

## **Thailand building its first alternative medicine hospital**

**Thailand has built an alternative hospital offering holistic and herbal treatments -- the most serious test to date of the efficacy of Ayurvedic and natural remedies including traditional Thai cures.**

BANGKOK (AFP-Khaleej Times / May 18, 2003) -- The public health ministry will support the construction of the traditional healing hospital to be run by the Ayurvedic College, Vichai Chokeviwat, director general of the ministry's department for development of Thai traditional and alternative medicine, told the Bangkok Post.

The hospital is expected to be built within three years in Suphan Buri province, 100 kilometres (62 miles) northwest of Bangkok, and could be a government-approved showcase of the alternative and traditional healing methods that have a long and respected tradition in Thailand.

The hospital will not, however, be equipped to offer emergency medical care, surgical treatment or to replace Western medicine in its entirety, stressed Kamala Kumarpawa of Thammasat University's faculty of medicine.

There are 14,000 certified traditional "healers", 16,000 traditional pharmacists and 400 licensed traditional doctors in Thailand, the paper said. The Ayurvedic College has already trained 500 healers of its own.

Thai remedies including herbs -- a 700 million-dollar a year business -- are attracting global attention, with hospitals here reporting growing interest in traditional medicine among their foreign patients.

The origins of traditional Thai medicine are not certifiably known, but the Thai government says on an official website that it blends Indian and Chinese medicine as well as astrological and superstitious beliefs dating back to the 14th century.