

Copy of Political Department demi-official letter No.F.49-I.A./40, dated the 9th/10th July 1941, to the Hon'ble the Resident for Central India, Indore.

Buddhist relics from Sanchi.

Please refer to your demi-official letter No.139-S dated the 30th January 1941, on the above subject.

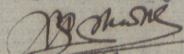
2. The position briefly stated is that in January 1939 on a representation from the Budha Society, Bombay, addressed to H.E.the Viceroy, the Government of India made enquiries whether the Victoria and Albert Museum would hand over to India two Budhist relics containing the ashes of two of the chief disciples of Bhdha. In June 1939 the Government of India heard through the Secretary of State that the Board of Education and the trustees of the Museum agreed to do so. Much discussion then ensued, into which both Burma and Ceylon entered, and it was finally decided to hand the relics over to the Maha Bodhi Society in India. They themselves proposed to enshrine them in the Buddhist temple in New Delhi. By the time, however, that this decision was reached, war had broken out and it was agreed by all concerned that the relics should not be shipped to India under war conditions.

The original request from the Bhopal Government conveyed in your demi-official letter No.914-S, dated 2nd September 1940, came about a year later and would appear to have been based originally upon a misapprehension. The relics referred to are quite different and are stated to be in the British Museum, not the Victoria and Albert. So far as the Government of India are aware, no proposal to transfer these relics to India has ever been entertained and it is doubtful whether it is likely to be considered favourable by the Museum authorities in England. It was, however, explained in Maynard's  
demi-official.

demi-official letter No.F.49-I.A./40, dated the 9th October 1940, that the proposed transfer related only to two relics of particular religious significance. It is not clear that H.H.the Nawab of Bhopal, when he wrote to Major Edwards on the 7th December 1940, fully appreciated the real position, which is that the Museum authorities are prepared to surrender the two relics because they have no outstanding archaeological or antiquarian value. That being so, it is, in the opinion of the Government of India, for the Maha Bodhi Society to decide where the relics should be enshrined and it would be objectionable for the Government of India to interfere in a matter in which the decision must be dictated by religious sentiment. You will no doubt appreciate that in any case this cannot become a live issue so long as the war continues, since the various Buddhist Societies prefer not to risk the transport of the relics in war conditions.

3. In the circumstances H.E.the Crown Representative would be glad if the position as stated above is kindly explained to H.H.the Nawab of Bhopal and he is told that, although the Government of India are reluctant to reopen the discussion on the ground that the matter is mainly religious and that it is impossible now to disturb an arrangement agreed upon after prolonged discussion with the accredited representative of the Buddhist religion, they would have no objection if the Bhopal Government can persuade the Maha Bodhi Society, as the representative body of Buddhist opinion in India, to whose custody, under present arrangements, the relics are to be transferred, to agree to the ashes being enshrined at Sanchi instead of at New Delhi.

True Copy,



For Head Clerk,  
Central India Agency Office.