

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1270

ANSWERED ON 06/02/2026

INDIA'S BUDDHIST DIPLOMACY

1270. SHRI JAGADAMBIKA PAL

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the manner in which recent 'Bodhi Yatra' and related initiatives have advanced India's Buddhist diplomacy in Southeast Asia and strengthened cultural and spiritual ties with ASEAN countries;

(b) the details of specific long-term strategies being formulated by the Government to sustain and enhance engagement with ASEAN nations through cultural diplomacy, including support for ASEAN Cultural Heritage projects and tourism cooperation;

(c) whether the Ministry is collaborating with State Governments, the Ministry of Tourism and other stakeholders to develop infrastructure and promote connectivity along the Buddhist circuit to meet international standards and facilitate increased tourism and bilateral exchanges, if so, the details thereof; and

(d) whether the Government is promoting cultural linkages between heritage sites like Piprahwa and Kapilavastu in Siddharthnagar district to Buddhist heritage sites abroad and if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

(SHRI PABITRA MARGHERITA)

(a to d) The objective of the Act East Policy of Government of India is to promote economic cooperation, strengthening cultural ties and developing strategic relationships including with the countries of Southeast Asia. Shared Buddhist heritage is an important aspect in our ties at bilateral, regional and multilateral level with many ASEAN countries. Cultural and spiritual connections are reinforced by regular exchange of visits of Buddhist Monks, senior functionaries, pilgrims and tourists.

In the past two years, based on request from partner countries, Government of India has facilitated two significant expositions of the Holy Relics of Lord Buddha in Southeast Asia. The first, held in Thailand from 22 February to 19 March 2024, included relics of Buddha and his disciples, and witnessed wide public participation across four venues, with over 40 lakh devotees in attendance. The second exposition was undertaken in Vietnam from 2 May to 2 June 2025, where relics from Nagarjunakonda,

Andhra Pradesh, were displayed at nine locations during UN Vesak celebrations, drawing an estimated 1.4 crores visitors. These initiatives contributed to fostering cultural linkages with the respective countries.

Under the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) Plan of Action (2019-24), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) organised a 9 days trip of travel agencies to prominent Buddhist sites for 49 participants, (from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam) from 02-10 June 2025 on nomination basis in coordination with Government of Uttar Pradesh and Government of Bihar.

Government of India has also contributed towards capacity building on Buddhist heritage, including through support for research, academic degree courses, short term training at various universities & institutions, including at the Nalanda University.

The year 2025 was designated as the ASEAN-India Year of Tourism, and several activities have been held to deepen tourism cooperation. Key initiatives to enhance visibility and cooperation included the ASEAN-India Tourism Professionals Exchange Programme held in Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Guwahati and Bengaluru. Also, ASEAN-India Tourism Ministers' Meeting is held on annual basis to facilitate exchange of views and promote tourism cooperation. India is supporting ASEAN in conducting a feasibility study for the development of an ASEAN Cultural Heritage List.

MEA has been facilitating events/conferences aimed at promotion of Tourism including Buddhist circuit and Buddhist heritage sites in various States in collaboration with Embassies of foreign governments in India. MEA also supports activities through our Missions/posts abroad including promoting Buddhist Circuit as part of their tourism-promotion initiatives. Indian missions have also been facilitating participation of State Governments in various tourism industry trade fairs in their respective countries.

The 2nd Global Buddhist Summit organised by the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture in New Delhi on 24-25 Jan 2026 witnessed participation from nearly 200 international representatives from across the world, including leaders of major Buddhist organisations, eminent monks, scholars, and followers of the Dhamma.

From 08-25 November 2025, the sacred Pirprahwa relics of Lord Buddha from India were on exposition in Bhutan. The sacred relics were received with much reverence by the Royal family, the government and the people of Bhutan. About 108,000 persons (14% of the Bhutan's population) visited the Holy Relics.

On 03 January 2026, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi inaugurated landmark exposition titled 'The Light and the Lotus: Relics of the Awakened One' showcasing the sacred Piprahwa Relics recently repatriated to India, at the Rai Pithora Cultural Complex, New Delhi. This historic event marks the reunification of the Piprahwa gem relics of Lord Buddha, repatriated after 127 years.
