

## [Global Dharma](#)

Category : [March 1994](#)

Published by Anonymous on Mar. 02, 1994

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India's Wild Tigers Stripped to Bones India's tigers are a kind of National Geographic icon of wilderness beauty, power and grace. Until 60 years ago they were hunted en masse for bloodsport by predatory Hindu rajahs, often to entertain and impress their sporting European guests. Today, poachers have replaced rajahs as the tigers' arch-enemy, skinning their luxurious fur for upscale throwrugs and extracting their bones to ship into China. The Chinese grind the bones to sell as an aphrodisiac and headache cure. The skin and bones of one tiger fetches US\$6,000. Conservationists estimate India's tigers could slip into extinction by the year 2000-the one place where they would remain alive is in zoos. Only 3,000 (two-thirds of the world tiger population) are left, prowling the habitats of India. The World Wildlife Fund reports over the past 3 years 1,500 tigers were killed by poachers. Arin Ghosh, head of Project Tiger-a federally funded group to protect the beasts-says that without their 20-year-long campaign the wild tiger population would be zero. New Delhi's old city is the bustling hub of India's illegal wildlife trafficking. In secret tanneries only betrayed by their hellish smell, the tiger parts are processed. Oily-robed traders coming in from Tibet pick up bone shipments and smuggle them along ancient Himalayan salt-caravan roads into China. Ashok Kumar, a conservationist, says the skins are often carried out of the country in luggage or rolled up inside carpets. Economic pressure put on China forced the Beijing government to crack down on banned wildlife product peddlars. In May last year they were told to

dispose of their supplies in six months. In January, 1994, Chinese officials burned 1,100 pounds of confiscated tiger bones. Worldwide TV news channel CNN aired a report on three white Bengal tiger cubs born at the MarineWorld Zoo in the US.

Islamic Law Approved In One Malaysia State Among the constellation of Muslim-majority countries, those outside of the Middle East-Malaysia, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Azerbaijan-have not adopted syariah, the Quranic Islam civil code, known for its punishment of crime by various mutilations, decapitation and stoning to death. In a fundamentalist trend, conservatives in these nations have tried to introduce syariah into state law. But the more liberal powers have so far parried such reforms. In November, 1993, the State Assembly of Kelantan, an arch-conservative state in Malaysia, unanimously passed the Syariah Criminal Code Bill. These codes are known as the Hudud Laws In Malaysia. According to Malaysia governance, the Bill cannot become law unless the Federal Constitution is amended. Liberal Muslims publicly surmise that the Kelantan bill may induce the federal government to declare Malaysia a secular nation. Hudud Laws are shrouded in mystery for the great majority of Malaysian Muslims. There is also widespread ignorance of how syariah is practiced in Middle Eastern countries. In Kelantan, it isn't clear how the Hudud Laws would be implemented or who they would actually apply to. M. Kuppusamy, a Hindu and chairman of the Indian political party in Kelantan, can only guess at this time how the laws would effect the 5,000 Indians in the state. In a Hinduism Today interview, he said that in the slipstream of the Hudud Laws other Islamic legislation could follow. He says, "The most common worry is the education system. Our own surveys have shown that parents are scared that Islamic religious education will be made compulsory. We're also afraid that the religious freedom which we enjoy under the Federal Constitution will be lost forever. This would mean that Indians

here may not be able to practice their religious and cultural beliefs. We may even lose our identities and roots in the process." Education Minister Datuk Amar Saliaman Daud, responding to the wildfire apprehension growing among the Kelantan Hindus, assured them that the education curriculum was federally controlled and would remain the same.

Twenty-six Hindu groups have pledged themselves to fight the syariah movement. Concerns of Hell Flare Up in West Over the past few years Europe and the Americas have enjoyed a renewed fascination and communion with angels (devas in Hinduism)-considered the guardians, guides and messengers of the heaven worlds (svarloka in Hinduism). But now the flames of hell are also making a comeback among agnostics, Christian laypeople and theologians. For the past thirty years the 6000-degree sinner-consuming hell was put on a back burner. A Catholic catechism of the 1960s declared the Biblical hell was not to be taken literally-it was a condition of being isolated within oneself from God. This was a time of reflection in the Christian community on whether God could "really be so vicious." Now, in the 90s, hell is back in the catechism, and back in peoples' conversations. One famous British novelist-who is not a strong believer-says the idea of hell is satisfying to her because "it means all the violent criminals, corrupt politicians and generally malignant people in the world will pay a heavy price in the afterworld." One theologian says most Christians view today's world as increasingly bad. According to him, hell as a condition of divine retribution for evil conduct is very appealing to 90's Christians. The mystery of afterlife is very magnetic to young Westerners, who are filling to overflow capacity university courses on heaven and hell. Comedian Steve Allen-who has written two books on religion-quipped, "As a deterrent to sin, hell has been an utter failure." One item notably not back in the Catholic catechism: limbo, the state of oblivion where all

non-Christians automatically and permanently check into after death. Rao Dazzles US Vedic Astrology Symposium K.N. Rao with his horizonless gaze and scholar's beard looks remarkably like the only existing painting of Nostradamus, the famous 16th-century French seer. Rao is one of India's most redoubtable astrologers, able to calculate charts in his mind like an Apple Power PC computer, and interpret natures and events with fair precision. And he speaks good English. So, in the first time he's left India, Rao was the keynote speaker and chief guest of the six-day Second Annual American International Symposium on Vedic Astrology, held in November, 1993, in California. A pinnacle of the event was Rao's day-long class, including a mind-probing exploration of Vedic astrology's psychological analysis. Western astrologers often critique Hindu astrology as being strong in prediction, but weak in personality assessment. One of the major developments of the Symposium was the creation of the American Council on Vedic Astrology to guide the teaching quality of the Hindu science in the US. During his keynote address Rao offered these predictions for 1994 (he totally missed the January 17th Los Angeles. earthquake): 1.Iraq: major shakeup in government 2.Japan: turning toward Asia-especially India-as major trading market 3.China: increasing tensions with US 4.Germany: increase of right-wing Nazi violence 5.France: turbulent stock market 6.England: John Major's popularity continues to erode; may not finish term 7.Russia: violent change in government; Yeltsin's life may end violently 8.United States: recession continuing to effect economy-national debt remains high; fierce opposition by medical establishment to Clinton's health reform; opportunity for revival of true spiritual values; increased stability in marriages-lower divorce rate Trends to Watch: India's Inviting "Namaste" to International Business A'beefless' McDonalds fastfood chain dotting the metropolises of India (where sacred

cows still have the right of way on roads) signals more than any other single event India's warm and accommodating namaste to international business. McDonalds plans to graze its beefless restaurants in India over the next two years, catering to an urban middle class bigger than the entire population of the US. India's present openness to international business and the retooling of its economic infrastructure has attracted more money and companies over the past year than in the last 45 years. Dozens of large companies like IBM and Coca-Cola (both booted out of India in the 1970's) and hundreds of small businesses are pilgrimaging to India. The India government hopes to flood the country with investment capital, put its colossal labor pool to work and create the same economic miracle that is gracing China. As the Washington Post reports, "Privatization, competition and quality control are rapidly becoming the mantras of the Indian elite." The big changes in economic reforms are the reduction of import/export taxes, foreign companies can now own 51% share of their India counterparts and can sell their goods under their own brand name. In 1993 US\$511 million poured into India business and US\$1.02 billion into the stock market. The hurdles to success are also huge: power and water shortages, illiteracy (China's literacy ratio is 25 times that of India), bad road structures and massive corruption among the middle-level government officials, who want the reforms to fail. Some Indian businessmen are worried about foreign companies taking over their previously protected markets. In the case of McDonalds, Hindu ahimsa sentiments are catalyzing nationwide campaigns to stop the burger company from settling India. Despite the fact McDonalds is serving chicken-burgers rather than beef-burgers, Hindu activists are reminding Indians that McDonalds kills 500,000 cows a year. Swami's Sudden Passing Trinidad Hindus woke up the morning of December 9th with sad news for their community: Swami

Satchidananda, 62, had died the evening before at his home. The popular swami-born in Trinidad and the founder and president general of the Divine Life Society of Trinidad-had suffered from an illness for some time, but his transition was totally unexpected. During the past decade he received numerous medals and awards for his service to Hinduism, and was often called upon by the government for interreligious social service. He is missed for his erudition of Sanatana Dharma, fine singing voice, fatherly mien and humble ability to admit he sometimes erred.

**Hindu Business Forum Begun** With the slow crumbling of Apartheid in South Africa, the country's Hindu businesspeople are attempting to network with other global Hindu commerce communities. In December the Hindu Business Forum was inaugurated, under the direction of the South African Hindu Association. One catalyzing factor for the Forum's birth is that foreign financial delegations (including from India) were visiting South Africa, with Hindus being left out of the discussions.

**Hindu-Run Medical Camps** Hundreds of patients waited outside the gates of the Baba Dogo Health Center near Nairobi, Kenya, for free medical treatment sponsored by the Hindu Council of Kenya. Volunteers from the Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh (BSS) performed the karma yoga of registering and treating the ill, and dispensing medicine. By the day's end, 3,000 had been seen. The Hindu Council of Kenya and BSS have organized six medical camps over the past three years. Financial help comes from Provide International.