

## INDIA IN THE WEST



Singer Mahendra Kapoor performs with son Rohan Kapoor at the FIA Republic Day celebration in Haverd, CA. Photo by Shashi Desai

## 'Black Magic' in Silicon Valley

SAM RAO

Hayward, CA

AT least 20 complaints have been recorded with the Union City Police Department against a fake healer, who duped people of hundreds of dollars without any cure. The police are now looking for this man, Iqbal Sahib.

Iqbal Sahib was a Holy man. He was a 'Baba' who could recite the Quran from memory and he did not discriminate. His clients were from all religions and he treated all of them the same. Clients hailed from the Indian Sub continent, Fiji etc. and he promised them all the same—a miracle cure for their individual problems, a "guaranteed" cure that costs literally thousands of dollars—in a short while as the clients, now victims, realized to their dismay.

Healer Iqbal Sahib also seemed legitimate as he advertised freely in most local South Asian newspapers and on radio. But on closer examination, it seemed that Iqbal Sahib had unusual tactics. He never wanted his pictures taken, "lest he lose his spiritual power." So there was no picture of him or his assistant—allegedly also his cousin—anywhere to be found. The only thing that people who have seen him agree is that he was between 30-40 years old, from the Indian Subcontinent and seemed to make object appear and disappear at will while in session to ward off black magic

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## Britney turns to Hinduism for solace

KALYANI VASAN

Los Angeles

POP star Britney Spears seems to be seeking solace in Hinduism if her latest activities are any indicator of her religious preferences.

The pop diva was spotted at the famous Hindu temple at Malibu in California, recently with her four-month-old son Sean Preston, though husband Kevin Federline was conspicuous by his absence. She offered prayers at the Lord Venkateswara Temple and the Ganesha Temple. The star, whose marriage with Federline has reportedly struck turbulence, was seen wearing a vermilion spot on her forehead after she sat through elaborate rituals conducted by the temple priests Narasimha Bhattar and Krishnamachary.

She promised to return to the Malibu temple and made a commitment to conduct more elaborate pujas in future. The artist, who was raised a Baptist and was initiated into the mystical Jewish religion of Kabbalah by Madonna, is reportedly also visiting Hindu mystics for a peek into the past and the future.

The temple's president Nadadur Varadhan explained to her the various tenets of Hinduism as well as the significance of the rituals being carried out. "She showed a lot of interest in the religion and was quite fascinated by the *prasadam* offered by the temple in the form of *puliogere* and *sadam* (rice)," Varadhan told *The Indian Express*.

Varadhan elaborated that several celebrities have earlier come to this temple to seek blessing of Lord Venkateswara. "We have welcomed the *Beach Boys*, the *Beetles* and even Robert Downey Jr. There seems to be a belief in Hollywood that Hinduism is the panacea for many of their troubles and in particular this temple. Hollywood considers this temple as a destination wherein their prayers are answered; in fact, Beatle George Harrison was an ardent devotee of our temple and our priests conducted several poojas and



Britney with son Sean at the Hindu Temple.

ceremonies at his home. When he passed away, his body was cremated in accordance with Hindu rituals by our priest. Besides being a vegetarian, Harrison had great devotion to the Hindu faith.

Among Indian film celebrities, the list of temple visitors is even longer and includes Hema Malini, Rajnikant, Bappi Lahiri and Aishwariya Rai.

Set in the idyllic Santa Monica Mountains, the Malibu Temple emulates the Tirumala Tirupati locale and architecture, making it a big draw to Hindu devotees and a 'must see spot' for many tourists to Los Angeles. The temple offers all Hindu services, conducts all Hindu festivals and has a state of the art auditorium where many arangetrams, weddings and other festivities have been held.

