



CONCEPT NOTE
PAHARPUR DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Prepared by:
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ABOUT SOMAPURA MAHAVIRA

Evidence of the rise of Mahayana Buddhism in Bengal from the 7th century onwards, Somapura Mahavira, or the Great Monastery, was a renowned intellectual centre until the 12th century. The symmetrical layout and massively built single unit of the monastery was perfectly adapted to its religious function. The striking architectural form introduced at Paharpur on a grand scale for the first time in Asia, profoundly influenced the subsequent construction of temples of Pagan in Myanmar and Loro-Jongrang and Chandi Sewer temples in central Java. It also continued to influence Buddhist architecture as far away as Cambodia, Angkor Wat (built in 12th c).

Geographically located to the north-west of Bangladesh in the district of Naogaon, the heart-land of ancient “Varendra”, close to the village of Paharpur the extensive ruins of the Buddhist monastic complex are the most important pre-Islamic monument in Bangladesh.

Somapura Mahavihara, in **Paharpur is the most spectacular and magnificent monument in Bangladesh and the second largest single Buddhist monastery on south of the Himalayas.** It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



PAHARPUR NOW

Yet, with all of its history and heritage, the site still fails to be recognized as a tourism hub for the country with remaining work still in excavation and restoration. Paharpur only manages to generate tourist revenue in the range of \$60,000 yearly. Similar sites such as Angkor Wat Park makes \$100 million annually from a whopping 2.6 million visitors from the world over.

PROPOSED PLAN

The proposed action is to restore the site, continue efforts in excavation and develop tourism infrastructure in and around the city to attract the domestic and international attention this 1,200 year old site deserves.

The absolute economic contribution of tourism in Bangladesh is projected to reach just over \$1 billion by 2026, up 0.7% from 2021, where international tourism is expected to reach 378,000 in 2026, a 2.5% increase from 2021, a 12.4% increase since 2000.

Factors relating to government priorities along with barriers for private sector intervention in the past are responsible for the wasted potential of a world heritage site which is four centuries older than Angkor Wat. To excavate, restore and maintain the site along with acquisition and development of properties to build hospitality and recreational infrastructure such as resorts & recreation zones would require an estimated value of \$350 million USD. In order to sustain, the plan is also to develop housing surrounding Somapura Mahavihara, priming the location for other attractions beyond the site.



In collaboration with entities such as BIDA, BTB, BPC, Archaeology Department and Relevant Private International and Local Parties in real estate, tourism and hospitality and joint efforts from local, governmental and international experts from relevant industries and sectors are crucial to make this project a success, one that matches global standards.

ISHO is a leader in design and furniture led by Rayana Hossain, who has a degree in Architecture and Landscape Architecture from Harvard University. The company is a sister concern of Dekko Isho Group, one of the oldest conglomerates in, Bangladesh doing business in various industries for over 7 decades.