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Contact:

Shailendra Adroja
(732) 744-1744

BAPS BRINGS EASTERN TRADITIONS TO THE WEST

After four years of anticipation by the members of the Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) living in the western region of the United States, His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Swamishri) has come to Los Angeles for 12 days as part of his North American visit.

One of the major highlights of Swamishri's visit to Los Angeles was the June 19th Shilanyas Vidhi (Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony) to signify the upcoming Hindu mandir and cultural complex in Southern California. The event was spiritually-charged as ancient Sanskrit verses reverberated throughout the halls. During the ceremony, Pramukh Swami Maharaj explained that the time importance of the mandir is that it "is a place where the mind becomes calm and relaxed" in this hectic world.

Many ranking officials and representatives were present for this historic occasion including Gary Larson, the Mayor of Chino Hills (CA), who expressed his appreciation for Swamishri's social and humanitarian work. Mr. Larson remarked to the assembly, "The coordination of family and family values which I hold dearly, are present through Pramukh Swami Maharaj." Others in attendance were Eddie Kay, a representative of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger office, Gary Ovitt – mayor of the city of Ontario (CA), Councilman Bob Huff of Diamond Bar and Candidate for State Assembly, Sheriff Gary Penrod, Supervisor Pete McHugh and President Knecht were also amongst the distinguished guests.

In preparation of his visit spanning from June 16th to June 27th, the volunteers, members and well-wishers of BAPS have planned an array of cultural programs and events for the entire community to enjoy. As is common at most BAPS functions, the high level of participation from the youth wing, under the guidance of BAPS saints, provides energy and color to the festive environment. This was apparent from the first day during an enthusiastic welcome assembly at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Los Angeles.

Other programs treated the audience to kirtan-bhakti and enlightening discourses from talented and learned BAPS sadhus. At the conclusion of the evening program, Swamishri addresses the audience and imparts the modern and practical applicability of the timeless lessons within the Vedic scriptures. One such pearl of wisdom came during the welcome assembly when Swamishri stated, "One should live a moral and spiritual lifestyle amidst all the world's pleasures. One should have zeal, optimism and enthusiasm in all of God's words and actions."

On June 19, 2004, the women's wing of BAPS orchestrated their exclusive cultural program called "The Building Blocks of Society." The three-hour event conveyed the importance of mandirs in the lives of the modern Hindu woman. "The event touched me deeply as I witnessed female devotees express their love and teachings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. It was evident that this event was organized with unity, oneness and hard work by all the women in this region", said Uloopi Patel, a BAPS member.

On the morning of June 20th, many health care professionals from various medical fields gathered and participated in the Medico-Spiritual Conference that was held in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The purpose of the convention was to create awareness of the spiritual component in today's high-tech health care field. A key issue struck upon was the effectiveness of prayer and meditation in reducing stress – a leading cause and catalyst for many health related problems. Swamishri also addressed the assembly and stressed the importance of performing one's medical duties in a fair and honest manner. In addition, Swamishri explained the formula for a quick recovery for patients is a combination of medical services and the use of prayer.

The remainder of the day was spent in a celebration of the glory and richness of the Indian heritage. The day, called "Sanskriti Din" was a display of colorful dances, inspirational dramas, delightful music and enlightening lectures.

His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj is on a 95-day tour of North America until August 17th. Having already visited New York, Edison (NJ), Atlanta and now Los Angeles, Swamishri will next be visiting Orlando and Toronto. This trip will be capped with the inauguration of two traditional Hindu mandirs in Houston and Chicago. These mandirs 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.

About Pramukh Swami Maharaj

His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan

Swaminarayan, has inspired millions of devotees across the world to lead a God-conscious, character-centered life. As the present leader of BAPS, he travels from village to village, continent to continent, inspiring people of all ages to center their lives on moral values and sound judgment. He emphasizes the importance of family harmony, community service and spiritual progress among others. Representing the essence of Hinduism, his compassion for humanity, universal wisdom and striking simplicity have touched many world religious and national leaders.

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