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HIS DIVINE HOLINESS PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ WELCOMED TO NORTH AMERICA

The Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Sanstha (BAPS) held a reception in honor of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj on May 15th at the Hofstra University Arena in Hempstead, New York. Members of the Indian-American community gathered from throughout the New York metropolitan area to welcome Pramukh Swami Maharaj (also known as Swamishri) for the first time in four years. Various officials, including Indian Ambassador to the United Nations Vijay K. Nambiar, U.S. Congressmen Gregory Meeks and Anthony Weiner and Nassau County Executive Tom Souzzi, were present to welcome Swamishri. The two-hour program was a cultural spectacle of Indian devotional singing accompanied by a classical Indian ensemble, traditional folk dances, enlightening orations and blessings from Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The evening program served a dual-role as it was also the celebration of the birth of His Divine Holiness Yogiji Maharaj. Born in 1892, Yogiji Maharaj preceded Pramukh Swami Maharaj as the spiritual leader of BAPS from 1951 until he left his mortal body in 1971. It was through his vision and inspiration that the renowned BAPS children and youth activities were founded.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the present-day leader of BAPS, a global socio-spiritual organization. Regardless of age, religion, race or color, his universal message of peace and love promotes understanding and service to humankind. During this evening's blessings, Pramukh Swami Maharaj stated, in reference to the technological advances of today, "If our morals and values are strong, if we live spiritually, we will be able to use these tools for good, otherwise, these tools will be used for wrongful purposes. That is why we should not have ill-feelings, ill-wishes or ill-words for others, but rather we should hope that good comes to all. We should use our wealth, abilities and intellect for the good of every individual and every country. That is how we can all live happily. To make this a reality, we must be vigilant in maintaining our spirituality."

The following morning, on May 16th, the organization and members celebrated the rededication of the BAPS temple in Flushing, New York. The marble images of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his choicest disciple, Gunatitanand Swami, were installed along with those of Radha-Krishna, Sita-Ram, Shiva-Parvati, Ganeshji and Hanumanji. This temple was originally established in 1974 and stands as the first BAPS temple in North America. In the evening, another inspirational program was held at the Hofstra University Arena. Frank Petrone, Supervisor of the Town of Huntington (NY) and India's Counsel General in New York, Pramathesh Rath, were among the invited guests who came to meet Swamishri.

His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj is on a 95-day tour of North America until August 17th. After New York, he will be visiting Edison (NJ), Atlanta, Los Angeles, Orlando and Toronto. This trip will be capped with the inauguration of two traditional Hindu temples in

Houston and Chicago. These temples are designed and constructed using authentic techniques inscribed in the Vedic scriptures and are the first of their kind in North America.

About BAPS

The Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), a worldwide socio-spiritual organization in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, is dedicated to community service, peace and harmony. Founded on the pillars of practical spirituality, BAPS strives to care for the world by caring for societies, families and individuals. Through a number of medical, cultural, educational, environmental, social and spiritual activities, BAPS endeavors to produce better citizens of tomorrow, who have very high esteem for their roots - the rich Indian culture. Its 9,000 centers including more than 5,000 youth centers across the world support these activities of character building. Under the guidance and leadership of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, BAPS aspires to build a community free of addictions and that is morally, ethically and spiritually strong.

For more information on BAPS and further details of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's North America schedule and program, please visit <http://www.swaminarayan.org>.