

On July 7, 2013, a series of ten bombs exploded in a terrorist attack at the Mahabodhi Temple complex in Bodh Gaya, India, in a coordinated attack by the Indian Mujahideen on the important Buddhist temple and UNESCO World Heritage Site where the Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment.

The Mahabodhi Temple

- The Mahabodhi Temple is one of the four sites related to the life of the Buddha and is the site where Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment in 531 B.C.¹ It is also known as “the Land of Peace” and the “Temple of the Great Awakening” and is located in Bodh Gaya, in the state of Bihar, India. The complex became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2002.²
- The first temple on the site was built in the 3rd century B.C. by Emperor Asoka and the current temple dates from the 5th or 6th centuries A.D.³
- The temple complex comprises of six sacred places in an enclosed area and a seventh, the Lotus Pond, just outside the enclosure to the south. The most important of the sacred places is the Bodhi Tree, which lies to the west of the main temple, and is said to be a direct descendent of the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha sat as he became enlightened.⁴

The Mahabodhi Temple Bombings

- On the morning of July 7, 2013 between 05:30 and 06:00am a series of ten⁵ bombs exploded at the Mahabodhi Temple complex and at other targets within a 500 metre radius of the main temple. The explosions occurred at the same time as daily morning Sutta chanting and meditation.
- Thirteen bombs in total were planted sites at the main Mahabodhi Temple and the surroundings areas.⁶ The bombs had been placed at key points aiming to inflict maximum damage, but the ten that detonated were found to have exploded twelve hours early due to damp weather conditions.⁷ Three bombs were later defused by bomb-disposal squads, including powerful devices at the 80-foot Buddha statue near Terega monastery in the neighbouring village of Baiju Bigha.^{8,9}
- Two monks, one Burmese and one Tibetan, were injured in the blasts, though there were no fatalities.¹⁰ The main temple itself and the sacred Bodhi Tree were undamaged in the attack, although the Archaeological Survey of India confirmed that damage had been done to structures in the complex.¹²
- In November 2013 the National Investigation Agency (NIA) announced that the Indian Mujahideen (IM) were responsible for the bombings. The investigators unearthed evidence linking to the attack in Ranchi, Jharkhand province, where the cell that masterminded the jihadist attack at Bodh Gaya had an outfit.^{13,14}

“[O]ur composite culture and traditions teach us respect for all religions and such attacks on religious places will never be tolerated.”¹¹

Official press release from the Prime Minister's Office of Manmohan Singh

The Indian Mujahideen, a jihadist group linked to the Pakistani organisation Lashkar-e-Taiba was found to be responsible for the attacks in November 2013.

Indian Mujahideen

- The Indian Mujahideen (IM) is a militant jihadist group that, according to reports, formed between 2005 and 2008 and is connected to the Pakistani jihadist organisation Lashkar-e-Taiba.^{15,16,17,18}
- The US Department of State listed the Indian Mujahideen as a terrorist organisation in September 2011, citing the IM's responsibility for “dozens of bomb attacks throughout India since 2005, and [their causing] the deaths of hundreds of innocent civilians”.¹⁹
- The IM mostly uses simple bombs and have claimed responsibility for such high-profile attacks such as the 2007 Uttar Pradesh bombings, the 2010 Varanasi bombing and 2011 Mumbai serial blasts. They often claim responsibility by sending an email to Indian media outlets detailing their involvement.²⁰
- This appears to be one of the only attacks by the Indian Mujahideen on a religious or sacred site, as their attacks often centre on crowded urban areas, and certainly the only attack to date to attempt so extensively to cause destruction to the site as well as injure civilians. There has been speculation that this attack was planned as retaliation for violence against Muslims in Myanmar by Buddhists.^{21,22}

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