. Contact: 9999 Palm Street, Bellflower, California, 90706, USA.

First came prayer wheels, then prayers by fax, and now computerized penance, thanks to the ACM (Automatic Confession Machine), a kiosk for Catholics containing a computer screen and keyboard. The user selects his sin, and the ACM dispenses the appropriate penance. And for sinners in a hurry, another device will even recite "Hail Marys" or "Our Fathers" by the hundreds, as needed. Can the japa machine be far behind?

A sari style uniform is being integrated by the Royal Bank of Scotland for their Indian employees. The "Royal Collection" will also include shalwar kameez styles and maternity wear. "The way we present ourselves to our customers is an important element of our total service offering," says managing director of the branch banking division, Tony Schofield.

A raging fire caused us\$600,000 damage to Siddhachalam Tirth in New Jersey, called "the first and only Jain Tirth outside India." Founded by Muni Sushil Kumar Ji Acharya, the Tirth is now appealing for funds to rebuild its kitchen, dining hall, and other buildings consumed in the October blaze. Contact: International Mahavir Jain Mission, 65 Mud Pond Road, Blairstown, New Jersey, 07825, USA.

People & the Planet offers articles on population, health care, economics, the environment and more. A recent issue included articles on Tamil Nadu, Mauritius and Madhya Pradesh-a useful, globally oriented magazine. Contact: 60 Twisden Road, London NW5 1DN, United Kingdom.

Yogi Amrit Desai, founder of the Kripalu Yoga Fellowship, has stepped down from his position as spiritual leader at the urging of the Fellowship's directors. The resignation follows the acknowledgment of an extramarital affair with the group's

former chief executive and two other women on the staff. Yogi had taken a vow of celibacy, and taught "very strict standards around celibacy since the very beginning, so he essentially went against the teachings of the fellowship," said Kripalu president and chief operating officer Michael Risen. Insiders are hopeful their teacher will stay on, in an informal capacity, to guide his closest devotees.

Sri Ramesh Gandhi, President of the Federation of Hindu Associations, who recently died in an automobile accident in India, was remembered fondly at shraddhanjali by over a thousand Hindus and others in Artesia, California, in October. The community condolence is being called "the largest attended funeral procession of any Hindu activist and Indian-American in the United States." Instrumental in founding the Hindu-Jewish Solidarity Council and the Hindu Ekamata movement, "he was a great soul and a selfless worker. May our Lord keep him in peace," writes Dr. Shiva Subramanya, Secretary of the Advisory Board of VHP of America. Sri Ramesh Gandhi was 37-years old.

Mahatma Gandhi's global legacy was affirmed at celebrations held on the 125th anniversary of his birth by the Gandhi Seva Sangh of Trinidad, where Prime Minister Patrick Manning was moved to speak of his influence: "He was to indenture what the Abolitionists were to slavery, and we all know what important consequences the termination of the indentured system of labor exploitation had for our country."