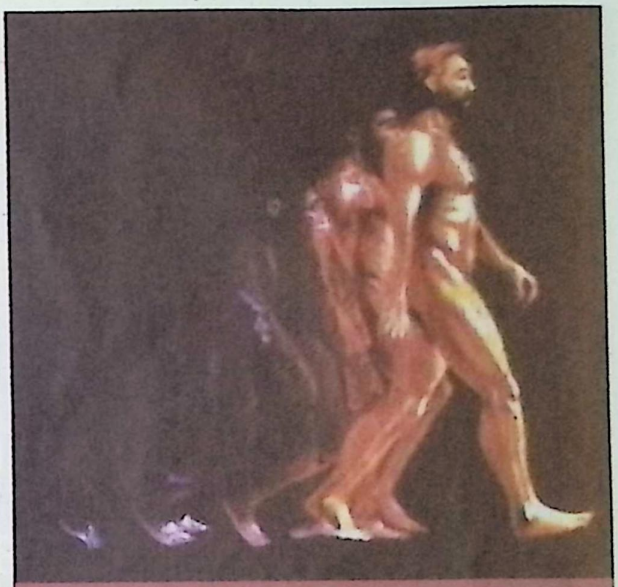
Put away the apples and pears

For frustrated math students it may be a relief to realise that teaching methods meant to make math 'more relevant' may actually be making it harder to understand, US researchers say. In a study, students who were taught abstract math concepts fared better than those taught with real-world examples, such as story problems. Distracting students with extraneous details makes it hard for students to extract the underlying mathematical concepts and apply them to new problems, say research scientist at Ohio State University, whose study appears in the journal Science.





Human line nearly split in two

Ancient humans started down the path of evolving into two separate species before merging back into a single population, a genetic study suggests. The genetic split in Africa resulted in distinct populations that lived in isolation for as much as 100,000 years, the scientists say. This could have been caused by arid conditions driving a wedge between humans in eastern and southern Africa. According to a report published in the American Journal of Human Genetics.

Calories linked to baby boys

A woman's diet around the time of conception may influence the gender of her baby, research suggests. The UK study suggests a high-calorie diet at this time - and regular breakfasts - might increase the odds of a boy. The researchers say the modern trend to opt for low calorie diets might explain why the proportion of boys is falling in developed countries. The study, by the Universities of Exeter and Oxford, appears in the Royal Society journal Biological Sciences.

