International Partners Pledge Support for Bagan Renovations

By NYEIN NYEIN  16 February 2017

International partners pledged financial and technical support in the restoration of central Burma’s quake-hit ancient Bagan pagodas, during a two-day international conference on the renovations, from Feb 15-16.

The conference, held in Bagan, was attended by experts from Burma, China, Japan, India and South Korea, as well as representatives from the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
“We are collaborating to be able to best renovate those damaged temples,” said U Aung Aung Kyaw, director of the Bagan branch of Burma’s Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library. “The discussions are on very detailed renovation work, such as what we found during our assessments and which materials would be best used in renovating the affected temples.”

Burmese authorities, in collaboration with national and international experts, have conducted assessments of the stupas and undertook emergency stabilization measures following the 6.8-magnitude Aug. 24 earthquake; 389 out of a total of 790 temples in Bagan and the surrounding area were left in need of repair.

As of last week, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture had received more than 5 trillion kyats and US$1 million from nationals’ contributions, according to figures released by state-run media.

On Wednesday, during his address to the International Conference on the Proposed Program of Bagan Monuments Post-Earthquake Restoration and Preservation, Chinese ambassador to Burma Hong Liang confirmed his country’s donation of US$1 million, which Mr. Liang pledged last year.

China’s State Administration of Cultural Heritage also lent its support by dispatching two teams of archaeological experts to Bagan “to cooperate with the UNESCO and experts from other countries to jointly undertake the repair work,” said the ambassador.

“Through the Bagan Pagoda repair cooperation, the cultural bond of Buddhism between China and Myanmar will be even stronger and our traditional pauk-paw friendship will blossom forever,” said Hong Liang, using a term to reference a relationship like the one between siblings.

Germany also promised a contribution of 100,000 euros ($106,400) to the cause, said U Aung Aung Kyaw.

He added that the total donations should be enough to cover the costs of the repairs, including both short- and long-term measures to preserve the cultural sites.

Min Jeong Kim, the head of UNESCO in Burma, called for “all conservation efforts to be better coordinated and to adhere to international standards and conservation norms.”
Ms. Kim said in a press statement released on Wednesday that UNESCO had prepared rehabilitation guidelines endorsed by the Burmese Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, and added that a detailed checklist with required procedures for planning and implementing restoration work would also be put in place.

U Aung Aung Kyaw added that Burma would accept and abide by those guidelines, so that Bagan could be added to UNESCO’s World Heritage sites.

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