

India digs for treasure on tip from Hindu holy man

October 18 2013, by Biswajeet Banerjee



In this Thursday, Oct. 17, 2013 photo, people visit the fort of King Rao Ram Baksh Singh in Unnao in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh state, India. Archaeologists began digging for treasure beneath the 19th century fort on Friday, after a popular Hindu holy man said a former king appeared to him in a dream and told him of the cache. (AP Photo)

Archaeologists began digging for treasure beneath a 19th century fort in northern India on Friday, after a popular Hindu holy man said a former king appeared to him in a dream and told him of a nearly \$50 billion

cache.

The [treasure](#) hunt began after Hindu swami Shobhan Sarkar relayed his dream to an Indian government minister who was visiting the swami's ashram last month.

The swami said the spirit of King Rao Ram Baksh Singh, who was hanged in 1858 after rising up against British colonial forces, told him to take care of the 1,000-ton treasure hidden under the late king's fort in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

Indian geological and archaeological officials surveyed the area Sunday and found evidence of heavy metal about 20 meters (66 feet) underground, District Magistrate Vijay Karan Anand said. Digging would be the only way to confirm which type of metal.

The Archaeological Survey of India said it would begin digging under a temple contained within the ruins of the old fort.

A host of interested parties have already lined up to stake a claim to the treasure, believed to be in gold and silver.

One of the king's descendants, Navchandi Veer Pratap Singh, said "if gold is really found there, we should get our share."

Uttar Pradesh state authorities, as well as local officials, also said they had a right to the wealth.

"The treasure trove should be used for the development of the state," local lawmaker Kuldeep Senger said. Uttar Pradesh, with a staggering population of 200 million, is one of the poorest and least developed states in India.

Residents of the impoverished Daundia Khera village, who have no access to electricity, said they have long known about the treasure from stories told by their elders.

"Everyone in the village knows about it," said 60-year-old Vidyawati Sharma, who learned the stories from her father-in-law.

Locals have found silver and gold coins in the area in Unnao district, about 80 kilometers (50 miles) southwest of the state's capital of Lucknow, according to the swami's disciple, Om Ji. "No one knew exactly where" the treasure was until the late king visited the swami in his sleep, he said.

However, officials from the Archaeological Survey of India denied that the agency had begun the excavations at the bidding of the Hindu holy man.

"Archaeology doesn't work according to the dreams of a holy man, or anybody else. Archaeology is a science. We are carrying out this excavation on the basis of our findings" at the site, said Syed Jamal Hasan, an agency official.

Authorities have set up barricades against thousands of people who have since thronged to the village in hopes of seeing the treasure, or possibly taking a small piece home. People were offering prayers at the temple within the fort's ruins.

Locals also said they hoped Swami Sarkar's vision turned out to be real, as he "is revered as God in this area because he has done a lot for this place," schoolteacher Chandrika Rani said.

The Supreme Court said Friday that it would consider a petition for the court to monitor the treasure hunt, amid fears that some of the riches

could be stolen.

Indian officials are also unearthing and cataloging another [treasure trove](#) found two years ago in a 16th century Hindu temple, and have barred the media and public from the excavation site in the southern state of Kerala. The discovery of that treasure, including bagfuls of coins, jeweled crowns and golden statues of gods and goddesses, made the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple the richest known religious institution in India. The former royal family that has remained the temple's trustees since India's 1947 independence has said the treasure belongs to the Hindu deity Vishnu, who is also known in the region as Padmanabhaswamy.

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Citation: India digs for treasure on tip from Hindu holy man (2013, October 18) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-10-india-treasure-hindu-holy.html>

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