Global Dharma
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AYURVEDA:Resurgence Threat to Herbs

INDIA'S ANCIENT MEDICAL SYSTEM is finally getting official recognition at home where the government of India proposed in February to make a 10-fold increase in the health care budget to promote indigenous medicine. The US$250 million budget will fund more Ayurvedic medical colleges, health care centers and also support other medical branches. India's ratio of two Ayurvedic doctors to 100 Western medical practitioners "will now dramatically change," announced Dr. Ved Prakash Vasudeva in a United Press report. Ayurvedic doctor Piyush Kumar says, "We get many patients with chronic diseases who are dejected by Western medicine.... They are cured by our treatment."

Unfortunately, the new boom in natural health and cosmetic products is unintentionally threatening species of medicinal plants. India's federal Health and Family Welfare Ministry has put 45 herbs on the endangered species list, including koovalam(used for diabetes and stomach disorders), gmelina (used as a brain rejuvenant in Chyavanaprakash) and desmodium(orila, used for cleaning the stomach) and other famous bushes and trees. Ten of these are from Kerala where the Kerala Agricultural University is doing research on the cultivation, propagation and distribution of these plants to growers. Its regional laboratory has advanced

chromatographic equipment for research and quality assurance testing of herbal drug preparations.

Natural medicine is getting another boost from two scientists in US and Britain, Professor Vakula Srinivasan of Ohio and Professor Anthony Gorman, who have released their joint research on haldi (turmeric)--long known in Ayurveda as a powerful anti-inflammatory and antiseptic. They say Haldi's active ingredient--curcumin--may even neutralize the oxygen reactive radical molecules implicated in cancers.

TRENDS: DEADLY TAMPERING,What an Offal Way to Die

BRITISH HEALTH SECRETARY STEPHEN DORRELL CONFIRMED IN MARCH that ten deaths from Creuztfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) may be connected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or "mad cow disease," first identified in the UK in 1986. The disease causes holes in brain tissue, progressive dementia and death in six months. Scientists believe that BSE spread to cattle through man's tampering. The cows, by nature vegetarians, were fed offal: butchered sheep intestines and carcass scraps. Sheep are known to suffer from scrapie, a BSE-like disease. But, for three years after the discovery, the meat-processing industry arrogantly continued to use infected parts, brains, spinal cords, etc. until these were banned in 1989. According to Associated Press, about 150 cases of mad cow disease have been recorded in 14 other European Union countries. In Switzerland, Bern officials announced in March that they have recorded a total of 207 cases of the illness in cattle since 1990 making it the most affected country after Britain. Decrying UK officialdom's negligence, the European Community has forbidden Britain to export beef or related products. Britain's US$4.6 billion beef industry faces ruin and

slaughterhouses are empty. This past decade 160,000 diseased cattle have been destroyed and the UK is proposing to the EC to kill 4.5 million more. Now it's revealed that beef-fed cats and zoo animals are dying from a related brain disorder. The shock wave is global. In the US, vegetarians who drink milk were chilled to learn that common dairy cow feed includes "poultry feathers, meat and bone meal and animal fat." For decades, the US cattle industry has fed a minimum of 14% of rendered cattle remains to other cows and another 50% to pigs and chickens. It is now advocating the removal of animal products from livestock feed. On March 24th, Michael W. Fox, of the US Humane Society addressed the Vegetarian Society of Delhi, warning that Kentucky Fried Chicken and MacDonalds could bring BSE into India. The Times of India, editorialized, "Hindus have often been mocked for considering their cows as holy, even as other have made a meal out of theirs." The paper said the current crisis resulted from the quest for profit and neglect of human and animal health.

CONVERSION TO HINDUISM: Western Hindu Defends His Tilak

SHAKTI GANAPATI SUBRAMANIAM CONVERTED TO HINDUISM OVER TEN years ago, but maintained his former Jewish name, Bernard Konowitz. This year he decided to make the legal change to his Hindu name, Shakti Ganapati Subramaniam. In the process of getting all his documents upgraded, he went to the Department of Motor Vehicles in the state of North Carolina, USA, for a new driver's license. The trouble started when an official noticed the dot on his forehead. "I had been to the temple that day, and I was still wearing the dot," Subramaniam said in an interview with a local newspaper. "But the woman at the DMV said I'd have to take the dot off." Upon asking why, he was told the governor of North Carolina had ruled against signs on the forehead a few years ago after

someone tried to have their license photo taken with a "666" on his forehead. Subramaniam says, "I explained that the law was in violation of my two constitutional amendments pertaining to religious freedom, and that I was not going to take my tilakoff. I also took out my cellular phone to call television news stations and explain to them what was going on. So the officials called the DMV headquarters in Raleigh...and after I had been there half-an-hour they finally said, 'Take the picture with the dot.' " According to a DMV spokesperson, the office is not supposed to ask customers to remove symbols that have religious significance, "Usually if it's religious we don't question it. Now, if you have warpaint on or some kind of picture, we would question that. But we would not question a Hindu dot."

SINGAPORE: Asia's Bright Face of Dharma

ONE MIGHT BE SURPRISED TO FIND that in the tiny technocratic center of the universe called Singapore, religion is carefully nurtured by the government, with agencies for each religion. The Hindu Endowment Board serves Hindus. One of its tools is a quarterly magazine, the Singapore Hindu, an inspiring, glossy, four-color magazine that our staff would rate in the top echelon of Hindu publications. With Tamil and English articles, it is visually and informationally rich in the South Indian tradition, with stories from India, explanations of religious practices and fabulous photo coverage of Hinduism in the beautiful little country of Singapore.

One important editorial theme has been Singapore's temples. Maintaining an old temple infrastructure under the crush of urban development on a small island with no land for expansion has forced city planners to make radical rules. Small

Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist temples have been consolidated and relocated to make way for transit improvements and urban developments. Still, Hindus there feel the end result is positive, with larger congregations at larger, new or properly renovated temples. One success story is Singapore's 170-year-old Sri Mariamman Temple which will be gaining a face lift that includes viewing galleries and a giant new wedding hall to open in May of 1996. It's only one of the city's many powerful temples. Making a pilgrimage to an urban center seems anomalous, but if you thirst for divine darshan, have only a few days in Asia and covet the convenience and comfort of a modern hotel and city infrastructure, Singapore is the place to visit!

Hindu Endowments Board, Editor, 397 Serangoon Road, Singapore 0821

TRADITIONAL ARTS:Cultural Tourism

DISTINGUISHED SINGER AND MUSICOLOGIST Dr. Salem Jayalakshmi inaugurated on January 18th a new center for traditional arts with a modern program and international outreach. The ten-acre center is located in a scenic area, ten miles from Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu. It will consist of a music college, shopping complex, cafeteria and tourist accommodations in an effort to draw aspiring youth in India and abroad to come for the study of Indian arts and culture in a "salubrious" atmosphere. An innovative fund-raising scheme allows for a lifetime lease, with permission to build on 500 square feet of land which reverts to the center on the death of the lease owner. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami graced the ceremony, laying the foundation stone of the center's Sri Vishwa Ganapathy temple.

POP SCENE: Stars Turn Veggy, Yoga Helps Sting

INDIA POST REPORTS THAT SILVER SCREEN STAR and Bharatiya Janata Party leader Shatrughan Sinha announced before a crowd of thousands that he vowed before Sant Asaram Babu to never again eat non-vegetarian food. Sinha was inspired by his wife who had, unbeknownst to him, recently become a vegetarian after listening to Sant Asaram Babu's preaching at the Andheri Sports Complex in Bombay.

Meanwhile, we learn from California's Yoga Journal that rock star Sting has become an ardent yoga practitioner. "I think the time is right for yoga. Yoga will take us out of all this historical paranoia. Its a long haul we're in." In fact he says, his whole band "does yoga."

EUROPE:On the Royal Road to God

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS, PRINCE OF WALES, VISITED THE SWAMI Narayan Mandir, Neasden, UK on the evening of February 28. Prince Charles received the traditional tilakfrom Pujya Atmaswarup Swami, the head of the mandir and participated in the evening arati. The future king's inspired address to the congregation revealed a profound empathy for Hinduism: "This mandir represents the timeless principles which people all over the world associate with Hinduism--peace, harmony, patience, tolerance and right conduct, what you call dharma, truth.... The loss of a sense of the wholeness of and unity between the material and spiritual worlds is one which threatens the essence of modern society. The essence of Hinduism which sees God throughout creation and sees creation as vastly more than just the material world is a powerful reminder to all of us of this basic principle of existence." '