

Archaeologists found temple under Babri Mosque rubble

AFP, Lucknow

Indian archaeologists have found a medieval Hindu temple under the remains of an Islamic shrine that was razed by Hindus in 1992 sparking deadly nationwide riots, a report unveiled in court yesterday said.

Muslim leaders immediately vowed to challenge the study, which described a 10th century temple with Hindu carvings, that was found under the rubble of the Babri Mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya.

More than a decade ago thousands of Hindu zealots pulled down the 16th century mosque saying it was built after a temple to their mythological warrior god Ram was destroyed.

The act sparked off nationwide Hindu-Muslims riots that left 2,000 people dead and became a key issue in the electoral campaign of the Hindu nationalist BJP party, which now heads the coalition government.

The dispute over the site is now

in the hands of the courts which ordered the report by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Monday's release of the sensitive document was followed almost immediately by two car bomb blasts that killed at least 44 people and injured 100 in India's financial capital Bombay. It was not known if there was any connection.

A summary of the report, released by the court, said there was "archaeological evidence of a massive structure just below the disputed structure (the mosque) and evidence of continuity in structural phases from the 10th century onwards up to the construction of the disputed structure."

In the report, archaeologists said they found decorated bricks as well as a "mutilated sculpture of a divine couple", a circular shrine with a waterchute and 50 pillar bases with temple-style carvings including lotus motifs.

The lotus is a symbol associated

with the Hindu religion, while waterchutes are seen usually only in Hindu temples.

These were "indicative of remains which are distinctive features found associated with the temples of the north," said the report.

ASI, a government body which cares for historical monuments, Friday handed over the sealed report on its excavations to the Lucknow High Court, which Monday held a closed-door hearing to study the findings.

Mohammad Shameem, one of the top lawyers representing the Muslims in the high-profile case, told AFP that people should not jump to conclusions about the mosque being positioned over a temple.

"Whatever structures have been found are located at least 150 feet (45 metres) away from the disputed site," Shameem told reporters after coming out of the hearing.

"It would be wrong to jump to conclusions."

Meanwhile, Zafaryab Jilani, convenor of the All India Babri Masjid Action Committee, a Muslim group that is a plaintiff in the case, said the ASI report was "vague and self-contradictory and prepared under political pressure."

"We have sought a month's time to go through the report after which we will file our objections," said Jilani, who also attended Monday's court hearing.

The court said it would grant both parties six weeks to file their objections to the findings of the ASI report.

ASI has declined to disclose the report's contents but others say it runs to 574 pages and contains substantial visual evidence.

The dig at India's most sensitive religious site began on March 12 and was supposed to be finished in a month, but the court granted ASI several extensions.

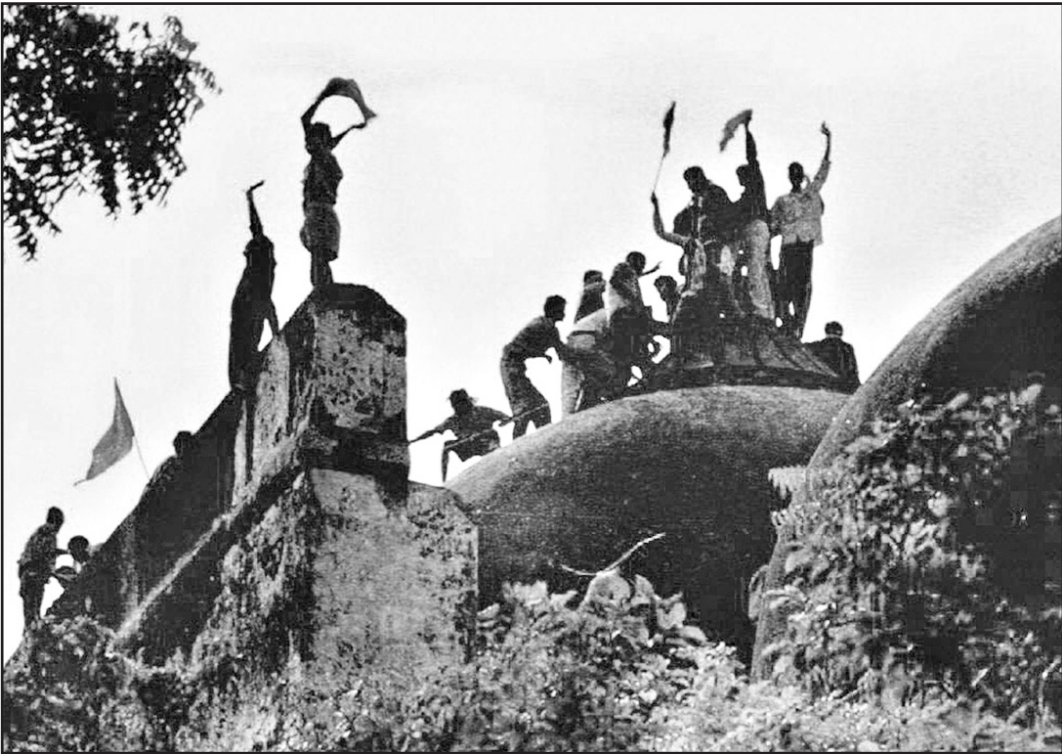


PHOTO: AFP

In this picture taken on December 6, 1992, Hindu fundamentalists shout and wave banners as they stand on the top of a stone wall and celebrate the destruction of the 16th century Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. Archaeologists in a report to an Indian court yesterday claimed they found the remains of a Hindu temple below the surface of the mosque. The 1992 razing of the Babri Mosque sparked off nationwide Hindu-Muslim riots that left more than 2,000 people dead, Hindus believe the Babri Mosque was built in the 16th century after razing a temple to their mythological warrior god Rama in the northern Indian town of Ayodhya.



PHOTO: AFP

Israeli soldiers receive instructions moments before a military operation in Gaza Strip yesterday. Israeli helicopter gunships late Sunday killed four Palestinians, including two militants of the radical group Hamas, in the first attack since the formal breakdown of a ceasefire two days ago.

ME conflict shows no signs of abating

4 more Palestinians killed in Israeli air strikes

AFP, Jerusalem

The Middle East conflict showed no signs of abating yesterday, with Israel vowing to wipe out Palestinian militant leaders and the Palestinians swearing revenge for a new air strike that left four dead.

At the same time, a struggle within the Palestinian leadership for control of security services intensified with Palestinian patriarch Yasser Arafat appointing a new adviser to restructure the security apparatus.

Tensions rose further after four militants of the radical group Hamas, including one described as chief of operations, were struck down Sunday night in Gaza City by rockets fired from Israeli attack helicopters.

It was the second air strike on

Hamas in three days and the first since the hardline movement and the Islamic Jihad group announced Friday they were calling off a seven-week-old truce already badly stained with blood.

Israel, which considered the truce dead after a suicide bombing last week killed 21 passengers on a Jerusalem bus including several children, made it clear Monday it would press its campaign to assassinate militant chiefs.

A senior security source told AFP a meeting of senior military officials late Sunday decided to continue or even intensify the strikes because the Palestinian Authority was doing nothing to rein in radicals.

The army chief of staff, Lieutenant General Moshe Yaalon, served notice Sunday that no militant leader was safe.

"As far as we are concerned, the radical core, from the first to the last, are targets for liquidation," he said.

Hamas' armed wing vowed to avenge the death of its four members killed in the air strike Sunday, three days after one of the group's senior political leaders Ismail Abu Shanab and two bodyguards were killed in a similar attack.

"We will counterattack as soon as possible the crimes of the Zionist occupation," said a statement from the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades' sent to AFP's offices in Gaza City.

With Palestinian anger rising since the death of Abu Shanab, tens of thousands were expected to turn out Monday for the funerals of the latest Hamas victims, three in the southern Gaza town of Rafah and the fourth in Gaza City.

Mayawati dismisses resignation reports

AFP, Lucknow

The chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, Monday dismissed reports that she had quit but said instead she had recommended the dissolution of the provincial assembly.

"These are all rumours that I have quit," Chief Minister Mayawati, who like most Indians uses only one name, told reporters after meeting Uttar Pradesh state Governor Vishnu Kant Shastri.

She said she had recommended the dissolution of the assembly but added, "Whether or not to dissolve the assembly is left up to the governor."

Compounding the situation in the state, Uttar Pradesh BJP president Vinay Katiyar said his party had withdrawn support for Mayawati's coalition government.

Rough road ahead for Roh

THE KOREA HERALD/ ANN, Seoul

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun marked exactly six months since he took the oath of office as the 16th president.

Raised by a poor peasant family without a college background, Roh's dramatic victory in last year's presidential election signified a major paradigm shift in the country's presidency and politics.

In his inauguration speech, the former human rights lawyer promised to build a fair society where reason and common sense would dominate.

Special privileges would not be allowed.

Over the past half year, he devoted himself to bringing significant change in every corner of society, particularly in the areas of media reform and focusing on the country's two most powerful agencies, the prosecution and the National Intelligence Service.

Shattered cars, blood litter Mumbai blast scenes

AFP, Mumbai

Mumbai's most famous landmark overlooking the Arabian Sea was littered with mangled car parts, blood and shattered glass yesterday.

Throng of tourists and trinket-sellers spending a leisurely afternoon outside the Gateway of India arch were sent scurrying for cover as a taxi in the parking lot blew apart, smashing window panes across the street at the Taj Mahal Hotel, Mumbai's most prestigious address.

Seven minutes later, another taxi exploded outside one of the city's most popular Hindu temples inside Mumbai's densely populated old city, demolishing a ramshackle shop selling fruit juice.

Kanak Raja had just parked his Mitsubishi Lancer outside the Gateway of India when a taxi

exploded, sending splinters flying in all directions.

"The roof of the taxi was ripped apart and was thrown at least 100 metres (yards) near the entrance of the Taj Mahal," he said, referring to the luxury hotel whose guests have included everyone from Prince Charles to Michael Jackson.

"There was chaos. People ran for cover and shouted. Some people had blood streaming from their bodies," Raja said.

Tanaji Pawar, a bus driver, was startled by the blast as he walked towards the Gateway of India, an archway built by British colonialists in 1924 after a visit by King George V.

"I rushed back when I heard the explosion," Pawar said, adding he saw panic-stricken men and women running helter-skelter.

"I helped some of the injured people, bundled them into private

cars or cabs and rushed them to hospital," he said.

"It was a scene of complete anarchy and chaos. I knew when I lifted some of the injured that they had no chances of survival. They were dead."

The whole area was cordoned off, with scores of police scouring the scene for clues. Sniffer dogs were brought out to search for other bombs around southern Bombay, the city's financial heart.

Minutes later a taxi exploded outside the Mumbadevi temple named after the patron goddess of the city -- known locally as Mumbai.

A small shop selling juice was rendered unrecognisable with a few surrounding shops and cars also destroyed. The dense jungle of buildings around the temple saved the shrine from any damage.

Democrat Dean seeks to challenge Bush on Iraq

AFP, Seattle

Cheering supporters packed a Seattle park to hear former Vermont governor Howard Dean, an opponent of the US war in Iraq, who is emerging as a frontrunner in the field of candidates seeking to challenge President George W. Bush in the 2004 election.

"People are sleepless in Seattle wondering whether they'll have health care, keep their jobs or if their kid will be the next to die in Iraq," Dean said Sunday at Seattle's Westlake Park where some 2,000 supporters turned out to hear the candidate seeking to win the Democratic Party's nomination for the presidential election.

Dean is following Bush in the economically-depressed US northwestern states of Idaho, Oregon and Washington to address economic and environmental woes and press his outspoken criticism of the Iraq war.

The president has been vacationing on his ranch in Texas but has made several trips to western states to raise funds for his presidential campaign and tout his environmental initiatives.

Up to 500 drum-banging demonstrators expressed their disapproval of Bush when he visited Seattle Friday.

Dean says he will repeal tax cuts proposed by Bush and use the funds to build infrastructure, fund a health care system and help with jobs and education.

The family doctor from the small, politically insignificant East Coast state has political traction on the left-leaning West Coast. In Seattle, a majority of citizens told pollsters they were against the Iraq war from the onset.

The Dean campaign is gaining steam not only on the liberal West Coast, but nationally. A recent national CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll showed him leading in the

important early primary states, Iowa and New Hampshire, and polling well in voter-rich California.

Bush is looking less than invincible amid mounting discontent with the ongoing violence in Iraq and the sluggish domestic economy. Asked in a Newsweek survey if Bush should be re-elected to a second term, 48 percent said no, and 44 percent said yes.

US political observers sat up and began taking Dean seriously after he raised 7.6 million dollars in April, May and June, mostly in small donations to his website -- by far the most ever raised online by a politician.

It was not only a pioneering use of the Internet, but an impressive show of strength by a motivated grassroots movement that no other candidate enjoys.



PHOTO: AFP

Residents of the Shorongi Commune, Rwanda, line up to vote yesterday. The first presidential elections after the 1994 genocide began last morning in Rwanda, with President Paul Kagame given as possible winner by most analysts.

Attempt on Iraqi cleric: 3 killed

Thousands gather in Najaf for funerals

AFP, Baghdad

Thousands gathered in the holy city of Najaf Monday for the funerals of three men killed in an assassination attempt on a leading Shiite Muslim cleric, as the top US general admitted his forces were stretched thin but that he could find more troops if needed.

Meanwhile, a Brazilian air force plane carrying the body of the slain UN envoy to Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello, arrived in Geneva, a day after a memorial ceremony in his hometown of Rio de Janeiro.

And Iraq's US-appointed Governing Council has taken its quest for international legitimacy to Egypt before heading on to Jordan.

The three men who died Sunday in a bomb attack in Najaf were employees of one of Iraq's most influential Shiite clerics, Grand Ayatollah Seyed Mohammed Said al-Hakim.

"Two bodyguards and one employee of the house were killed. His holiness al-Hakim and his son were both in the room next to the bomb. Thank God they're both safe," said the ayatollah's spokes-

man, Abdul Hussein al-Kadi.

Hakim is one of the four top clerics in the Hawza, the highest religious authority of Iraq's Shiite community, which makes up some 60 per cent of the 25-million population and was systematically oppressed by Saddam Hussein's Sunni Muslim elite.

Kadi said bodyguards protecting Hakim's house saw four bearded men in a white car drop a cooking gas bottle near the wall of Hakim's house in Najaf, 180 km south of Baghdad.

The ensuing blast left a 1.5 metre (five foot) hole in the side of the house.

Najaf, the power base of Iraq's Shiites, is locked in a battle between those prepared to cooperate with the US-led administration and those who champion resistance.

The struggle by supporters of firebrand cleric Moqtada Sadr to push the religious hierarchy into a more antagonistic approach towards the Americans has seen three attacks on mainstream clerics in recent weeks.



PHOTO: AFP

A North Korean ferry Man Gyong Bong-92 arrives at Niigata port, 250 km north of Tokyo yesterday as supporters and families of Japanese nationals kidnapped by the Stalinist nation during the Cold War era gather to protest. The North Korean ferry, which serves as the only direct link with Japan, paid its first port call in seven months on Monday.

Up to 1000 feared killed in Liberia

AFP, Monrovia

Many civilians were killed and villages torched in a massacre in Nimba county north-east of Monrovia, a senior Liberian military official told AFP late Sunday.

"I have received a report from our security officers that many villages there had burned down and that there have been lots of massacres," said General Benjamin Yeaten, deputy head of the government army.

"My understanding is that there was a massacre but we are not exactly sure how many people have been killed, it could be a hundred, it could be a thousand," he added, without saying who the perpetrators were.

He did say that the two main rebel groups in the country, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), had carried out attacks in Nimba in recent days.

Citing a witness who had fled the assault at Bahn, in Nimba, 250 km north-east of Monrovia, local public radio reported that MODEL rebels had stormed the town, opening fire on the local population before disappearing back into the surrounding forest.

21 dead in Haiti plane crash

AFP, Port-Au-Prince

A Haitian airliner crashed shortly after takeoff from the airport in the northern city of Cap-Haitien, killing the 19 passengers and two crew members onboard, police said.

The Czech-made twin-engine turboprop plane, operated by Tropical Airways, crashed into a sugar-cane field Sunday afternoon and caught fire.

According to local radio reports, the cause of the crash was a door on the aircraft that had not been shut properly and opened after takeoff.

All 19 passengers and one of the pilots were Haitian nationals. The other pilot was from neighboring Dominican Republic, police said.

Local television showed images of the destroyed plane and charred bodies. Police said the bodies were so badly burned it would be difficult to impossible to identify them.

Maoists utter ultimatum for Nepal govt

AFP, Kathmandu

Maoist rebels Sunday gave Nepal's government three days to agree to an assembly that would redraft the constitution, warning they would otherwise consider peace talks finished.

The fresh rebel ultimatum came after the government said it would not budge on the constitutional assembly proposal unless the Maoists first committed to disarming. The assembly issue helped scuttle a long-delayed round of peace talks last week.

"The Nepalese government should be prepared to declare a constituent assembly unconditionally within three days or else the rebels will be forced to view it as a one-way declaration of breaking away from further peace talks," Maoist chief negotiator Baburam Bhattarai said in a statement.

Hizbul sticks to guns

AFP, Srinagar

A dominant Muslim rebel group in Indian Kashmir said Monday it would not announce a ceasefire in its armed struggle in the region, and vowed instead to take the fight to its "logical conclusion".

Hizbul Mujahedin said the decision was made when its field commanders, including operational chief Gazi Naseer-u-Din, met in the Muslim-dominated Kashmir valley Monday to "review the situation".

"The field commanders have decided that there will be no ceasefire," it said in a one-page statement.

7 killed in Colombia blast

AFP, Bogota

Seven people were killed and 38 injured Sunday when a bomb exploded at a busy waterfront in central Colombia, authorities said, blaming leftist rebels for the attack.

The bomb exploded about 10:00am local time at a dock in the town of Puerto Rico, just after a boat carrying 56 people moored at a dock on the Ariari River. Army General Luis Eduardo Barboza said.

A woman was carrying the bomb inside a box, he said. She died in the blast. Two children also were among the dead.

A senior local official, Wilson Munoz, said there were 10 people seriously injured. They were to be transported to hospitals by aircraft, he said.