



**Buddha statues from Gandhara, Pakistan**

# Pakistan holds conference on Buddhism

**T**he two-day international conference on 'Buddhism in Pakistan: History, Archaeology, Art and Architecture' on Tuesday unveiled the potential of religious tourism in Pakistan in terms of promoting social cohesion and interfaith harmony.

Managing Director Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation, Aftabur-Rehman Rana chaired the session on 'Potential of Religious Tourism in Pakistan' at the two-day conference. MD PTDC said, "We need to engage all the stakeholders to provide an ideal environment for the promotion of religious tourism especially for Buddhist religious tourism in Pakistan.

Pakistan is a land of great Buddhist heritage and there are millions of Buddhist who can be attracted to visit Pakistan.

He said, we need to especially involve local communities living in the vicinities of heritage sites through the sustainable heritage tourism in the protection and providing custodianship of the heritage sites. There is also need to create a self-financing mechanism through tourism promotion to better protect and manage the heritage sites of Buddhism which have great potential for attracting religious tourism".

During the session, topics like religious tourism, overcoming hindrances of religious tourism to enhance social cohesion in multi-religious settings, Potential of Religious Tourism in Pakistan with Special reference to Religious Heritage of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sri Lanka Image of "Taxila" in the Sri Lankan Folklore and Writing Context, Interfaith Dialogue and Peace Making in the Age of Globalization: A Necessity of Youth Involvement,

Potential for cultural diplomacy of Gandhara were covered.

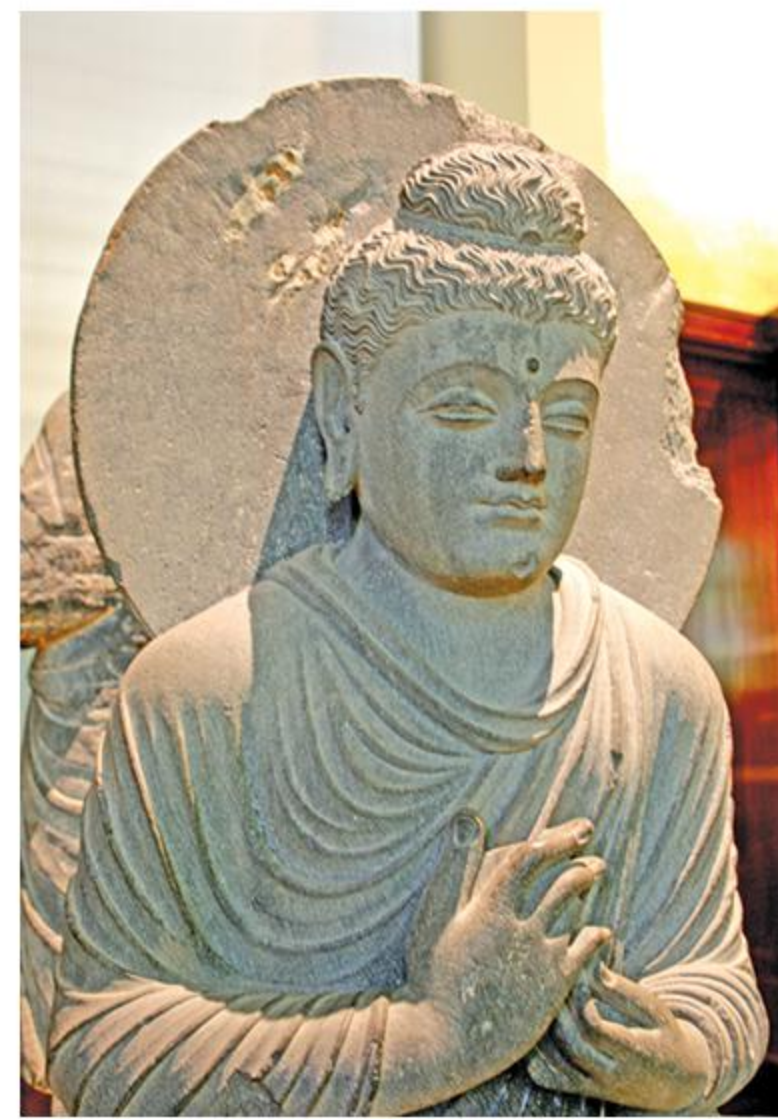
The two-day 2022 International Conference and Art Festival for Promoting Social Cohesion and Interfaith Harmony was jointly organised by Silk Road Centre, International Institute of Central Asian Studies, Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad and Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations with the support of PTDC, STFP, Serena and other organisations at Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) Islamabad.

Both in-person and online panel sessions provided an opportunity to multiple presenters to speak on a common theme of the conference. Presentations by the panelists were followed by questions and answers. Together with research presentations, the conference hosted an art festival featuring exhibition of Gandharan art and craft. In this exhibition, local and international artists presented the outstanding beauty of Buddhist art through their artworks and visual stories. The artwork was on display at the conference.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Federal Ministry of Education has said that Buddhism and Zoroastrianism will be added to the nation's religious studies curriculum, the Single National Curriculum (SNC). Five other minority religions will be added as well: Baha'i, Christianity, Hinduism, Kalash, and Sikhism.

The draft curriculum for Buddhism was accepted on March 4, while the others are still in process. The move marks the first time in Pakistan's history that such a broad set of religious studies recommendations has been undertaken by the Ministry of Education.

For Buddhists in Pakistan, the



move comes at a crucial time. There are few communities of Buddhist practitioners in the country, but a lack of places for worship and teachers has led some to worry that the religion could die out in the country. Meanwhile, archeologists have unearthed several ancient Buddhist sites in the country in recent years, increasing interest among Buddhist scholars and practitioners in visiting the country. In 2019, Pakistan Government gave authorization to the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism to establish a Buddhist temple at an ancient site in the country.

In a conference this week, Pakistan's President Dr. Arif Alvi said that Buddhism's propagation to places such as Korea and Japan came by way of Northern Pakistan, highlighting the role the country once played as a key nexus in the spread of the religion. In his address, he reportedly also said, "Buddha taught that in the presence of worldly desires, there could not be peace and this message was reflected in the image of fasting Buddha. Buddhism stressed upon curbing of desires in life to becoming familiar with other basic human emotions."

*(News International, APP)*