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D.A. BROWN: HINDU PRIEST CHARGED
WITH SEXUALLY ABUSING TWO TEENAGE SISTERS
Allegedly Used Bogus Religious Ritual To Rape One Victim

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that a former Trinidad police officer who is now an ordained Hindu priest in Queens has been charged with sexually abusing two teenage parishioners and raping one of them by tricking her into participating in a purported religious cleansing ritual that would rid her of evil spirits.

District Attorney Brown said, "What allegedly happened to these children is every child's and every parent's worst nightmare. Under the guise of being their religious leader, the defendant is alleged to have taken advantage of the youngsters and their trust in him by robbing them of their innocence. Fortunately, one of the sisters found the courage to come forward and report the incident to police. However, even after the physical abuse has stopped, the consequences of such sexual assault for victims are profound and can result in emotional trauma from which they may never fully recover."

District Attorney Brown identified the defendant as Ramadhar Ramlal, 59, of 92-30 173rd Street in Jamaica, Queens. He is the pastor of the USA Pandits Parishad Church, located at 147-07 88th Avenue in Jamaica, Queens. Ramlal was arraigned yesterday in Queens Criminal Court on charges of third-degree rape, third-degree criminal sexual act, second- and third-degree sexual abuse and endangering the welfare of a child. If convicted, he faces up to four years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the criminal complaint, on two separate occasions in December 2002, the defendant directed one of the sisters, then 16, to meet him at a friend's apartment on 165th Street in Jamaica so he could perform a ritual to help her with family problems. Once there and assured that she had not told anyone where she was going or what she was doing, he allegedly instructed her to take off her clothes, which she reluctantly did. On exiting the bathroom wrapped in a towel, she observed the defendant wearing just a tank-top and boxer shorts. The defendant then allegedly ordered her to lie on the floor atop a white sheet and to hold her arms outstretched with a coin in each and not drop them. The defendant then allegedly began to chant, put coins on various parts of her body and rub her with oil from head to toe. Informed by the victim that she felt uncomfortable, the defendant allegedly covered her eyes with a towel before tying a string on his finger, which he then used to sexually assault her. At the completion of the two-hour ritual, the defendant allegedly collected the string and burned it in a bowl and then turned her over and sexually assaulted her again.

According to the District Attorney, the complaint further charges that, in February 2003, the 16-year-old girl met the defendant on 104th Street in Jamaica and that the defendant drove her to the Econo Lounge, a motel located at 113-18 Rockaway Boulevard in Jamaica, and performed a similar ritual. The defendant then allegedly placed the victim on her stomach, moved her to her hands and knees and stated, "Now I have to do this to complete the ritual and I am sorry but I have to do this," and raped her. Afterwards, the defendant drove his victim to the train station.

The criminal complaint further charges that, in the spring of 2003, the defendant sexually abused the younger sister, then 13, in his church by touching her breasts and private parts over her clothes.

According to District Attorney Brown, the investigation began last week when his Special Victims Bureau was notified by the NYPD's Special Victims Squad that the oldest sister had reported the incident to her college counselor who had encouraged her to report it to the police. The defendant was arrested on Wednesday, September 6, 2006, and arraigned yesterday before Queens Criminal Court Judge Alex J. Zigman who set bail at \$50,000, granted orders of protection for both victims and a return date of September 25, 2006.

The investigation was conducted by Detective Eric Echevarria of the New York City Police Department's Queens Special Victims Squad under the command of Lieutenant Arthur Hall.

Assistant District Attorney Lucinda Suarez, Deputy Bureau Chief of the District Attorney's Special Victims Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Marjory D. Fisher, Bureau Chief and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Charles A. Testagrossa and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Daniel A. Saunders.

It should be noted that a criminal complaint is merely an accusation and that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted on www.queensda.org