

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 14, 2004

Contact:

Shailendra Adroja
(732) 744-1744

RAISING THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW

International Drive, Orlando, witnessed a different type of attraction this summer. A series of educational, spiritual and fun-packed conventions for the youth and the children was organized by the Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS). Recognized for its youth based activities worldwide, BAPS holds many such annual conferences, which have been inspired by His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the spiritual leader of BAPS.

This year's convention – themed "Vicharan" - was held at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida and was split into 3 separate events catering to the delegates of various age groups. The second phase of the convention, held between July 4th and July 8th saw over 2000 high school and college students participate from as far as Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain join their peers from the USA.

Graced by His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and an entourage of BAPS Saints, the four-day program was filled with cultural programs and experiences on Indian heritage through dance, lectures, multimedia presentations and an interactive exhibition. The event not only entertained with comedy music and drama but also conveyed the need for instilling time-honored and tested ideals in individuals living in the fabric of modern society and thereby nurturing responsible and compassionate members of the community.

Tushar Tank, a National BAPS Youth Coordinator stated that, "By having Indian culture presented through various means to the delegates, we hope to make a connection between them and the culture from which they come. Living in the United States, there is a definite American pride in all of our delegates. By connecting them to their Indian roots, we do not wish to at all minimize their feelings towards America, but rather enhance it through letting them know they are a part of two great lands."

The event also focused on the problems faced by the younger generation of Indian-Americans. One session centered on the hazards of alcohol and drug abuse in which some of the delegates conveyed how their lives had been tragically affected by such abuse by close friends and relatives. Pramukh Swami Maharaj underscored the need to shun alcohol and drugs by stating, "All of the (Vedic) scriptures speak of staying away from vices. They are bad for the individual and the society".

As the youth convention rolled into the final day, delegates were clearly inspired to introspect and apply some of the lessons learnt. "This convention really made me think about my priorities. I learned so much and from what others have said, this convention

has made a real impact on our lives,” said Amish Patel, a delegate from Washington, D.C.

The final phase of the convention from July 8-11 was geared towards children from 8 to 14 years of age. With an array of Indian festivals to amaze, entertain and educate on the culture of India, the children reveled in celebrations such as Rath Yatra, complete with colorful and intricately designed miniature chariots. Inspirational games and panel discussions portrayed the importance of studies, health, values and spirituality in a young age and elucidated on avoiding distractions that hinder one’s progress. Motivational speeches by learned BAPS saints on topics like “Thinking Right” equipped the delegates to make right choices in their teenage life and beyond.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj in his blessings, conveyed to the young audience the vital role of traditional Indian value of mutual respect within the family. “We should bow down to our parents and elders everyday after morning prayers, should excel in studies, stay away from bad company and do spiritual reading on a regular basis in order to progress in life and develop an enlightened and balanced character” stated Swamishri.

For parents in attendance it too was a memorable experience. “It was an astounding experience for me as a parent to see how much care and efforts Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his saints are putting in the children’s activities and development. This convention will definitely bring out the positive energy and untapped potential of many children and make them better citizens of tomorrow”, said Ronak Bhatt, a Silicon Valley software engineer and a volunteer in the BAPS Children’s Activities.

With these Conventions concluded His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 14-day program in Orlando which is a part of his 95-day tour of North America until August 17th. After Orlando, Swamishri will be visiting Toronto, Houston and Chicago. 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>.