

## A global potpourri of poisons

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Article

The Sun - 01/25/97

HERE'S A QUICK LOOK AT POISONING cases that took place globally in 1996.

### The United States

- In Colorado, five men, who were enjoying themselves drinking beer and listening to music inside a car at their garage with the engine on, died of poisoning of carbon monoxide fumes.
- Two American teachers nearly became victims of poisoning by their students. In one case, a 12-year-old girl poured rat poison in her teacher's soda and was subsequently sentenced to five years detention. In another case, a teenager was charged with spiking his teacher's drink with the drug LSD. Both teachers suffered no harm.
- In Fort Lauderdale, a mother will be charged for having deliberately poisoned her nine-year-old daughter by injecting faecal bacteria into her blood.
- In New York, a 19-year-old medical student died after being given too much anaesthesia in a government-sponsored research project.
- A finding published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* said the outbreak of salmonella that affected more than 200,000 was traced to a nationally distributed ice-cream made in Minnesota. It was the largest case of poisoning from a single food source in the United States.
- In Texas, a man bitten by a poisonous coral snake killed the reptile by biting off its head, then used its skins a tourniquet to keep the venom from spreading. He was later driven by a passerby to a hospital emergency room.

### Europe

- A Scottish woman lost 8.5 kg in weight as a result of food poisoning from a curry served in a local restaurant in Edinburgh.
- A 64-year-old grandmother was identified as a serial poisoner suspected of murdering several elderly, well-to-do males and spending her inheritance at the casinos. She poisoned them with medicinal products in their meals.
- A Swedish farmer was shocked when he walked into his hog farm and found his 2,500 pigs drunk as a result of consuming fermented food.
- Bad behaviour and anti-social acts are said to be part of the list of problems posed by high levels of lead in the bodies of children, according to a psychiatrist at Pittsburgh University.
- According to a new book released in the United States, there is evidence that men's sperm counts have dropped worldwide since the introduction of plastics, pesticides and industrial processes.
- In Manchester, a 27-year-old female executive who had a rare allergy died after eating walnut butter served with bread rolls at a party.
- In Bucharest, a depressed Romanian who survived a jump from a 10-storey building after taking 50 tranquilliser pills, was looking for a better way to kill himself. His next suicide attempt was foiled when his fall was broken by a parked car.
- In Essen, Germany, unknown blackmailers threatened to poison food stores in Europe with snake venom unless they were given a fortune worth RM4,000 millions in diamonds.

### The Indian subcontinent

- In Tamil Nadu, 28 people died after drinking home-made liquor reportedly laced with varnish. Most of the victims had a quick drink at a vendor on their way home from work.
- Poisoned turtle meat killed 24 people on the Island of Pemba in the Indian Ocean. More than 200 others were treated.
- In Sri Lanka, a former army chief who imported military rations unfit for human consumption was put to jail. The entire consignment was subsequently destroyed.
- Three rare Bengal tigers in the Bangladesh National Zoo died within days after a short illness. Zoo officials suspected the animals were poisoned.
- A heavy tank was used to crush hundreds of cans of beer in Kabul in a demonstration against the consumption of alcohol.

### China and East Asia

- An investigation in the Guangxi province revealed that the water well serving a kitchen in a school was deliberately poisoned with a toxic chemical. Over 200 students were affected.
- Chinese doctors used arsenic to treat patients with leukaemia and claimed the treatment to be effective.
- China's Internal Trade Ministry appealed to restaurant owners to stop adding opium poppy shells to spice up the ingredients of a popular winter hot soup.

- A young woman mourning the accidental death of her fiancée, drank poison beside her dead beloved in the morgue. She was dressed in a bridal gown.
- In China, a teenager puffed 100 cigarettes in one sitting to win a bet but died when his heart collapsed. His death was due to excessive intake of cigarette smoke and acute nicotine poisoning.
- In Hong Kong, the public was urged to exercise special caution against a type of Chinese herbal medicine used widely as a cold remedy since it was found to contain high levels of arsenic.
- In Hong Kong, a man tried to black mail a leading soft drink manufacturer by claiming he had spiked its products with a lethal poison. He was jailed for four and-a half year.
- A man suspected of lacing biscuits with poisons and handing them out to local children was arrested in the Guangdong Province. Six children were affected and one died. The man acted in revenge after other villagers accused him of stealing a cow.

### **Malaysia and Southeast Asia**

- In Malaysia, two Singaporean women in their 30s attempted suicide in a hotel by swallowing a bottle of insecticide each.
- In Malacca, a 29-year-old Indonesian died of renal failure three days after taking an overdose of a *jamu* aphrodisiac.
- Filipinos were warned that kissing the wrong person could be deadly. This was in response to reports that more than 400 people died from rabies in 1996. It was said that humans are possible carriers of rabies and may spread it through kissing.
- In Manila, a group of prisoners celebrating the appointment of one of their inmates as assistant chief of a prison gang, drank a cocktail added with alcohol. The newly-appointed assistant chief and five others died two days later. A fellow prisoner who sold the deadly drink was charged with homicide.
- In Phnom Penh, a city officially reported that the sale of rice wine believed to have been laced with organophosphate insecticide to unsuspecting customers had killed at least 16 people in the Cambodian capital. The insecticide was added to make the wine "stronger."
- Three Vietnamese men were overcome by fumes in 9.5 m well and died while trying to retrieve a chicken. There was no word of the fate of the chicken.

### **Other parts of the world**

- In New Zealand, a female molecular biologist fed her ex-lover, a professor, with poison after he jilted her. While in hospital, she visited him and gave a top-up dose that almost killed him. She was found guilty by a high Court jury.
- In the Black Sea city of Nikolayev, a woman died at the burial site of her only daughter. Both had eaten the wrong mushroom.
- In Gambia, military authorities decreed a ban on skin bleaching and import of skin-lightening products, citing them as harmful and not good for health.
- In Liberwillie, Africa, nine people died of gastroenteritis after dining on the remains of a dead chimpanzee found near their village.
- In Cairo, a jilted civil servant whose fiancée left him to marry his best friend, took revenge by spraying acid on 60 beautiful women whom he said were "treacherous."

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