

PRESS RELEASE

Pramukh Swami Maharaj & Prime Minister of Canada **Inaugurate Canada's First Traditional Hindu Mandir**

Toronto, 22 July 2007

Calling it a gift to all Canadians, the Chief Guest of Honor the Right Honorable Prime Minister of Canada Stephen Harper, Premier of Ontario Honorable Dalton McGuinty, Mayor of Toronto His Worship Mayor David Miller, His Excellency Rajamani Lakshmi Narayan the High Commissioner of India to Canada joined the leader of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha Pramukh Swami Maharaj in inaugurating the first traditional stone and marble Hindu mandir in Toronto on July 22, 2007. Also dedicated to the people of Canada today was the Canadian Museum of Cultural Heritage of Indo-Canadians. The awe inspiring BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir and Museum join the existing Haveli as part of the BAPS Swaminarayan Complex.

After 18 months of construction and thousands of hours of volunteer work, the first Hindu mandir in Canada, hand-carved by Indian artisans out of 24,000 pieces of Italian marble and Turkish limestone, stood glistening with white pinnacles as the much anticipated inauguration ceremony started on the morning of July 22nd. Just as stone becomes a statue at the hands of a sculptor, a carved stone becomes a *murti* once divinity is infused into the statue through a spiritually enlightened Guru. This ritual is known as the *murti-pratishtha*. Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony in accordance with vedic rituals to infuse divinity into the sacred images inside the mandir in the presence of devotees and well wishers from Canada, USA, UK, India and various countries from around the world. Those who could not make it to the event saw the live telecast on TV Asia, Sahara One and Aastha TV channels.

The Prime Minister's arrival was received with a tumultuous welcome by the BAPS marching band, a troupe of children in colorful and traditional dress and waving of Canadian flags by devotees and wellwishers. He then ascended the Mandir steps to be greeted by Pramukh Swami Maharaj with a traditional welcome. Thereafter, the Canadian and Indian national anthems were sung. Then Swamishri, the Prime Minister, Premier of Ontario and Mayor of Toronto ritually opened the doors of the mandir to declare it open to public. The guests then had darshan of the deities, carvings and the Canadian Museum of the Cultural Heritage of Indo-Canadians.

Following their mandir visit the guests were honored on stage during the *murti-pratishtha* assembly. Speaking on the occasion, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said, "This awe-inspiring work of architectural brilliance will serve as a source of pride for not just Indo-Canadians, but indeed all Canadians. Today we are celebrating one of our country's greatest strengths – our commitment to pluralism." He also thanked His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the inspirer and creator of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, saying that he has given a great and wonderful gift to the people of Canada. The Premier of Ontario Hon. Dalton McGuinty said, "It seems to me Toronto is the perfect place for this mandir. This is a place where people from all over the world come together to create something beautiful – a strong and diverse society."

Other dignitaries present for the event were The Liberal Leader Mr. Stephane Dione of the Federal Government, Leader of the Official Opposition Party of Ontario Mr. John Tory and several Federal and Provincial Ministers of Parliament.

The inauguration was a culmination of a host of events, held over seven days. Prayers for world peace also formed a part of the festival through a traditional "yagna". This is a symbolic ceremony of rites and rituals for peace, prosperity and happiness for all of mankind. The mood turned festive after the yagna as a parade (shobha yatra) of decorative floats with the murtis (deities) to be installed in the mandir traversed the streets of Toronto. People in colorful costumes celebrated with folk dances, devotional hymns, and a youth marching band.

"It is truly the volunteers' 'labor of love' which has turned into this magnificent mandir in Toronto" said Chandrakant Sachdev. "In heat or cold, the volunteers have helped with everything from heavy duty labor work to planning and execution of the smallest thing for making of this mandir," concluded Sachdev.

The people of Ontario, Canada, and the entire world have been bestowed with a magnificent Complex that will bring spiritual well being, knowledge of the heritage of Indo-Canadians, and many colorful festivals and events for the next 1000 years.

Toronto's BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, By The Numbers:

- **1,800** craftsmen involved at 26 different sites in India
- **400** volunteers gave their services
- **18** months to complete stone work
- **132** archways
- **84** decorative ceilings

- **340** pillars
- **24,000** carved pieces
- **5.6** tonnes, heaviest stone
- **50** grams, lightest stone
- **2,638** tonnes of Turkish limestone
- **2,260** tonnes of Italian Carrara marble
- **1,487** tonnes Indian sandstone
- **95,000** cubic feet of stone carved in India and shipped to Toronto
- Built to last **1000** years

###

About BAPS

The BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), established in India, in 1907, is a worldwide civic and religious organization dedicated to the spirituality of the individual while promoting harmony between individuals, within families, and within diverse communities. Since 1970, BAPS has been serving in Canada in the areas of: Family Unity, Spirituality, Indian Heritage, Children and Youth Development, and Humanitarian Services.

About The Canadian Museum of the Cultural Heritage of Indo-Canadians

The BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir & the Canadian Museum of the Cultural Heritage of Indo-Canadians was inaugurated on July 22, 2007, in the presence of creator and inspirer Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The *Canadian Museum of Cultural Heritage of Indo-Canadians* is Canada's premier museum dedicated to showcasing and promoting the understanding of the history, civilization, diversity and cultural heritage of Canadians whose ancestry originates from India. The Museum is uniquely designed to inspire visitors to appreciate how the rich heritage of Indo-Canadians has contributed to the fields of art, architecture, science, democracy, education, culture, pluralism and spiritual values.

About the Inspirer and Creator: Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, has inspired millions of devotees across the world to lead a God-conscious, character-centred life. 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.