NEWS IN BRIEF
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Hong kong Indians have been reassured by the Chinese that their business interests "will be protected," says Indian businessman and community leader Hari Harilela. Harilela says that means more business for China, where the infrastructure is more advanced, than for India, where business is attractive but the pace is slow. "We have been given repeated assurances--which has prompted 99.9% of us to do business with China," he said. Indians face an uncertain status in Hong Kong after the colony's 1997 return of Hong Kong to Chinese rule.

Sanskrit is the spoken language of Mattur, Karnataka, making it India's only Sanskrit village. Children learn it early at the century-old patasala, and visitors will find even grocery items with Sanskrit names. Originally populated by Vedic scholars known as Kaushik Sanketis, Sanskrit is now used daily in the village by all castes, ages and occupations. A source of village pride and distinction, it inspires the young to remain in the community.

A Joint family of 130 members, perhaps the world's largest, lives together in Lokur, Dharwarm, Karnataka, as it has without an interruption for the last 400 years. Forty-three men, 42 women and 45 children live together to embrace ancient tradition, rather than for economic reasons, says family member Bhimanand Narasinganavar. Though they sleep under several roofs for convenience, but have one central kitchen, busy daily from 4:30am to 10:30pm. Because the mainly agricultural Jain family is nearly self-reliant, only sugar, cloth and kerosene are bought. To save money, up to ten couples marry at the same time.

Ramayana broadcasts on Suriname television are having a profound impact on viewers. One Hindu woman poised to convert to Christianity rejected her baptism. Interest in learning Hindi has increased. Ratings indicate equal numbers of Hindu and Christian viewers (about 40% each). Many are now anticipating the broadcasts

of the TV-series "Mahabharata."

A Carnatic Concert Tour is set to raise funds for scholarships for deserving youth "to promote and encourage them in the various fields of fine arts." The esteemed singer, Dr. Bala Murali, is part of the Sri Annamacharya Project of North America. The Annamacharya Trust is dedicated to propagating the philosophy of the composer Saint Annamacharya. It has branches in the United Kingdom and Germany, and plans to construct a hospital for treating disease with music therapy. Contact: Dr. Sriram Sonty, 3042 Camel Drive, Flossmor, Illinois, 60422, USA.

Intermarriage between the Indian and Fijian communities as a way to understand each another's culture and traditions is being recommended by Swami Sridharanandaji, president of the Ramakrishna Mission's Sevashrama in Lucknow. During a visit to Suva, the Swami cited the success he has seen in Singapore, where intermarriage was once taboo, but is now common and accepted. "Slowly the isolating rigidity has disappeared," the Swami noted.

Tamil art, culture and heritage are being preserved and imparted in the United Kingdom through the Tamil Academy of Language and Arts (TALA). Classes include Tamil language, Carnatic music, Bharata Natyam, mridangam and computer skills. Contact: TALA, The Headteacher, 5 Randisbourne Gdns, Bromley Road, London, SE6 3BS, England.

"Nepali Baba" sets off on pilgrimage from Kanyakumari at India's southern tip on December 4, 1993 and expects to reach Badrinath in Nepal on May 20, 1994. Pundit Tejonath Sharma Nepali Baba, a respected member of the World Hindu Federation's Religious Council, is experienced at long spiritual journeys, having travelled 121 days around Nepal in 1988, and pilgrimaged for 118 days from Muktinath, Nepal to Kanyakumari in 1992.

UK hindu Half marathon and Fun Run for Peace and Unity, which drew 4,200 runners to Kingsbury, London, is being hailed as a success. A new Hindu Marathon record time of 62 minutes and 56 seconds was set for the 13-mile race. The top-finishing Hindu man in the race open to all comers was Dipak Patel, who placed 8th; the top Hindu woman, Usha Gohil, finished 4th among women. The event raises money for charities including SEWA International.

The "Progress in Hinduism" award has been given to Sri Panduranga Athavale Shastri of India. The philosopher/saint has not only given many years of social service but is noted "as the best philosopher, thinker, and propagator of the religious principles of Bhagwat Gita and Bhagwat," according to Shankerprasad S. Bhatt of Chicago. Selectors for the Diwaliben Mohanlal Mehta Charitable Trust award included Dr. Karan Singh, Justice Sri Bhagwati, and Sri Madhubhai Mehta. The award was presented by India's Vice-President.

Afghanistan's only museum is among the saddest casualties of the archeologically-rich nation's 14-year-old civil war. Thousands of artifacts, some as old as 100,000 years, and others the priceless legacy of 2,500 years as a cultural crossroads, have been destroyed or stolen, while across Afghanistan hundreds of historic sites have been obliterated. "Future generations will never forgive us for this vandalism," said National Museum of Kabul curator Najibullah Popal.

The 1991 Conviction of Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada of New Vrindaban, West Virginia, on murder conspiracy, mail fraud and racketeering charges was overturned on appeal. He will be retried on charges associated with alleged violence and illegally using copyrighted and trademarked logos during fund-raising activities which earned over $10 million between 1981 and 1985.

over 3,000 practitioners of Transcendental Meditation, followers of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi from 35 countries, gathered in Washington, D.C. for intensive group meditations meant to cut crime in the USA's capitol. The 2-month, US$4 million program was "aimed at cutting the homicide and robbery rates, improving the quality of life of the city and the nation, and promoting the success of President Clinton and Congress."

Michael Jackson is off on a world tour from India to Israel, and from Africa to South America. Hailed as "the King of Pop," and often criticized for all the hype and marketing that follows him, the singer is touring six continents before ending in December in Australia. The singer says he hopes to bridge cultural barriers. Western news reports state, "critics have denounced him for taking Western hype and commercialism to India, Russian, Mexico and other countries where his youthful followers can ill-afford the ticket price for such a splashy show."

Western publishing giant Rupert Murdoch has acquired controlling share of the satellite service Star TV for US$525 million. He sees "enormous potential" in the expanding Asian advertising market. Star TV now has six channels and 45 million viewers. Murdoch has major expansion plans. India should brace herself for an increase of western-style advertising, shows--and values.

"The Bible" tv series finally restarts on screen in India after being interrupted by a spate of law suits. One such was filed by a Muslim group in Kashmir who point out that the Old Testament is sacred to both Christians and Muslims. Since Islam does not permit depiction of its holy men, stated the Muslims, the serial should not be allowed. "They even argued," said producer Appachan, "that we did not vest the prophets with the degree of divinity they deserved." Now the producers face diminished sponsorship and dwindling viewership caused by the interruption.

Ethical consumers, who opt for ecologically-correct products, have more choices these days. But they're also becoming targets for companies hoping a "green" label will sell anything from cruelty-free make-up to ethically-correct investments. To help inform consumers of conscience, the European Community will require labels stating which products really do the least environmental harm.