NEWS IN BRIEF
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Diwali may becomean official holiday in New York, thanks to a definitive proposal submitted to the mayor by the Indo-American, Indo-Caribbean and Indian Guyanese communities of the tri-state area. Hindus here feel that Diwali well deserves official status. Chandrika Prasad, president of the USA Pandits' Parishad, claimed that, "Diwali is the festival for humankind." Official sources report that Mayor Rudolph W. Guiliani is receptive to the idea.

The thriving Hindusof Portugal are planning a temple and community center in Lisbon. If their current goals are realized, it will likely be the largest such complex in Europe. The mostly Gujarati organization, Communidade Hindu, is in charge of the project. The land has been subsidized by the municipality of Lisbon, which has also named the street in front of the complex after Mahatma Gandhi.

Hindu student groups' publications and activities may be eligible for funding assistance from their university. A recent US Supreme Court ruling declared that the University of Virginia (UV) was wrong to deny funds for a Christian student group's publication. The UV requires full-time students to pay $14 per semester into a fund that supports its student groups. The Supreme Court ruling stated that a student group could not be denied access to such funds because of religious orientation. Some say this significant ruling erodes church-state separation; others applaud it as ending discrimination against religion in academia.

Without a Maharajato provide the specially prepared wood, the construction of new festival chariots for the Lord Jagannatha temple of Puri has fallen prey to contention. Before the State Government's forestry department took over the task, it was the Raja of Dasapalla who had allocated forests in his region to provide the wood. He would cut it three years prior to use to allow for proper curing. The temple has claimed that some of the wood recently provided was aged only six months. Fearing this could cause a catastrophe during the festival, special safety measures were implemented. The forest department blames corruption within the temple's

endowment board. No claims have been substantiated.

Tuberculosis has infectedmore than half of India's adult population, according to a recent World Health Organization report. WHO reported that each year approximately 1.5 million people are infected, and that this year 500,000 were expected to die from TB. Death estimates are up to 10,000 per week, despite considerable preventative and curative programs. (Though 50,000 people may be cured, another 1 million are infected.) WHO anticipates serious repercussions in India's workplace productivity. Shortage of drugs and inadequate budgets are the greatest barriers to controlling this epidemic.

The yearly pilgrimageto the Amarnath ice Lingam cave in August was again immersed in tight security [see Hinduism Today, November, 1994]. Special arrangements, transportation and protection were provided by the district security forces of Jammu, Srinagar, Gazigund and Pahalgam to ensure the safety of the pilgrims. The Islamic Kashmiri separatist group, Harkatul Ansar, had threatened to disrupt the pilgrimage. In Pahalgam, in July, five Western tourists were kidnapped (one has escaped) and a bomb blast killed four people and injured 23.

East Indian Hindus Mustcome to know and understand themselves and their cultural heritage fully so that they can better understand their fellow human beings, declared Paras Ramoutar, Public Relations officer of the 150th Indian Arrival Day Celebrations of Caparo, Trinidad. Ramoutar was addressing the distinguished audience at the celebrations, including the Indian High Commissioner, Mr. Jagganath Doodmani and his wife. Stress was placed on renewed allegiance to their new "motherland" of Trinidad and that Hindus here were "poised for great things."

Tainted Meat goesto market undetected by the current US Department of Agriculture (USDA) meat inspection program, which has not been revised since 1906. Yet, the meat industry is resisting the present effort to modernize the system, claiming the proposed changes are unfair and too costly. The meat-eater's foremost risk lies in the deadly E. coli and other bacteria, which activists claim are not effectively screened-out under current regulations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, report that up to 20,000 Americans are poisoned by E. coli yearly. About one-third of these require hospitalization and a few-hundred die, mostly children and elderly.

The Omnifarious Aumis becoming the nefarious Aum in Japan. The ongoing saga of the Aum Shinrikyo sect in Japan has caused its downfall there. One company, Aum Electric, is reported to have spent $3 million to change its name as a result of clients' complaints. Other companies are following suit. Hindus have decried the media for referring to the Buddhist cult simply as "Aum," fearing a desecration reminiscent of that which befell the swastika under Hitler.

Ayurveda may need to cureitself as the modern evolution of the environment makes it more and more difficult--in some cases impossible--to use the traditionally prescribed ingredients. Some herbs are now exceedingly rare; some are extinct. Such items are now being omitted, or substituted, by some manufacturers, bringing into question the purity and effectiveness of the medicines being sold. Companies have been blamed with falsifying the ingredients list, while those that strive to keep to tradition have no choice but to charge formidable prices.

Pat Robertson's impudentefforts to convert India to Christianity [Hinduism Today, July, 1995, also page 3, this issue] are mirrored by similar evangelical groups who prey upon India. Family Radio News (FRN) is one to be wise to. Their September, 1995, bulletin says, "India is where we want to concentrate. They want to wash in the Ganges river instead of the water of the Gospel. Their sins can never be washed away in a physical river. So it is a dead religion." A letter from a child in Varanasi told, "I read your paper Does God Love You? and put it under my pillow. But I couldn't sleep because I was afraid of hell." FRN touted this as "accomplishing His purposes." They claim that "The cry from India is 'Come over and help us.'"

Suspicious Missionariesare causing concern in northeast India. Nine or more foreign missionaries are expected to be deported due to allegations that their organizations diverted funds and supported other organizations which are banned. Though the accusations are quite serious, the government is taking great care not to rouse international protest from human rights groups and the missions involved. At least 25 organizations were identified as "violating their stated purpose and helping extremist elements." Some foreign-funded churches with alleged involvement in illegal arms trafficking are now being closely monitored.

Modeming Mullahsare modernizing Islam in Qom, Iran, the Muslim "center of learning." Using personal computers connected to Sprintnet and other electronic networks, a small group of Iranian Muslims creating a world computer database with the full text and commentaries of the seven branches of Islamic law and answers to

about 12,000 religious questions. The availability of information is expected to create a "more moderate climate," according to one mullah. Can Hindus catch up?

It's Mom against Monksin the mountainous highlands of Nepal. Maria Torres' ten-year-old son, Osel, is being raised by Tibetan Buddhist monks, who believe he is a reincarnated lama. But the lama's mama now wants more control. "He is turning into a little tyrant rather than a little Buddha," she argues. Mystical signs first gave hint of Osel's unique nature, and he has since passed all the "crucial tests" given by the Tibetan masters. It is common practice in Eastern traditions to offer a son to a monastery, lama or not. Tradition also states that the parents do not consider such a son as their own and do not interfere with his training.

Earth Island Journalreports that if the world were a village of 1,000 people, there would be: 325 Christians (187 Catholics, 84 Protestants, 31 orthodox); 178 Moslems; 167 non-religious; 132 Hindus; 60 Buddhists; 45 atheists; 3 Jews; 86 of all other religions.