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COMMUNITY

The Togetherness Run

UK Hindu half-marathon is a runaway hit

Krishan Dutt, London

London's quiet eastern suburb of Newham was a beehive of activity on July 26 as over 5,000 Hindu men, women and children converged at the Terence McMillan Stadium to take part in the 15th National Hindu Marathon. They were joined by Christians, Jews, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis--and atheists--in a 14-mile run around the borough. With the number 2459 prominently displayed on my chest, I joined the runners--but dropped out, wisely, after the first hundred yards. In just over an hour the first of the returning runners approached the finish line--some huffing and puffing and with faces as red as a tomato. The race marshals with their stop watches and notebooks were at the ready; exuberant spectators lining both sides of the track clapped in delight. Bhupinder Tyagi of India was the winner, and Harsha Mistry from Coventry, United Kingdom, the first female across the line.

The marathon, a project of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (UK), is one of the three top races in the UK and a public relations coup for Hindus. Its sheer size combined with superb

organization wins praise from local communities, police and national sports organizations. Sponsors included the British Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy. The family atmosphere allows other Britains to see and be with Hindus at their best. Free vegetarian food provided by the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha temple in Neasdon is its own lesson in dharma. Other countries are running away with the idea--South African Hindus staged their own successful half-marathon this year.