

## [News In Brief](#)

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THE LINK BETWEEN RELIGION and the environment is being honored and applied in the holy city of Vrindavan. "Our community awareness project, which invokes religion to protect environment, is a role model for others," said Samar Singh, Secretary General of the World Wildlife Fund, India. Reducing pollution of the holy river Yamuna and planting sacred tulsitrees are among the successes of the Vrindavan Conservation Project started in 1991. "By greening the parikrama(sacred path), we are now confident to take on other problems," added project coordinator Sanjay Rattan.

AMERICA'S 1,000-HINDU soldiers don't have a single Hindu chaplain to serve their spiritual needs, nor do any Buddhist chaplains serve the 5,000 Buddhist soldiers. But all that may be changing soon. Imam Abdul Rasheed Mohammed has been sworn in as the US Army's first Muslim chaplain to serve the Army's nearly 3,000 Muslim soldiers--to the delight of America's Muslim community. Hindus and Buddhists now want equal recognition, and the director of the Armed Forces Chaplain Board says he welcomes chaplains representing other faiths, calling it a reflection of today's multi-cultural America.

A PLUCKY PARROT CAUSED quite a flutter after flying into the inner sanctum of the Sri Mariamman temple in Madurai and

taking up residence on the presiding deity's shoulder. Further, Press Trust of India reports hundreds flocked to the temple to offer the parrot pranams. The bold bird ignored all attempted evictions, including being chased with sticks, and even returned after being nabbed, driven miles away, and released. The bird arrived just as the annual Panguni festival began with puja to Lord Ganesha.

THIEVES STOLE LORD Krishna's 24-carat gold flute right out of His arms at the Sri Krishna Mandir Temple in Wolverhampton, United Kingdom, then smashed into a safe containing donations. Calling them "inhuman thugs," one worshipper noted "these people have no respect for any religion."

MAHESH CHANDER MEHTA, India's dynamic public interest attorney whose 40 landmark judgments place him among the most successful environmental litigators in the world, has been named one of six recipients of the highly prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize, considered the Nobel Prize of environmentalism. Honored in April, Mehta is credited with reducing the industrial pollution fouling the holy river Ganges and eroding the Taj Mahal, and with the introduction of unleaded gasoline to India.

SHRIDHAR BHASKAR Varnekar, whose self-proclaimed mission is to save the Sanskrit language, has been honored with the Ramakrishna Dalmia Shreevani Alankaran award for Sanskrit literature. Recognizing Varnekar's life-long contributions to Sanskrit, the award was presented by the Dalai Lama.

NO "BEGGING" ALLOWED, not even in the name of Krishna. The US Supreme Court has upheld a Dade County, Florida, ordinance banning begging at Miami International Airport. ISKCON devotees regularly gathered at the airport to chant "Hare Krishna" and sell flowers to raise money. They had contested the ban, arguing that it violated its first amendment right to freedom of assembly.

10,000 HINDUS CHEERED and chanted as Pilot Baba, once an Indian Air Force officer, now a yoga adept, emerged after 4-days of meditating in a 9-foot deep pit called a bhū samadhi, or earth grave. But the Indian Rationalists Association, who piously attempt to expose fraud and debunk claims of miracles, denounced the feat as "third-rate gibberish," and claimed that air easily passed through the thin layer of soil atop a tarpaulin covering the pit. But the Rationalists could not rile the yogi, who retorted, "Disbelievers have their religion, too."

MEANWHILE "GURU BUSTERS," an hour-long program delivering the anti-religion message of the Indian Rationalists Association, was recently aired on The Learning Channel, on American cable television. The program targeted Satya Sai Baba, Swami Ganapathi Satchidananda, and others, calling them "charlatans and cheap magicians." Its message of ridicule of religion is ostensibly meant to promote "scientific thinking" and to rid India of backward "superstitiousness." However, it has been observed over the years that this association only attacks Hindus (and sometimes Muslims), but never the beliefs, practices or even "superstitions" of Christians. Sounds like a case of anti-Hindu Hindus as discussed on page 6 in this issue.

A SIKH CLERICAL COMMITTEE has cracked down on the clement habits of some of its congregation. The Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee in Amritsar proclaimed that Sikhs who drink, smoke or use any other intoxicants can no longer keep the Guru Granth Sahib (the holy text) in their home. In addition, the clergy will now not recognise any member as a Sikh who cuts his or her hair or trims his beard. This, along with bans on commercialization of religious music and unauthorised publication of their holy book, made for a significant step toward preserving Sikh tradition.

PRAVRAJKA VIVEKAPRANA, Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, the world's largest self-administered women's monastic order, is touring the USA between June 26 and September 30. Lectures and retreats in the USA and Canada are being scheduled by her sponsors, the Sri Sarada Mission. Contact by phone: 518-7677- 2246, or 916-483-8269.

IF ANUBHAVIS ANY INDICATION, Hinduism's future is safe. This journal from the Sanatana Dharma Sanga of the Hindu Students Organization of Columbia University in New York is meant to "provide insight into the diverse experiences of our members" and as an "illustration of the effect Hinduism has had on its most recent inheritors." Contact: Hindu Students Organization, Earl Hall, Box 38, Columbia University, New York, New York, 10027, USA.

CASTE DISCRIMINATION IS NOT exclusive to India, notes Pope John Paul II. When a reporter asked His Holiness why he had not spoken out more forcefully against the caste system while

visiting India, the Pope replied, "There are other systems of caste that are not called caste but exist in the world."

THE DEMAND FOR ORGANIC foods, those grown without hormones or pesticides, is steadily increasing. Forty-nine percent of organic farmers in the USA planned to increase acreage this year, according to the Organic Farming Research Foundation. "Consumers are increasingly turning to certified organic food," writes Wendy Gordon, "because it's their only guarantee that the farm from which it came is ecologically sound, the farmer is responsible and the cows are sane."

BEWARE OF THE BAPTIST World Alliance, whose 42-million members worldwide have been enjoined to each "win one person to Christ by the year 2000," and for each congregation to establish another within the same time frame.

"YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT." Well, here is what New Yorkers are, based on a survey of the top-10 "edible items" purchased at supermarkets: Pepsi Cola, Coke Classic Cola, Bumble Bee Tuna, Coke Classic Cola (large size), Pepsi Cola (also large size), Hellmans Mayonnaise, Budweiser Beer, Diet Pepsi Cola, Domino Sugar and Chock Full O'Nuts Coffee.

INDIA'S PRESIDENT, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, was recently presented the newly-published book Hindu Darshan by its author, noted Hindu scholar and former Union Minister Dr. Karan Singh. President Sharma praised Dr. Singh's qualities of head and heart, saying that through his pen, he has not only served literature and society, he has also significantly served

religion and culture.

**YOURNEWS IN BRIEFWRITER**Ravi Peruman, was recently honored by the Associated Press Radio and Television Association as Reporter of the Year for his work at KGO Radio in San Francisco. Hinduism Today beseeched him for an exclusive interview, but, citing the yoga-like difficulty of typing while patting oneself on the back, he declined further comment.

**VEGETARIAN**information--including diets and sources of non-animal products, is available from: VRP, Box 1463, Baltimore, MD 21203, USA; or: [http:// www.envirolink.org /arrs/vrg/home.html](http://www.envirolink.org/arrs/vrg/home.html).