

PRESS RELEASE

15 December 2007

1500 CHILDREN PRESENT DAZZLING BAPS CHILDREN'S DAY CENTENARY PROGRAMME 15 December 2007, Amdavad

Under the theme 'Transforming Tomorrow', BAPS Children's Wing celebrated Children's Day as part of the BAPS Centenary Celebrations in Chandkheda, Amdavad. Tens of thousands of people, including more than 20,000 children from the 5,500 BAPS children forums worldwide attended this inspiring event. The entire program, inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and performed entirely by children, featured spectacular dances, dramas, videos, testimonials and other programs emphasising the values of character, health, education, culture and satsang.

The program began with an opening prayer and traditional welcome dance. Then, a small skit demonstrated the role of the weekly BAPS Children's forums around the world. Founded more than 55 years ago according to Yogiji Maharaj's vision of fostering children's overall development, today, more than 150,000 children attend over 5,000 BAPS children's forums worldwide and benefit from physical, educational, cultural, moral, and spiritual development.

Then, BAPS International Convenor, Ishwarcharan Swami's first hand account of the establishment and growth of BAPS Children Activities showed how Yogiji Maharaj's visionary efforts, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's inspirational leadership and the selfless service of thousands of sadhus and volunteers have transformed innumerable lives. Following this, children recited scriptural passages representing the hundreds of thousands of BAPS children who have memorized and internalised scriptural wisdom.

Next, a magnificent parade took spectators on a journey through BAPS Children Activities as beautifully decorated floats rolled their way across the stage. Each float represented a different focus of BAPS children's activities: character development, health awareness, cultural preservation, education awareness, and spiritual progress.

Following this, dramas and personal testimonies highlighted the values of honesty, faith in God, respect for parents, and maintenance of spiritual traditions taught in BAPS children's activities. Then, some examples of the fruits of BAPS's focus on overall children's development were seen as BAPS children who had excelled in sports, art, literature, academics and social work were honoured on stage.

Next a massive rally and drama was presented on BAPS children's astounding anti-addiction efforts. Since April 2000, 35,000 children around India have contacted over 3,000,000 people and persuaded over 1,000,000 to give up destructive addictions – all in their summer vacations. In reference to the exemplary social service by children, Head of BAPS Children's Activities Worldwide, Vishvaswarup Swami commented, "At BAPS, we believe that children are not useless, they are simply used less. Pramukh Swami Maharaj also tells us that 'Children look small, but their thoughts are high, and with their thoughts they can do great work.'" A video on BAPS Children's activities showed how BAPS is transforming tomorrow by inspiring children to

elevate themselves as well as those around them. Then, in a colourful dance of flowers, birds and butterflies, 370 BAPS children showed how they spread the message of peace around the world.

Finally, various children shared their personal incidents of how Pramukh Swami Maharaj had showered his selfless love on them. A video and prayer by children showed how Pramukh Swami Maharaj treats each child with such motherly care, that children see him not just as a towering spiritual personality, but as a best friend.

The 3-hour programme was capped with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj who said, “Today on the BAPS Centenary, the children’s celebrations have delighted everyone. Yogiji Maharaj established BAPS Children’s Activities to develop children’s character and create a more promising tomorrow. It is important for parents as well as all of society to focus on developing character and culture in children. Today, this focus on moulding children’s character and culture is as essential as education.”

The entire programme was concluded with a dance celebrating BAPS children’s activities coupled with a spectacular fireworks display.

In consonance with the Vedic teachings of Akshar and Purushottam (i.e. Bhakta-Bhagwan tradition) revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830CE), Shastriji Maharaj installed the murtis of Akshar (Gunatitanand Swami) alongside that of Purushottam (Bhagwan Swaminarayan) in Bochasan Mandir on 6 June 1907. From that beginning, the organization came to be known as the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS).

The Centenary Celebrations of this United Nations affiliated social-spiritual organization with 3,300 global centres, 700 mandirs, 780 sadhus, 55,000 volunteers and one million followers will culminate tomorrow, 17 December 2007, with Guru Bhakti Day (the 87th Birthday Celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj), which will be telecast live on Aastha from 5:30pm to 8:30pm.

Reports of each day of the celebrations will be posted in the Media Info section of the BAPS website at www.swaminarayan.org.