Global Dharma
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Nepal Outraged Over Call to Kill Cows

Recently Mr. Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Minister for Labour and Social Welfare in the government of the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML), publicly stated in Bara district that it is a violation of human rights that certain communities are not allowed to slaughter cows. The minister is presumed to be under the influence of the growing Nepalese Muslim lobby. He also asked for the cancellation of news in Sanskrit which was resumed from April 3, 1995, on the occasion of 45th anniversary of Radio Nepal.

Under the Himalayan country's five-year-old constitution, the cow, Nepal's national animal, is protected. Cow slaughter is a civil offence with a 12-year prison sentence. The local vernacular weekly Rastra Pukar reported in their April 12th issue that, "some followers of CPN-UML have slaughtered cows at Boxe V.D.C, Udaypur, inspired to commit this heinous crime by Minister Tuladhar's statements."

A wave of protest swelled among Nepalese Hindus. To quell unrest the government issued several statements, "The government is totally against cow slaughter in Nepal and any activity designed to cause a setback to this august tradition is not desirable for anyone.â¦It is the responsibility of all to put a stop to these disputes on the basis of their faith in religious tolerance existing in the country and revert to the sacrosanct status of the cow."

Nepalese Hindus perceive Mr. Tuladhar's statement as a direct challenge to the constitution and their Hindu faith. The government did not ask Mr. Tulardhar to

resign, or ask him for a public explanation. Some feel the CPN-UML secretly supports the minister. Many have taken to the streets with banners like "Gai Katne Sarkar Rajinama De" i.e. "The cow killing government must resign." Effigies of Minister Tuladhar are being burned and protestors set up road blocks. The Arya Samaj and the World Hindu Federation officially condemned the minister's statements.

An April 9th issue of the Suruchi journal reports that the situation galvanized a contingent of the Maharastrian Shiv Sena party to come to Nepal and assist in the creation of a Nepalese Pasupati Sena. The new president, Mr. Arun Subedi, issued a call to Hindus for unity in preparation for possible action against the government. The Shiv Sena/Pasupati Sena hoisted various banners like "Gai Katna Paidaina, Emale Sarkar Chahidaina" i.e. "The cow cannot be killed. We do not need UML government." at various places in the capital city of Kathmandu. If the present momentum grows, it may result not only in the resignation of the minister but the end of the communist rule in Nepal. Vice-Chancellor of Mahendra Sanskrit University, Mr. Chuda Nath Bhattaraya, asked, "Where will our country be led under the United Marxist Lenist party which does not believe in religion, rebirth, nationalism and the King?"

Reported by Subhash Basnet, Nepal

Peaceful Death by Fasting

Amidst the fierce debate over euthanasia in cases of terminal illness, the Jain community is actively publishing its teaching on prayopavesa, self-willed death by fasting. An article from the April 1995 Jain Study Circular is entitled Rational Conduct for Householders: A Peaceful Death/Sallekhana. Selections are taken from the Ratnakarand Shraavakaachaar, a treatise on religion by 2nd century Jain monk and scholar, Acharya Samant Bhadra. Premature death by suicide in a state of pain, fear or anxiety is considered wrong. But a "passionless" death by fasting is sanctioned. Sutra 122 says: "An individual, under the exigency of a sudden tribulation, famine, old age or some incurable disease, religiously prepares to leave the material body without passions. This is called sallekhana, the vow of peaceful death, by the scholarly sages," undertaken only when death is inevitable and the final situation would prevent proper fulfillment of religious duties.

Peaceful death requires careful preparation. One asks for and grants forgiveness to and from everyone, accepts responsibility without exception for all deeds done by the self, gives up all regrets, fears, affections, attachments and aversions; cultivates joy, equanimity, enthusiasm and inner strength. The votary gradually gives up all solid food, switching to liquids such as milk or buttermilk, then to plain liquids like fruit juices, then to boiled water and finally a total fast. Sutra 129 says: "The five transgressions of the vow of peaceful death are yearning to live, yearning to die, fear of death, reminiscence of friends and longing for superior future." The person maintains the Jain precepts, maintaining self-control while consciously leaving the body, mentally reciting the Namokaar Mantra.

Hare Krishna's Beaten in Armenia

Recent events show non-Christian faiths are in serious trouble in countries of the former Soviet Union. At 3 pm on April 18th, 20 unidentified men stormed the ISKCON temple in Yerevan, Armenia, with metal clubs, chains and automatic weapons in a 45-minute raid, according to a report from ISKCON. They severely beat 17 persons, including women and children, then removed the women and children and continued to beat the men, especially one Russian devotee and one invalid. Twelve devotees were hospitalized. The temple was ransacked, the altar desecrated and destroyed. What remained was stolen: US$3,000.00, computer equipment, a fax machine, printer and video equipment. Residents were stripped of their passports and watches. A bloodied devotee went to the police station for help, but was refused with the statement, "This has happened because you deviated from the national tradition." There has been a long history of abuses from Russian KGB and Armenian government right up to 1994 when 30 tons of religious literature was destroyed by the Armenian government. The nature of the raid indicated a trained para-military group was involved.

Renowned Saiva Sage and Reformer Goes to Siva's Feet

On April 15th, SrilaSri Deivasigamani Arunachala Desiga Paramacharya Swamigal, the 45th head of the 700-year-old monastic order at Kundrakudi, Tamil Nadu, died of a massive heart attack in Madurai at the age of 69. In early years Swamiji came under the tutelage of Sri Lankan Swami Vibulananda of the Ramakrishna Order. Then as a young novitiate at the Dharmapura Aadheenam, the largest of the six ancient Saivite monasteries in Tamil Nadu, he distinguished himself as a true vairagi, scholar and dynamic organizer. He was later called to serve at the fourth

largest of the six mutts, at Thiruvannamalai Aadheenam, Kundrakudi, where he received the mantle of spiritual leadership in 1957. It is 50 miles from Madurai and 100 miles from Chidambaram. Known as Kundrakudi Adigalar, "the servant of Kundrakudi," his mission was a unique integration of religion and social work. In the early 1950's he spearheaded a bhakti movement to counter the "idol-breaking" agitation of the Dravidar Kalagam in Tamil Nadu. He organized volunteers for temple cleaning in the spirit of the ancient Tamil Saiva saints, promoting literacy through the Tamil scriptures like Tirukural. His later alignment with the DK party social reform programs and left-wing ideology led to some criticism, but he always worked from a religious platform under the theme, "Praise God and Care for Your Fellowman." A champion of Tamil culture, he brought Tamil into use for temple archanas. The humble, industrious swami wrote 44 books, won many awards, served on numerous councils and was much in demand as a dynamic speaker in many countries. Always striving for consensus, his Village Planning Forum model of Kundrakudi village drew scientists, bankers, government officials and local citizens together to implement five-year development plans and won him international acclaim. In 1994 the International Lion's Club awarded him the Melvyn Jones Fellowship Award for outstanding service to society. Kundrakudi Adigalar was a great and rare soul whose ministry to the Hindus under his care was a shining example for the rest of the Hindu world. He is succeeded by Sri Ponnambalam Thambiran whom he appointed as his successor several years ago.

By Alagappa Rammohan, Illinois, USA

Trends to Watch: Appropriate Technology For Sustainable Living

For 20 years "green" theorists have talked a lot about "sustainable development," requiring "appropriate technology"-earth benign machines, gadgets, systems, processes that make efficient use of renewable resources. Initially, small scale technology failed in its promise and much was abandoned. But continuing efforts are now bearing fruit. Notable is the improved cookstove. "Bad" stoves and traditional "three-stone" fires eat up annual incomes and hours of fuel gathering time, polluting homes worse than city air. But Scientific American reports a new trend, "Over 120 million households in China, eight million India and 700,000 in East Africa have begun to adopt more efficient stoves. Several hundred improved cookstoves programs are running in more than 50 countries." Advanced thermodynamics are used to design new stoves made with local materials. A modern look and an open entrepreneurship are keys in China, the leader in improved stove sales. Meanwhile a '94 World Bank report says India's subsidized national program had over 4 million stoves left unused.

"Appropriate fire-wood technology" is a cooking-related key antidote for deforestation. World Watch magazine says the overlooked pro-sopis tree (known in the West as mesquite) provides a harder, longer burning fuel. It can grow 4 meters in a year even in dry conditions and poor soil. Prosopis wood is excellent for furniture. The tree's pods provide protein and sugar for people and animals. Sufficient prosopis plantings "in Mexico, South America, sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian subcontinent, could help provide a bridge to the cleaner (wind and solar) energy technologies, without requiring short-term incursions into natural forests."

"Appropriate garbage technology" concerns cities faced with gigantic volumes of waste and human sewage. Calcutta leads with a century-old system now being refined by experts. Recyclable materials are removed from refuse dumps by pickers, leaving an organic substrate perfect for vegetable gardens. Liquid sewage feeds "garbage farms," where sunlight, algae and plants purify sludge into verdant marshes with healthy fish. One 21 hectare site treats 1 million litres of sewage a day, with an expected yield of 50 tons of fish a year.

Towering Chariot Topples

On May 3rd, the chariot of Rato Machhindra Nath-a widely revered God in Nepal-fell over during the procession to Gabahal, Patan in Kathmandu for the annual Bhote Jatra festival. The murthi had to be removed and placed in a public square nearby. Seven devotees were injured and one is in critical condition. Devotees believe the event portends a grave crisis for the country. In 1990 a top piece of the chariot fell off just before the political unrest that led to the overthrow of the Panchayat regime. This event was much worse. One elder said, "Never before in history has the chariot of Machhindra Natha fallen over!"

Swamis' Grassroots Mission

In March, ten sannyasis with social workers went on a yagna mission to Kerala villages. Visiting the homes of poor fishermen coastal families on the first day, they held satsangs on the beach the second day-one village every two days. In April they moved on to the mountain regions. The mission uncovered the people's poor living conditions and brought new focus for social work. One 90-year-old village patriarch, Sankaran of Beypore beach, said: "Today is a happy day, the first time a sannyasi

entered my hut. That kind sage taught me dharma and sanskar."

Chinmoy's Buddha on Broadway

The spiritual mastery, peace works, art and athletic feats of Sri Chinmoy are renowned among his disciples and a select group of parliamentarians. Now his wisdom is getting a broader exposure through his Off-off Broadway theater play, "Siddhartha Becomes Buddha," which received rave reviews in New York and moved on to Chicago, Seattle, Vancouver and Europe. The play dramatizes the tension between "human and divine truths," as it unfolds the story of Prince Siddhartha's transformation into the Enlightened One who "is always pushing for an ethic beyond human understanding which makes him many enemies and many devotees." Buddha is played by Hawaiian-born Chinmoy devotee, Mike McCullock.