

**Hon. Chief Minister of Bihar  
Shri Nitish Kumar**

## **Memorandum: Regarding Bodhgaya**

Respected Chief Minister of Bihar,

This Memorandum is a joint statement provided by three academic scholars working on Bodhgaya. We are Abhishek Singh Amar (PhD Candidate) from the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies; Prabhat Krishna (PhD Candidate) from the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies and David Geary (PhD Candidate) University of British Columbia, Department of Anthropology, Canada. All three of us are conducting research on different aspects [historical/archaeological, legal and developmental/anthropological respectively] of Bodhgaya for our respective PhD's and have spent considerable time at Bodhgaya in recent years. We feel that given the sites increasing global importance we may be of some assistance in offering a critical perspective and suggestions that can be taken into account in order to ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for this World Heritage site. We also feel that given the forthcoming transfer of management among the Bodhgaya Temple Management Committee (Hereinafter BTMC) in August 2007 that these points of concern may be useful for rethinking the long term potentiality of the place. We would like to draw your attention with regard to the appointments of new committee members. The new incumbents must be people of high integrity as well as professionally imbued as Bodhgaya is now under constant scrutiny of the transnational communities including the local populace.

In recent years the original vision of the site, as described by Jawaharlal Nehru in the post-independent era, has been exploited by various groups leading to much of the development/management predicaments the site is faced with today. As a result, Bodhgaya is losing its revered status as a site of sanctuary, peace and religious devotion and giving rise to a mismanaged commercialization of the site. Bodhgaya, being the de-facto birth-place of Buddhism, is the prime Buddhist center of world and therefore should reflect these sacred tenants in line with other major religious centers such as Vatican and Mecca. Bodhgaya is a shared cultural heritage of the people of Bihar, and we acknowledge that any sectarian tension in the name of Buddhist-Hindu identity is deplorable. Our intention in this memorandum is to ascertain Bodhgaya as a **shared cultural zone** reflecting fairness and justice to all its stakeholders.

It is quite obvious to envision the potentiality of this major transnational site in terms of its religious [pilgrimage] and cultural [tourist] importance and its impact on the overall developmental pattern of the place and Bihar in general. The development of the State of Bihar is largely dependent on agriculture, small-medium scale agro-industry and **'tourism'**. Bodhgaya and other Buddhist site of Bihar offer tremendous potential for

international tourism which any responsible government cannot overlook. The state government must pay serious attention to the concerns, highlighted in this memorandum.

The purpose of our memorandum is not to criticize the central or state government as we are certain you are already informed of the challenges and complexity of the site today. As academic scholars, it is also not our intention to interfere with state and government programs. We rather intend to offer constructive suggestions which can help establish coordination within the state administrative set-up to ensure the larger interest of Bodhgaya in terms of infrastructure requisite for a growing international destination. We are also familiar with the City Development Plan proposal for Bodhgaya and feel that this will certainly bring about many of the changes the public and devotees are anticipating.

## **I. MAIN CONCERN: Good Governance and Management of Bodhgaya**

We feel that the core concern of the site which needs to be addressed is

*“the lack of proper administrative structural coordination vis-à-vis state-district-local levels leading to the failure of institutional accountability related to the governance of Bodhgaya as a whole.”*

Due to the multiplicity of authoritative bodies, overlapping institutions and lack of implementation at bureaucratic levels in conversation with local bodies, Bodhgaya suffers from a long history of mismanagement, corruption, negligence and growing mistrust between the various stakeholders.

The role and mandate of BTMC as enunciated in the Bodhgaya Temple Act, 1949 are archaic and do not reflect the reality of this temple city of 2007. It is quite reasonable to assert that a new legislative instrument is very much required which would be compatible in addressing the complexities and status of this international heritage. We understand that a revised legislative instrument would not be possible before the appointment of new BTMC. In order to have proper governance, the prerequisite step is the precise demarcation of the site (Temple city). For the time being, at least precise demarcation of the Bodhgaya administrative zone is earnestly solicited.

### **Examples:**

- Lack of accountability and transparency within BTMC (especially regarding the channels of donations and aid) leading to questioning of integrity of members of the Temple Management Committee from both the local and international Buddhist community.
- Breakdown of Bodhgaya Temple Advisory Board (which met in 2006 for the first time in over ten years). Lack of effective communication between international Buddhists and local authorities especially over the acquisition of land.
- A rotating District Magistrate serving as Ex-Officio Chairman to the Mahabodhi Temple without proper understanding of the sites complexity and importance.

- Inadequacy of the Bodhgaya Temple Management Committee to address issues outside of the main temple.
- Structural complexity without clear flow of administrative duties by multiple governance agencies. A general lack of clearly defined roles.
- Mushrooming of NGOS with lack of accountability – requires some regulative mechanism that can verify their mandate and work in terms of accountability.
- Alienation and lack of active participation by local citizens.
- Bodhgaya Temple Management Act continues to reify the politics of identity opposing 'Hindus' and 'Buddhists' leading to clashes between different religious groups.

## II. Developmental Concerns

As a result of the core concerns and issues highlighted above it directly feeds into the neglect of the socio-economic development, environment, heritage value and deterioration of the surrounding landscape.

### Examples:

- Since 1961 all the Master Plans prepared for Bodhgaya have been neglected which led to the haphazard development, urban congestion and environmental degradation of the site.
- Growing carrying capacity without addressing increasing pressure on the environment including: blockage of water bodies/channels, sewage management and maintenance of proper sanitation in line with an international pilgrimage site.
- Lack of proper excavation and conservation of heritage/archaeological zones.
- Lack of clear demarcation of site areas: religious space, urban, agricultural. No clear specificity of land use.
- Lack of proper connectivity and effective transportation nodes.
- Growing creation of social ills – begging, drugs and alcohol, harassment of visitors.
- Visual approach to Bodhgaya has been undermined due to urban construction and unregulated growth, such as the eight existing mobile towers.

## III. SUGGESTIONS:

Modeled after the West Bengal Heritage Act of 2002, we would like to propose an alternative framework of management where proper coordination between various stakeholders and bodies of expertise can be installed and reflects the growing concerns of the site. This form of management will involve both local, state and central authorities and international members. There will be a core committee that meets every two months [similar to the existing structure of the BTMC] and the larger advisory-technical body that will meet bi-annually [or as needed]. In those cases where representatives may not be present they will be informed of the details of each meeting. **For each member there will be clearly defined roles and responsibilities.**

The most reasonable immediate step for improving the existing scenario is to appoint the new BTMC as per the existing provision of the Bodhgaya Temple Act, 1949, who can make positive contribution in the aforementioned concerns. Our suggestions in that regard for the forthcoming appointments of the members of BTMC [due in August, 2007] are as follows:

### **BTMC – 9 Members**

- The District Magistrate (Ex-officio Chairman) - ideally it would be better to have a separate IAS official regulating the day to day affairs of the BTMC, rather than DM of the district. This is also necessary for accomplishment of the long term challenges and developmental plan of Bodhgaya
- Bodhgaya Mahant
- Secretary – A professionally-qualified and skilled manager, and possessing considerable experience of managing an international institution.
- Chief Buddhist Monk, learned monk of pious integrity.
- Representative of International Buddhist monasteries at Bodhgaya.
- A reputed citizen from the local community who possesses considerable knowledge and experience in social and charitable activities.
- UNESCO/INTACH member
- A reputed Buddhist scholar, having the sound knowledge of Buddhist heritage of Bihar.
- Representative of Indian Buddhist community.

**This committee should be entrusted with a task of constituting the following three bodies and granting them the consultative status.** One of the members of BTMC should serve as the spokesperson of the committee. Other than the Ex-officio Chairperson and the Mahant, all the appointments should be made through a **proper recruitment process**, duly advertised in the national/international media.

The most important and immediate task for the BTMC is to establish a **central information centre, in the vicinity of Mahabodhi Mahavihara**, for disseminating information to pilgrims and tourists on important Buddhist sites of Bihar including Bodhgaya and provide registered guides, transportation amenities, charities and NGOs, tourist police task force etc.

### **Consultative Bodies:**

#### **1. RELIGIOUS BODY: 6 Members**

- International Buddhist Council: One Indian Buddhist, Two Foreign Buddhist, Chief Monk (total 4 Buddhist)
- Bodhgaya Mahant
- Local Muslim religious representative [to represent the mosque at Taradih and the local Muslim population]

The main role of this body is to advise on the religious harmony in the area, and also to ascertain that religious functions are carried with utmost sincerity.

## **2. TECHNICAL BODY: 13 Members**

- Archaeologist: member of the Archaeological Survey of India
- Urban Planner
- Tourism: member of Bihar State Tourism/Central Ministry of Tourism
- Sociologist: Advisor for rural reconstruction.
- External Bodhgaya Scholarship Body: - one Magadh/Nalanda University scholar and up to four international-Indian experts.
- Security and Legal Consultant
- Financial Accountant with proper training and background
- INTACH Member: Indian Cultural Heritage Expert.
- UNESCO Member

The role of the technical body is to supervise the infrastructural development of the entire Bodhgaya temple city. The archaeologist and urban planner should work in tandem to develop the heritage potentiality and urban planning of the area beyond the temple precincts in accordance with the archaeological, architectural and aesthetic concerns. The concept of “Heritage Walk” can be explored to bring together the existing sites in the neighboring environs of Bodhgaya such as Bakror, Taradih, Dungeshwari etc. This should be done in consultation with the members representing Tourism, INTACH and UNESCO.

It is very important for the BTMC to seek the expertise of the members of this body. This body must prepare the yearly report and the Chief Minister should evaluate the progress on that basis.

## **3. CIVIL BODY: 7 Members**

- MP
- MLA
- Divisional Commissioner
- District Magistrate
- Member of the Nagar Panchayat
- Two Members from Local Business Community: Hotels and Shopkeepers

The civil body should be entrusted with the task of supervising smooth interactions between the administrative authorities and peoples’ representatives to ensure proper governance of the area. This body can take stock of the local concerns important for various segments of the society thereby facilitating the exchange of ideas between people’s representatives and administrative authorities. It should also liaise with the Chief-minister’s office.

**In addition we want to offer some general suggestions that may be taken into account:**

- A need for transparency including a **suggestion box**.
- Proper linkage of **railways** to Bodhgaya.
- Publication of **annual financial report** and minutes that is to be reviewed by State and Central bodies.
- Implementation of **land cap** and no exchange for ownership without permission from specialized body.
- Public institutions including: hospital, women's college, vet clinic and research institute that includes a **Centre for Dialogue and Peace and a Centre for Buddhist Studies of international standards**. For example the Centre for Buddhist Studies can liaise with various academic institutions of the world which organize annual training programmes at Bodhgaya. It should also provide research facilities for visiting scholars.
- Greater initiatives for **local employment** such as availability of foreign-languages, tourism-management courses to the local youth which can generate employment opportunities and also sensitize locals towards the needs of the transnational visitors.
- **Local spaces** such as auditorium and lecture theatres for organizing cultural and academic activities in Bodhgaya.
- **Heritage trails** and connectivity of other Buddhist sites involving a pilgrimage map [not golf courses, and rope ways]. An appropriate vision of the landscape that takes into account of its living and ritual component.
- The heritage zone/trails should establish and include **green spaces and parks** in the surrounding environs of Bodhgaya.
- The planned **Golf-Course should be abandoned**. At present the current Master Plan that involves the construction of an 18 Hole Golf course and 1 kilometer Ropeway neither reflects the interests of Buddhist pilgrims, visitors and impoverished residents nor suits the religious and aesthetic values.
- **Tibet culture centre area** should be established where annual Tibetan festivals and ritual-ceremonies can be organized.
- No revenue extracted from meditation areas and parks and should be freely accessible.
- **Preservation of sculptures** should include measures such as ensuring **no gold polish** to the sculptures of historic value installed within the temple-precincts, **re-location of historical sculptures from the Mahant's math to Bodhgaya museum**. Votive stupas with inscriptions are lying in awkward positions at relatively unsafe place within the Math and hence should be relocated to the museum as well.
- Locals need to be sensitized to the value of heritage and needs of the site.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

We hope you will take the time to look into these constructive suggestions we have offered. We do not intend to circulate this letter to other groups and will wait to hear that

you have received notice of our letter. However at a later date we would like to disseminate this in order to bring out further dialogue and discussion over these matters preferably at a Bihar State sponsored meeting that could involve the different members as outlined above. In furtherance of this goal, we are also organising one-day interdisciplinary panel on Bodhgaya and many of the above raised issues at **XVth Congress of International Association of Buddhist Studies Conference, 2008 at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA**. Kindly apprise us of the receipt of the memorandum either by email or by post.

The contact details of the aforementioned authors are as follows:

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**CC: His Excellency The President of India.  
His Excellency The Governor of Bihar**

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