

Carnivores feeling sting

MAIN NEWS

OMAHA WORLD-HERALD

of discrimination in Bombay

■ Neighborhoods can say no meat-eaters allowed.

BOMBAY, India (AP) — Never mind pets, smokers or loud music. House hunters here, more often than ever, are being asked: "Do you eat meat?"

If yes, the deal is off.

As this city of 16 million becomes the cosmopolitan core of a booming Indian economy, real estate is intersecting with cuisine. More middle-class Indians are moving in, many of them are vegetarian, and the law is on their side.

"Some people are very strict. They won't sell to a nonvegetarian even if he offers a higher price than a vegetarian," said real estate broker Norbert Pinto.

Vegetarianism is a centuries-old custom among Hindus, Jains and others here. The government estimates India has 220 million vegetarians, more than anywhere else in the world and about a quarter of the country's 1 billion population.

"Veg or nonveg?" is heard in restaurants, at dinner parties, on airlines. And, increasingly, when house hunting.

In India, which is officially secular, there's nothing to stop you and your neighbors from forming a housing society and making your whole apartment block exclusively Catholic, Muslim, Hindu or Zoroastrian.

Vegetarians say they, too, need such segregation.

Rejected home-seekers have mounted court challenges to the housing societies, but India's highest tribunal ruled the practice legal last year.

"It's just not fair. It's a monopoly by vegetarians," said Kiran Talwar, 49, an engineer who has watched vegetarianism take over the restaurants and groceries of his childhood neighborhood. "If you step out to eat, there's nothing for miles."

Indians are accustomed to housing societies demarcated by religion, but separation by diet worries meat-eaters. Bombay sees itself as a city wide open to the world, and some worry that the vegetarian tide will damage that image.

Vikramaditya Ugra, a young Bombay banker in search of an apartment, said vegetarian neighborhoods were fine in neighboring Gujarat, a state dominated by vegetarians. "That's in tune with local sensitivity," he said.

"But to impose this restriction is not right in a cosmopolitan city like Bombay."