
Militants try to blow up Buddha statue in Pakistan

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Militants try to blow up Buddha statue in Pakistan (enews)

A survived statue of Buddha carved into a rock is seen in Jehanabad. (AP Photo/Hameedullah Khan)

PESHAWAR, Pakistan (AP) - Islamic militants tried to blow up a large statue of Buddha carved into a mountainside in northwestern Pakistan, but did not damage the structure, officials and a witness said Wednesday.

The incident occurred in the small village of Jehanabad in North West Frontier Province, a stronghold of pro-Taliban militants on the border with Afghanistan.

A group of armed men arrived in the village late Monday saying they were mujahedeen, or holy warriors, and told residents they wanted to blow up the seven-metre-high statue, said villager Amir Khan.

"I told them that there are houses near to the rock and any blast could put our lives in danger, but they pointed their weapons at us," said Khan. "We heard the sound of drilling twice and then early Tuesday morning we heard two blasts."

The statue was not damaged, but some of the rock surrounding it was blown away, officials said.

"Luckily, the actual statue of the Buddha is safe," said Abdul Nasir, assistant curator of the museum in nearby Swat town. "Islam teaches us to respect other religions and faiths, but unfortunately some elements are disturbing the peace in the Swat valley."

The statue was built around the first century AD, during the Gandhara era, which flourished in that part of Pakistan from the 6th century BC to the 11th century AD, according to Fida Ullah Sehrai, an expert on Buddhist archeology and former director of the Peshawar Museum.

In March 2001, Taliban militants in central Afghanistan dynamited two giant Buddha statues, deeming them idolatrous and anti-Muslim. It was one of the regime's most widely condemned acts.

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Re:Militants try to blow up Buddha statue in Pakistan

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