

Four people arrested for vandalising Buddha statue in Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa

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In yet another shocking incident, a recently discovered Buddha statue was smashed into pieces by local construction workers and a Muslim cleric on Saturday in Pakistan. The relic was discovered while digging the foundation for a house in the Pashtun-dominated Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province's Mardan district in Pakistan.

A video of the act, which has since gone viral on social media, showed the construction workers, along with a Muslim cleric, smashing the Buddha statue using a sledgehammer. They are seen walking over and destroying the life-sized Buddha statue while expressing their acrimony against Buddhism, which they consider anti-Islam.



According to reports, the statue was destroyed on the order of

a local Muslim cleric, who ruled that it is against Islam. 'Your nikah would cease to exist and you will no more be a believer if the statue isn't disposed of', the cleric told the people at the site, who then followed his orders to destroy the priceless relic, which was accidentally discovered in a good condition.

The vandalism of the ancient Buddha statue prompted by the Pakistan Army has brought much embarrassment for the Imran Khan-led government.

Four persons have been arrested in country's northwest Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province for smashing the ancient Buddha statue found during construction work in the Takhtbhai area of Mardan.

Dr Abdul Samad, KP director archaeology and museums, termed the destruction of the statue a "crime" and said "disrespecting any religion is intolerable". Dawn quoted him as saying that the statue belonged to Gandhara civilisation and was approximately 1700 years old. Buddhism thrived (*in Gandhara*) until the 8th or 9th centuries when Islam first began to gain sway in the region. Since 1836, when it was first excavated, archaeologists have dug out hundreds of relics made of clay, stucco, and terracotta in the area. Due to its historical and religious significance, it is a popular destination for Buddhist tourists from Sri Lanka, Japan, Korea etc. The Buddhist monastery is included in the World Heritage List.

Last month, in a similar incident, the ancient Buddhist rock carvings in the Chilas area of Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK)'s Gilgit-Baltistan has been desecrated by Islamists, who painted Pakistani flag and slogans on the rock-cut art. According to the reports, the incident came to light when the locals of Gilgit-Baltistan posted images on social media platforms. The Islamists had vandalised the rock carvings by writing Islamic slogans on the rock-art that belonged to 800

AD.

Recently construction of a temple in Islamabad was stopped under pressure from Islamists. The new temple planned for Islamabad, the city's first, was supposed to be a symbol of tolerance. Instead, violence and controversy have turned it into an emblem of Pakistan's troubled relationship with its religious minorities. Several Muslim clerics ruled that no Hindu temple should be built because Pakistan is a Muslim country.