

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 6, 2004

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## **“SANSKRUTI” A CELEBRATION OF INDIAN HERITAGE**

Every so often, there are special events that seamlessly celebrate the culture of ancient times in today's society. On Saturday, June 5, 2004, one such show took place at the Continental Airlines Arena in East Rutherford, NJ. The event, entitled “Sanskriti” (literally translated meaning heritage) paid tribute to the rich Indian heritage that, in the words of renowned American author Mark Twain, makes India “a cultural millionaire.” Thousands of attendees, primarily from the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States, were treated to a spectacular show presenting Indian heritage through traditional and modern means.

The event, hosted by the Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) was held in the presence of the organization's inspirer and spiritual leader, His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Pramukh Swami Maharaj is currently making his 12<sup>th</sup> visit to North America. One of Swamishri's fundamental messages, regardless of where one may live, is that parents should instill the proper morals and values to preserve and promote the Indian heritage for future generations to enjoy. This program, showcasing the many talents of children and youth, demonstrated that this message has been heeded by the younger generations in the United States. BAPS volunteer Brijesh Patel stated, “Almost everything that occurred was envisioned, planned and executed by the teenagers and youths of BAPS under the guidance of the sadhus (monks).”

The event began with a dynamic visual show of videos and graphical effects followed by a beautiful patriotic dance dedicated to India. Thereafter, a reenactment of western thinkers, including Max Mueller and Will Durant, gave their impressions and appreciation for the heritage of India. Audio-visual presentations and live skits, based on the Vedas, represented the glory of Indian heritage. Stories of ancient rishis including the original guru, Ved Vyas, culminated to the regal entrance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Various dignitaries, including New Jersey State Governor James E. McGreevey and United States Congressmen Steny Hoyer from Maryland, Joseph Crawley of New York and Frank Pallone, Jr. from New Jersey, along with many other distinguished guests, were present to celebrate the Indian culture and honor Swamishri's accomplishments in preserving this Sanskriti. The Governor and all three of the Congressmen received the Amrutkalash, a token symbolizing India's culture and heritage, from Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

While addressing the audience, Gov. McGreevey spoke of his support for BAPS and the future of Indian culture in the state of New Jersey. In particular, he told Swamishri, “[It is] my sole obligation to let all of us know, again with Congressman Pallone, Congressman Crowley and Congressman Hoyer, that in the great state of New Jersey we will build an Akshardham that will rival that of Gujarat and possibly Delhi.”

Representative Pallone similarly spoke of his recent trip to the Akshardham complex in Gandhinagar and his sentiments in regards to the September 24, 2002 terrorist attack on the site. “I remember at that time, Swamiji immediately called for non violence and that there shouldn’t be any violence in response to [the attack]. One of the greatest things about the BAPS movement and about Swamiji is that he constantly preaches nonviolence which is so crucial in today’s era. But I also had the opportunity, when I visited Akshardham near Ahmedabad, not only to see the beautiful building but to realize that there was an opportunity to have the same type of facility in New Jersey. Just before I came up to the platform, I was speaking with Gov. McGreevey and Gov. McGreevey made a commitment which I certainly will join in, that we vow that there will be an Akshardham like the one outside of Ahmedabad here in New Jersey.”

Enlightening speeches and beautiful kirtans (devotional songs) were given by the sadhus of BAPS. The grand event culminated into a resonating and practical blessing by Swamishri speaking of keeping of family values. “Our (Vedic) scriptures tell us not only of spirituality, but of how to live our lives. We spend so much time looking at other things such as movies and reading other books that we forget about this. There is much out there that can lead us away from our culture and heritage. This seems to occur particularly when kids go away to college. At this impressionable age and in this materialistic world, if we are not careful, everything we have will be lost. In order to make sure that our morals and our culture are passed on to the younger generations, it is important to take time out for your kids. If we keep a mandir in our house, read our scriptures there and sit down with our children, a deep respect and love will be fostered between the parents and children. Do your business and jobs, but you must take time out for this. Many go out until late at night with their friends. If we can take time for this, we can take time out for our children.”

### **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>.