

that a number of cedar and pine forests in Japan are deteriorating.

### Forests and Atmosphere Control

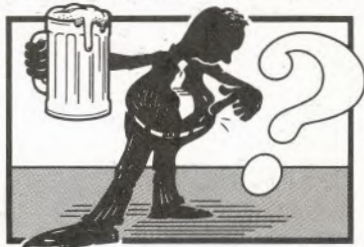
Ammonia is an important part of the earth's atmosphere. An alkaline chemical, it can buffer the acidity in acid rain. But too much of it contributes to the ugly brown clouds of smog that hang over many cities. New studies suggest that forests help the atmosphere maintain the right balance of ammonia. *The Denver Post* reported that scientists measured the amounts of ammonia in winds that blew over forests in Colorado, U.S.A. When the wind contained less ammonia than the natural level found in leaf cells, the plants of the forest emitted the chemical into the air. But when the wind was already laden with higher ammonia levels, the forest flora absorbed ammonia instead of emitting it. Andrew Langford, one of the scientists who performed the experiments, said: "The entire forest is strong enough to control the atmosphere as long as it's not overwhelmed by (unnatural) sources."

### Tomb of Caiaphas Found?

What appear to be the tomb and remains of Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest who was instrumental in the death of Jesus Christ, have been found in Jerusalem, reports *The Star*, a newspaper of Johannesburg, South Africa. The find consisted of an ossuary, or container for bones, with the inscription "Yehosef bar Caiapha." Caiaphas became high priest in about 18 C.E. and persecuted not only Christ but also Christ's followers. He was removed from office about 36 C.E. Mentioned also by the Jewish historian Josephus, Caiaphas is one of the few such ancient figures whose remains have been documented. *The Star* quotes one archaeologist as saying: "Of over a thousand ossuaries found in Jerusalem, we've recognised the names of maybe five."

### Alcohol and Fat?

It is hardly news that people who drink too many alcoholic beverages tend to get fat. But why? A recent study at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, came up with an interesting possibility. Apparently it is not just the calories in alcohol that make it so fattening but also the way alcohol affects the body's ability to burn fat. Nutritionists have long known that the body is a bit sluggish when it comes to burning fat, tending to store it while burning sugars and carbohydrates more readily. But alcohol makes the body burn



fat even more slowly. In an experiment, men were placed on diets that included three ounces of pure alcohol per day—about the equivalent of six beers. On this diet, the men burned about one-third less fat than usual. Of course, the more fat in one's diet, the more pronounced this effect tends to become.

### "A Sad Record"

The French daily *Le Figaro* reports that 1991 was the worst year of crime in the history of France. French law enforcement agencies have made public the latest crime statistics, which show that over 3.7 million crimes were reported in France last year—an increase of more than 7 percent above 1990. Over a fourth of all these crimes took place in the Paris region. There were "significant increases in almost every category of crime," from "unprecedented violence in the suburbs" to "white-collar crime, particularly among politicians," says the newspaper. These latest figures re-

veal that France's crime rate is now seven times higher than it was 40 years ago. "A sad record," concludes *Le Figaro*.

### Passive-Smoking Lawsuit

The New South Wales District Court in Australia recently awarded heavy damages to a 64-year-old woman who had sued her previous employers for serious health problems she claims to have suffered after working in a smoke-filled environment for about a dozen years. Previously, such cases have been settled out of court, but in this landmark decision, the court awarded \$85,000 (Australian) to the claimant. *The Australian* newspaper reported that this is the first time a jury has ruled that a smoker can harm the health of nonsmokers who breathe the smoke-laden air. Some feel that this ruling might have widespread effects on restaurants, hotels, nightclubs, and other workplaces where nonsmoking employees could sue for heavy damages if smoke-free work areas are not provided for them.

### Precocious Sex and Psychological Turmoil

Sexual intercourse can cause numerous problems for youngsters besides venereal disease. According to Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, one underappreciated risk is that a premature sex life can give rise to "psychopathologies that create turmoil in youngsters' minds and in their personal relationships, to the point of causing deviant behavior patterns, alcohol and drug abuse, and crime." At a convention held in Rome, organized by the Center for Psychosocial Studies and the Italian Ministry of Justice, it was affirmed that young people are beginning to have sexual intercourse at an increasingly early age. The average age, according to one consultant, is 17.