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Board delays decision on Krishnas at Nuuanu Pali

By Gerald Katz

Advertiser Government Bureau

A Hare Krishna sect said yesterday it wants to move from the "very passionate" mood in Waikiki to the more "peaceful" surroundings of tourist spots such as Nuuanu Pali Lookout, Hanauma Bay and Blow Hole.

The state Board of Land and Natural Resources, however, said it wants to iron out details before deciding whether the International Society of Krishna Consciousness Inc. will be permitted to spread its religious message at Nuuanu Pali.

The board put off action on the request until March 8.

Narahari Goswami Maharaja, spiritual leader of the Hare Krishna sect in Hawaii, told reporters yesterday that he wants to reduce the presence of devotees in Waikiki and begin "spreading our message of God" to Nuuanu Pali, Hanauma Bay, Blow Hole, Waimea Beach Park and Punchbowl. The city is now reviewing a request from the sect for permits to conduct religious activities at Hanauma Bay and the Blow Hole.

Narahari said the sect wants

to clean up its image and lessen the friction between Krishna devotees and the public.

"We don't like the image that the Hare Krishnas have and I think that we're willing to admit that a lot of it is due to our own faults and immaturity and so on," Narahari said during a land board meeting yesterday. "We're trying to move away from that and have a much softer image."

The Hare Krishna sect is willing to work with government on "reasonable" restrictions and obtaining permits, even though such permission is

not needed, Narahari said. Narahari said the sect is protected by the Constitution's guarantee of freedom of religion.

Narahari said devotees want to distribute religious literature and foods such as cookies and punch from a table at the popular tourist sites. At the Pali, there would be no more than two solicitors, who would conduct activities from within five feet of a table. Narahari said there would be no chanting.

State Parks Administrator Ralston Nagata said he's been advised by the attorney general

that religious activities are protected by the First Amendment and that solicitation of funds is considered a religious activity.

Nonetheless, land board members yesterday expressed reservations and said they want a clearer picture of the activities at the Pali before deciding what to do about the permit. Chairman Susumu Ono suggested that Nagata determine if the fact that the Pali is a historic site should be considered in deciding whether religious activities are permissible.

Narahari said Hare Krishnas solicit at many historic sites

around the country, including the White House in Washington, D.C. But Ono said, "That's in Washington, not here, though. . . . The kinds of concerns that we have raised are about history over here, not someplace else."

The Pali is the site of a bloody battle fought by Kamehameha the Great when he took control of Oahu. The Culture-Education Committee of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs has sent the board a letter expressing its concern about possible "commercial activity" at the site.

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