

**Subject:** Man Passes Away.

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Subject: A Man Passes Away.

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It appears that Sai Baba has passed away. I was not one of his admirers but I do follow the things that Babaji does.

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Enlarged Photo

PUTTAPARTI, India (AP) - Hindu guru Sathya Sai Baba, revered by millions worldwide, died after nearly a month of hospital treatment near his southern Indian headquarters. He was 84.

The news that Sai Baba died Sunday brought an outpouring of grief from his followers, including high Indian officials, who remembered him as a pious person who worked selflessly to help others with the billions of dollars donated to his charitable trust.

Women selling marigold garlands broke down in tears outside his ashram, or spiritual retreat, while devotees began flocking to the temple complex where the guru's body will lie through Tuesday.

The Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, where Sai Baba spent the past weeks on breathing support and dialysis, appealed for calm. Police, heavily deployed since Sai Baba was hospitalized March 28, kept tight control over road traffic and crowds. Shops were told to close to limit the number of people in town.

Sai Baba had a huge following, with ashrams in more than 126 countries and devotees in India including high-placed politicians, movie stars, world-class athletes and industrialists.

He was said to perform miracles, conjuring jewelry, Rolex watches and "vibhuti" - a sacred ash that his followers applied to their foreheads - from his halo of wild, frizzy hair.

But rationalist critics led campaigns against him, calling him a charlatan and his miracles fake. Several news reports alleged that he sexually abused devotees - accusations he denied as vilification campaigns.

Hundreds of thousands are expected to pay last respects in Puttaparti, where a funeral with state honors is planned for Wednesday morning.

Indian television ran nonstop news coverage Sunday of the guru's death, while officials and celebrities expressed sadness over an "irreparable loss."

"Sri Satya Sai Baba was a spiritual leader who inspired millions to lead a moral and meaningful life, even as they followed the religion of their choice," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in a statement. "The nation deeply mourns his passing away."

Andhra Pradesh state, where Puttaparti is located, declared four days of mourning, with its top official calling Sai Baba "a symbol of love, affection and passion."

"Sri Satya Sai Baba has given his great self to the service of humanity," Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy said. "He will be remembered for ages to come by all sections of people all over the world."

Born Nov. 23, 1926, as Sathyanarayana Raju, he was said as a child to display a tendency toward spirituality and unusual intelligence, which he expressed through music, dance and writing poetry and plays.

In 1940, at the age of 14, he declared himself an "avatar," or reincarnation, of another Hindu holy man called the Sai Baba of Shirdi, a town in western Maharashtra state, who died in 1918.

As the young guru attracted followers, his home of Puttaparti grew from a sleepy village into a vibrant town, with the sprawling "Prasanthi Nilayam" ashram built in 1950, as well as a large hospital, a university and schools run by his Satya Sai Central Trust, set up in 1972 with donations from devotees.

The trust - estimated to be worth at least \$-. billion and possibly much more - also established spi-itual centers in the cities of Mumbai, Hyderabad and Chennai. It built another hospital in Bangalore, where Sai Baba had a summer home, and funded water supply projects in several southern states.

Though no successor has been named to run the trust, "there is or will be no vacuum," a statement released after the guru was hospitalized said.

Health woes over recent years had forced Sai Baba to cut down on public appearances. He survived a stroke and a series of heart attacks in 1963. In 2005, he began using a wheelchair, and a year later he fractured his hip when a student fell from a stool onto him.

Sai Baba was also mired in controversies, with several news reports about allegations of se-ual abuse and fa-e mir-cles.

A 2004 BBC television program called the "S-cret Swami" featured interviews with at least two American male devotees who claimed the guru had fondled their g-nitals and exposed himself to them while claiming it was part of a he-ling ritual.

Though he denied the allegations and was never charged with any crime, the reports led some to break with the guru.

The ashram also said Sai Baba had survived an attempt against his life, with six devotees, including the guru's personal assistant, k-lled in his bedroom in June 1993 after allegedly trying to attack him. Facts of the case remain a mystery.

Sai Baba was never married and has no children.

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