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Global protests did nothing to dent the Taliban's resolve

India and Pakistan have led global condemnation of the Taliban's destruction of two ancient statues of the Buddha in Afghanistan, which was confirmed on Monday.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee described the demolition of the Buddhas in central Bamiyan province as "an act of barbarism".

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar, who has accused the international community of doing too little, said it was "a tragic disaster".

In Bangladesh, a rally was held in the capital, Dhaka, to protest against the destruction, as Muslim nations from Malaysia to the Middle East queued up to stress the attacks on the statues had nothing to do with Islam.

Earlier Unesco Director-general Koichiro Matsuura said in a statement that the demolition of the relics was complete.

"I was distressed to learn from my special envoy, Pierre LaFrance, that the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas has been confirmed," he said.

Mr LaFrance has visited Afghanistan twice in an attempt to save the artefacts, but to no avail.

The Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil, in Islamabad to meet with UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan,

“The whole world community remained a passive spectator to the disaster”

Pakistan Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar

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confirmed that the two giant statues had indeed been destroyed, along with all moveable artefacts.

"We do admit all these statues were the cultural heritage of Afghanistan, but we will not leave the part which is contrary to our belief." Mr Mutawakil said.

### Explosives

Even a delegation of senior Muslim scholars from the 55-nation Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) had been unable to dent the Taleban's resolve to annihilate the country's pre-Islamic heritage.

Journalists are barred from the region, but international aid workers have confirmed that the militia used explosives to bring down the soaring statues.

"The destruction work is not as easy as people would think," Taleban Information Minister Qudratullah Jamal told Reuters.

The statues are now said to lie in ruins at the foot of the cliff where they have stood since the second and fifth century.

### Intolerance

Standing at 51 and 36 metres high, the statues were once a symbol of the religious tolerance that pervaded the region but today Bamiyan is a war zone.

Islamic leaders around the world have stressed that the Taleban's iconoclasm has no justification in Islam.

Only Sudan and Saudi Arabia, one of only three countries to recognise the Taleban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, have remained quiet.

Kofi Annan, in Pakistan on a tour of the region, described the Taleban's acts as a "disservice" to themselves and to Islam.

Some analysts believe the demolition of the statues may have come in retaliation for UN sanctions imposed for the Taleban's refusal to hand over Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden.



The Taleban Foreign Minister confirmed the destruction



The statues were among Asia's great archaeological treasures

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