

[Global Dharma: A Monthly News Digest Text:](#)

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Don't Speak in Malaysia Without It

Dr. Sulaiman looked out over the crowd of computer enthusiasts at a Malaysian business gathering and prepared to address them. Beginning to speak, his face registered shock as a Malaysian police officer suddenly walked on stage. Mass confusion ensued as Dr. Sulaiman and his Malaysian host were arrested and led to a police car outside. He had violated the country's visa laws that require a specific speaking permit be obtained before speaking in public. During the 1980's Malaysia was more relaxed about this law, but now Hindu businessmen, spiritual leaders and swamis should be alert to the current cautious climate. There were 939 similar arrests in 1991 alone for "flouting regulations of the social visit pass visa."

Immigration Department public relations officer Mohamed Aris Chonin said, "Sulaiman was only issued a social visit pass which means he was not supposed to carry out any business activity or work with or without payment in Malaysia." One report says that two Buddhist monks from Thailand early this year had some problems with local organizers who were against them. Now all saffron-robed monks are looked at strictly by immigration when they apply for a speaking pass. A Malaysian embassy official in Washington D.C. told Hinduism Today, "When traveling to Malaysia on a Social Visit Pass Visa and you wish to give a speech to over seven people, the easiest way is for your Malaysian host to obtain a speaking permit from the local police. There should be no problem in doing this." Penalties are up to US\$1000 in fines and up to six

months imprisonment. If convicted in court, the accused would be deported upon finishing his sentence and barred from entering the country again. Hindus Peak in US's Spiritual Topography

While the United States is the wealthiest nation on Earth-and is plagued with the highest violent crime rate of all countries-it possesses a mythic reputation for its citizen's dogged and frontier spirituality. More than 90% of Americans say they believe in God, 50% say they pray daily, 40% go to church once a week and 69% have faith in the existence of angels (devas as they are called in Hinduism). But, as reported in Newsweek magazine (which used a Siva Nataraja as one of the article's religion icons), recent social surveys indicate that what many Americans say about their religious habits is not what they actually do. According to in-house Protestant and Catholic polls, spiritual practice is in reality half of what is claimed. America's spiritual landscape, of course, ranges from agnostic to Zoroastrian, with a rapidly growing body of Buddhist and Hindu faithful. These small minorities are usually overlooked in spiritual lifestyle surveys, but a new book, "One Nation Under God," based on the most detailed random sample ever conducted, showed up some Hindu achievement data. In a comparison with 29 other faiths in America, Hindus are the second highest in college education (47%), just behind Unitarians. Among this same comparison group, Hindus are the most employed (64%), but in terms of wealth are just a little above average (\$27,800 annual income), and they are among the least likely to own property. Christian Right Fears Interfaith Harmony

The 1993 Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago was a hundred-year echo of the same international assembly in 1893 that vaulted Swami Vivekananda and his Ramakrishna Vedanta into the lecture halls and parlors of America. Swami Vivekananda became the spiritual champion of the Parliament and crisscrossed America by train on a Vedanta lecture tour.

He often met caustic resistance from Christian clergy. The 1893 Parliament, in stirring together world faiths for the first time to get to know each other, effectively opened the door for alien religions to seed on US soil. The 1993 Parliament sought a heightened level of understanding, harmony and cooperation among Earth's religions and faiths in a world still fevered by interreligious conflict. Indeed the Parliament itself suffered some spiritual squabbling at its outset. As in the 1893 event, Christian fundamentalists are reacting strongly to the idea and gathering reality of interfaith cooperation. The October, 1993, issue of Christian Research Institute International is devoted to a view from the Christian far right-written by Hendrik Hanegraaff, president of the Institute, who attended the Parliament of Religions. He writes: "The original [1893] Parliament changed the religious landscape of America. In fact, in large part as a result of this conference, public opinion turned very favorably toward Hinduism, and the door was opened to Hindu missionaries coming to the US. Somehow I couldn't help but feel that 100 years later, the 1993 Parliament could have a comparable impact. What we, as Americans, are now open to is nothing less than chilling!" Hanegraaff continues with an observation that "the Parliament's promoters were out to display absolute tolerance for everything but the tolerance of absolutes! Yet simply dare to assert that there is an absolute and objective Truth [as in Christianity], and you were sure to be scorned as an intolerant fundamentalist. Here were brilliant intellectuals so spiritually blinded that they could honestly maintain that 'all religions are paths that ultimately lead to the same destination.' At the Parliament, not only did I actually witness Christians seduced into participating in mass pagan rituals, but I saw once again that Christian evangelicals and fundamentalists of all sorts are identified as the primary threat to the goal of a one-world religion. It is critical that we as Christians take a stand, here

and now, if we are to stem the tide of spiritual darkness that threatens to engulf those around us." Russian Hinduism

Russia is on slippery political footing as recent elections showed low confidence in current government and economic reforms. But the country's freedom of religion euphoria continues to rise with surety. Hinduism Today, interviewed members of the Hindu organization Tantra Sangha -with a temple in Moscow and teaching Saiva and Sakta theology, ritual and yoga. Ilya Dunayevsky, 20, and a student, says, "I found in the Sangha real wisdom of the greatest religion." Vyacheslav Ledyoshking, 25-a worker-observes, "My life became much more spiritual and truly happy after I became a follower of tantric Hinduism." Viktoria Velous, 33, a medical sister, says, "Tantra Sangha is my true family." The group publishes Tantric Path and Tantra in Russia, both in Russian.

Trends to Watch: AIDS Overshadows India's Brilliant Future

India, with a 4% productivity growth in just one year and with foreign investments beginning to pour in, is today the subject of optimistic speculation. It seems certain that, in a decade or two, it should be an economic giant, for reasons we explore here next month. But these projections do not factor in another virtual certainty-AIDS, as the big spoiler. By all indications, India is following Africa's footsteps to catastrophe, lagging behind by only a few years. In Uganda alone (pop. 16 million), AIDS has already claimed half a million lives. In Kenya (pop. 35 million), it will have killed five million by the year 2000. In certain places the labor force and brainpower are so decimated that entire industries, such as copper in Zambia, are shutting down. In other places, the production of cash crops, coffee, cocoa, tea, etc., are falling off drastically for the lack of children and youth to work the fields (Reuters News Service report of Sept. 16, 1993). In some places whole families are orphaned as both parents die of AIDS. Since HIV has an incubation period of up to 10 years, the visible effects of today show the extent of HIV infections years ago. And since

the number of these doubles each year, and with no effective controls or cure in sight, even the above figures seem as a prelude-for Africa, for India and others. Cuba has, in contrast, kept HIV at a negligible level via some draconian measures, such as the forced sequestration of infected people. China, with its similar political setup, could easily do the same and conceivably become the world's Great Survivor, while it also became its Industrial Giant. Put it on Treeless Paper

Treeless paper has been manufactured historically from bamboo and silk in China, sugar cane refuse in India and kenaf from Australia. With the world's paper demand expected to double by the year 2010, kenaf (rhymes with giraffe) is proving to be very promising. Not only does it save trees, but it requires less fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides and has low water requirements. It is also naturally whiter than wood, so it takes less bleach which means less chemical pollution. A commercial kenaf farm is being operated in New Mexico, US.

Bhadra's Dance Debut

Bhadra Sinha, daughter of the late Hinduism Today correspondent B.M. Sinha, held her bharata natyam debut in New Delhi last fall. Writer N.K. Mudgal observed, "She fluently executed postures describing various aspects of the Supreme being Shiva-a spectacular piece of dance with a strong aesthetic impact. Her sensitive face expressed the myriad of emotions of a heroine pining for Lord Shiva." New Vedanta Retreat Center

The Vedanta Society of America dedicated an expansive retreat center called Tapovan in western Washington. Swami Gahananandaji, vice president of the Ramakrishna Order of India, presided over the ceremonies and celebrations along with five other Ramakrishna swamis who run Vedanta Society centers in the western US and Canada. A Vedanta student flew over the retreat and sky-wrote "Ohm," "Vedanta," and "100 years." The center's focus is the Swami Vivekananda Centenary Hall.