



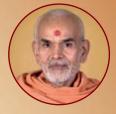
#### MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ IN ABU DHABI, FEBRUARY 2024

- 1. Swamishri with the BAPS Hindu Mandir in the background.
- 2. Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central shrine.
- 3. Swamishri performs the *arti* in the central shrine.
- 4. Swamishri performs the *arti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Abhishek Mandap.
- 5. Swamishri offers *abhishek* to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.









## BAPS HINDU MANDIR, ABU DHABI

A Spiritual Oasis for Global Harmony.

Enshrines the Universal Vedic Principle of Akshar-Purushottam –

Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan and

Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami –

and the Divinities of Sanatan Dharma

Built upon the generosity and friendship of the UAE and India, this Mandir was made possible by the vision and prayers of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who said in 1997:

"May a mandir in Abu Dhabi bring countries, cultures, communities and religions closer together."

To fulfil this vision of harmony, thousands of devotees, volunteers and well-wishers of diverse faiths, nationalities and backgrounds came together, inspired by the purity and spirituality of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.

It is a landmark that represents love, peace and harmony.

It is a gift from the present to the future for millennia to come and welcomes all to experience its profound spirituality.



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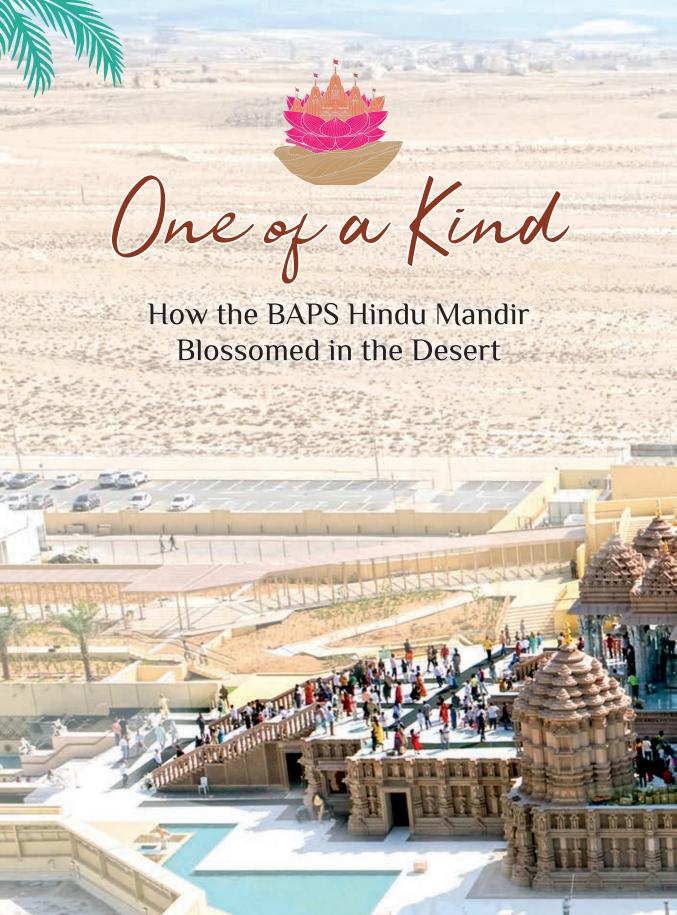
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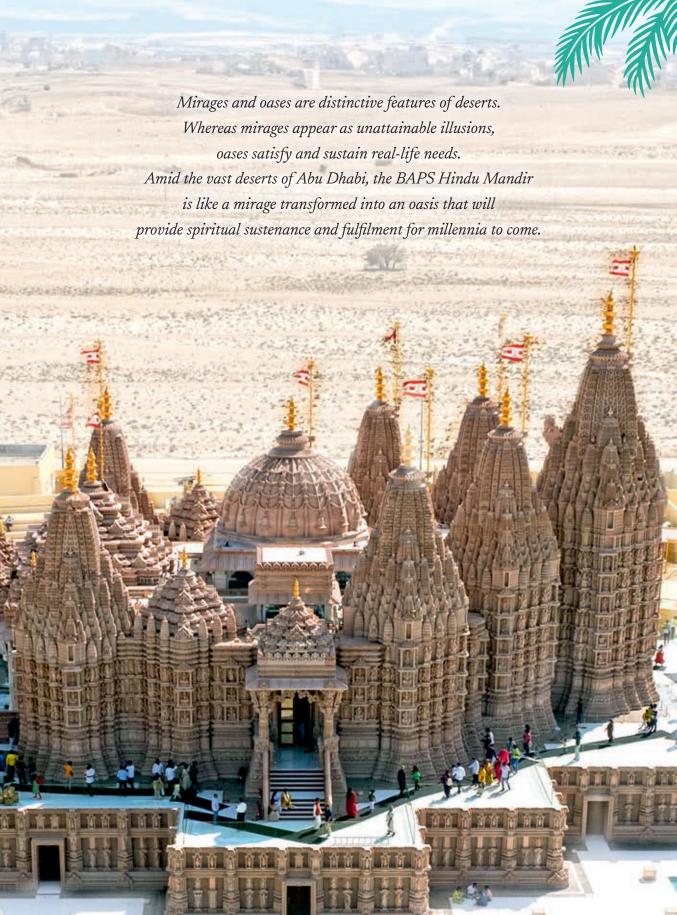
 1 Year
 630
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 80

 2 Years
 1300
 18
 28
 150

 3 Years
 1900
 27
 42
 220

In April 1978, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and inaugurated the first issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The bi-monthly magazine serves to enlighten BAPS youths, seniors and well-wishers about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and the Gunatit guru *parampara*. It also seeks to inspire the universal values and traditions of Hinduism to pursue a happy and peaceful life by serving God and humankind.







1997: Pramukh Swami Maharaj prays in the desert

et's rewind to the beginning.

The year was 1997: Pramukh Swami Maharaj's third visit to the UAE. Even then, a mere quarter-century ago, Abu Dhabi was cloaked in an aura of impenetrability. Although a large number of Indian expats lived and worked in the UAE, Hindus restricted their devotional practices to individual, family and small group gatherings out of the unfounded fear that overtly public celebrations would attract unwanted attention and perhaps harsh penalties.

Swamishri was residing at the home of Rohitbhai P. Patel and the handful of BAPS devotee families gathered there for satsang in Swamishri's presence.

Other well-wishers also came to meet him. Among them were Ashokbhai Kotecha and Narendrabhai Jain. They proposed that Swamishri be taken for a trip into the desert. Preparations were made for the journey, and on 5 April 1997, Swamishri, with Pujya Viveksagar swami, Jnanpriya Swami, Brahmavihari Swami, and other swamis and devotees, arrived at the desert in Al Khawaneej on the border of Sharjah and Dubai.

The blustery wind and blazing sun greeted the entourage, but Swamishri's presence was the focus



2001: Pramukh Swami Maharaj blesses an assembly

of everyone's attention. Seated on a deck chair under an umbrella as shade, Swamishri engaged in light moments with the swamis and devotees. Then, in his trademark way, Swamishri voiced a prayer: "May peace prevail here and everywhere. May all religions of all countries grow greater love for one other. May all countries be free of internal enmity and prejudice towards each other and may they all progress in their own unique way. May a mandir be built in Abu Dhabi."

At that time, these words envisioning a mandir were like a mirage, especially when any overtly public displays of devotion were likely to result in costly penalties. The swamis and devotees were amused at the thought of such a public place of worship. But even words uttered casually by enlightened seers are profound and prophetic, as these words of Pramukh Swami Maharaj would prove to be.

A Hindu mandir had first opened in Bur Dubai in 1958, even before the UAE was established as a nation in 1971. The founding father of the UAE, His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, was an exceptional leader and ardent advocate of tolerance and peace in the region. This was at the heart of his philosophy for life and governance.





2013: Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Brahmavihari Swami meet Sheikh Nahyan at his majlis, Abu Dhabi

He established a pioneering model for tolerance that guaranteed the cohesion and strength of UAE society, rejecting fanaticism, hatred and isolation. This ethos has been advanced by his successors and has made the UAE an exemplary symbol of tolerance.

As the expat Hindu presence in the UAE grew, groups gathered off-the-record for bhajan and devotion. The BAPS satsang also continued in this way.

In 2001, Pramukh Swami Maharaj made his fourth and final visit to the UAE to strengthen satsang and spirituality among the still very small number of BAPS devotees. Thereafter, over the years groups of swamis made regular sojourns. In 2013, this resulted in the opening of a new Satsang Bhuvan in Dubai. Subsequently, a meeting between Sheikh Nahyan bin Mabarak Al Nahyan and Brahmavihari Swami to resolve an accidental transgression of a building law triggered a cascade of events that ultimately led to the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. The lapse was forgiven and a respectful friendship between the two blossomed.

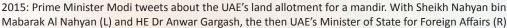
The Hindu population had longed for an official place of worship to meet the growing spiritual and cultural needs of the community. But the belief that

the rulers would not allow such a place prevented anyone from actively pursuing for it.

However, sometime after their first meeting, Sheikh Nahyan advised Brahmavihari Swami to write a letter to the then Crown Prince, and now Ruler and President of the UAE, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, that BAPS requests land for a mandir. Many community stalwarts counselled that the letter should request land for a cultural centre rather than a mandir since that would more likely be approved. However, Pramukh Swami Maharaj categorically stated that since the intention was to build a mandir that is what should be truthfully declared in the request letter. And so the letter requesting land to build a mandir was sent to the Crown Prince. Some months later, a verbal approval was given, but nothing formal was declared.

Meanwhile, a close friendship had formed between Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. And during an official visit to the UAE in 2015, the prime minister tweeted from the Grand Mosque: "I am very





thankful to the UAE Govt for their decision to allot land in order to build a mandir in Abu Dhabi. This is a great step." The news of this generous gesture was greeted with rapturous applause and great joy by the Indian community. Due to its experience and track record in building mandirs, the Government of India selected BAPS to build the mandir and coordinate the entire project. At first, 2.5 acres, which was later doubled to 5 acres, were allotted in Al Wathba. Later, the UAE government replaced that land with a 13.5-acre plot in Abu Mureikah.

Then, in 2018, the Crown Prince invited Prime Minister Modi to his Presidential Palace. Numerous MoUs were signed between the two countries, amid which Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Brahmavihari Swami presented the Crown Prince with a choice: to build a mandir that outwardly looks like a traditional stone mandir or one that looks like a conventional modern building. The Crown Prince chose the former, "Since it is a mandir, it should look like a mandir." And, subsequently, Prime Minister Modi unveiled a model of the mandir during a special function at the Dubai Opera.

Thereafter, planning for the traditional stone BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi began in earnest. The expat Indian community rallied behind the mandir project to support the efforts of the BAPS swamis, devotees and volunteers.

Professionally, on the land donated by a Muslim king to build a Hindu mandir, a tapestry of diverse contributors combined to guide and coordinate the design, construction and other technical aspects of the project. Among them, the lead architect was a Christian, the project manager was a Sikh, the structural engineer was a Buddhist, the construction contractors were Zoroastrian (Parsi), the main director, a Jain and the chief consultant was an atheist. They all contributed because they believed in harmony. Thus, the process itself was a remarkable symbol of universal cooperation between people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs.

In 2019, Brahmavihari Swami and Atmavatsal Swami met His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Foreign Minister of the UAE, to show him the architectural designs. He suggested that the temple should be elevated so that it can be seen from the highway. When he was told that underground parking would be necessary, Sheikh Abdullah expressed concern at the plan and assured that additional space for parking would be given. And soon, a 13.5-acre



2019: The initial 13.5-acre plot of land in Abu Mureikah

car park was earmarked, taking the total mandir plot size to 27acres. The Shilanyas Ceremony was performed on this site by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj on 20 April 2019 in the presence of the UAE leadership.

Then COVID-19 struck and paralyzed the world. Yet, amid this and other socio-economic challenges – senior devotees and project leaders passed away and donors faced financial difficulties – work on the BAPS Hindu Mandir continued due to the goodwill and dedication of many. At the forefront was Ramesh Ramkrishanan, CEO and owner of Transworld, and his staff. They were the sole transporters of all the stone from the various quarry locations to the artisans for sculpting and then to the mandir construction site for assembly. Even throughout the COVID-19 period, they ensured that the flow of stones and other materials continued undisrupted enabling the steady progress of the mandir construction.

In the latter months of 2022, with worldwide COVID-19 restrictions being withdrawn, the mandir inauguration was scheduled for 14 February 2024, the day of Vasant Panchami (Maha *sud* 5) – the birthday of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, founder of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.



2019: Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Brahmavihari meet the Crown Prince and Prime Minister in the Presidential Palace

Devotees and well-wishers focused their sights on meeting this deadline. From their offices, businesses or workplaces, they would come directly to the mandir site where they served till around midnight before driving home; they repeated this routine daily for almost a year, dedicating every spare moment to supplement the efforts of the artisans and construction workers.

In this way, through the generosity of the UAE Royal Family and government, Prime Minister Modi and the Indian government, and donors, as well as the collective efforts of the chairman and Board of Directors of the BAPS Hindu Mandir, consultants, contractors, devotees and well-wishers, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's vision has become a reality. Perfusing the entire project, the continuous guidance, encouragement and blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj were instrumental in ensuring the timely completion.

Hence, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's prayer in 1997 that people thought of as a mirage was transformed in 2024 by Mahant Swami Maharaj into an oasis that will quench the spiritual thirst of genuine seekers for millennia.



# A Firsthand Account of a Historic Event

hursday, 3 April 1997, was a special day for all Swaminarayan devotees, for it marked the 216th birthday of Bhagwan Swaminarayan (as per the Gregorian date). Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived in the morning at the home of a devotee in Sharjah to celebrate this auspicious occasion in the presence of a handful of faithful devotees and some well-wishers.

After the low-key festivities, someone suggested to Swamishri that he should visit the Sharjah desert, which was not far from the city, and experience the undulating sand dunes of

the UAE. Swamishri was not keen, but he asked a few swamis if they wished to go. So, the next day, Krishnavallabh Swami, Brahmavihari Swami, and a couple of other swamis and devotees went on a desert safari. They returned, all thrilled, and reported their experience to Swamishri. They requested Swamishri to visit the desert, which was thirsty for his divine presence.

Hence, on the morning of 5 April 1997, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, with swamis and devotees, embarked upon a desert safari in Al Khawaneej, a desert area on the border of Dubai



and Sharjah. Ashokbhai Kotecha, Narendrabhai Jain and their group of experienced desert drivers who had honed their driving skills amid the shifting sands of this challenging terrain, made the arrangements.

As the cars (all four-wheel drive SUVs) approached the desert periphery, the cars stopped at a short distance. Swamishri was seated in the front seat of the first car with pillows to cushion him from the jerks of the upward journey. After the expert drivers had surveyed the scene, they sped off one by one to scale the selected sand dune. The cars zig-zagged across the sand to adjust for the shifting terrain, and finally, arrived at the top of a majestic 150-foot-high dune. Swamishri emerged



Swamishri places his bare foot on the desert sand

from the car, and stood at the crest of the dune. In his characteristic style, he glanced at the desolate landscape, observing the surroundings. Intrigued by the view, he asked a few questions to satisfy his curiosity before taking his seat on a chair alongside Thakorji (Shri Harikrishna Maharaj), the sacred *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. A few swamis and devotees sat around him, while some swamis held their upper garments to shield Thakorji and Swamishri from the blowing sand and glowing sun.

After some casual conversation, Swamishri voiced prayers for global peace, prosperity and interfaith harmony and started chanting the Swaminarayan *dhun*. Then, as requested by some swamis, Swamishri removed his feet from his slippers and placed them upon the sand, a symbol of his divine blessings, and prayed for a mandir in Abu Dhabi where all could gather without hindrance to pray and do satsang. The prayer seemed like a pipe dream amid the prevailing social climate and was soon forgotten.

Little did everyone present on the top of the dune that day know that this divine prophecy would come true, albeit after 27 years, in 2024, when Mahant Swami Maharaj would inaugurate the magnificent BAPS Hindu Mandir near Abu Dhabi. This mandir stands as a testament to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine vision, the power of his prayers and his desire for global harmony. •

By Yagna Dave, a senior satsang activities coordinator in the UAE from 1984 to 1997

# **BAPS Hindu Mandir**

# ABrief Timeline

The BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi is a truly iconic and landmark building, as it is the first traditional stone mandir in the Middle East.

It's inauguration also marks a significant milestone for BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, as it is the 50th shikharbaddha mandir built by BAPS: 5 by Shastriji Maharaj, 2 by Yogiji Maharaj, 37 by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and 6 by Mahant Swami Maharaj. The following is a brief history of satsang in the UAE leading up to the Festival of Harmony and Murti-Pratishtha Celebrations for the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi.

## 1974

Rajendrabhai Dave and Ramnikbhai Luhar started a weekly *sabha* at home in Dubai.

#### 1975

Harikrishnabhai Amin, Hasmukhbhai Patel (Mama), Gangarambhai, Vinodbhai Jethwa and other devotees join the weekly satsang *sabha* in Dubai.

#### 1977

A small BAPS Satsang Bhuvan started in Hor Al Anz, Deira, Dubai. Dineshbhai Thakkar and Ramanbhai, Jaynarayanbhai Patel, Pankajbhai Thakkar and others joined.

#### 1982

18 to 25 March: Bhagwandas Jethanand

Bhatia of Sharjah helped Rajendrabhai Dave to obtain a VIP visa through His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi of Sharjah to facilitate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's visit to the UAE. After arriving at Sharjah International Airport, Swamishri was hosted at the home of Shri P.D. Patel, father of Rohitbhai P. Patel, in Dubai, and Khimjibhai Depala in Abu Dhabi.

During his stay, Swamishri graced the BAPS Satsang Bhuvan in Dubai, visited the 100-year-old Vaishnav Haveli for darshan and presided over public satsang assemblies.

He also met the Ambassador of India to UAE, HE Lalit Mansingh and the Consul General of India in Dubai, Praveen Lal Goyal.

Swamishri also visited Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah.

Inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's visit, devotees began weekly satsang *sabhas* in Abu







Dhabi and frequent *sabhas* were held in labour camps on Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi.

#### 1985

20 March to 4 April: During Swamishri's visit, satsang assemblies were held at the BAPS Satsang Bhuvan in Deira and public assemblies were held at Lakha Lulla's Astoria Hotel.

#### 1988

Satsang sabha started in Ajman.

#### 1989

Pujya Doctor Swami and swamis visited the UAE.

#### 1992

Pujya Viveksagar Swami and swamis visited the UAE.

#### 1994

Satsang sabha started in Sharjah.

#### 1997

- 27 March to 10 April: During Swamishri's visit public assemblies were held at the Indian Consulate in Dubai by Consul General Prabhu Dayal and at the Astoria Hotel. Swamishri was honoured by the Gujarati and Jain communities in Dubai. Also, satsang assemblies were held in Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Ajman.
- 3 April: Swamishri graced the BAPS Satsang Bhuvan in Sharjah.
  - 5 April: Swamishri voiced a historic prayer for

a mandir in Abu Dhabi at a desert in Sharjah. Later, he formed a committee to oversee the satsang.

#### 2001

- 5 to 12 April: Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited UAE. Mahant Swami also accompanied him during this visit.
- 6 April: Swamishri was honoured by the Ambassador of India to UAE, HE Krishan Chander Singh, Consul General Shri Asoke Kumar Mukerji and the Indian Association of Dubai.
- 7 April: Swamishri graced the BAPS Satsang Bhuvan in Nadishala, Ajman.
- 8 April: In Sharjah, Swamishri was received by Sheikh Hamed Bin Majid Al Qasimi, Minister for Justice, at his home.

#### 2006

In Mumbai, India, His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj sanctified *murtis* for the BAPS Satsang Bhuvan in Deira, Dubai. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami installed them in the Satsang Bhuvan in Dubai.

#### 2010

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Brahmavihari Swami and other swamis visited the UAE.

#### 2012

Swamishri blesses Brahmavihari Swami to meet the rulers of the UAE and request permission for a mandir.

25 May (Pramukh Varni Din): Satsang centre started in Ruwais.









#### 2013

- 21 May: Brahmavihari Swami had first meeting with HE Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mabarak Al Nahyan at his royal majlis in Abu Dhabi.
- 11–28 August: Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and swamis visited the UAE.
- 16 August: Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami inaugurated the new BAPS Satsang Bhuvan in Al Satwa, Dubai.

#### 2014

16 September: Request letter to HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, for a Hindu mandir in the UAE. A verbal approval was received.

#### 2015

16 August: Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi publicly appreciated the UAE government's gracious decision to allot land for a Hindu mandir at an assembly of more than 60,000 people in Abu Dhabi. He tweeted from the



Grand Mosque: "I am very thankful to the UAE Govt for their decision to allot land in order to build a mandir in Abu Dhabi. This is a great step."

#### 2016

- 23 March: HE Sheikh Nahyan attended the launch in Sharjah of *Transcendence: My Spiritual Experiences with Pramukh Swamiji* a book by Dr APJ Abdul Kalam on Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- 4 September: Allotment Order from the Crown Prince's Court to grant 2.5 acres, later increased to 5 acres, of land at Al Wathba.

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha and Mandir Limited were chosen and entrusted by the governments of both the UAE and India to construct, develop and administer the mandir project.

#### 2017

May: Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami and swamis visited the UAE.

24 October: In place of the 5 acres of land granted in 2016, His Highness Sheikh







Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan issued an order and generously gifted a 13.7-acre plot of land at Abu Mureikah, between Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

#### 2018

- 11 January: Official site plan approved by Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council.
- 26 January: In the Akshar Deri, Gondal, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed *pujan* of the *shilas* for the BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi.
- 10 February: Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Brahmavihari Swami and BAPS representatives met Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi HH Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan and the visiting Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, at the Presidential Palace. Presented with two designs, Sheikh Mohamed chose a grand traditional stone mandir over a normal building, saying, "Since it is a mandir, it should look like a mandir."
- 11 February: Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi officially launched the BAPS Hindu Mandir project and addressed the Indian



community at Dubai Opera. Simultaneously, the auspicious Vedic Shila Pujan was performed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami on the mandir site at Abu Mureikah, Abu Dhabi.

- 9–23 March: Pujya Dr Swami and swamis visited the UAE.
- 26 June: HH Sheikh Abudullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi.
- 9 August: Mandir Limited signed contract appointing RSP Architects, Planners & Engineers as the lead consultant and designer for the BAPS Hindu Mandir.
- 6 November: Meeting at palace of HH Sheikh Abudullah to discuss the mandir master plan. He decides to allot more land for parking.
- 9 November: Grand Diwali and Annakut celebrations in Abu Dhabi attended by over 10,000 dignitaries, devotees and well-wishers.
- 14 November: Official letter for parking plot from Department of Urban Planning and Municipality. Mandir site now 27 acres.









20 November: Crown Prince Court approved the mandir master plan concept.

# 2019

- 3-4 February: Brahmavihari Swami represented the BAPS Hindu Mandir at the Global Conference of Human Fraternity in the presence of His Holiness Pope Francis in Abu Dhabi.
- 10 February: Official permission granted to the proposed BAPS Hindu Mandir as a place of worship.
- 18 to 29 April: Mahant Swami Maharaj visited the UAE.
- 18 April: Mahant Swami Maharaj received at Al Maktoum International Airport (DWC) in Dubai as a State Guest of the UAE by HE Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mabarak Al Nahyan, Cabinet Member and the Minister of State for Tolerance.
  - 20 April: Mahant Swami Maharaj performed

the Shilanyas (Foundation Stone-Laying) Ceremony in the presence of government ministers, dignitaries, and 5,000 devotees and well-wishers on the 27-acre BAPS Hindu Mandir site at Abu Mureikah, Abu Dhabi.

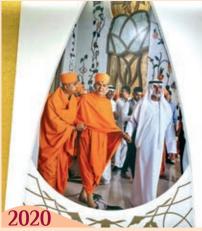
- 21 April: Mahant Swami Maharaj honoured by His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mabarak Al Nahyan at his royal majlis and the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi.
- 22 September: Abu Dhabi Department of Community Development (DCD) grants licence TH001 to officially recognize the BAPS Hindu Mandir as a place of worship in Abu Dhabi.
- 6 November: BAPS Hindu Mandir wins Mechanical Project of the Year 2019 award at the 13th annual MEP Middle East Awards.

#### 2020

13 February: BAPS Hindu Mandir's











foundation commenced. The largest pour of high volume fly-ash concrete in the UAE.

1 March: BAPS commences activities to provide COVID-19 relief aid.

16 November: Tolerance Path inaugurated at the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque Centre in Abu Dhabi, featuring a large photo of Mahant Swami Maharaj during his visit to the Mosque in 2019 in the third section of the over 300m long path.

20 November: BAPS Hindu Mandir wins the prestigious Interior Design Concept of the Year 2020 at the Commercial Interior Design (CID) Awards.

#### 2021

29 April: COVID-19 relief aid – BAPS Hindu Mandir sends oxygen and medical equipment to India.

9 August: Kumbhi Pujan of BAPS Hindu Mandir.

1 October: A majestic 3D model of the mandir was exhibited in the India Pavilion during the Expo 2020 Dubai for six months.

9–16 November: 'Pratham Shila Sthapan Saptah' – a week-long ceremony held at the mandir to sanctify the bricks being used for the construction. More than 1,000 devotees, volunteers, and well-wishers participated.

#### 2022

13 March: International Women's Day Celebration at the BAPS Hindu Mandir site, Abu Dhabi.

May 27: Mahapeeth Pujan Vidhi – ceremony to place the first carved sandstone on the mandir's first floor was performed.

19 June: International Yoga Day









Celebration at the BAPS Hindu Mandir site, Abu Dhabi.

7 August: BAPS Hindu Mandir gives 10,000 handmade *rakhis* to workers and residents.

21 August: Janmashtami Celebration at BAPS Hindu Mandir site, Abu Dhabi.

8–10 September: *Pujan* and placement of the first marble pillar by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami in the presence of 500 devotees, well-wishers, and construction professionals.

30 October: Thousands gather to celebrate Diwali and Annakut at BAPS Hindu Mandir site, Abu Dhabi.

8 November: United States Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom visits BAPS Hindu Mandir.

2023

6-7 February: Brahmavihari Swami

represented BAPS Hindu Mandir in the Global Tolerance and Human Fraternity Summit held under the patronage of His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan bin Mabarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence in the United Arab Emirates and in partnership with the Muslim Council of Elders in Abu Dhabi.

18 April: First Shikhar Shila Pujan Ceremony. 25 May: Over 30 ambassadors visit the BAPS Hindu Mandir site.

6 July: HE Sheikh Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahayan receives BAPS delegation.

**20** October: *Pujan* of the seven *shikhars* by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

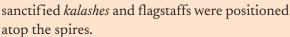
11 November: His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj performs the Vedic rituals of the Amrut Kalashes, flagstaffs and flags for the *shikhars* (spires).

29 November: Amrut Kalash Vidhi: the









#### 2024

29 January: Ambassadors and diplomats from 42 nations visit BAPS Hindu Mandir.

2 February: On behalf of BAPS, Brahmaviharidas Swami accepts the Global Order of Outstanding Disruptors GOOD Fellows Award presented by the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, internationally acclaimed for acknowledging individuals for creating GOOD impact through their contributions.

10 February: Festival of Harmony begins.

11 February: Over 980 people participate in the historic, first-ever Yagna for Global Harmony performed in the Middle East.

14 February: Morning: Mahant Swami Maharaj performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of



the BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi.

Evening: Public Dedication Ceremony in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj and Prime Minister of India Shri Narendrabhai Modi, HE Sheikh Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahayan and the UAE leadership.

Over 15,000 people attended in person and millions watched the live broadcast.

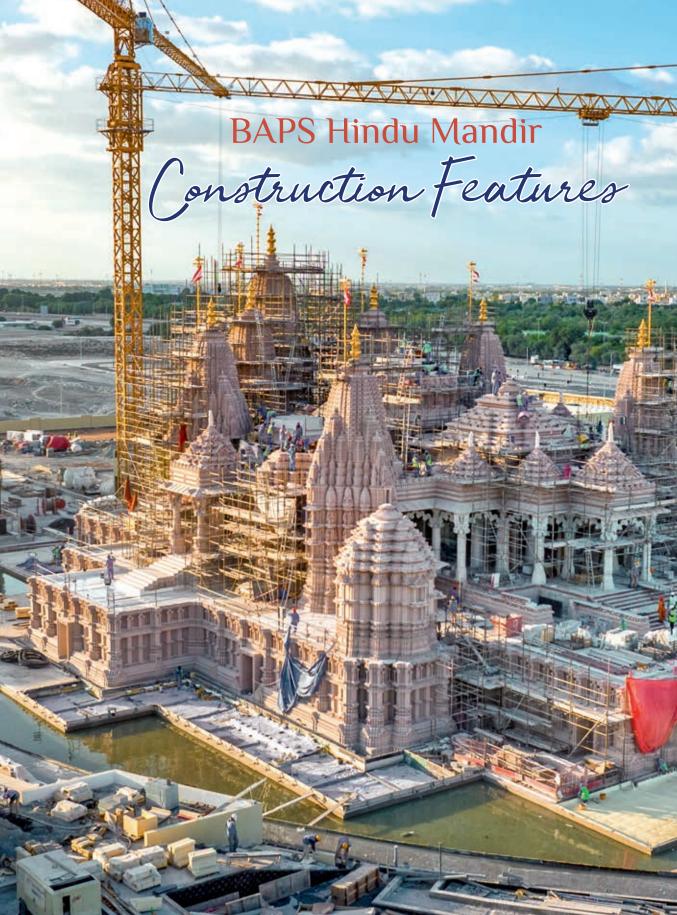
18-20 February: BAPS Hindu Mandir organized a blood donation drive in partnership with Aster Clinic. More than 500 visitors registered to donate.

1 March: First day of official public opening.

3 March: 65,000 pilgrims and visitors flock to the BAPS Hindu Mandir on the first Sunday after the public opening.













Eco-friendly concrete pour to prepare the mandir foundations

Pillars erected in the main mandir

#### VISION AND CREATION

Envisioned by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1997, the BHM was completed with the blessings and inspiration of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, guidance of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, and the unwavering support of the leadership of both the UAE and India. The design and construction of the mandir was efficiently and meticulously managed from ideation and inception to completion by Brahmavihari Swami, who was assisted by a team of dedicated BAPS swamis and volunteers: Akshaymuni Swami, Aksharatit Swami, Nirmalmuni Swami, Atmavatsal Swami, Bahushrut Swami, Uttamnilay Swami, Sarvajit Swami, Paritosh Swami, Gurunayan Swami and Paramvandan Swami; Late Rohitbhai Patel, Late Ghanshyambhai Pagrani, Late Jasbir Singh Sahani, Ashokbhai Kotecha, Yogeshbhai Mehta, Manubhai Patel, Chiragbhai Patel, Chirayubhai Patel, Dipenbhai Patel, Pranavbhai Desai, Sagoonbhai Patel, Madhusudanbhai Patel, Ullasbhai Shukla, Sanjaybhai Parikh, Vipulbhai Sompura, Nishithbhai Raval, Ravindrabhai Kadam, Vishalbhai Brahmabhatt, Deepakbhai Bhatt, Yogibhai Bhatt, Umeshbhai Raja, Tusharbhai Brahmabhatt, Harikrishnabhai Patel, Yogeshbhai Thaker and many others. This project

was propelled forward by the immeasurable support of innumerable local and international volunteers and well-wishers.

#### MANDIR STRUCTURE

The mandir is built according to the traditional Nagar (North Indian) architectural style, faithfully following the principles outlined in the Shilpashastras. It is 108 feet high, 180 feet wide and 262 feet long,

The outer structure of the two-level mandir stands out in the form of seven spires (each housing a widely revered deity) adorned with *kalashes* and flags, two raised domes, 10 *samarans* (pyramidal domes) and circumambulatory (*paradakshina*) paths at both levels. The mandir is also a tribute to the friendship between India and the UAE, with the seven spires symbolizing and honouring the seven emirates of the UAE, namely, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah.

The mandir's facade features sculpted stone panels depicting universal values, narratives of harmony from various cultures, and representations of avatars, celestial beings, spiritual leaders and famous devotees from the Hindu tradition. In the *mahapith* section of each shrine's *shikhar* are meticulously crafted carvings





Artisan expertly arranges a stone

that narrate the life stories of the consecrated deity within from the Ramayan, Mahabharat, Shrimad Bhagvat and other Hindu shastras.

The lower level houses the Abhishek Mandap and two ceremonial rooms, where individuals can perform *abhishek*, participate in *mahapuja* rituals, and conduct personal and family rites.

In total, there are 110 intricately sculpted and 300 elegantly cladded pillars depicting a variety of scenes, *murtis* and designs supporting the inner areas of both mandir levels.

The mandir structure is surrounded by water features, representing the River Ganga, River Yamuna and the subterranean River Saraswati. The mandir stands at the convergence point of these rivers, embodying an oasis of spirituality and serving as a guiding light for global harmony.

#### **MATERIALS & ASSEMBLY**

Pink sandstone from top-tier quarries in Rajasthan and Aqua Bianca marble sourced from Carrara in Italy are the main stones used in the mandir structure. These stones were intricately carved by over 5,000 skilled sculptors in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The more than 30,000 exquisitely sculpted stone pieces were crafted using traditional methods passed down through generations, employing manual tools like chisels

and mallets. Each carved stone was then uniquely marked, transported to the UAE and meticulously assembled on-site like a colossal 3D jigsaw by the collaborative efforts of 150 heritage craftsmen.

The stones were meticulously assembled using a time-honoured lock-and-key method, a centuries-old technique used in the traditional construction of ancient Indian mandirs. Thus, there is no rebar or any other metallic reinforcement in the mandir, making it a pure stone structure. This unique method relies solely on gravitational load rather than adhesive substances to ensure the structural integrity of the mandir.

The entire process was micromanaged using 360 Reality Capture, an OpenSpace technology which tracked every stone quarried, carved, transported and finally fixed.

#### SUSTAINABILITY FEATURES

When the construction team began to excavate the land to prepare the foundation, they hit a thick strata of sandstone just one metre (3 ft) below the sand surface. It was so robust and large that the lead structural engineer, Dr Kong Sia Kong, Executive Director, SOE Consultants, said, "The temple will be like a small pigeon sitting on an elephant's back." Hence, no steel piles were needed in the foundations.



A sensor placed in position upon the sandstone in the mandir foundation

In construction, only sand that is free of chloride and sulphur can be used. Ordinarily, this type of sand is not found in a desert area with oil. However, when sand from the foundation was tested in the lab, it had no chloride or sulphur and so could be directly used in the construction. Thus, no truckloads of sand were needed, reducing carbon emissions.

In 2020, the BAPS Hindu Mandir foundation was prepared with a single concrete pour of 3,000 cubic metres. This special, extremely eco-friendly mix comprised 55% fly ash, significantly reducing the construction's carbon footprint. Notably, these foundations align with the principles of traditional ancient stone architecture by forgoing any steel reinforcement, which is characteristic of religious stone structures in India. This event also marked the largest single pour of its kind in the UAE.

To counterbalance the inherent lack of tensile strength in concrete, which primarily possesses compressive strength, bamboo and glass elements are integrated vertically within the foundation to prevent cracks in the transverse direction, ensuring structural integrity.

The foundations and the mandir structure

incorporate more than 300 strategically placed temperature, load and strain sensors. These sensors gather and relay real-time stress, pressure and temperature measurements, enabling continuous surveillance and evaluation.

As per the Abu Dhabi International Building Code (ADIBC), the mandir's seismic design category is C and can withstand a 7.0 Richter scale earthquake.

Furthermore, in a bid to minimize waste, the wooden pallets in which the stones were shipped were repurposed into furniture and fittings for the food court and other areas of the mandir.

# BLEND OF ANCIENT AND MODERN TECHNIQUES

The mandir harmoniously merges ancient wisdom with modern innovations, incorporating natural elements to ensure effective ventilation, lighting and cool interiors. Other important utility features include thoughtful water management systems, energy-efficient lighting, air quality control, demand-based ventilation, as well as centralized monitoring and control systems.

Modern HVAC designs, structural performance measuring instruments, automation, security measures, surveillance, audio-visual setups, wireless networks, and energy monitoring tools have been used. The use of technology facilitated speed, precision and innovative architectural solutions.

The following represent some of the construction challenges faced and their creative solutions.

# MECHANICAL, ELECTRICAL, PLUMBING (MEP) SERVICES

As the mandir structure is composed entirely of stone and features intricate hand carvings, drilling sizeable holes to mount supports for drainage, water pipes, chilled water systems, ducts, and other MEP services was not possible. Moreover, the supports had to be non-ferrous, yet strong enough to provide robust support.

The solution emerged by leveraging the inherent strength of the stone in the slabs and beams. Specially designed nonferrous supports were engineered with sufficient tensile strength and durability. This innovative design allowed for the installation of support channels for all utilities without causing any damage to the stone structure.

# Lighting

The challenge was to illuminate the intricately carved stone pillars, slabs and ceilings without compromising their beauty, since installing typical modern containment systems would involve drilling and conduits that would detract from the exquisite craftsmanship.

The solution utilized the stone itself. Small channels were intricately carved into the stone, serving as containment for the cables. These channels were discreet yet adequate to house the necessary cables, allowing them to seamlessly follow the design of the stone. This approach ensured that the cables could be twisted, turned, and bent inconspicuously, enabling the implementation of modern lighting features. These lights are controlled using RGBW, Dali, DMX and other advanced systems, offering a range of lighting schemes that are both efficient and centrally monitored.

## Connectivity

Another challenge was to incorporate wireless access points (WAPs) into the structure without them being visible and while maintaining the integrity of the stone carvings.

The solution again utilized the stone itself as a medium for concealment. Channels and grooves were strategically designed within the stones to accommodate the WAPs, ensuring seamless coverage without compromising the aesthetic appeal of the stone carvings.

#### Audio

Considering the vast space, numerous stone pillars and stone's natural tendency to absorb and

deflect sound, the challenge was to deliver optimal audio solutions for an immersive visitor experience without compromising the area's visual aesthetics.

By understanding the physical properties of the stones, and a comprehensive study of frequencies and sound levels, speakers and subwoofers were strategically placed to harness the density, reflection, resonance, reverberation, and sound deflection of the stones. Thus enabling the delivery of concealed high-quality sound.

Furthermore, the positioning of backend equipment was meticulously planned to ensure future accessibility and centralized control, allowing for efficient management and maintenance of the audio system.

#### Airflow

In the post-COVID pandemic scenario, HVAC systems were re-evaluated to ensure sustainability, efficiency and user comfort, as well as for their capacity to ensure air quality and swift responses to any detected incidents or potential threats, halting the spread of airborne infections and minimizing downtime for disinfection. The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) standards were a foundational consideration in devising a solution that addressed these multifaceted needs.

This challenge was compounded by the need for airflow circulation ducts to run within stone structures where openings were limited and space for HVAC equipment was constrained. The aim was to achieve quality air availability and maximum equipment life cycle while ensuring modularity for operational efficiency.

The solution involved a strategic design where fresh air was directed into the Air Handling Units (AHUs) through stainless steel ducts, carefully placed in precisely calculated locations that would not impact the stone structure. These AHUs utilized a hybrid ducting system, incorporating the stone itself as a conduit for air transfer. Stone-finished grilles were mounted to seamlessly blend



BAPS awarded the Mechanical Project of the Year 2019

with the interior, ensuring both functionality and aesthetics.

Also, the inherent properties of the stone, such as its capacity to absorb thermal heat, higher density and thickness, were carefully considered in designing the HVAC system. Leveraging these inherent stone characteristics allowed for the development of a downsized custom HVAC system while meeting ASHRAE's high standards of air quality and safety.

# **Lightning Protection**

Using cutting-edge lightning protection air terminals connected to an extensive system of earth bars, this comprehensive setup safeguards the entire structure from the potential impacts of lightning strikes.

The challenge of incorporating earth bars into a stone structure was met using a stone-based solution. Multiple earth pits were strategically constructed around the mandir, ensuring accessibility for future maintenance. Copper conductors were then routed through stone-created shafts, extending from the ground to the roof and further up to the top of the *shikhar* structure. This meticulous setup ensures a robust and unparalleled lightning protection system.

## **Awards & Recognitions**

From the outset, the BAPS Hindu Mandir (BHM) has been a focus of attention due to its unique location – a Hindu mandir in a Muslim



BAPS awarded Interior Design Concept of the Year 2020

country – and the trust conferred by the UAE leadership and Government of India.

When still in its design phase, the BHM was selected as the 'Mechanical Project of the Year 2019' at the prestigious Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing (MEP) Middle East Awards. This recognition from *MEP Middle East*, a premier magazine in the MEP industry, commended the mandir's design for its utilization of energy-efficient systems integrating energy and enthalpy recovery.

In November 2020, BAPS Hindu Mandir Abu Dhabi and RSP (the mandir's architects) were awarded the prestigious Interior Design Concept of the Year 2020 at the Commercial Interior Design (CID) Awards.

#### Summary

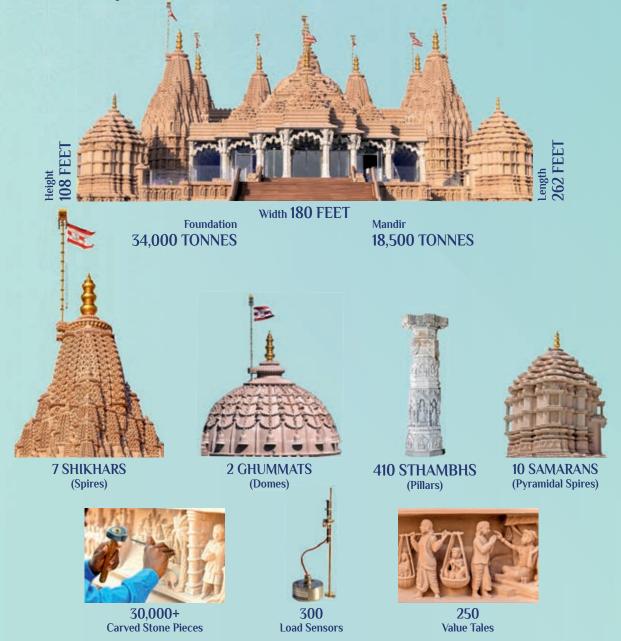
The BAPS Hindu Mandir stands as a testament to the rich cultural, spiritual and engineering heritage of India, blending ancient architectural principles and traditional craftsmanship with modern technological innovations. Its recognition and awards highlight its significance as a cultural landmark and as a valuable addition to the UAE's architectural landscape.

The BAPS Hindu Mandir is a symbol of peace, harmony and cultural exchange. It serves as a beacon of spirituality and cultural values, welcoming visitors from around the world to experience its beauty and serenity. It is, indeed a heaven in the desert and a spirtual oasis for global harmony.



Built in the Nagar architectural style of Hindu mandirs, based on the Shilpashastras.





#### **KEY NUMBERS**

- Campus Area: 27 acres Italian Marble Used: 50,000 cubic feet
- Indian Sandstone Used: 1.8 million cubic feet 
  Bricks Used: 1.8 million
- Parking area: for around 1,400 cars and 50 buses

# From Render to Reality...



Over four years of focused effort, the computer-rendered designs of the BAPS Hindu Mandir were turned into a breathtaking reality.



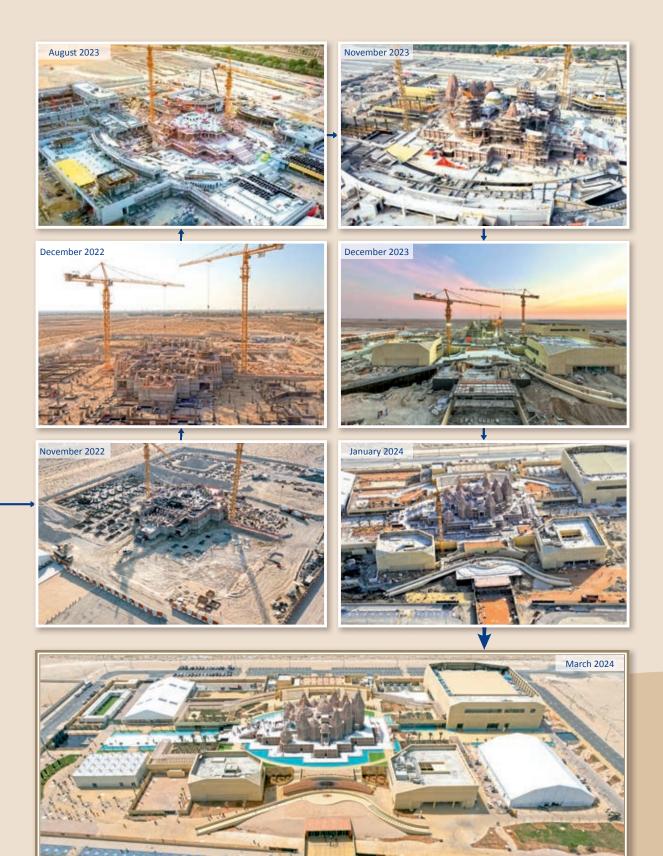


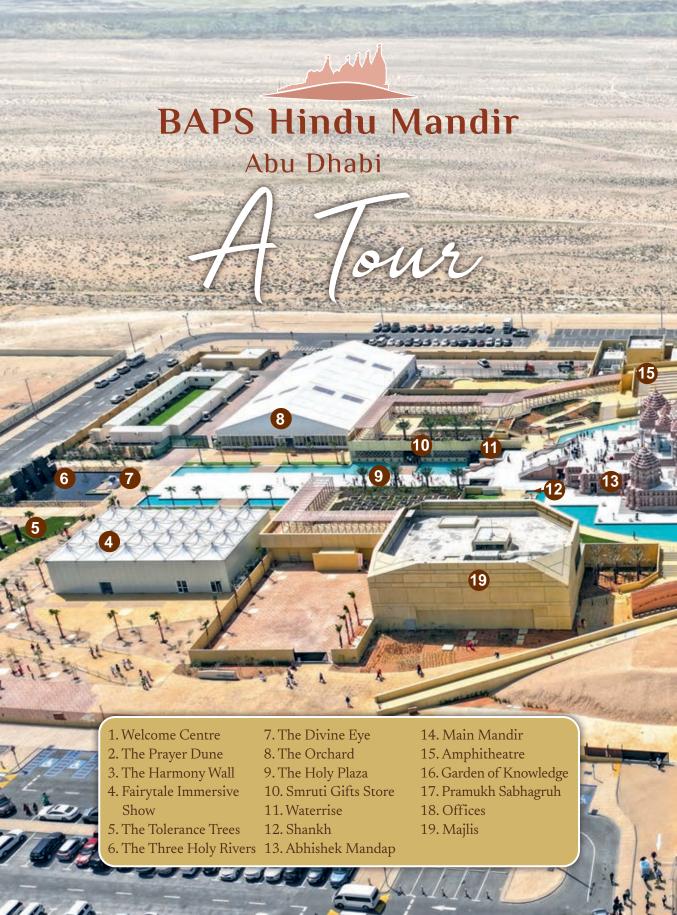


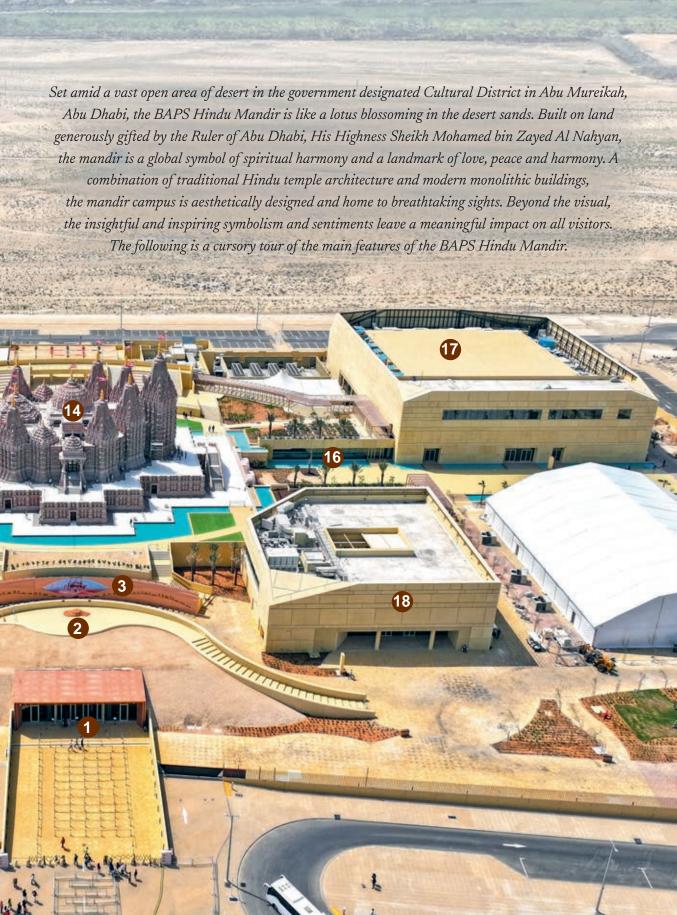














#### Welcome Centre

Entry into the mandir campus from the car park is through the Welcome Centre.



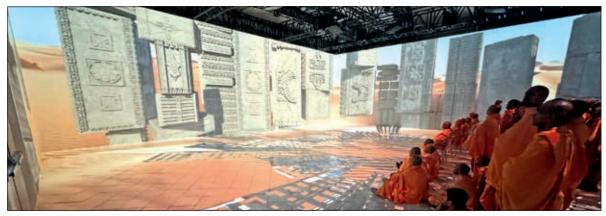
# The Harmony Wall

- One of the largest 3D printed walls in the UAE. Length: 45m; Height: 4.5m; 225 layers.
- The curves represent sand dunes. In the centre, an LED screen projects visuals of the key milestones of the mandir construction.
- The wall is decorated with small metallic replicas of different landmarks from the east to the west, symbolizing that great civilizations have grown, thrived and succeeded because of harmony.
- The word 'Harmony' has been written in 15 different ancient and modern languages.
- \* The mandir has been built with the support of many people from around the world of different faiths. This wall honours that harmony.



# The Prayer Dune

- This dune represents the sand dune in the deserts of Sharjah where Pramukh Swami Maharaj voiced a prayer for a mandir in Abu Dhabi on 5 April 1997.
- On The Prayer Dune, one can pray for one's noble wishes and impossible prayers to come true.



# The Fairytale Immersive Show

• Using 24 projectors, a 13-minute show on the creation of the mandir, unfolding like a fairytale, is projected on all four walls and the floor, giving a truly immersive experience.



# The Tolerance Trees

- The 6,500-year-old black subfossil oaks and desert palms stand tall together and tell a tale of tolerance, harmony and life.
- The rare glacial oaks, which carry the secrets of the last ice age, were gifted to preserve the legacy of art, environment and harmony.

# The Three Holy Rivers & The Divine Eye

- The UAE is known for its majestic deserts, but not typically for rivers. So to create a cultural and spiritual bridge between India and the UAE, water from the three holiest rivers of India – Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati – flows throughout the mandir.
- \* At the point where the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers begin, The Divine Eye rises.
- \* From here, facing the mandir, the Ganga continues to the left and the Yamuna continues to the right. The Saraswati goes underground and will emerge in the Abhishek Mandap.
- The Divine Eye reminds us that, just like the confluence of the three rivers, if we work together, we will also experience love, peace and harmony.
- In The Divine Eye, soft blue represents the Ganga, deep blue represents the Yamuna, and white represents the Saraswati.







# The Orchard

- \* Approaching the mandir, on the left is the Orchard – a pure vegetarian *sattvic* food court.
- \* Every bench, table, and chair tells a story of sustainability crafted from the wooden pallets that once carried the stones that now form the mandir. These materials would normally be discarded, but have now been given a new life.

# Smruti Gifts Store

 Stocked with a variety of welldesigned fun and educational gift articles for visitors of all ages.





# The Holy Plaza: 96 Bells & Gaumukhs

- The Holy Plaza is flanked on the left by the Ganga and on the right by the Yamuna.
- The 96 bells on both sides represent Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 96 years on this earth; they honour his vision of global harmony, and lifelong dedication to bringing cultures, communities and people closer together.
- \* On both sides are *gaumukhs* from which water flows into the Ganga and Yamuna water streams.

# WaterRise

As one climbs up the first flight of stairs, one sees the waterrise features on both sides.

Normally water flows downhill, due to gravity. But, at this point, water shoots upwards, symbolizing that the journey of life and spirituality is a constant effort to rise amidst the obstacles and challenges that pull one down.





#### Shankh

- At the top of the first flight of stairs, there are two shankhs (conch shells), one to each side of the mandir. The one on the left holds water from the Ganga, and the one on the right holds water from the Yamuna.
- \* Before entering the mandir, to symbolically and spiritually clear one's mind and heart for the divinity inside, we sprinkle some of this water on our head.







### Commemorative Plagues

Two plaques, one to the left and one to the right, honour the vision, generosity, values and support that have made the BAPS Hindu Mandir possible. Both plaques are displayed in English and Arabic.



#### Value Devis

- \* Four stone *devis* on each side hold up the mandir. They symbolize that the mandir is built upon the foundation of core values and virtues. These universal values connect us all, and a peaceful, harmonious life is also created on the foundation of values.
- Left: Pavitrata (Purity), Daan (Charity), Shanti (Peace), Jnan (Knowledge).
   Right: Shraddha (Faith), Karuna (Compassion), Satya (Truth), Samvadita (Harmony).



### Abhishek Mandap

- \* Located on the first level, under the main mandir, the Abhishek Mandap is a tribute to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the spiritual gurus of BAPS, River Saraswati, the holy rivers of India, the main rivers of the world, and the sands of the seven emirates of the UAE.
- A solemn venue where individuals and families can participate in traditional prayer ceremonies.
- On entering, one sees the previously unseen River Saraswati, represented by light, flowing along the floor of the Abhishek Mandap as the hidden river of knowledge.
- The Abhishek Mandap has two main areas the Charanarvind Dome and the Abhishek Dome.

### Charanarvind Dome

- The earth and soil have always been honoured in the Hindu religion. So, under this first dome, is the divine soil from the birthplaces of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit Gurus, as a tribute to their life on this earth.
- Also presented are sands from the seven emirates of the UAE, as a gesture of gratitude for the nation's generosity in gifting this land for the BAPS Hindu Mandir.



- Pink onyx charanarvind (footprints) of Bhagwan Swaminarayan with the 16 auspicious divine signs symbolize the birth of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on earth, as a testament to his inspiring life and work.
- \* The ceiling is a mashrabiya style design, representing Islamic art blended with traditional Indian *rangoli*. The designs comprise fruit and flowers that used to florish along the Saraswati, and paintings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and the Aries and Saggitarius constellations.

#### Abhishek Dome

- \* At the centre of the second dome, the Abishek Dome, is a seated *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.
- \* Performing *abhishek* is one way of offering prayers to God. This ritual involves pouring water over the *murti* while praying to attain God's blessings.
- \* Above, the ceiling is decorated with paintings from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan which depict values inspired by his teachings of *seva* (service), *karuna* (compassion), *jnan* (wisdom), and *samvadita* (harmony).
- \* This dome features decorative flowers embodying nature's diversity and reflecting the vital role flowers play in Hindu worship and celebrations.
- \* At the base of the pillars are the holy rivers of India and famous rivers from around the world, which have nourished not only civilizations but life in every form.







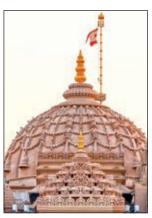
### Guru Parampara

After the Abhishek Dome, the path of the Saraswati leads to the murtis of the BAPS Gunatit gurus, symbolizing a spiritual journey through the tradition of enlightened gurus. The illuminated River Saraswati culminates at the divine feet of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the inspirer of the mandir.

After climbing the second flight of stairs, one reaches the second level. From here, one can walk along the spacious circumambulatory path around the main mandir or climb another small flight of stairs leading into the main mandir.

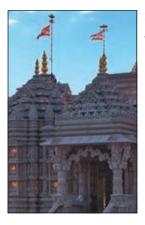
#### Main Mandir

The exterior of the mandir is made from pink sandstone and the interior is Italian marble. The following features are visible from the outside.



#### **Ghummats**

\* Two domes (ghummats) atop the mandir, representing the vastness and completeness of the universe, reflect the idea that the divine is omnipresent and allencompassing. They also symbolize the protection and shelter provided by the divine to all beings.



#### Samarans

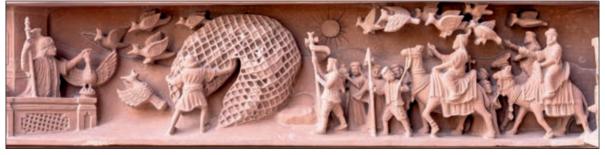
\* On the roof of the mandir there are 10 samarans, that is, pyramidal domes, which are smaller than the ghummats.



#### Shikhars

- Seven curvillinear pinnacles (shikhars), each housing a revered deity, are crowned with kalashes and dhvaja. The shikhars symbolically honour the seven emirates of the UAE.
- \* Honouring the divinity consecrated within each *shikhar* are inspiring stories sculpted in stone from the Ramayan, Mahabharat, Shrimad Bhagvat, Shiva Puran, Swaminarayan texts and other shastras.
- \* The bottom layer of the *mahapeeth* depicts cows, camels, falcons, lions, elephants, horses, peacocks and other animals in their natural habitat, animals living in harmony with man, and animals having a deep connection with the divine.
- The layers above show deities, celestial beings, sages, rishis and devotees engaged in playing musical instruments, dancing, creating art, and other diverse devotional activities.
- \* Thousands of sculpted figures of flora and fauna include traditional Indian animals, e.g. cows, elephants, peacocks, etc., as well as traditional Arabian animals, flowers and fruits, e.g. camels, oryx (desert goat), falcons, Tribulus Omanense (national flower of Dubai), dates and others.

At eye level, on the mandir exterior, before one climbs the steps into the main mandir, are inspiring sculpted stories.



#### Value Tales from Past & Present Cultures

To the left of the stairs are stories depicting universal values from 14 ancient and more recent civilizations: African, American, Arabian, British, Chinese, Dutch, Egyptian, Emirati, Greek, Indian, Inuit, Mayan, Mesopotamian and Native American.



#### Indian Value Stories

To the right of the stairs are 15 Indian value stories from the ancient era, such as the Panchtantra, to the contemporary world, such as Pramukh Swami Maharaj's historic prayer, representing the virtues of Indian Culture.

On entering inside the main mandir, one arrives at the first, smaller dome.

### Dome of Harmony

- \* Symbolically represented in this dome are the five elements of earth, water, fire, air and space, which are the building blocks of everything created by nature. We all share the same five elements. It is what connects us all and therefore this is the Dome of Harmony.
- These five distinctive elements come together to create the beautiful universe, so if nature can live in harmony, so can we.





#### Dome of Peace

- Peace is at the centre of our life, and so this dome, the central part of the mandir, is called the Dome of Peace.
- Structurally, the dome is supported by raised beams and columns, allowing natural light to illuminate the mandir.

### Ceilings

\* There are a variety of exquisitely crafted ceilings, which capture the beauty of nature and the respect that human beings have towards the elements of nature. For example, the sunflower ceiling has intricately carved layers of the sunflower leaves and petals; the *kalpavruksha* ceiling features the divine *kalpavruksha*, the wish-fulfilling tree; and the spiral ceilings have skillfully carved flora and other patterns in both horizontal and vertical depths.



#### **Torans**

\* The ceilings are adorned with over 130 *torans* (sculpted arches) of various designs.





#### Pillars

- The main mandir has 96 marble pillars each featuring different intricate designs, carved stories or *murtis*.
- \* Among them are several Pillar of Pillars. These pillars were each sculpted from a single marble block by 12 artisans. They spent one year sculpting a stunning array of 1,400 small pillars within each main pillar.



#### Murtis

The centre of attraction of the entire mandir and focus of devotion for the faithful are the *murtis* enshrined in the seven sanctums of the main mandir.



Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami (Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj)



Shri Radhaji-Krishna Bhagwan



Shri Sitaji-Rama Bhagwan & Parivar



Shri Paravatiji-Shankar Bhagwan & Parivar



Shri Jagganathji Bhagwan

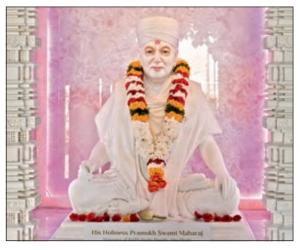


Shri Tirupati Balaji



Shri Ayyappa Swami Maharaj





### Sankalp-Siddhi Murtis

#### Shastriji Maharaj

Between the shrines of Shri Krishna and Shri Jagannathji is the *sankalp murti* of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj (1865–1951), who had resolved to promote the divine universal Akshar-Purushottam principle revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut and grounded in ancient Hindu shastras.

#### Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Between the shrines of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Tirupati Balaji is the *siddhi murti* of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, whose saintliness and vision to spread goodness across the world made the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi possible.

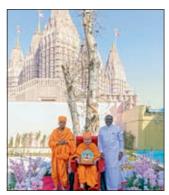


### **Amphitheatre**

\* To the left of the mandir, visible from both levels, are the River Ganga and the amphitheatre. The amphitheatre resembles the Varanasi ghats. Visitors can come and sit on the amphitheatre steps and engage in darshan of the mandir, the Ganga and the gardens, and reflect. At night, the mandir lights up for the *arti* ceremony, which can be performed at the amphitheatre, honouring the Ganga *arti* ceremony at Haridwar in India.

### Garden of Knowledge: Guru Tree

- \* The Garden of Knowledge honours the guru tradition of Sanatan Dharma. The tree is a banyan tree specially gifted by the Government of Sri Lanka and is from the famous Ashok Vatika, where Sitaji was held captive by Ravan.
- It was under such trees that the gurus of ancient India imparted wisdom to students in their gurukuls.
- The mandir landscape also incorporates elements reflecting Indian and Hindu cultural aesthetics as well as plant life hailing from the Arabian peninsula, such as ghaf trees and palm trees.

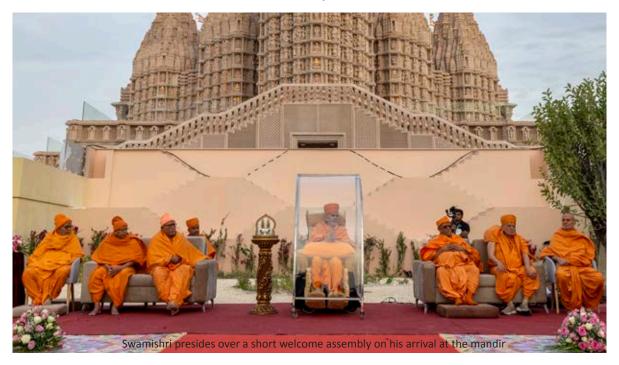




During February 2024, the world witnessed a pivotal moment in history with the inauguration of the BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi - the Middle East's first traditional stone temple - by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. The public dedication ceremony was held in the presence of Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. The mandir became possible due to the generosity of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi, who gifted 27 acres of land to BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha to construct a traditional Hindu mandir. The BAPS Hindu Mandir thus stands as a timeless testament to the enduring friendship between India and the UAE, embodying the spirit of interfaith harmony, cultural diversity and community collaboration. To honour this landmark occasion, the 'Festival of Harmony' was organized, inviting members of the Indian communities and Indian diaspora in the UAE to a series of uplifting programmes and events focused on strengthening faith and inspiring harmony among people of all generations and backgrounds in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj, 150 BAPS swamis and a plethora of distinguished dignitaries. The highlights of Mahant Swami Maharaj's visit to the UAE as a state guest from 5 to 23 February and the Festival of Harmony are presented here.

### Sankalp-Siddhi Yatra: Mahant Swami Maharaj Arrives in the UAE

5 February 2024



On the flight from Ahmedabad to Abu Dhabi, Swamishri was asked, "Why did you called this the 'Sankalp-Siddhi Yatra'?"

Swamishri replied, "Because Maharaj has fulfilled all our wishes."

Brahmavihari Swami presented a card on behalf of the UAE devotees and requested Swamishri to write his blessings on it. He wrote 'Bliss-Harmony-Unity'.

Upon arrival at the airport, His Holiness

Mahant Swami Maharaj was warmly greeted by His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance for the UAE. His Excellency said to Swamishri, "Welcome to the UAE. Our nation is blessed with your

presence. We are touched by your kindness and we feel your prayers." In response, Mahant Swami Maharaj warmly said, "We are touched by your love and respect. The leaders of the UAE are great, good and large-hearted."

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami greeted Swamishri with a garland. Then, reflective of his status as a state guest, Swamishri was welcomed in honorific Arabic style by a troupe of dancers, drummers and chanters performing the Al-Ayyala, an

expressive traditional cultural presentation usually performed on national holidays and celebratory occasions.

Swamishri reached the mandir at 5.15 p.m. (UAE time), where thousands of devotees and well-wishers from the Gulf



Swamishri enthusiastically responds to a troupe of dancers performing the Al-Ayyala, a traditional Arabic welcome dance

countries and worldwide had eagerly gathered to devotionally welcome him by waving flags, showering flowers and hailing the *jai naad*. The entire campus had been decorated with auspicious symbols, including messages of 'Welcome' in Sanskrit, Arabic, English and Gujarati.

During the brief outdoor welcome, with the mandir in the backdrop, Swamishri blessed the



His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahyan greets His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj at the airport

senior devotees and project engineers.

Thereafter, he untied the *nadachhadi* to formally open the Sant Ashram. From Sarvasva, Swamishri's residence, on the first floor, he marvelled at his first sight of the mandir through the large windows and said, "It is like we have arrived in another world."

### Day of Devotion: Honouring Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

10 February 2024

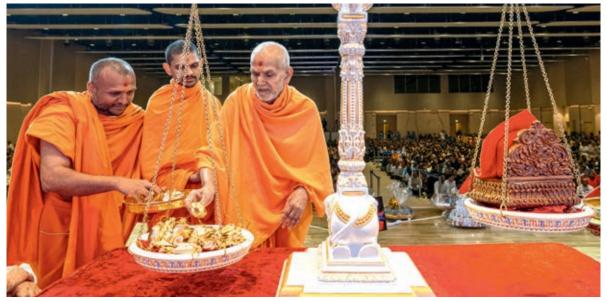
Aspecial Day of Devotion was held in the form of a Bhakti Tula in which devotees offered their gratitude to God and guru through a devotional offering to Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.

In the morning, after his puja in the Pramukh Sabhagruh, Swamishri performed the Vedic consecration rituals for the *chal murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj which will reside in the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. Then, he performed the *pujan* of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj which he worships daily.

After Swamishri had performed their *arti* and offered *mantra-pushpanjali*, both sets of *murtis* were placed on separate *tulas* (scales).

The devotional Bhakti Tula ceremony then began. First, the *sadguru* swamis and other swamis all placed small bags of *mala* beads on the scale pans opposite the *murtis* in both *tulas*. Then, Swamishri concluded the morning session by placing *mala* beads on both *tulas* and tipping the scales.

The evening assembly began with kirtans that explained the spiritual benefits realized through devotion. Pujya Viveksagar Swami highlighted the



Swamishri places a rosary bead onto the scale as a devotional offering to Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

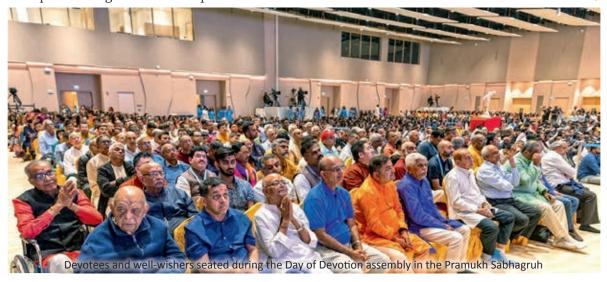
goodwill of countless people who had supported the construction of the new mandir and paid tribute to their invaluable contributions.

After Swamishri's arrival, both sets of *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj were joyously welcomed into the assembly hall carried in decorative palanquins.

Thereafter, Swamishri performed their *pujan* and *arti* and offered his own devotion by placing *mala* beads on the scales.

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri reiterated the spiritual significance of pure devotion and selfless prayer, "God is limitless and transcendental. He can never be weighed in materialistic terms. Only our selfless devotion can truly reach him and please him. By pleasing God, we are thanking everyone."

Thereafter, devotees and well-wishers from the Middle East and across the world expressed their devotion and prayers by placing *mala* beads in the *tula* to honour Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj to symbolize their gratitude and celebrate the imminent inauguration of the mandir.



## Day of Prayers: Vedic Yagna for Global Harmony

11 February 2024

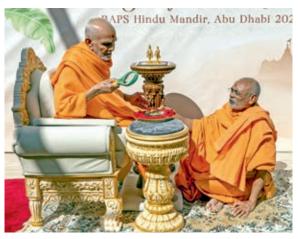


Before sunrise, at 5 a.m., more than 980 people had gathered for the Vishwa Samvadita Yagna (Vedic Prayers for Global Harmony), the first such yagna to take place in the Middle East, to pray for peace, harmony and the well-being and success of everyone in the UAE and across the world.

The UAE is known for its ever-present sunshine and rare rainfall. Today, however, the rain gods greeted the *yagna* participants with a steady shower of rain. Swamishri was informed and he blessed that the *yagna* begin. The open-air arrangements resulted in the participants being soaked by the rain, yet all joyously performed the *yagna* offerings and prayers, while the seven expert pandits recited the Vedic mantras.

More than 200 volunteers, who had set up the 108 *yagna kunds*, also helped the participants to conduct the rituals.

On 7 February, Swamishri had sanctified the various items that were to be offered in the *yagna*. And on 9 February, at 1.11 p.m., Swamishri had naturally kindled the *yagna* flame using the sun's



Two days prior to the *yagna*, Swamishri ignited the *yagna* flame that would ignite the sacred altars using natural sunlight



Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami arrived in the rain to conclude the *yagna* 

rays. This was used by the participants to ignite

the flames in all the 108 kunds.

Participants and onlookers marvelled at the wonderful sight of a traditional *yagna* being performed amid the rain, since all the five elements of nature had come together to honour the opening of the new mandir.

Despite the inclement wet weather, the joyous spirits of the participants could not be dampened. Jayshri Inamdar, a 70-year-old devotee who had travelled from London to attend the event, shared, "The rains made the historic event all the more memorable and enjoyable. Never in my lifetime have I witnessed a *yagna* take place in the rain! It felt especially auspicious."

### Honouring the Murtis

11 and 13 February 2024



Swamishri performs pujan of the chal murtis of Shri Radhaji-Krishna Bhagwan, 11 February

Due to the unexpected and unusually harsh rain and wind, adjustments were made to the events and Swamishri's schedule.

On 11 February, despite the persistent rain, devotees enthusiastically, patiently and devoutly participated in the *yagna*. However, due to the wet



Swamis reverently honour the murtis to be consecrated in the mandir during the Palkhi Yatra, 13 February

conditions, the afternoon's Palkhi Yatra in honour of the *murtis* involving the participation of various communities in the UAE had to be postponed.

So, after Swamishri's lunch, the small replicas of all the *murtis* to be consecrated in the mandir were brought before him. One by one, Swamishri devoutly performed *pujan* of all the *murtis* to honour them.

Thereafter, on 13 February, Swamishri expressed, "The Palkhi Yatra of the *murtis* could not be held on the day of the *yagna* due to the rain. But it should be held before the *murti-pratishtha* 

takes place tomorrow. So, this tradition remains to be done."

Hence, in the afternoon, the traditional celebratory Palkhi Yatra of all the *murtis* was carried out in the lower circumambulatory path (*parikrama*) of the mandir by swamis and youths. Swamishri watched and blessed the procession in honour of the *murtis* from his viewing window in his residence (Sarvasva). The *sadguru* swamis also joined him in paying their respects to the *murtis*. In this way, Swamishri ensured that the age-old tradition was upheld.

### Murti-pratishtha Ceremony

14 February 2024

After four years of diligent effort, the intricately crafted BAPS Hindu Mandir, located in the Cultural District at Abu Mureikah, Abu Dhabi, was ready for inauguration.

Devotees began to arrive from 6.00 a.m. for the ceremony. Donors, dignitaries and senior devotees gathered in the upper sanctum of the mandir as well as in the Abhishek Mandap, while thousands of devotees and well-wishers of diverse faiths and backgrounds from all over the world watched the live relay of the proceedings in the Pramukh

Sabhagruh (indoor assembly hall) and outdoor Narayan Mandapam. The main *murti-pratishtha* ceremony was also webcast live.

In the early morning, the *sadguru* swamis performed the *murti-pratishtha mahapuja* ceremony. Then, at 7.12 a.m., Swamishri sat before the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central shrine to perform the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals. Simultaneously, *sadguru* and other senior swamis performed the rituals in the other shrines and Abhishek Mandap.



Swamishri ritually releases the divine gaze of God from the murtis

Thereafter, Swamishri performed pujan of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and offered mantrapushpanjali. Then, Swamishri went to all of the other shrines and offered flowers to the murtis in each: Shri Radhaji-Krishna Bhagwan, Shri Sitaji-Rama Bhagwan & Parivar, Shri Parvatiji-Shankar Bhagwan & Parivar, Shri Jagannath Bhagwan & Parivar, Shri Padmavatiji-Shrinivas Bhagwan, and Shri Ayyappa Swami Maharaj.

Swamishri then blessed the occasion,

"Throughout the ceremony, I have been praying for the people of this country and the world. May there be peace and prosperity for everyone, and may we all progress together to serve the whole of humanity." He also thanked His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE, who had generously gifted the land upon which the mandir has been built, and everyone who had contributed to the mandir. Further, Swamishri emphasized that the mandir is a place



Swamishri and sadguru swamis before the central shrine of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.

where people of all faiths and backgrounds are welcome to learn, experience peace and contribute to global harmony.

Then, at 8.22 a.m., Swamishri capped this historic moment by performing the *murti-pratishtha arti*.

After the rituals in the main mandir, Swamishri

went to the Abhishek Mandap, where he ritually offered flowers to perform the *pujan* of the *abhishek murti* of Sahajanand Swami.

From here, Swamishri went to both the indoor and outdoor assembly halls to grant darshan to the thousands of devotees and well-wishers present there.

# Public Dedication Ceremony of BAPS Hindu Mandir

14 February 2024



Swamishri and Prime Minister Modi untie the nadachhadi, to publicly open the mandir

After the morning Vedic murti-pratishtha Ceremony of the new BAPS Hindu Mandir by Mahant Swami Maharaj, the evening Public Dedication Ceremony was held in the distinguished presence of the Honourable Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, and the eminent Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence for the UAE, His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan

Mabarak Al Nahyan, as well as a host of esteemed dignitaries. Millions watched the live TV broadcast and online webcast.

On his arrival at the mandir at 5.15 p.m., Prime Minister Modi was garlanded and warmly welcomed by Anandswarupdas Swami. Then, along the entry path, representatives of the numerous Indian communities in the UAE greeted



At The Harmony Wall, Prime Minister Modi with various religious and community leaders who supported the mandir

the prime minister with cultural performances by youths of their regions.

During an extensive interactive tour of the mandir campus guided by Brahmaviharidas Swami, Prime Minister Modi learned about some of the inspiring features of the mandir that promote universal compassion, respect, charity, and learning. Along the route, he also met senior swamis, BAPS trustees from around the world, artisans, children, and men and women volunteers who supported the construction of the mandir. In addition, Prime Minister Modi helped carve 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' into a block of stone.

Then, he climbed the steps of the mandir and at the top was welcomed by Mahant Swami Maharaj. The prime minister respectfully bowed and grasped Swamishri's hand in delight, and the two then proceeded towards the main mandir.

At the entrance, while Vedic mantras were recited, they untied the decorative *nadachhadi* to ritually and formally perform the public dedication ceremony.

Then, seated before the central shrine, Swamishri and the prime minister performed the *arti*. At the same time, by prior arrangements, *artis* were performed at all BAPS mandirs throughout the world and at the homes of thousands of BAPS devotees, all joyfully participating in this historic Global Arti Ceremony.

Thereafter, the prime minister entered all the shrines and paid respects by offering flowers at the feet of the *murtis*.

Then, while escorting the prime minsiter to the assembly in the Pramukh Sabhagruh, Brahmaviharidas Swami showed and explained to him the architecture and intricate carvings of the mandir.

In the assembly, Prime Minister Modi and Sheikh Nahayan sat on the stage to either side of Swamishri.

After a welcome speech by Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami, Brahmaviharidas Swami appreciated the generosity of the UAE leadership and the leadership of Prime Miniser Modi, and applauded the friendship between the two countries that helped create the mandir.

Then, His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahyan shared his sentiments on this momentous occasion. First, he thanked Prime Minister Modi for visiting the UAE, "We are proud to welcome a great friend from a great and friendly country."

Sheikh Nahayan also welcomed His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj and thanked him



Prime Minister Modi and Swamishri share a light moment before entering the main mandir

for building the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. He said, "Today marks the beginning of something special. The new mandir will serve as both a place of worship and as a community centre for all."

After introducing Mahant Swami Maharaj as "a powerful advocate for human harmony" and "a renowned global leader whose teachings are a source of spirituality, inspiration, and joy," Sheikh Nahayan added, "Your visit, Your Holiness, is an opportunity for us to marvel at your example in working cooperatively to resolve conflicts between different communities and to build a spirit of tolerance as a gateway to understanding, mutual respect, and peace."

Then, in his keynote address, Prime Minister Modi said, "Today, the UAE has written a golden chapter in the history of humanity through this mandir.

"The BAPS Hindu Mandir is for all of humanity. So, I have full faith that the mandir will usher in a new age of faith and hope, bringing the whole world together in harmony and collaboration.



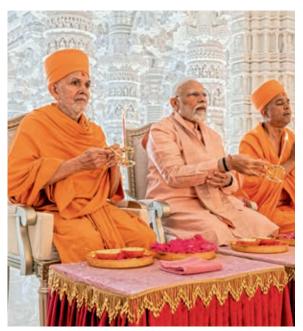
Senior Indian government officials and diplomats: National Security Advisor Ajit Kumar Doval (left), Minister of External Affairs Dr S. Jaishankar (middle) and Indian Ambassador to the UAE His Excellency Sunjay Sudhir

"The magnificent mandir that we see today in Abu Dhabi is because it was first envisioned years ago [in 1997] by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's heart will be glowing with joy at its fruition.

"On behalf of all Indians, I thank Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed and the UAE government, because it is their generosity that has made possible a mandir so beautiful and magnificent."

The prime minister then called for a standing ovation from the audience as an expression of everyone's heartfelt gratitude to His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

In his blessings, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj highlighted the importance of the new mandir, calling it "an abode of love, peace and harmony". He then explained, "Harmony can be achieved when we do not expect harmony from others, but instead when we ourselves live in a way that promotes harmony. For that, we must ask ourselves, 'What can I do, what can I say, and what can I think to nourish harmony?"



Mahant Swami Maharaj and the Prime Minister perform the *arti* of the *murtis* 





Thousands of devotees at BAPS mandirs and centres around the world simultaneously joined in the Global Arti ceremony to celebrate the opening of the new mandir



Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahyan on stage with His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj

Swamishri added, "Harmony is the power of God, and humility is the way of God. With this understanding, we can serve humanity."

He went on to pray for the prosperity, progress and peace of the UAE, India and the world.

On this occasion, a special publication on the history of the making of Abu Dhabi Mandir, titled

A Millennial Moment, written by Bikram Bohra and published by Penguin, was inaugurated by Swamishri.

Together, the morning consecration ceremony and evening dedication assembly formally opened the BAPS Hindu Mandir to the world as a gift to generations, to nations, and to the future.

### Day of Harmony

15 February 2024



Swamishri with leaders of the world's major religions on stage during the evening assembly dedicated to interfaith harmony

The evening assembly, titled 'Day of Harmony', was graced by leading representatives from the major religions of the world: His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj; Rabbi David Rosen, Special Advisor to the Abrahamic Family House, Abu Dhabi; His Eminence Bishop Paolo Martinelli, Apostolic Vicar of the Catholic Vicariate of Southern Arabia; His Excellency Dr Abdulrahman Alzaid, Deputy Secretary-General of the Muslim World League, Mecca, Saudi Arabia; Swami Avdheshanand Giriji Maharaj, President of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha; Sri Satguru Uday Singhji, Spiritual Leader of the Namdhari Sikh Community; and Venerable Bhikkhu Sanghasena, Founder President & Spiritual Director of the Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre. They were joined by Bawa Jain, Secretary General of the World Council of Religious Leaders.

Compèring the proceedings was His Excellency Omar Saif Ghobash, UAE Ambassador to the Holy See, Assistant Minister of Cultural Affairs for the UAE, and Religious Advisor to His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Prior to their entry on stage, Swamishri greeted all the spiritual leaders individually in the green

room and engaged in dialogues with them.

Thereafter, on stage all the leaders were honoured with garlands and shawls.

A short video on the faith each speaker represented was shown before their speech. All the distinguished guests voiced admiration for how Mahant Swami Maharaj has inspired the mandir, where people of all faiths, cultures and backgrounds are welcome.

His Excellency Dr Abdulrahman Alzaid stated, "For social and spiritual harmony, we should coexist and behave peacefully with each other."

Rabbi David Rosen reminisced about his interactions with Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his visit to Swaminarayan Akshardham in Delhi.

Venerable Bhikkhu Sanghasena said, "We are all friends, we are members of one family; the human family."

Swami Avdheshanand Giriji Maharaj said, "This mandir will be the spirit of communal harmony and interfaith collaboration not only in Abu Dhabi but around the world."

His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed, "If we are united with harmony, then love and peace will flourish everywhere; it will flourish in our hearts and everyone's hearts."

### Day of Civilizations

16 February 2024



Swamishri and the chief guests join hands in solidarity to uphold the universal values taught by the world's great civilizations

The Day of Civilizations evening assembly, based on the theme 'One World, One Culture, One Story at a Time', celebrated cultural diversity. The event highlighted the beauty and significance of each culture's unique contribution to the shared story of humanity.

The event brought together individuals from over 30 countries to appreciate and explore the different values depicted along the exterior walls of the BAPS Hindu Mandir through intricately carved stories in stone from diverse civilizations, including African, Arabian, Aztec, Egyptian, Inuit, Indian, Mayan, Mesopotamian and Native American. The stories from these civilizations, permanently embedded in the mandir, help to preserve and promote the values that bind humanity together.

Brief animated versions of some of these civilization stories were shown to introduce the topics of the speakers. The topics included: Friendship and Love, Service, Purity, Choice, Forgiveness and Positivity, and Harmony and Unity.

The event was graced by Swami Shri Govind Dev Giriji Maharaj, Jagadguru Sri Dr Nirmalanandnatha Maha Swamiji, Shri Paramatmanand Saraswatiji, Chinna Jeeyar Swamiji, His Excellency Dr Abdulrahman Abdulla Buali and American author Dr David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri).

David Frawley expressed his delight at the mandir, "It's a great experience to see this mandir, which brings civilizations together."

Chinna Jeeyar Swamiji highlighted, "All who have offered their service in this mandir have served not just the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, but the entire Sanatan Dharma and India. We have heard of lotus flowers growing in lakes, but never before has a lotus bloomed in a desert. This is indeed remarkable and can only be done by Mahant Swami Maharaj."

Jagadguru Sri Dr Nirmalanandnatha Maha Swamiji expressed, "Millions of people will benefit from this mandir. May all hearts unite. This temple is not made out of metal, stone or soil; it is made out of devotion, love and service." Swami Paramatmanand Saraswatiji said, "This temple itself has created a new global civilization of love, harmony, trust and friendship."

Swami Shri Govind Dev Giriji Maharaj said, "This temple is not just a temple, this is a lighthouse of humanity, peace and love."

### Day of Peace

17 February 2024



The esteemed speakers on the Day of Peace with Swamishri on stage

The value of peace is at the core of the mandir and so, in Swamishri's presence, distinguished guests shared their wisdom on how to attain peace through various facets of life in the special Day of Peace evening assembly.

The speakers included Honourable Justice Sharad Arvind Bobde, Former Chief Justice of India; Kailash Satyarthi, Indian social reformer and 2014 Nobel Peace Prize Winner; Padma Bhushan Dr Tejas M. Patel, Chairman and Chief Interventional Cardiologist at Apex Heart Institute, Ahmedabad, India; Bhavish Agarwal, entrepreneur and co-founder of Ola Cabs and founder of Ola Electric; and Umang Bedi, co-founder of VerSe Innovation and Dailyhunt.

Vivek Oberoi, a renowned Indian actor and producer, was the emcee for the assembly. He also expressed, "We are just action heroes in films, but the real action heroes are these volunteers and sadhus here in front of us."

The speakers gave insightful talks on attaining

peace through Environment, Child Development, Justice, Wellbeing, Media and Spirituality.

Kailash Satyarthi shared, "Let us march together. No one should be left behind. We need to learn to walk together."

Bhavish Aggarwal said, "We don't seek peace; we are the peace by thinking of the world as one family."

Umang Bedi said, "This temple is a testament to the power of the human spirit and the boundless potential of unity. It is an example for every leader about the power of unity."

Dr Tejas Patel said, "To achieve peace, one must give back to humanity by volunteering and preserving mental health."

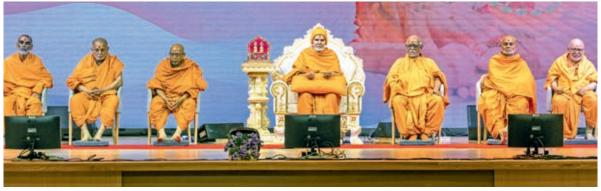
Justice Sharad Bobade said, "I am sure this temple has inaugurated a new era in our civilization in which justice and peace reign supreme."

In the end, Swamishri blessed the assembly.

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### Day of Gratitude

**18 February 2024** 



Swamishri presides over the Day of Gratitude assembly to appreciate all who supported the new mandir

Construction of the BAPS Hindu Mandir and campus was completed due to the diligent and dedicated efforts and support of innumerable people.

The evening Day of Gratitude assembly was a small gesture to acknowledge the people whose selfless contributions enabled the project completion.

Speeches by Anandswarup Swami, Uttamnilay Swami, Sanjaybhai Parikh, Sumitbhai Bheda, Ashokbhai Kotecha and Aksharatit Swami paid heartfelt appreciation to the dedication, devotion and efforts of all the BAPS men and women volunteers, the artisans and labourers, government officials and project contractors and engineers, and the swamis involved in the design, planning and onsite execution of the project. Brahmavihari Swami read and elaborated upon the historic and prophetic letter written by Mahant Swami Maharaj in December 2020 during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The biggest appreciations were expressed towards Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

### Day of Values

19 February 2024



The Day of Values evening assembly celebrated the spiritual values on which the mandir is built and the values it will continue to promote and sustain.

The chief stage guests were Pujya Chidanand Muniji, President and Spiritual Head of the Parmarth Niketan Ashram, Rishikesh, and Padma Shri Pujya Brahmeshanand Swamiji, Founder Head, International Sadguru Foundation.

### Day of Inspirations

21 February 2024



Traditional dance presentation during the special Day of Inspirations assembly for women

Organized by the Women's Wing of the BAPS Hindu Mandir, the Day of Inspirations celebrated the pivotal role of women in uplifting society and their invaluable contributions to humanity. More than 2,000 women of all ages attended the evening assembly highlighting families and inspirational individuals who have contributed to society.

A captivating themed video titled 'Faces of Inspiration' highlighted the remarkable stories of individuals who have served the BAPS Hindu Mandir under extraordinary circumstances.

The event was graced by esteemed guests, including Sadhvi Saraswati Bhagwati, a renowned spiritual leader, author and motivational speaker based in Rishikesh, India. Sadhvi Saraswati is the author of the #1 bestselling memoir, Hollywood to the Himalayas: A Journey of Healing and Transformation.

She conveyed her joy upon visiting the mandir, highlighting its significance in fostering unity among communities and how mandirs inspire faith and peace, "This mandir is a testament to 'Bhakti ki Shakti' (the strength of devotion). It serves as a symbol of global harmony, akin to the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers in Prayagraj. The mandir is greater than the sum of its parts and it can be seen in everyone

coming together for this mandir."

Among the distinguished guests was Vandana Sudhir, wife of the Indian Ambassador to the UAE, who has over 30 years of experience in the field of education. She expressed, "This mandir has connected different cultures and religions, making this world a better place. What can be a better place than here to inspire unity and love in the society."

Poonam Bhojani, founding CEO of Innoventures Education, said, "My father used to teach me to work without expecting any results. This is the first time I have seen it in action, here at the BAPS Hindu Mandir as every individual has served without any expectations. This is true service with compassion."

The event splendidly celebrated community spirit, with attendees representing the Jain Samaj, Art of Living, Amey Gujarat Ladies, Indian Women of Dubai, Rising Stars Group, Maharashtra Group, South Indian community, ILA Abu Dhabi, and other communities in the UAE.

The assembly concluded with the recorded video blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj, "You are not ordinary. You are great souls because you have obtained God. You have infinite power within you so take great pride in this."

### Palkhi Yatra:

### Communities Honour the Murtis

25 February 2024



Agrand, colourful Palkhi Yatra (devotional procession), honouring the deities consecrated in the BAPS Hindu Mandir was held on the mandir grounds.

During the Palkhi Yatra, the *murtis* were first ceremoniously placed on decorated palanquins. Then, senior swamis performed *pujan* of all the *murtis*, which were then lifted by the devotees of the various communities and carried around the

circumambulatory path (*parikrama*) of the mandir, to bestow blessings to the community.

Over 1,100 people, representing various local communities in the UAE participated. Diasporic communities in the UAE representing Kerala, Rajasthan, Orissa, Maharashtra, and others from north, south, east, west and central India participated in the procession wearing their traditional Indian attire and performing traditional devotional music and singing.

Each carried a palanquin with the sacred *murtis* of the deities widely worshipped in their respective regions of India. It was the first time that such a pan-Indian procession had taken place in the UAE.

After the Palkhi Yatra, all the participants attended the celebratory assembly in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami, Pujya Avichaldasji Maharaj, Head of the Sat Kaival Sampradaya, and other senior BAPS swamis.

### Brick by Brick

November 2021 to December 2023



H.E. Dr Mugheer Khamis Al Khaili, Chairman, DCD, Abu Dhabi and Indian Ambassador Sunjay Sudhir lay bricks

The BAPS Hindu Mandir's Brick By Brick initiative began on 9 November 2021. The objective was to enable people from all over the world to come to the site, view the mandir construction in progress and participate in a *pujan* of an individual brick. They would then take that brick and place it at a designated collection spot, from where the bricks would be taken to be used in the construction of the mandir.

This initiative gave individuals and families the opportunity to be a part of the mandir construction. Originally set to take place every Sunday, with an

anticipated participation of around 300 individuals, Mahant Swami Maharaj suggested that if people were visiting during the week, they should also have the opportunity to lay a brick. So, the Mahila Mandal undertook the responsibility to daily conduct the Brick by Brick *pujan* ceremony.

For over two years, a total of 28 women volunteers participated in this *seva*, during which over 60,000 people performed the brick *pujan* ritual and contributed a brick to be placed in the mandir structure.



Famous actor, Akshay Kumar, lays a brick

### Tiny Treasures

October 2023 to January 2024





Balaks and balikas prepare and paint the stones

To engage and involve children when they came to the mandir site on Sunday, they participated in the 'Tiny Treasures' project by creating art on small pieces of stone left over from the construction process. They collected the stone pieces, and washed and polished them. Then, they would paint them with a coat of white primer to enable the paint to stick to the stone. Thereafter, they painted designs

and added motivational messages on each stone. Once dry, they would varnish the stones to peserve the artwork. Then, each stone was packaged in a small jute bag. In this way, around 100 *balaks* and *balikas* prepared 3,000 decorated stones over a period of four months, which were given to dignitaries, visitors and swamis who came to the Festival of Harmony during February 2024.













# Building Faith

### **Volunteer Dedication**

umerically, the BAPS community in the UAE is very small – barely 200 families. Many of them are first generation expats from India who have relatively recently migrated on work visas to provide a more secure financial footing for themselves and their family.

Amid this backdrop, to say that the project to build the BAPS Hindu Mandir from foundation to the crowning finials, was several orders of magnitude beyond the monetary, material and manpower resources of the devotees is itself a gross understatement. Yet the















project is complete, made possible by the generous donation of land by the Ruler of Abu Dhabi, His Royal Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, contributions in kind by many industrialists and entrepreneurs, and financial support from generous donors.

Moreover, despite the many limitations of the devotees, they dedicated their time and energy to physically contribute to the project.

Following the gradual return to normal after the restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the race was on to finish building the mandir and ancillary buildings before the inauguration by Mahant Swami Maharaj scheduled for 14 February 2024. And that too, with all the necessary clearance certificates from the relevant authorities.

Amid such a demanding schedule, the devotees, young and old, male and female, picked up the challenge. Their tasks were broadly two-fold to help in whatever way required on the construction site and to plan for the Festival of Harmony (FOH) in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj that would mark the inauguration celebrations.

For the entirety of 2023, all devotees streamlined their daily schedules to ensure they were available whenever and wherever required.

During this period, they would go from home





to their work or business location in the morning. Then, in the evening they went directly to the under-construction mandir site in Abu Mureikah, reaching by about 7 p.m. They would serve till around midnight and then return home. Since the majority of volunteers lived in Dubai, Sharjah and further afield, their return journeys were over 140 km. Yet, they maintained this routine for many months to ensure the timely completion of the mandir.

The volunteers helped in the construction, clean-up, catering and other areas. Every Sunday, families would spend the entire day on site serving where directed. In this way, they merged day and night, home, work and mandir, and adjusted their personal and family responsibilities to volunteer for this historic project. Without their thousands of hours of voluntary service, many tasks would have remained incomplete.

At the same time planning and preparations











for the Festival of Harmony was in full flow. Many volunteers contributed in multiple departments to ensure the timely arrangements to host Mahant Swami Maharaj, 150 swamis and thousands of visitors from around the globe.

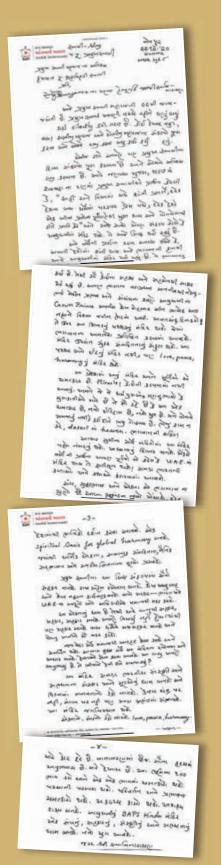
In addition to the 468 male and 303 female volunteers from the UAE, BAPS volunteers from other countries also registered to serve during the Festival of Harmony: 733 males and 265 females from Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia,

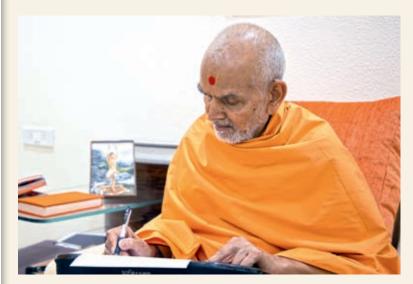
India, UK, USA, Australia and Africa. They served in 30 departments to ensure the smooth and efficient flow of the celebrations: Audio-Video, Community Outreach, Construction, Darshan Arrangements, Decoration, Guest Services, Medical, Housekeeping, Information Technology, Kitchen, Maintenance, Media, Parking, Sabha and Stage Arrangements, Safety and Security, Transport, Accommodations, Volunteers, Yagna and others.











### Mahant Swami Maharaj's Letter for BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi

At a time when the world was in the grips of the COVID-19 pandemic, global economies were struggling and people everywhere were anxious about the future, Mahant Swami Maharaj penned a historic letter documenting his vision for the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi, and reassuring a promising future beyond the bleak present. The letter reveals his deep faith in God and guru and gives an insight into his own elevated spiritual stature, for today, his words have and continue to become visible to us.

The following is a translation of Swamishri's letter written in the rural surroundings of Nenpur on 22 December 2020.

Swami Shriji Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Nenpur 22/12/20 Tuesday, Magshar *sud* 8

To Pujya Brahmavihari Swami, who has been immensely graced by Pramukh Swami Maharaj,

Heartiest Jay Shri Swaminarayan with lots of affection from Sadhu Keshavjivandas [Mahant Swami Maharaj].

Today is the 99th birth anniversary of Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Pramukh Swami, whilst living amongst us, did so much so silently. No pretence whatsoever. That's it! He did everything only to please and fulfil the wishes of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

In the same way, we, too, must fulfil the divine wishes of Pramukh Swami and greatly please him.

As you mentioned, in 1997, in the desert of Sharjah, Pramukh Swami offered prayers:

"May peace prevail here and everywhere in the world. May the religions of each country grow in mutual love. May each country be freed from prejudices towards each other and progress in their own way."

Alongside this, he [Pramukh Swami Maharaj] also made a divine wish that there be a mandir in Abu Dhabi. That wish is being fulfilled today.

In this way, we have prayed for years for peace to prevail in the Gulf countries. And by the grace of God, a mandir is being built in Abu Dhabi today. This is God's doing. It is taking shape with everyone's support and cooperation.

Due to the influence and bond shared with our honourable Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, has generously gifted a vast stretch of land Until the sun and moon shine!

Upon this, a stone mandir with seven spires will be erected, where the avatars [sacred images] of God will be ceremoniously consecrated.

Alongside being a Hindu place of worship, it will be a beautiful complex of harmony. This is not merely a mandir made of stones and bricks, but will be a mandir of love, peace, and harmony.

For such a mandir and such sacred images to be erected in this country is a miracle. Miracle! No one can even imagine it. The spiritual leaders, distinguished guests, and visitors who I meet all say that this is a miracle, a new chapter in history, a new era.

I myself cannot understand how everything is falling into place. It is beyond mental comprehension.

It is a heaven in the desert. The power of God. Of all the mandirs thus far, this mandir will be the best. It will be a pinnacle of spirituality.

Our ancestors have prayed for centuries for a mandir to be built in the UAE. Their prayers will come to fruition! All of India's arts and wisdom tales will be carved.

Solidarity, fraternity, and unity are the virtues of God. All the souls of the universe will be drawn here. Well-wishers from every country will come here for darshan. It will become a spiritual oasis for global harmony from where interfaith harmony, community cohesion, righteous goodwill, and international friendship will flourish.

You will receive everyone's support for this divine wish of Pramukh Swami. The king will be the preserver. HH Sheikh Abdullah and HH Sheikh Nahyan will be supporters.

Both governments, the ambassadors and officials of the UAE and India, will help as if it [the mandir] is their own. In this haven of harmony, support, support and support will pour in from all four directions. Even in ways we have never imagined, support will arrive unexpectedly. People of all faiths will offer their support, considering this [mandir] to be their own.

People of all ages, from the youngest to the eldest, will wholeheartedly engage in *seva*, devoting themselves entirely. The young and the old, everyone will become the protectors and supporters of this mandir. The *devtas* [divine beings] will come to offer their *seva*.

We have experienced this all first-hand. How do we explain it to others?

This mandir will be an abode for all of Indian culture, civilization and values. The bells of humanity will resound across the world. Not just on the Moon, not just on Mars, but they will resonate throughout the entire universe. This mandir will become globally renowned. The bells of unity and solidarity shall ring.

Love, peace and harmony are prevailing in all four directions. They are already in the

atmosphere. They are felt in everyone's heart.

I can see this before my own eyes.

If you divide this land into a hundred parts, miracles will occur in every part. There will be a succession of miracles. Miracles that will transform hearts and change lives.

Unimaginable good works will transpire. The impossible will become possible.

The BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi will be a home of harmony, cooperation, culture and civilization.

A new era will dawn.

Jay Shri Swaminarayan.



THE LETTER
The Handwritten Destiny of
Abu Dhabi Mandir



A documentary based on the historic letter written by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj on 22 December 2020 for the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi.

The letter reveals the purpose, intentions, and feelings of the creator of this extraordinary mandir.

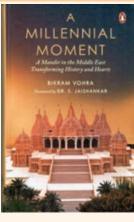
This documentary tells the story of how Mahant Swami Maharaj's words have turned into reality. Handwritten in the midst of the pandemic, this letter breathed hope and reignited hearts to inspire the construction of the BAPS Hindu Mandir.

It is a letter that takes us into the mind of the creator and reveals the untold story of this spiritual oasis for global harmony.

### A MILLENNIAL MOMENT

A Mandir in the Middle East Transforming History and Hearts

Author: Bikram Vohra Foreword by Dr. S. Jaishankar







An Outsider's Insight into How BAPS Built the First Hindu Temple in an Islamic Nation

A reputed journalist in the Gulf for over thirty years, Bikram Vohra shadowed BAPS in the months following the month-long birth centenary celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in January 2023 in Gujarat. Driven by his curiosity as a non-spiritual outsider, he set out to uncover what it was about BAPS that had compelled the UAE leadership to accept their proposal to build a temple.

The strength of their beliefs, the selfless and dedicated volunteers, and the great transparency with which BAPS operates, mirror the UAE's ethics of harmony, tolerance and oneness, that bind its residents of 200 nationalities by an

incredible sense of togetherness.

Spread across 27 acres and situated midway between Dubai and Abu Dhabi, this magnificent traditional stone temple is now an oasis for global harmony. A prophetic vision come to life, the story of its inception is a captivating account of serendipity, noble intent and clarity of purpose combining to accomplish an impossible feat.

Serious yet light-hearted, *A Millennial Moment* evokes warm laughter with its gentle leg-pulling, and hope for the future of our world. Its simple message: Good people do good things.

Published by Penguin Random House India.

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# Visitor Voices



HH Acharya Dr Lokesh Muniji Jain muni, Founder & President, Ahimsa Vishwa Bharati

The construction of the first BAPS Hindu Mandir in

the UAE is an extraordinary, unparalleled, incomparable and truly miraculous event. It is not only a credit to this country, but also a celebration of Indian culture.

Through the medium of these temples, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has achieved unparalleled success in connecting our future generations with our ancient culture and spirituality. Through his visionary leadership the integration of our ancient culture and contemporary knowledge and science has been harmoniously achieved.



Bhikkhu Sanghasena Founder President, Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre, Ladakh, Himalayas, India

It was truly a very memorable experience of universal peace, love and religious harmony.



H.E. Dr Mugheer Khamis Al Khaili

Chairman of the Department of Community Development, Abu Dhabi

The progress of this temple is really beyond my expectations. What I have seen today; so much effort has been put in this temple. It is really a piece of art. This is a place of worship where all people in the UAE will come and pray. This gives you the feeling of harmony and peace.



**Dr Vijay Chauthaiwale**In charge, Foreign Affairs
Department, BJP

In February 2018, when I first visited this site, I could

not imagine how such a big structure could emerge from the sands.



Om Birla (Message)

Speaker, Lok Sabha, India
The inauguration of the
BAPS Hindu Mandir
represents a significant

milestone in this journey towards unity that transcends cultures, embracing humanity as one family.

I believe that as the doors of this magnificent mandir open, they will usher in a new era of reverence, unity and enlightenment. Its serene architecture and sacred ambience will invite all to embrace the timeless wisdom and profound spirituality of Hindu traditions.



Smt. Shalini Agarwal, IAS

Surat Municipal Commissioner
I am impressed by the
sincerity and hard work
being put up by the

volunteers. All the volunteers are working as a family here. They are totally committed and absolutely enthralled to work in the temple. All the volunteers are working 24/7, even menial works, cleanliness and everything.



Shri Harsh Sanghavi

Home Minister, Gujarat State
Who would have ever
dreamt that a Hindu temple
would be built in the

capital of the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi? The noble thoughts of the leaders of both countries (India & the UAE) and especially the work being done by the BAPS organization. Not just me, but millions of other Hindus will definitely experience a sense of pride.

All volunteers are putting in the workmanship day and night to help showcase our culture in the best way to everyone at the international level; and for this workmanship, I thank you; not as a minister of the State of Gujarat, but as a citizen of India.



Mr Krishnan Balakrishnan CFO, Jazeera Airways

The 3D wall beautifully represents the harmony created by the BAPS mandir

in an Islamic nation, bringing together cultures and religions under one roof.

The *triveni sangam* depicted in front of the temple pays rich tribute to the rivers that have been the backbone of the age-old Sanatan civilization, making it thrive and flourish since time immemorial.

The carvings in the temple are absolutely astounding! No words can amply do justice to the intricacy, beauty, aesthetics and stunning impact of the carvings on the temple interiors and exteriors. The well-thought carvings around each sanctum sanctorum will help educate and convey values to our future generations for millennia to come.

The deities are so beautiful and mesmerizing, inspiring *bhaktas* to keep coming back time and again.



**Ketan Patel** 

Chairman and Managing
Director of Troika
Pharmaceuticals, Gujarat
Spiritually overwhelmed

to experience the divine. The high level of perfection makes one proud as a Hindu. This temple will be a hub that will spread the goodness of Hinduism in the region.



Paras Shahdadpuri Founder & Chairman, Nikai

Group
Why not support somethi

Why not support something which is going to live much

beyond our life? There is so much work done with a lot of details, intricacy and immense depth. The details I saw! This is not just a temple; it is a symbol of India and the people of India. This is a symbol of our culture, of our civilization abroad.

Hats off to the leadership here and hats off to the BAPS leadership for this huge effort done by the volunteers. My salute to the volunteers who are all unsung heroes. This will reveal India's contributions to the world. This is our culture, this is our civilization, and this is our ancient knowledge. This is a great monument of harmony, of peace and the unity of the world.



Sanjay Dutt Indian Actor

It is just beautiful... beautiful... I have never seen such a mandir in my entire life. It

is love, harmony and peace. Harmony, peace and love is the most important thing in the world today. I wish everybody could follow that so that there could be peace all over the world.



Suniel Shetty Indian Actor

I do not think words can express. I am overwhelmed. I had tears in my eyes through

this entire journey. Teaches you so much, what an individual needs to do for society and for mankind.

I am in the middle of the desert; it is a spiritual, religious, social and architectural oasis... It's a miracle. I know this is going to be the place for people to find themselves spiritually. It's the vision to do something to change humanity and bring everybody together.



Sonalee Kulkarni Indian Actress

I am unable to find a suitable term to describe my experience today as it was

truly different and mesmerizing. I have not seen such a temple anywhere in the world and I would like to invite visitors from all across the world of diverse faiths to come and experience this for themselves as I have experienced it myself.

This temple is all about harmony. In fact, I have seen the letters H.H. be used everywhere for 'His Holiness' and 'His Highness'; but they stand for Humanity and Harmony and have the utmost important role to play in our current times. It's going to be for generations and centuries to witness.



# Sangeeta Mehta

This temple is truly one of the wonders of the world with its unique stone carvings. The experience and vibrations

on visiting this temple were divine. Many generations will benefit from the values instilled in the foundation and creation of the temple. Very proud of the BAPS team!



# Sonal Oberai,

2nd Secretary, India Embassy The place oozes tranquillity. The founding principles of the place – peace, harmony

and unity - come out with full bloom.



# Jain Study Group representatives

It was a serene experience and left me completely stunned and speechless. The beauty of

the temple is matchless. The intricate carvings and the thought process behind each pillar, and the harmony dome with the depiction of the five *tattvas* is stellar. The stories depicted from the Ramayan and other scriptures on the entire outer temple are beyond words.

The BAPS temple has a different aura; it felt like we were out from this material world. This architectural marvel took me back to the Dilwara temples. The divine *arti* took me to the ghats of Haridwar.



#### **Uday Singh**

I am deeply impressed by the noble work that BAPS is undertaking to foster religious harmony, a value

that resonates deeply within Sikhism. Your organization's dedication to spreading the message of Sanatan Dharma and promoting global harmony and peaceful coexistence is commendable and reflects the highest ideals of humanity.



#### **Ouentin Perret**

This is an extraordinary building, dedicated to peace, harmony and understanding. Awonderful achievement. This

will be one of my favourite places, where I will return whenever I need to restore my spirit.

# Media COVERAGE

The global interest and jubilation that greeted the inauguration of the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi is reflected in the extensive print and electronic media coverage of the BAPS Hindu Mandir and Festival of Harmony.

### **PRINT MEDIA**

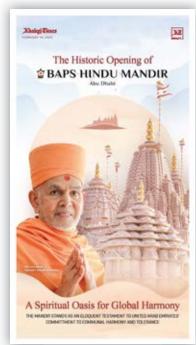
■ Special 40 page supplement on the inaugration day by *Khaleej Times* – UAE's leading newspaper.

रोदी ने मां भारती को किया नमन

- In UAE: *Khaleej Times*, *The National*, *Gulf News*, *Gulf Today* and others.
- In India: Times of India, The Indian Express, India Today, The Week, The Hindu, Hindustan Times, Dainik Bhaskar, Rajasthan Patrika, Divya Bhaskar, Gujarat Samachar, Sandesh, Ahmedabad Mirror, NavGujarat Samay and others.
- Jamaica Gleaner from Jamaica, Arab News from Saudi Arabia, The Borneo Post from Malaysia, Garavi Gujarat from US, UK, Africa, Times of Oman from Oman, The Sunday Times from Sri Lanka, Sunday Tribune from South Africa and others.

# DIGITAL MEDIA

Worldwide, from 1 December 2023 to 14 March 2024, over 10,200 online news articles were published in 64





THE RESERVE OF SHIP SHIP TEMPLE IN ABU DHABI

READY FOR GRAND **OPENING** 

We have no fear of war,

Iran says

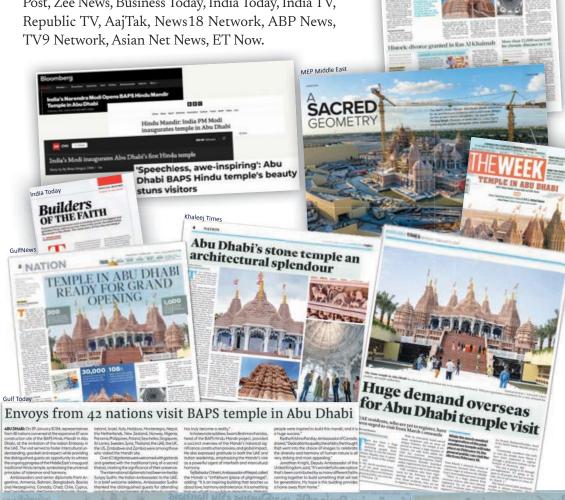
countries in 26 different languages, with a total potential reach of 67.2 billion.

- News sites included: BBC, Daily Mail, Bloomberg, MSN, Yahoo News. In the UAE: Khaleej Times, The National News, Gulf News, Gulf Today.
- News.com.au from Australia, The Times of India, Economic Times, AajTak, NDTV, News18, Hindustan Times from India, CNBC from Africa, Beijing Bulletin from China, Nation.com.pk from Pakistan, AGI.it from Italy, IsraelHerald from Israel, Kuwait Times from Kuwait, Times of Oman from Oman, Egypt Daily from Egypt.
- Reuters, Associated Press, ANI, PTI, IANS and other news agencies.

#### TV

मुलक में खुला मंदिर

Bloomberg Television, Reuters, BBC, CNBC, First Post, Zee News, Business Today, India Today, India TV, TV9 Network, Asian Net News, ET Now.





# **INTRODUCTION**

Some outstanding facts and landmark events that took place in the satsang history of Nadiad are as follows.

- Nadiad was formerly known as Natpur and had more than 270 renowned literary scholars.
  - Renowned personalities like Shri Santram
- Maharaj, Pujya Srimad Rajchandra and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel performed spiritual and national activities in Nadiad.
- Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit parampara had sanctified Nadiad on many occasions.
- On 25 March 1826, Bishop Heber of England met Swamishri performs the murti-pratishtha rituals has been done by you. Your

Bhagwan Swaminarayan here.

- Through the efforts of Bhagatji Maharaj the seeds of Akshar-Purushottam upasana were sown about 125 years ago. Jhaverilal Mehta (Jhaverbhai) was a blessed devotee of Bhagatji Maharaj.
- On many occasions, Shastriji Maharaj discoursed and discussed about true upasana

with the local devotees. Dolatram Kruparam Pandya, a renowned scholar and committee member of the Vartal Swaminarayan Sanstha, told Shastriji Maharaj, "The task of establishing the pure upasana that Shriji Maharaj would have had to take another birth to accomplish

importance and greatness are unfathomable. You have installed the *murtis* of Maharaj and (Gunatitanand) Swami, however, in future your disciples will install your golden *murti*. And thus your greatness will be enhanced manifold times."

- About 100 years ago, the blessed devotees of Shastriji Maharaj and Nirgundas Swami from Nadiad had taken the *paksha* (side) of Shastriji Maharaj and strived immeasurably for the spread of the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. They included Ramchandra Narayan Thakar and his friends and relatives, Vitthalbhai Barot, Chhotubhai Master, Dr Gordhanbhai, Bakorbhai Brahmabhatt, Ghanshyambhai, Vallabhbhai Desai, Rayjibhai, Jaydevbhai and others.
- Yogiji Maharaj gave the benefit of his spiritual bliss to all the devotees. Mahadevbhai Desai, Jamnadas Amin (Bapuji), Krushnalal Patel and others of Nadiad were spirited and dedicated devotees who did *seva* and helped to increase satsang.
- Nadiad *mandal* cheerfully did *annakut*, housekeeping and cleaning of grains *seva* in Gondal and other mandirs.
- The *bal* and *yuvak mandals* were active in doing *seva* during *adhiveshans* (competitions) and festivals.
- Govindbhai (Nigos) and his brothers donated their four-storeyed building, which is now used as a mandir by the women's wing, and other properties to BAPS.

Other memorable occasions and events that are etched in the satsang history of Nadiad are as follows.

- 1959: Yogiji Maharaj had performed a wonderful *parayan* at Desai Vaga.
- 1963: On the large precincts of Santram Mandir, Pramukh Swami had done a *parayan* on Satsangijivan and Swamini Vato in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj.
- 1968: A *parayan* on the Harililakalpataru was held in Yogiji Maharaj's presence. Pramukh Swami and Shri Krishnashankar Shastri, an

exponent on the Shrimad Bhagvat, also gave enlightening discourses.

- 1968: Yogiji Maharaj's 77th birthday celebration was held. Governor of Gujarat Shri Mannarayan, minister Shri Babubhai J. Patel and renowned social worker Shri Ravishankar Maharaj spoke glowingly about Yogiji Maharaj.
- On 27 January 1982, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated a *shikharbaddha* BAPS Mandir on College Road. Naginbhai Desai and his sons donated the land. In 1991, Swamishri inaugurated a students' hostel on the precincts.
- On many occasions Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mahant Swami and sadguru swamis visited and stayed in Nadiad to foster satsang.
- On 27 March 2004, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated a memorial mandir on the spot where Bishop Reginald Heber had met Bhagwan Swaminarayan. A *yagna*, colourful procession, sadhu *diksha* to youths and the birthday of Bhagwan Swaminarayan were held and celebrated.

# BEGINNING OF CONSTRUCTION OF SHIKHARBADDHA MANDIR IN NADIAD

In 2004, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was pleased with the devotion and *seva* of the local devotees and the increasing growth of satsang in Nadiad. Subsequently, Swamishri declared his wish to construct a *shikharbaddha* mandir with a large campus. Besides Swamishri's tremendous efforts, Sarvamangal Swami, Janmangal Swami and other swamis also made great efforts for the growth of satsang in Nadiad and its neighbouring villages.

Due to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wish, land was acquired by the Nadiad-Piplag Road. Through Swamishri's inspiration and blessings a staunch devotee, Manubhai Umedbhai Patel, donated land for the mandir project. In addition, Pravinbhai Shah (Mwanza), Nibodhbhai Shardulbhai Patel and others funded the project.

On 22 October 2015, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *pujan* of the *shilas* for the



Devotees participated in the yagna rituals, Nadiad

foundation-stone laying ceremony in Sarangpur.

On 13 December 2015, Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Bhaktipriya Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, Ghanshyamcharan Swami and senior swamis performed the mandir *shilanyas* rituals on the site called Yogi Farm. Thereafter, devotees of Nadiad, Dabhan, Uttarsanda, Mahudha, Alindra, Mehemdavad, Ghodasar and other towns enthusiastically collaborated for mandir *seva*.

Through the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj, guidance of Ishwarcharan Swami, the efforts of Akshaymuni Swami and Sanjay Parikh of the BAPS Planning Cell and architect Devdutt Sompura the mandir construction commenced. Jayantibhai Patel, Dr Neelbhai Shah and others served assiduously for the mandir construction.

According to the mandir plans, various parts soon started taking shape, namely, the main entrance, satsang activities offices, residential

facilities for swamis, assembly hall, dining halls, bookstore, gardens and public amenities. In eight years, the 45-acre BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir's large campus was complete.

With Pramukh Swami

Maharaj's vision and Mahant Swami Maharaj's inspiration, the *shikharbaddha* BAPS mandir is 240 ft long, 131 ft wide and 79 ft high. It comprises 100,000 cubic feet of pink stone from Rajasthan. The mandir includes five ornately carved *shikhars*, one *ghummat*, 11 *ghummatis*, 12 *jharukhas*, 324 attractive pillars, 254 decorative *torans* (arches), 36 carvings of Akshar Deri, 13 four-faced *samarans* and a 1,210 ft long *pradakshina* pathway.

In the main central shrine of the mandir are enshrined the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj; in the shrine to their left is the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj and in the last shrine are the *murtis* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radhaji-Krishna Bhagwan. The two front shrines and *shikhars* house the *murtis* of Bhagwan Shri Ram-Sitaji and family and Shri Shiv-Parvatiji and family. On the inside part of the main dome (*ghummat*) are installed the *murtis* of devotees and *paramhansas* contemporary to

Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

On the ground floor of the mandir lies the abhishek mandap, wherein are installed the murtis of Shri Nilkanth Varni and the Guru Parampara.





Nagar yatra through the streets of Nadiad

#### SWAMISHRI'S ARRIVAL

On 1 December 2023, Swamishri arrived at the newly built BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Nadiad. The entrance was inaugurated in Swamishri's presence by Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, senior swamis and Shri Dineshbhai Patel, a former minister of India. Swamishri was given a festive welcome by children, youths and devotees.

### PUJAN OF KALASHES AND DHVAJA

On 3 December 2023, the golden *kalashes* and *dhvaja dands* (flagstaffs) of the mandir were ritually worshipped by *sadguru* and senior swamis. Then, Swamishri performed *arti* and sanctified all the *kalashes* and flagstaffs by touching them. On this occasion, Swamishri initiated *sadhak* Ravi Sureshbhai Patel of Khakhariya village, Amreli, into the *parshad diksha*.

PERFORMANCE ON NADIAD SATSANG

**HISTORY** 

From 5.00 p.m., a drama-cum-ballet was presented by 300 children and youths of Nadiad about the history of Nadiad satsang *mandal*. Swamishri, swamis and

16,000 devotees and well-wishers appreciated the performance.

### YAGNA RITUALS

On 4 and 6 December, the Shri Swaminarayan World Peace Yagna was held prior to the main pratishtha ceremony, on the open grounds of Yogi Farm located behind the mandir. Around 300 yagna kunds, 3,000 devotees participated in each of the two yagnas. Swamishri performed pujan of the yantras to be later installed beneath the murtis in the mandir. The sadguru swamis performed pujan of all the murtis and thereafter arti and mantra-pushpanjali were performed by Swamishri and sadguru swamis.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, "The rituals have been completed without any obstacles. God has been kind otherwise many hindrances would have occurred (due to adverse weather conditions). I pray that all of you be happy in body, mind

and wealth and may the virtues of *jnan*, *vairagya*, bhakti and *seva* fluorish in your lives. Thereafter, Swamishri passed by the devotees in his vehicle and gave *samip* darshan.





Swamishri performs the murti-pratishtha rituals



Swamishri performs abhishek of Shri Nilkanth Varni

#### NAGAR YATRA IN NADIAD

On 6 December 2023, at 2.30 p.m., the *murtis* to be installed in the mandir were taken out in a grand *nagar yatra* in the town. The *murtis* were placed in colourful floats. After the customary *pujan* rituals the procession commenced, comprising 75 different presentations. Some of them were as follows.

Children and youths waving BAPS flags and riding motorcycles. Tribal devotees engaged in traditional dances and attires. Swamis singing bhajans. Various floats in which the marble *murtis* were paraded: Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (peacock chariot), Shri Shiv-Parvatiji and Ganpatiji (*damru* chariot), Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (peacock chariot), Shri Nilkanth Varni (Muktinath chariot), Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj (horse chariot), Shri Radha-Krishna (lion chariot), Shri Sita-Ram and Hanumanji (swan chariot) and the Guru Parampara (guru chariot).

The 1½ kilometre long nagar yatra also included women and female children and youths dressed in cultural costumes, dancing and carrying auspicious kalashes on their heads. Various religious and social organizations of Nadiad welcomed and honoured the nagar yatra along the 4½ km route. The residents of Nadiad were awed by the colourful displays,

darshan of the *murtis*, cultural performances and messages portrayed. The procession concluded at the mandir, where all were blessed by Swamishri's darshan.

# RITUAL ENTRY INTO MANDIR (PRASAD PRAVESH)

On 5 December 2023, *sadguru* and senior swamis performed the *vastu homa* (*yagna*) under the mandir dome. In conclusion, swamis and devotees performed *arti*.

# 7 DECEMBER: MURTI-PRATISHTHA CEREMONY

7 December marked Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 102nd Birthday Celebration. From morning, devotees from many parts of Gujarat, other states and abroad arrived for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony. The rituals carried out were as follows.

- Dharmacharan Swami and Sarvamangal Swami performed the *mahapuja* rituals in the mandir before the sanctum sanctorum. In the *abhishek mandap*, Anandswarup Swami performed another *mahapuja*. A large number of devotees also participated in the rituals in the mandir and *abhishek mandap*.
  - When Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived for



Swamishri, senior swamis and guests on the stage during the birthday celebration and pratishtha assembly

the *pratishtha* rituals, the devotees received him warmly with *jais*. Swamishri continued the rituals in front of the central shrine before the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.

Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami performed the rituals before the shrine of Ghanshyam Maharaj, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami performed the rituals before the *murtis* of Harikrishna Maharaj and Radha-Krishna Bhagwan respectively.

Pujya Dr Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed the rituals in the *abhishek mandap* before the *murti* of Nilkanth Varni. Senior swamis performed the rituals of Bhagwan Ram-Sitaji and Hanumanji, Bhagwan Shiv-Parvatiji and Ganapatiji, and at the Guru Parampara shrines. Shrutiprakash Swami and Madhurvadan Swami conducted the *pratishtha* rituals.

- At 11.09 a.m., Swamishri performed the *netra-anavaran* (opening of eyes ritual) of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and thereafter swamis in all the shrines held mirrors before the *murtis* amidst loud chanting of the *dhun*. Prayers were offered and thereafter Swamishri performed *pujan* of all the *murtis*. He also performed the first *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni.
  - *Annakut* was arranged before all the *murtis*

and finally the *pratishtha arti* was performed by Swamishri and all present. Thereafter, the *sadgurus* and other swamis honoured Swamishri with garlands.

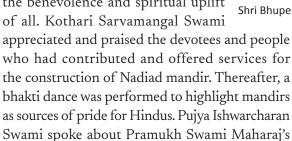
- In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the gathering in the mandir, "With the *pratishtha* rituals over and the proclamations of *jais* of Maharaj and Swami we have to consolidate our faith in them and spread their glory. We have to praise their greatness. I pray that all who are present here and whoever has helped here be happy in body, mind and wealth, and may their spiritual devotion increase further."
- Shri Pravinbhai Shah (Tanzania) and other devotees who had offered *seva* for the mandir were recognized and appreciated with garlands.

# 7 DECEMBER: PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION AND PRATISHTHA ASSEMBLY

At 5.00 p.m., the birthday and *pratishtha* celebrations assembly commenced on the open Yagnapurush Sabhagruh ground. After the customary singing of *dhun* and *prarthana* children and youths performed a traditional bhakti dance. The assembly programme included speeches by swamis, dramas by youths and videos. The programme in brief was as follows.

■ Dharmanilay Swami spoke about the contributions of children and youths for the construction of Nadiad mandir. Janmangal Swami elaborated upon the contributions of devotees in the growth of Nadiad satsang. Pujya Dr Swami spoke about how the gurus strived for the benevolence and spiritual uplift of all. Kothari Sarvamangal Swami

ideal saintliness.



- The evening celebration assembly also hosted several invited guests: Pujya Jagatguru Shri Avichaldasji Maharaj of Sarsa, Honourable Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel, State Minister Shri Jagdishbhai Vishwakarma and distinguished district officials. Brahmavihari Swami spoke glowingly about their services.
- Chief Minister Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel addressed the occasion, "Mandirs are our culture and heritage. This mandir here in Nadiad will be a centre of Dharma, *upasana* and culture."
- Jagatguru Kaivalgnan Pithadhishwar Pujya Avichaldasji Maharaj blessed, "It is praiseworthy that BAPS Sanstha makes great efforts in not only building mandirs in India and abroad but also in imparting values and

instilling morality and faith in society. The organization has love and respect for Hindu culture and the latter is being practised in countless BAPS families. Such works are worthy of emulation. I offer my profound congratulations. The Sanstha is globally renowned as an ideal of Sanatan Dharma. One of



Chief Minister Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel

the reasons for the immense success lies in the humility of its followers."

Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the congregation, "Avichaldasji Maharaj spoke out of his personal experience. His speech is sweet and without any criticisms. May whoever has helped in creating the Nadiad mandir be happy in all ways. We are all blessed

that the *pratishtha* has coincided with Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birthday in accordance with the English calendar."

Swamishri and the whole congregation offered mass *arti* to Thakorji. Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured with garlands and decorative shawls by senior and *kothari* swamis. In conclusion, children and youths performed a traditional dance.

On 8 December, donors who had helped physically, economically and mentally for making the mandir were felicitated in an evening assembly. In the morning, Swamishri performed the *pujan* of bricks for the foundation of a school complex on the mandir campus for 2,000 students.

# 1-15 DECEMBER: SATSANG PROGRAMMES DURING SWAMISHRI'S STAY IN NADIAD

On 2 December, a women's programme was held in the newly built Keshav Kunj assembly hall. In the following days, various evening programmes were held: Nadiad Chhatralaya Day, rural (*gramya*) and urban (*shaher*) satsang days and Swamishri's morning *puja*. During this period many guests and

spiritual leaders came for darshan. Swamishri also performed the *murti-pratishtha* and *pujan* rituals of bricks for new BAPS mandirs. Many youths performed austerities and pilgrimages by foot to the Nadiad mandir to please Swamishri.



Pujya Acharya Avichaldasji Maharaj



18 October 2023 to 5 February 2024 Ahmedabad, Gondal, Bochasan, Surat

On 16 October 2023, Mahant Swami Maharaj departed from Robbinsville, NJ, by a charter flight and arrived in Ahmedabad on the night of 18 October. The swamis and devotees gave a festive welcome to *guruhari*.

#### **OCTOBER: AHMEDABAD**

# 22: Grand Welcome Assembly

In the evening, 25,000 devotees had assembled at the Pramukh Vatika Grounds, opposite the BAPS Mandir, to welcome Thakorji and Swamishri. Swamishri gave samip darshan to all as his vehicle slowly passed by the audience towards the main stage. Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured with garlands by swamis and arti was collectively performed by 25,000 devotees. After speeches by swamis about the story of Akshardham, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "The external Akshardham has been accomplished through body, mind and wealth of the volunteers. I have witnessed their sacrifices.

Men and women, young and old totally dedicated themselves in *seva*. Shriji Maharaj divinely pervaded the volunteers to perform such sacrifices.

"To build an Akshardham within our hearts is far more difficult than the one accomplished without. For that, we require firm faith, dharmaniyam, and agna and upasana. No lapses are permitted. Shriji Maharaj has underscored about observing niyams. We also have to consolidate the virtues of harmony, friendship, unity, divyabhav and mahima in ourselves. Only when we attain them can we accomplish the Akshardham within."

#### **GONDAL**

### 24: Grand Welcome

During late afternoon Swamishri took a flight to Rajkot and then travelled by road to Gondal. Swamis and devotees gave a warm, festive welcome to Swamishri as he passed by them on the mandir grounds and entered the Akshar Deri. Thereafter,



Over 25,000 devotees honour Swamishri with homemade garlands, Ahmedabad



Mahant Swami Maharaj is festively welcomed at the BAPS Mandir, Gondal



Youths perform a traditional dance during the Sharad Purnima celebration, Gondal



Swamishri sanctifies a model of the BAPS Swaminarayan Chhatralaya, Junagadh

Swamishri did darshan of the guru *murtis* in the mandir *pradakshina* and then entered the mandir sanctums. A grand *annakut* was arranged before Thakorji in all the three sanctums. After doing darshan, Swamishri came to the mandir podium where senior swamis greeted him with beautiful garlands. A colourful fireworks display followed to honour him. Then, Swamishri blessed, "Many festivals will be celebrated during our stay here and there will be immense joy. You will all be inspired with more devotion in your lives."

# 28: Lunar Eclipse

Tonight, a special assembly was held to observe the lunar eclipse. From 11.30 p.m. to 3.57 a.m., *dhun*, kirtan, quiz, narrations of stories and discourses were held. At 3.05 a.m., Swamishri arrived in the assembly and a question-answer session was held. In conclusion, *dhun* was sung by all.

#### 29: Sharad Purnima Celebration

The 238th birthday celebration of Gunatitanand Swami was held in the evening on the mandir grounds. The celebration assembly was interspersed with speeches by swamis and video presentations about the glory of Gunatitanand Swami and Swamishri. Children and youths

performed a cultural dance to pay obeisance to Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami. Swamishri blessed the assembly and performed the concluding *arti* in unison with an audience of 10,000 devotees.

# 31: Gurukul Day

Children studying in the mandir gurukul performed a traditional dance before Swamishri. Several students were awarded for their outstanding academic achievements. Finally, Swamishri blessed and encouraged the students to work hard in their studies and also strive to progress in satsang.

#### **NOVEMBER: GONDAL**

# 2: Inauguration of BAPS Chhatralaya, Junagadh

An evening assembly to inaugurate the newly built BAPS Chhatralaya in Junagadh was held in Swamishri's presence. The hostel students performed a traditional dance and drama about the benefits gained by staying and studying at the *chhattralaya*. Finally, Swamishri inaugurated a model of the *chhatralaya* by showering flowers and blessed the assembly.

#### 4: Parents' Day

The special evening assembly was themed

on 'Parents' Awareness'. The main highlight of the programme was a drama for parents about inspiring values in children. In conclusion, Swamishri addressed the assembly.

# 5: Youth Day

The evening assembly was themed on the weekly youth *sabha* as a wellspring of values. The inspiring drama was based on the virtues of *seva*, *sayam*, *samp* and satsang. The youths also performed a dynamic traditional dance. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly on the above four virtues by explaining from 'Purushottam Boliya Prite'.

# 7: Special Assembly

In Swamishri's presence, students of 'Pramukh Academy' in Vadodara presented inspirational programmes on the theme 'Cultivating Pramukhness'.

On 8 November, Swamishri inaugurated the Pramukh Academy website: www. pramukhacademy/pramukhvision app.

### 10-12: Diwali Celebrations

On 10 November (Dhanteras), Swamishri did *pujan* of Thakorji's jewellery decorations and blessed the devotees for all-round happiness.

On 11 November (Kali Chaudash), Swamishri did *pujan* of *dhvaja dands, kalashes* and a model of the 3D Harmony Wall for the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi.

On 12 November (Diwali), Swamishri performed the concluding evening *mahapuja* rituals for Chopda Pujan and Lakshmi Pujan. He also showered rice grains and flower petals on the account books. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, "Blessings to all that Diwali, New Year and your account books be full of all-round happiness. Thakorji will abundantly bless you all, the New Year will usher in happiness and all your good wishes will be fulfilled."



Swamishri amid the *annakut* offered to Thakorji in the main mandir, Gondal

# 13: Annakut Festival

Today, Swamishri gave puja darshan to thousands of devotees in the assembly hall. A variety of food items were arranged before Swamishri's puja platform and beyond. After puja, Swamishri blessed all, "First of all, I ask for more bhakti to be inspired in the lives of swamis and devotees. The reason being that bhakti is dear to Shriji Maharaj. Thus, may bhakti be consolidated in the hearts of all and nothing other than Maharaj and Swami remains within. I pray to God that all the devotees be happy in body, mind and wealth."

Swamishri performed the *annakut artis* in Akshar Mandir, Akshar Deri and Yogiji Maharaj's Smruti Mandir.

# 14: New Year's Day

The auspicious day of the V.S. 2080 New Year dawned. Swamishri did darshan and *arti* of Thakorji, Akshar Deri and Smruti Mandir. Thereafter, he gave puja darshan to all. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, "Jai Swaminarayan for the New Year. Shriji Maharaj travelled through infinite *brahmands* to come here on earth for the purpose of developing faith in *jivas* and to make them abundantly happy. Thus, you all should strengthen faith (*nishtha*). This is the message for the whole year."



Swamishri engrossed in darshan of Thakorji and the vegetables offered to celebrate *shakotsav*, Bochasan

# **BOCHASAN**

#### 15: Arrival

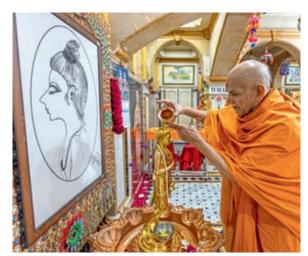
After arriving in Bochasan, Swamishri was given a warm welcome. After doing darshan and *abhishek* Swamishri was honoured with garlands by Vedagna Swami and other swamis.

# 17: Children's Day

The evening assembly theme was based on Satsang Diksha. Children performed a traditional dance and enacted the principles and values taught in the Satsang Diksha. In a Q&A session, Swamishri guided children to give up laziness, avoid bad company, observe *niyams* and become ideal. Thereafter, Swamishri joined all in chanting *dhun* for the safety of 40 workers trapped in a tunnel in Uttarakhand.

# 18: Youth Day

Presentations by youths were the highlight of the evening assembly. They enacted a drama titled 'Suraksha Chakra,' which portrayed the benefits of observing *niyam*-dharma through real life stories of BAPS youths. Thereafter, the youths performed an exciting traditional dance. Finally, they sought Swamiswhri's guidance through a Q&A session.



Swamishri performs *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni, Bochasan

# 23: Prabodhini Ekadashi

During Swamishri's morning puja an array of fresh vegetables were arranged for the *shakotsav*. Appropriate kirtans were sung by swamis. After puja, Swamishri displayed different vegetables to the audience and gave *smruti* to all.

Swamishri and *sadguru* swamis performed the customary *shakotsav arti* of Thakorji in the mandir. In all the three sanctums a variety of vegetables were arranged decoratively to celebrate the occasion.

### 27: Dev Diwali

On Kartik Punam or Dev Diwali a variety of fruits were arranged before the Guru Parampara shrines and an *annakut* was arranged before Thakorji in the mandir shrines. Swamishri performed the *annakut arti* and did *abhishek* of Nilkanth Varni.

To celebrate the festive occasion a special assembly was held on the grounds of Swaminarayan Baug. The assembly was themed on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's words 'Our Sanstha Has Progressed Due to the Practice of Saintliness'. Speeches in tune with the theme were delivered by Anirdeshdas Swami, Narayanmunidas Swami, Anandswarupdas Swami and *sadguru* swamis. A video portrayed Mahant Swami Maharaj's unique saintliness.



Youths perform a traditional bhakti dance, Surat

Swamishri then inaugurated the new cath lab by untying a *nadachhadi* wound around a photo of Shastriji Maharaj Hospital, Atladara.

After Dr Swami's speech, children and youths performed a traditional dance on the bhajan 'Akshar-Purushottam nā Dankā Digant mā Sambhalāy chhe...' Swamishri struck a bell during the dance and gave a divine smruti to all.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Shriji Maharaj is the all-doer. Gunatitanand Swami declared, 'If I retract my divine powers then the whole *brahmand* would smell terribly.' This is the power of Aksharbrahma. Maharaj and Swami are the all-doers. One should consolidate this in one's soul. Faith in God should be strongly established within oneself. Only then will the bells of victory toll."

# 30: Stambh Pujan of BAPS Mandir, Jodhpur

Swamishri performed the *pujan* and *arti* of two pillars of the under-construction BAPS *shikharbadhha* mandir in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. Swamishri also blessed the devotees from Jodhpur.

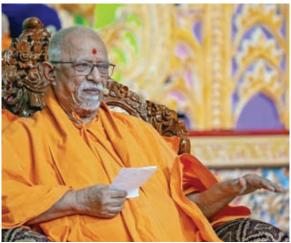
On 1 December Swamishri departed from Bochasan and travelled to Vallabh Vidyanagar, then to Mahelav and finally arrived in Nadiad for the mandir *murti-pratishtha* ceremonies.



Swamishri honoured with a garland, Surat



Swamishri seated between the newly carved pillars for the BAPS Mandir in Jodhpur, Bochasan



Pujya Swayamprakash Swami (Doctor Swami) addresses the 102nd birthday celebration assembly



Mahant Swami Maharaj resided at the Akshardham site in Kanad, Surat. Thousands of devotees took the opportunity of his puja darshan, various evening programmes and special events. A brief description is as follows.

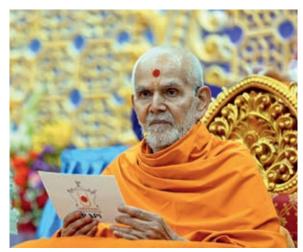
### 15: Arrival

On Swamishri's arrival from Nadiad to Kanad, Surat, he was welcomed by swamis, devotees, and children and youths who blew conch shells and played a music band. Seven hundred devotees had observed various austerities for Swamishri's good health. The satsang assemblies and puja darshan were organized at the Kanad campus.

### 17: Welcome Sabha

To welcome Swamishri a special assembly was held themed on 'Aksharbrahma in Akshardham'. Speeches by swamis and videos on Swamishri's virtues were delivered and shown respectively. On the arrival of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Swamishri, swamis, children and youths sang *shloks* for the *pujan* rituals. Swamis garlanded Swamishri and children and youths performed a traditional bhakti dance.

The central government minister Shri Prafulbhai and Mayor of Surat Shri Daksheshbhai



Swamishri blesses the celebration assembly

gave a welcome speech. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly.

# 20: Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 102nd Birthday Celebration

Thousands of devotees from Surat and South Gujarat assembled for Swamishri's morning puja darshan. The evening celebration assembly was themed on 'Pramukh Swami Sukhkari'. The programme was as follows.

- Swamis and youths: *Dhun* and prayer.
- Pujya Dr Swami: speech on 'How can one become an ideal disciple of an ideal guru'.
- Speeches about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine virtues, works and his blessings upon Surat.
  - Pramukh Swami Maharaj's video blessings.
- Speeches by Kothari Uttamprakash Swami and Prabhucharan Swami about the memories Mahant Swami Maharaj gave in Surat.
- Children and youths presented a traditional dance to express indebtedness to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.
- Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the celebration assembly, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj was seva-oriented. Each seva he did was greater than the former. He was also absorbed in offering bhakti and seva to his guru. He pleased both the young and old. He was immensely great yet he became like us



Youths during a shibir session, Surat

and intermingled with all. He travelled all over the world and also retained his saintliness (*sadhuta*) and did his work. By reading Swamishri's biography one will understand his glory and greatness and attain happiness and guidance in life."

■ Then, thousands of devotees offered mantrapushpanjali to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and pragat guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj. Finally, all offered arti in unison.

# 24: Assembly on Stories of Sacrifice

A special assembly was held on the theme, 'One Aim – Surat Akshardham'. Devotees were felicitated and appreciated for their *seva* in the Akshardham project. Brief programme highlights are as follows.

- *Dhun, prarthana* and a video on the progress of the Akshardham construction work.
- Speech: 'What We Cannot Do for Bhagwan' by Adhyatmachintan Swami.
- Speech: 'Let's Unitedly Make Akshardham' by Munivandan Swami.
- Felicitation: Devotees who have contributed generously.
- Story presentations by youths about the sacrifices of devotees in the making of Akshardham Mahamandir.
- Mahant Swami Maharaj, inspirer of the Akshardham project, blessed, "All have done *seva*

beyond their capacities. By donating to Bhagwan and Sant one gains benefits in this world and beyond. The soil gives so much in return for the few seeds we sow, similarly God and the Sant too give back in abundance. Maharaj and Swami will never forget your *seva* for Akshardham. Your *seva* will definitely provide you with inner peace and with happiness in mind, body and wealth."

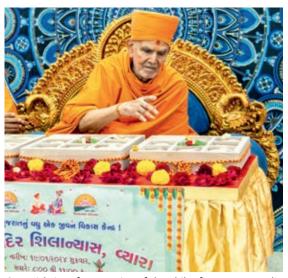
#### 30: Youth Shibir

A two-day youth *shibir* was organized for 3,200 urban and rural *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* at the Kanad Akshardham campus. The central theme was 'Akshardham in Our Lifetime'. Swamishri kindled the inaugural lamp. Then, Swamishri explained the essence of *prapti*, "*Prapti* means attainment of supreme Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Mul Akshar Gunatitanand Swami. If one understands *prapti* then one becomes *brahmarup*. By pondering properly upon *prapti* we will not have any inner deficiencies. All our *swabhavs* will be extinguished and we will experience happiness and peace of mind."

#### **JANUARY 2024: SURAT**

### **Rituals for Special Occasions**

2: Swamishri did *pujan* of *shilas* in Kanad as part of the *shilanyas* rituals for the *shikharbaddha* mandir in Vyara. Swamishri also performed



Swamishri performs *pujan* of the *shilas* for Vyara Mandir



Swamishri performs *arti* during the evening Uttarayan festival assembly, Surat

*pujan* and *arti* of the bricks to be used for the construction of Premvati and the kitchen in Vyara.

- **4:** Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the foundation-stone laying rituals for the 'Mahant Swami Sabhagruh' to be built on the Akshardham campus in Kanad.
- 9: Swamishri initiated 1,500 children by saying the *vartman* mantra. He blessed, "All children will grow to become good and virtuous, and will do bhajan of God."

# 14: Uttarayan Celebration Assembly

After giving puja darshan, Swamishri addressed the large assembly of devotees. Then, with two *jholis*, one on each shoulder, Swamishri hailed, "Swaminarayan Hare Sachchidanand Prabho..."

The Uttarayan celebration assembly was held in the evening, in which 42,000 devotees and well-wishers attended. After the singing of *dhun* and bhajans Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami addressed the assembly.

Swamishri was welcomed in the assembly with tunes from the music band played by youths. After performing *arti* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Swamishri blessed, "The tradition of begging (*jholi*) is from the time of Shriji Maharaj. He begged for grains and flour in Loj village and

also instructed his *paramhansas* to do likewise. Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj completed the mandir constructions by begging with *jholis* suspended around their shoulders. Pramukh Swami Maharaj also begged with a *jholi* in many places. I pray that Maharaj and Swami bless all with good times in body, mind and wealth."

Swamishri then, with two *jholis* hanging from his shoulders, hailed, "Swaminarayan Hare Sachchidanand Prabho..." Then, Swamishri gave *samip* darshan for over an hour in his golf cart while it passed by all the sections of the large gathering.

# **FEBRUARY: SURAT**

2: Swamishri blessed the students appearing for the 10th and 12th grade board exams. Each student received a ballpoint pen sanctified by Swamishri.

# 3: Vidyamandir Day

The students of BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir celebrated Vidyamandir Day themed on 'Education of the Heart', before Swamishri in the evening assembly. A Q&A session was held with Swamishri.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, "You have





Devotees during Swamishri's farewell and smruti assembly

all come to study here, and thus you should strive hard. Learn virtues, keep good company and be focused on becoming good, then *seva* and bhakti will naturally follow in your life."

# 4: Farewell and Smruti Assembly

Swamishri stayed for 53 days in Kanad, Surat, and gave the benefit of his presence to all. During his stay Swamishri gave *samip* darshan to 100,000 devotees and well-wishers and 25 puja darshans. He attended 43 special satsang assemblies, addressed the audience 48 times, gave *vartman* to 1,500 children, performed the foundation-laying ceremony of six mandirs and the *murti-pratishtha* 

rituals of 30 mandirs.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, "Shriji Maharaj accepts the prayers of all. May you all remain spiritually strong and spirited and make rigorous efforts in completing Akshardham. Maharaj, Swami and the gurus are all happy upon you all." After *arti*, swamis offered a beautiful farewell flower garland to Swamishri.

On 5 February 2024, Swamishri took a flight to Abu Dhabi to inaugurate the newly accomplished *shikharbaddha* BAPS Hindu Mandir and stayed there till 23 February.

Translation by Sadhu Vivekjivandas from a concise Gujarati report by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas

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(Signed) Sadhu Swayamprakashdas. Date: 5-4-2024



# Mahant Swami Maharaj Inaugurates Raj Sabhagruh at the Shrimad Rajchandra Mission

26 December 2023, Dharampur

The town of Dharampur in the Valsad district, South Gujarat, was sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan's visit over 200 years ago. Today, 26 December 2024, the Srimad Rajchandra Mission was on the cusp of adding another feather to its cap of spiritual activities. Pujya Shri Rakeshbhai Jhaveri, the guru and president of the mission, had invited Mahant Swami Maharaj to inaugurate the newly built ultra-modern auditorium, Raj Sabhagruh.

On Swamishri's arrival in Dharampur from Surat, Shri Atmaprit Nemiji, the vice-president of

Shrimad Rajchandra Mission, respectfully bowed and welcomed Mahant Swami Maharaj. The devotees and trustees of the mission gave a warm welcome. On arriving at the 34 ft high *murti* of Shrimad Rajchandraji, gurudev Shri Rakeshji welcomed and garlanded Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Similarly, Swamishri garlanded Shri Rakeshji. Thereafter, Swamishri performed *abhishek* and offered flowers and rice grains at the *charanarvind* installed opposite the *murti* of Shrimad Rajchandraji. Then, Swamishri went to the *garbhagruh* of the *derasar* (mandir), garlanded the *murti* of Bhagwan Mahavir and placed a crown on the *murti*'s head.

After performing bhakti rituals and chanting of mantras, Swamishri and Shri Rakeshji untied the inaugural ribbon at the entrance of the auditorium amidst chants of great joy. Shri Rakeshji, carrying

Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in his hands, entered the auditorium followed by Swamishri, who was carrying a *murti* of Shrimad Rajchandraji. Thereafter, both spiritual leaders kindled an inaugural lamp on the main stage. Youths then performed a welcome dance and both Shri Rakeshji and



Swamishri with a *murti* of Shrimad Rajchandra and Pujya Rakeshji with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



Swamishri sanctifies bricks for a proposed guesthouse in Dharampur Shri Nemiji garlanded Swamishri.

Shri Rakeshji addressed his disciples, "One of this Swaminarayan Sampradaya's traditions is to earn the guru's rajipo and for that one has to dedicate oneself to him. Another tradition is that of spiritual harmony. We are experiencing it now through Mahant Swami Maharaj's arrival here. The guru graces in four ways: through his words, touch, sight and wish. We have experienced that he has graced us in all the four ways. Mahant Swami Maharaj produces 'electromagnetic waves' by virtue of his purity. If we remain with love before him, we will be able to absorb those waves and thus experience an effortless inner transformation. His physical presence is more than enough. His presence effects in us love for God and Sant." Shri Rakeshji's sincere words were received with a generous round of applause and appreciation. Thereafter, Brahmavihari Swami addressed the congregation.

In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed, "Today, I have been drawn here by the love of Rakeshji Maharaj. This land is holy because Bhagwan Swaminarayan had come to Dharampur. Today's society is greatly inspired by the thoughts and life of Shrimad Rajchandra. Pujya Rakeshji Maharaj is taking forward the work of Shrimad Rajchandra. I pray to Mahavir Swami and Bhagwan Swaminarayan that whoever does satsang and sadhana here attains immense happiness and peace in life. I also pray that Pujya Rakeshji Maharaj's health remains well and the organization progresses greatly. Jai Jinendra and Jai Swaminarayan."



Swamishri sanctifies Pramukh Swami Vocational Training Centre for tribal youths, Dharampur

Swamishri's blessings were received with a standing ovation. After performing *arti*, Swamishri departed to the BAPS Mandir in Dharampur.

### BAPS MANDIR, DHARAMPUR

Swamishri was welcomed on a red carpet decorated on either side with colourful *rangolis*. After Thakorji's darshan, Swamishri performed the *pujan* of bricks and soil for the proposed construction of a guesthouse. Then, Swamishri sanctified the premises of Pramukh Swami Vocational Training Centre. Presently, 275 male and female tribal youths are taught various vocational skills free of cost. The students are provided lodging and boarding facilities in the campus. Swamishri blessed the administrators of the training school and hostel.

Finally at 2.00 p.m., Swamishri briefly attended an assembly of 30,000 devotees from Navsari, Sankari, Tithal and other regions of South Gujarat. They were all seated in the open ground from 8 a.m. Kothari Vivekswarup Swami prayed to Swamishri to bless all for the fulfilment of their wishes. Swamishri raised both his hands in blessings and appreciated, "All of you have made great efforts by sitting here for six hours. My Jai Swaminarayan to you all."

Swamishri released balloons to launch the Silver Jubilee Year celebrations of the Tithal mandir. The swamis honoured Swamishri with garlands and offered him a *kalash* filled with rice grains peeled by the *mahila mandal*.

After a lot of travel and strain Swamishri returned to Kanad, Surat, at around 3 p.m.



Swamis and devotees during the first pillar pujan ceremony of Akshardham, Surat

# Under-Construction Akshardham Mahamandir

# Installation of First Pillar in Kanad. Surat

26 January 2024

Tn December 1996, Pramukh Swami Maharaj  $oldsymbol{1}$  consecrated the BAPS Mandir in the Adajan area of Surat, located by the banks of River Tapi. Thereafter, with a marked growth in Satsang the present mandir premises falls short in accommodating the thousands of devotees who come for the weekly satsang sabha and festival celebrations. Thus, Mahant Swami Maharaj

decided to create a new shikharhaddha mandir and an Akshardham Mahamandir in Kanad, located on the outskirts of Surat.

On 7 May 2019, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the grand shilanyas rituals of Akshardham Mahamandir. Now, with its construction Swamishri places a flower on the ornate pillar

work having reached the plinth level, the occasion to establish the first pillar arrived on 26 January 2024, India's Republic Day. To witness the milestone event thousands of devotees and well-wishers assembled on the site. Initially, the mahapuja rituals were performed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami. Thereafter,

> the three sadguru swamis and Harshadbhai Chavda addressed the assembly.

> Swamishri and Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj arrived on site in a crane cabin. At 11.10 a.m., Swamishri unveiled the red cloth enveloping the ornately carved pillar by untying the nadachhadi





Swamishri, sadguru swamis and swamis after installing the first pillar in Akshardham

wound around it. Then, Swamishri commenced the *pujan* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, followed by Shrijiswarup Swami and Nikhilesh Swami performing Swamishri's *pujan*. Then, Swamishri performed the *pujan* rituals of the first pillar. Firstly, Swamishri sprinkled holy water on the *kumbhi* (base of pillar), then poured the sanctified *panchamrut* on it and also poured a mixture of cement on top of the *kumbhi*. The *sadguru* swamis, senior swamis, Harshadbhai Chavda, Ashwinbhai Patel (engineer), Prashantbhai (architect) and others also poured cement.

At 11.24 a.m., in the presence of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and with Swamishri's divine touch, the first pillar of Akshardham was installed amidst loud hails of *jais*. Then, Swamishri performed *pujan* of the pillar with *chandan*, rice grains and flowers. Ishwarcharan Swami expressed good wishes (*sankalps*) for the project and all joined in chanting the Swaminarayan *dhun* for their fulfilment. Swamishri and *sadguru* swamis performed *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* rituals of the pillar.

Shrijiswarup Swami, who has played a pivotal role in designing Akshardham, spoke about Mahant Swami Maharaj's zeal and inspirations for the project. Thereafter, swamis honoured Mahant Swami Maharaj with garlands. Then, devotees who have physically and mentally dedicated themselves in this project were also garlanded. They included: Harshadbhai Chavda, Vinodbhai Patel, Prashantbhai Desai, Bhupatbhai Vithani and others. The artisans working in the project were also appreciated and honoured.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Akshardham is the divine home of Shriji Maharaj and he will stay here forever. So today, the first pillar has been installed and in no time Akshardham will be ready.

"To build Akshardham three things will be required: samp (unity), sampatti (money) and sampark (contact). Where there is samp God's power is evoked. I pray to Maharaj that all be blessed with good times. Through sampark may you engage others in the seva of Akshardham. Because anyone who does seva of Akshardham, Pramukh Swami Maharaj will make them happy in all ways. The Akshardham we are building is with devotional feelings and not to show off to others. There is no motive to enhance our greatness or glory. I pray to Shriji Maharaj that no obstacles hamper the construction and it is accomplished properly and on time."





Swamis and devotees during the shilanyas rituals of the shikharbaddha mandir

Swamishri lowers the *nidhi-kumbh* into the *qart* 

Swamishri's blessings were received with generous applause. To celebrate India's 75th Republic Day the Indian flag was hoisted on the Akshardham grounds amidst the singing of the national anthem and salutes.

# SHILANYAS OF SHIKHARBADDHA MANDIR 25 JANUARY 2024

On 25 January 2024, Gunatitanand Swami's diksha day celebration, the foundation-stone laying (shilanyas) ceremony for a BAPS shikharbaddha mandir on the Akshardham campus was performed by Mahant Swami Maharaj. Amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras, Swamishri lowered the nidhi-kumbh, sprinkled holy water, soil and gems into the gart or foundation pit above which the

central sanctum will be built. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's asthi pushpa (holy ashes) were also placed in the pit. Thereafter, Swamishri and sadguru swamis performed pujan of the marble shilas for the foundation.

Swamishri also lowered another *nidhi-kumbh* where the *abhishek murti* of

Nilkanth Varni would be installed. Thereafter, sadguru swamis and senior swamis honoured Swamishri with garlands. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami appreciated the gift of Akshardham and the mandir that Mahant Swami Maharaj would give to all. He also announced that from henceforth "Surat Akshardham Mahotsav ni jai" be hailed on all occasions and in all satsang assemblies.

In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the event, "The mandir that will come up here will be grand and ornate like the mandir above Akshar Deri (in Gondal). By Pramukh Swami Maharaj's grace, the mandir and Akshardham here will be accomplished without any obstacles. Maharaj and Swami

will generously reward all those who have served and will serve in this project."

More than 300 swamis from different mandirs and thousands of devotees attended this landmark event.



Swamishri performs the mandir shilanyas rituals

# **BAPS Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav**

# Mahant Swami Maharaj Launches the Celebrations in Surat

28 January 2024



Swamis and karyakars during the assembly

Dedicated BAPS satsang volunteers in India and abroad are the cornerstone of the Sanstha's spiritual and community services. Fifty years ago, through Pramukh Swami Maharaj's inspiration and blessings, a systematic and organized volunteer force was established. Presently there are over 100,000 male and female, youth and adult volunteers in India and abroad. Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj launched the year-long Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav in Surat to acknowledge and appreciate their selfless seva and sacrifice.

On 28 January, Swamishri kindled the inaugural lamp for the golden anniversary celebrations in a special assembly of *karyakars* in Surat. The children and youth volunteers presented inspiring programmes in the three-hour long assembly. It included dramas, videos, speeches by swamis and a presentation on *bal-yuva* activities. The coming annual projects were also announced and explained. Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami, the convener of BAPS satsang activities, and Pujya Yagnapriyadas Swami, who leads the central satsang activity cell, addressed

the volunteers.

Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the special celebratory assembly, "It is a great honour to offer service in spreading the Vedic philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam. Shastriji Maharaj used to say, 'If you remain ever-ready in doing this seva, then you will be redeemed from the cycles of birth and death.' Pramukh Swami Maharaj used to say that all of you are like 'sadhus in white (householder's) clothes' because of your immense contributions and sacrifices. The women's wing is also making great efforts. You have all relegated your sansar and life's activities for the sake of doing seva. It is not possible to evaluate the value of your sacrifices and neither can they be repayed. Thus, your seva is like that of swamis. We are celebrating the Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav to honour and recognize you.

"This celebration will foster your spiritual faith, pride for the *sanstha*, *satpurush* and *siddhant* and for *samp*, *suhradbhav* and *ekta*. My blessings that the grand finale celebration be celebrated in a glorious and divine way."

# Disc Honouring Pramukh Swami Maharaj Reaches the Moon

22 February 2024



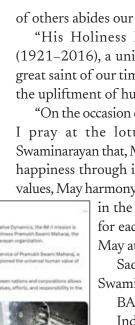
n Thursday, 22 February 2024, at 6.23 p.m. EST - Friday, 23 February 2024, 4.53 a.m. IST - the Odysseus Moon Lander from the Intuitive Machines 1 mission touched down on the moon's South Pole carrying a stone disc in tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

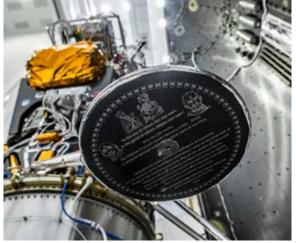
Developed by Intuitive Machines, a company based in Houston, Texas, in collaboration with Relative Dynamics, based in Laurel, Maryland, Odysseus was launched into orbit on a SpaceX

Falcon 9 rocket on 15 February 2024. It was the first American spacecraft to successfully land on the moon since 1972.

The moon lander carried six scientific instruments as part of NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) and six private payloads. In addition, Odysseus carried an etching on a stone disc in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj:

"In the joy of others. In the good





of others abides our own.'

"His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj (1921-2016), a universal spiritual leader and a great saint of our time, dedicated his entire life in the upliftment of humanity.

"On the occasion of his Centenary Celebrations I pray at the lotus feet of Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan that, May all the people get bliss and happiness through imbibing spiritual and moral values, May harmony and unity spread everywhere

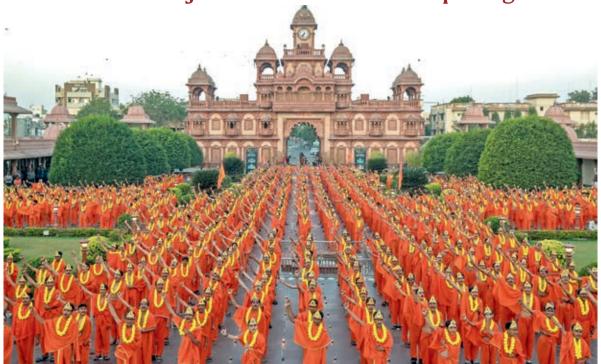
> in the world, May love and respect for each other flourish everywhere, May auspicious wishes come true.

> Sadhu Keshavjivandas (Mahant Swami Maharaj)

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, India."

On 22 December 2022, during the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations in Ahmedabad, Mahant Swami Maharai had sanctified this etched stone disc.

# BAPS Mandirs Celebrate Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir Opening



On 22 January 2024, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir in Ayodhya was inaugurated bringing great delight to Hindus worldwide in the presence of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Shri Mohanji Bhagvat, Uttar Pradesh Governor Shrimati Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Shri Yogi Adityanathji, President of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust Mahant Shri Nrutyagopaldasji Maharaj, Treasurer Shri Govind Dev Giriji Maharaj, other trustees, swamis, mahants and dignitaries.

Mahant Swami Maharaj had been invited to the historic occasion by the International President of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad Shri Alok Kumar. However, Swamishri was unable to attend in person, but was represented on this auspicious occasion by Premprakashdas Swami, Bhadreshdas Swami, Brahmaviharidas Swami,



Aksharvatsaldas Swami, Munivatsaldas Swami and other BAPS swamis.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a keen supporter of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and on 16 August 1989, on the day of Raksha Bandhan, had performed the Vedic *pujan* of the first Ram Shila. For decades he offered his wholehearted prayers, guidance and support.

Mahant Swami Maharaj has continued this

support. In fact, on 3 August 2020 (Raksha Bandhan), he performed the Vedic *pujan* of the Shri Ram Yantra and Ram Rakshak Yantra to be placed as per the tradition of Sanatan Dharma in the mandir's foundation pit.

On behalf of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, on 5 August 2020, Brahmaviharidas Swami and Aksharvatsaldas Swami placed these two sanctified *yantras* in the foundation pit of the Ram Mandir's *garbhagruh* in Ayodhya.

## MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S LETTER

On 19 January 2024, Mahant Swami Maharaj wrote a lengthy letter expressing his heartfelt joy for the Ram Mandir inauguration and specified that the occasion be enthusiastically celebrated by all BAPS devotees in India and abroad in their homes and local mandirs.

He acknowledged that the mandir inauguration is the fruit of the dedication, devotion, faith and austerities of countless devotees for over 500 years. He directed that all should celebrate this occasion like Diwali and that whenever convenient should pilgrimage to Ayodhya for darshan of the mandir.

He concluded by praying for Bhagwan Ram's blessings for world peace, unity and harmony.

### **BAPS CELEBRATES**

Swamishri's wish was conveyed to all BAPS devotees through the central offices in each country.

Mandirs and homes were decorated with *murtis* of Bhagwan Ram, posters of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj performing *pujan* for the Ram Mandir, colourful lighting, traditional *divos* and other decorations. *Annakuts* were also devoutly offered.

In the mandirs, devotees joyously participated in the *palkhi yatras* honouring Bhagwan Ram. Women devotees, as per tradition, respectfully carried the Ramayan, Vachanamrut, Bhagavad Gita and other shastras wrapped in red cloths on

their heads. *Mahapujas* and assemblies were held to honour the occasion. Inspiring dramas and celebratory bhajans were presented. Devotees celebrated in a multitude of ways expressing their inner joy on this historic occasion.

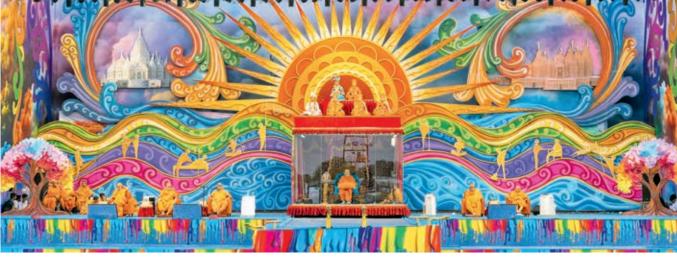
Previously, as part of the inauguration preparations, the project to encourage Hindus everywhere to recite the Hanuman Chalisa was launched from Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. In the esteemed presence of many spiritual leaders and other dignitaries, the 'Shatkoti Hanuman Chalisa Path' was launched for devotees to recite the Hanuman Chalisa a total of 100 crore (one billion) times between 23 March 2023 and 15 January 2024 and offer their devout prayers for the mandir.

On 22 January 2024, a special webcast was relayed from the BAPS website. After the initial *dhun* and bhajans, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Doctor Swami spoke about the Ram Mandir and the historical glory of Ayodhya. Swamishri was in Surat, from where he blessed, "Ayodhya is a pious pilgrim place where Bhagwan Swaminarayan also gave many memories. On this auspicious occasion of the consecration of the *murti* of Shri Ram Lalla, we pray to Bhagwan Ram to bless all in India and the world with peace, joy and harmony. May all live devout and virtuous lives. May he bless all with good health and prosperity."

Thereafter, Swamishri performed *pujan* of Bhagwan Ram, offered *mantra-pushpanjali* and performed *arti* at the same time as the first *arti* was performed in the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and others.

To mark this auspicious occasion, the prime minister had undertaken 11 days of fast and prayers, which he concluded at the hands of Shri Govind Dev Giriji Maharaj.

In the evening, to commemorate the Ram Mandir consecration, celebratory fireworks displays were held at many BAPS mandirs.



# Mahant Swami Maharaj Celebrates Pushpadolotsav

21 April 2024, Sarangpur

on 21 April 2024, from 5.45 p.m. to 8.15 p.m., over 60,000 devotees and well-wishers from throughout India and many other countries gathered in Sarangpur to celebrate the grand Pushpadolotsav (Festival of Colours) in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj. Countless devotees also witnessed the celebration through the live webcast on baps.org.

The colourful stage background depicted the mesmerizing and recently inaugurated iconic Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, NJ, and the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. To celebrate the year-long 'Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav', the background also symbolically paid tribute to the BAPS volunteers for their selfless community services. Mahant Swami Maharaj was seated at the centre of the stage along with the *sadguru* swamis on both sides.

The celebration assembly was themed on the 'Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav' and 'Antar Akshardham'.

Pujya Viveksagar Swami spoke about the spiritual essence of the festival of colours. He said, "Bhagwan Swaminarayan insisted on the observance of dharma even while joyously celebrating festivals. Pramukh Swami Maharaj often said that we have to colour ourselves in the divine colours of Bhagwan and guru. I pray to Mahant Swami Maharaj that we all be dyed in his divine colour of unfading saintliness."

Thereafter, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami said, "The spirit of selfless seva by devotees and volunteers is recorded from the time of Shriji Maharaj. Pramukh Swami Maharaj greatly accelerated this volunteer activity. Even during the festivals of Shastriji Maharaj's Birth Centenary in 1965, Yogiji Maharaj's Amrut Mahotsav in 1967, and Bhadra Mandir Pratishtha in 1969, we witnessed the volunteers doing extraordinary seva. In 1916, during the pratishtha festival of Sarangpur Mandir, the volunteer devotees served with great

enthusiasm." He further elaborated upon the seva of volunteers in the making of Robbinsville Akshardham and during Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary celebrations in Ahmedabad.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami also requested



all the devotees to exercise their right to vote judiciously for the development and progress of the nation in the upcoming general elections in India.

Addressing the assembly on the theme of 'Antar Akshardham', Pujya

Doctor Swami said, "Our aim should be to purify our hearts. If a person believes that God sees him, knows whatever he is doing and gives him the fruits of his karmas, then he would refrain from all immoral activities. Our entire life is a celebration if we focus on self-improvement and imbibe virtues."

Blessing the mammoth celebration assembly Mahant Swami Maharaj said, "Yogi Bapa instilled a divine colour in everyone's heart which never fades. We have all come here to get drenched in the divine colour. Think about the glory of Bhagwan we have attained (*prapti*). To soak in Bhagwan's



divine colour, we need to first remove the worldly colours or desires. I pray to Bhagwan that his divine colour continues to impress upon us."

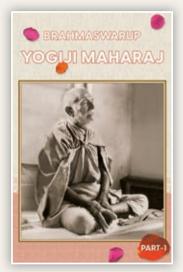
Thereafter, Swamishri performed *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

and devoutly sprayed them with saffron-scented water. At the same time, Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj sprayed Swamishri with coloured water.

Finally, Swamishri sprayed the *sadguru* and senior swamis and all the joyous devotees with sanctified saffron-scented water. Thereafter, all departed home with *prasad* dishes and joyous memories of the occasion.

In all, 8,000 volunteers served in 30 different departments to ensure the efficient planning, preparation and execution of the celebration. •

# **NEW PUBLICATION**



# Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, Part 1

Yogiji Maharaj was an unparalleled personality and an embodiment of flawlessness. Even amid the many hardships and challenges he faced and overcame,

his glowing smile never faded.

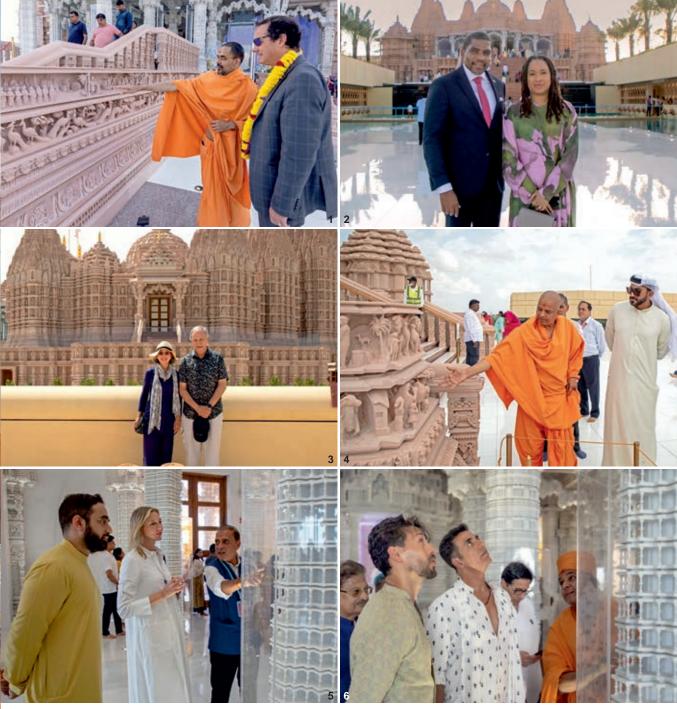
He showered limitless magnanimity and affection on all.

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, Part 1 is an English translation
of the first volume of Yogiji Maharaj's extensive
six-part Gujarati biography.

Translated by Sadhu Mangalnidhidas

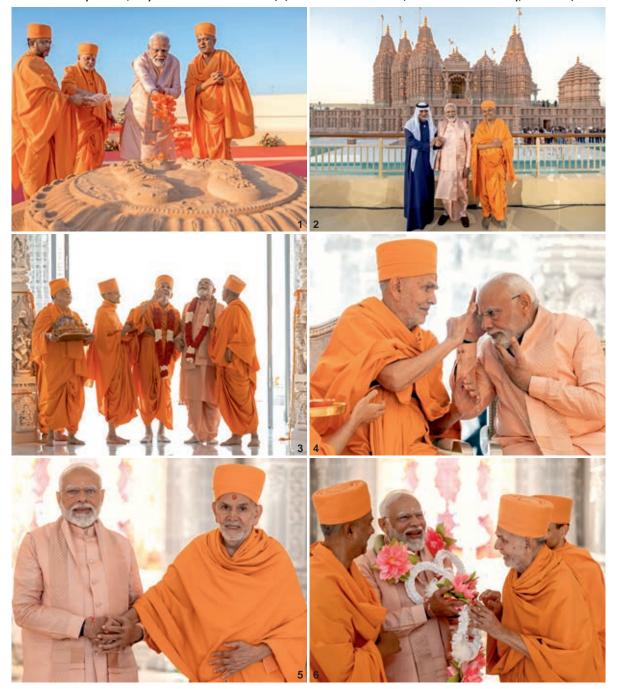
Inspirer: HH Mahant Swami Maharaj

Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad ◆ Available on baps.store & at BAPS bookstores (India)



### **VISITORS TO BAPS HINDU MANDIR, ABU DHABI**

- 1. HE Edward Hobart, British Ambassador to the UAE, views a sculpted stone panel (20 February 2024).
- 2. The Honourable Dr Terrance Drew, Prime Minister of St Kitts and Nevis, and First Lady Diani Prince-Drew in front of the mandir (19 April 2024).
- 3. Ray Dalio, Co-Chief Investment Officer of Bridgewater Associates, and Mrs Barbara Dalio stand on The Prayer Dune (17 March 2024).
- 4. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Faisal Bin Khalid Al Qassimi, a member of the royal family of Sharjah, views a sculpted stone panel (29 February 2024).
- 5. Mufaddal Ali, Founder and Owner, Inoventive 3D Solutions, Dubai, and British 'spiritual entrepreneur' Shelley Lewis view the Pillar of Pillars (4 May 2024).
- 6. Famous Bollywood actors Akshay Kumar and Tiger Shroff marvel at the Pillar of Pillars (8 April 2024).



PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI AT BAPS HINDU MANDIR, ABU DHABI

### 14 February 2024

- 1. Prime Minister Modi showers flower petals on the holy *charanarvind* on The Prayer Dune.
- 2. The prime minister greets Sheikh Nahyan bin Mabarak Al Nahyan.
- 3. Mahant Swami Maharaj shows a mandir feature to the prime minister.
- 4. Swamishri applies a chandlo to the prime minister and blesses him.
- 5. Swamishri and the prime minister inside the main mandir.
- 6. Swamishri honours the prime minister with a special garland.