

## [News in Brief](#)

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Sri Lankan Buddhists demanded an apology from Pope John Paul II for passages printed in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. The pontiff's best-selling book characterizes Buddhism as an atheistic system, adding that "Buddhist tradition and the methods deriving from it have an almost exclusively negative soteriology" (means to salvation). Calling the remarks "malicious," the 15-member Federation of Buddhist Organizations challenged John Paul to debate the points raised when he visits Colombo on January 20th. Hinduism is given scant mention in the pope's book.

"Strength in Unity, Unity in Diversity" is the motto of Hindu Council U.K., a new umbrella organization established in England to present a unified voice and a higher profile for England's 1.5-million Hindus and 500 associations. The group's launching was blessed by 16 spiritual leaders, and comes after four years of research by the National Council of Hindu Temples U.K.

Christians are targeting Nepal, the world's only Hindu kingdom. Nepalese church leaders have signed the "Kathmandu Declaration" whose goal is "the evangelization of Nepal and the Nepalese diaspora around the world." They also point nervously to the arrest of eleven evangelicals on charges of proselytism as the beginning of Nepal's enforcement of its anti-proselytism laws. Nepal enacted the laws years ago to forestall well-funded foreign missionaries from destroying the country's ancient religious traditions.

Husbands whose wives stay at home earn more and advance further. Loyola University of Chicago studied 348 managers at Fortune-500 companies over 5 years. Men whose wives did not work earned raises 20 percent higher than men with working wives. Earlier studies of MBA's showed husbands of homemakers earned 25 percent more than men whose wives held jobs.

"VISUDHI," a new ayurvedic treatment center at Amritapuri opened last November by the Mata Amritanandamayi Math in Kerala, specializes in the traditional system of cleansing and detoxifying the body known as panchakarma. The "five actions" include nasal administration of medication, medicated enemas, purgation and therapeutic vomiting. As described in Matruvani, "Panchakarma therapy, which serves to clean the body/mind system of toxins and impurities, can be a challenging and painful process, but it is certainly worth the effort as it results in glowing vitality and health clarity and subtlety of mind and a vibrant, joyful spirit." Address: Amritapuri P.O., Kollam Dt. 690 525, Keralam, India.

The AIDS infection rate among India's housewives is what it was among prostitutes eight years ago, according to I.S. Gilada, Secretary General of the private Bombay-based Indian Health Association. He predicts by the turn of the century 10,000 Indians will die from AIDS every day and "India will need six times as many hospital beds as it has today to manage just the AIDS cases."

Robo priest has arrived. The robed and bearded Buddhist monk, who serves 24-hours a day at Yokohama Central Cemetery in Japan, raises one hand in prayer while beating rhythm with the other, and always says the right prayers at the right time. The computer-driven robot was created two years ago by a man who saw a need for priests and filled it, noting that fewer young people are becoming Buddhist priests these days. Price tag: \$400,000. Here's one priest who won't complain about long hours or beggar's gruel.

Meat products may not be sold during Diwali celebrations in Leicester, England. The city council made it so to respect the wishes of the Hindu community. "Leicester boasts of having the best Diwali celebrations in the West. Up to 30,000 people turn up for the switching on of the Diwali lights every year." said a council spokesman. UK schoolchildren of all religions study Diwali as part of their school curriculum.

"Stop eating beef!" That is the warning in Britain because of the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy among cattle. BSE, which causes holes in the brain, is popularly known as "mad cow disease." It has been identified on 20,000 British farms, and over 130,000 cattle have been destroyed. "We have a terrible crisis on our hands," says Richard Lacey, a professor of microbiology at Leeds University, "The threat to humans is very real." Because BSE cannot be killed by cooking, Lacey is calling for all beef consumption to cease, and all affected herds to

be destroyed.

Divorce is skyrocketing in India, and a lack of family elders is being blamed. Rates are up 350% in Kerala, 158% in Haryana, Punjab, and in New Delhi. "Despite the sacred Hindu vow of marital companionship through seven births, more than 8,000 marriages are ending in divorce in India's capitol per year," writes UPI (compared to 200 cases per year a decade ago). One expert says the nuclear family structure replaces a crumbling of the joint family system, which leaves no elders to guide and advise young couples.

Over 400 students and masters of Vedic astrology gathered in San Rafael, California, to share advanced techniques and research at the Third International Symposium, sponsored by the American Council of Vedic Astrology. Keynote speaker, Gayatri Devi Vasudev of Bangalore, India, was bestowed the Special Achievement Award. Predictions: that 1995 will be remembered as the year of AIDS as the epidemic spreads.

New computer software and Vedic astrology can predict personalities, allowing "the correct times for conceiving and delivering children who will possess specific qualities as grown individuals." The program's developer calls his new science "Spiritual Astrology Genetic Engineering," or SAGE. Contact: Das Gorvani, P.O.Box 198, Badger, California, 93603, USA.

More women are performing rituals in India since the Shankaracharya of Puri stated that only men are allowed to recite the Vedas and perform temple duties. The Indian notes the escalation of ladies' devotion as a backlash to "his pious uttering..." Women in West Bengal are chanting Vedic slokas at auspicious events, while actress/editor Aparna Sen had a woman officiate at the wedding of her daughter.

What price progress? The book The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators notes that in the USA since 1960 graphs charting violent crimes, juvenile arrests, teen pregnancy, child abuse, teen suicide, single parent families, and time watching TV all point sharply upward. Plummeting are the numbers of children living with both biological parents and scholastic aptitude test scores. "In the 1940s," notes author William J. Bennett, "teachers identified talking out of turn, chewing gum, making

noise, running in halls, cutting in line, dress code infractions and littering" as the worst problems in schools. Now teachers identify "drug and alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery and assault."

The Kalighat Temple Committee (KTC) is at odds with the Sathi Brahmins, or pandas, and the Sevayats, or descendants of the temple's original Haldar priests, who claim the hereditary right to perform puja to Goddess Kali in Her most famous of temples in Calcutta, and take turns doing so. The Sathis bid for a turn to perform the puja, paying the Sevayats hundreds of dollars for the lucrative opportunity, then collect many times that amount in offerings of money and jewelry. The temple's only income is the less than US\$5 paid by the Sevayat for each day. The Sathis recently passed a resolution saying only a panda's son can succeed him. KTC Secretary Pritish Bagchi says, "Sathi Brahmin is an age-old custom here. It's not hereditary." And the KTC now wants a set fee paid to it for the brahmin's chance to perform the puja.

Over 30,000 people jammed the first Dussehra Mela at Nassau Beach Park in Long Island, New York, USA. Attendees enjoyed cultural arts, crafts, foods and dramatic performances. In one, an effigy of the ten-headed demon king Ravana was blown apart and burned by 65,000 firecrackers. "It was like visiting India right here in Long Island," said V.K. Sabapathy.