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MANTRAS ARE SPIRITUALLY POTENT, but can they heal the body? Janak Shahi, chosen to run the Mantra Healing Centre in New Delhi, says yes, mantras can cure conditions from rheumatoid arthritis to cancer and muscular dystrophy. But doctors with the Delhi Medical Association say the clinic "has no rational or scientific basis" and that government support is unwarranted. Even ayurvedic doctors object, saying, "in place of encouraging proven systems of medicine, the government is encouraging mantra recitation."

NEPAL'S REMOTE MANAKAMANA TEMPLE is becoming more accessible. By October, a new 1.5-mile cable car system, appropriately named Manakamana Darshan, Ltd., will ferry 600 pilgrims per hour to view the Goddess. Visitors are expected to increase from 400,000 per year to one million.

PILGRIMS TO AMARNATH have found a pious if untidy use for those blue & white identification cards the Jammu and Kashmir government now requires the faithful to carry. They're being tied to the railing protecting the ice Shiva Lingam, joining other types of name tags, wedding announcements, even a missing-person flyer, as calling cards--invitations for God's blessings.

TEMPLE DESECRATION IN FIJI has sunk to a new low. A Member of Parliament reports that a land rental dispute actually resulted in local villagers entering a Hindu temple with a bundle of fish and cooking it in the havana kunda, or sacred fire pit.

NORTH INDIAN HINDUS are being specifically targeted by evangelicals. The goal of "OM India" (Operation Mobilization) is 100 million converts. The Partnership for North India "has a goal of seeing a Christian church within 'shouting distance' of every village and urban area (one million churches)," reports the missionary publication Pulse. By one estimate, "just nine Indian and Western agencies have started nearly 5,700 Indian churches."

THE US DEPARTMENT OF STATE issued its first report on religious rights around the world, naming Saudi Arabia as the only nation where freedom of religion is nonexistent. But the report, commissioned by Congress, focuses only on the worldwide persecution of Christians. The National Council of Churches urges "further dialogue among America's various faith communities as to how to respond to any religious persecutions..." and prayerful conversations "based on the assumption that each is seeking the best interests of all religious people around the world."

SPOUSAL ABUSE is not just a man-beat-woman issue. "Of the 9,000-odd cases of marital disturbances registered by the Crimes Against Women unit during the past year, 10 to 15 percent of the complaints were of women harassing and beating up their husbands. And the numbers are growing..."

reports The Gazette, Montreal. New Delhi's All-India Front Against Atrocities by Wives claims to have "a membership of 40,000 maltreated husbands across India."

FIVE YEARS AFTER AYODHYA erupted with violence between Hindus and Muslims, 49 people have been indicted on criminal charges for their role in the destruction of Babri mosque. The charges include conspiracy, creating hatred, defiling a place of worship, causing grievous hurt by threatening and damaging the life and safety of others. Over 2,000 people died in the subsequent December, 1992, riots.

NEW EXCAVATIONS at Dholavira, in Gujarat, have "given a well-stratified account of the rise and fall of Harappan culture and revealed an exquisite planning, monumental and aesthetic architecture, and water-harnessing and storm-water drainage systems," writes R.S. Bisht, a senior director at the Archeological Survey of India. Among the unearthed marvels is a reservoir measuring 30 feet wide by 260 feet deep, cut into a single rock.

GRAMIN SEVA SANGHA, dedicated to educating children and helping the needy of rural West Bengal, is facing needs in excess of resources, and is appealing to non-resident Indians for help. Programs include several rural schools and support of the destitute and disabled. Contact: Baduria Village School, 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India.

"ORGANIC" MEANS MORE than simply "grown without pesticides or chemical fertilizers"--it means money. Organic

produce has grown into a \$3.5-billion dollar a year agri-business in the USA with a four-fold increase expected in the next decade. A similar expansion is reported in Britain, where Europe's demand for organic fruit and vegetables is rising 20% annually.

A PATENT ON TURMERIC has been revoked by the USA's Patent Office, a decision applauded as a crucial but "small step" in stopping bio-piracy. American law "permits patents to be filed on discoveries in the US, despite the fact that identical ones may already exist and be in use in other parts of the world," reports The Hindu. "The US needs to revoke all patents based on indigenous knowledge," they said.

IS IT REVOLUTION OR REVIVAL? The Madhya Kailash temple complex in Chennai now allows devotees (not just priests) to perform puja and arati, generally a North Indian tradition. Temple trust secretary S.T. Swami says that Saint Aandal offered her garland to Lord Vishnu, and Saint Kannappan his eyes to Lord Siva, and that personal worship used to be the tradition and should be again. His 25-year-old temple is otherwise unique, too: chanting is to be done only in Tamil; an "invented Deity" of half Lord Ganesh and half Lord Hanuman has been installed, and a pancha-loha (five metals) image of Tamil nationalist poet Subramania Bharati, installed August 15, has received regular worship ever since. Hmmm!

AIDS IS DEADLY, BUT MALARIA kills almost as many people each year as AIDS has in 15 years. A full 40% of the world population is now at risk from the parasites and viruses carried by the anopheles mosquito. Ironically, the mosquito's

resurgence as "a new drug-resistant avatar of malaria" is linked to previously successful drugs and insecticides. According to the Malaria Foundation, research dollars spent per death by AIDS in 1990 equalled \$3,274; for malaria it was \$65.

Briefly is compiled from press, TV and wire-service reports and edited by Ravi Peruman, award-winning radio journalist at KGO in San Francisco.