

# Experts oppose festival at Pakistani ancient site

January 31 2014, by Adil Jawad

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In this Thursday, Jan. 30, 2014 photo provided by Bilawal House, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, second from left, son of Pakistan's assassinated Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visits the site of Sindh Cultural Festival in ruins of Mohenjodaro in Pakistan. A plan by Bilawal to hold a cultural festival at an ancient site in southern Pakistan has sparked controversy, with several leading archaeologists saying Friday it could damage the ruins. (AP Photo/Bilawal House)

A plan by the son of assassinated former prime minister Benazir Bhutto to hold a cultural festival at an ancient site in southern Pakistan has sparked controversy, with several leading archaeologists saying Friday it

could damage the ruins.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is spearheading the event to be held Saturday at Mohenjodaro, where one of the largest settlements of the Indus Valley civilization existed thousands of years ago, as part of efforts to publicize the southern Pakistani region of Sindh's rich cultural heritage.

But the plans sparked controversy with experts who fear the stage and other infrastructure needed to host the event could damage the delicate mud ruins that are already suffering from water and salinity damage.

"It is nothing but insanity" said respected archaeologist Asma Ibrahim, who is a member of the Management Board for Antiquities and Physical Heritage of the Sindh government. She said the chairman of the board sent a letter to the provincial government to draw attention to their concerns about the festival.

She said the stage and sound and light show could damage the delicate walls of the ruins.

Another senior archaeologist who heads the University of Punjab's archaeology department said he was not attending the festival in protest.



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"I am very sad over what they are going to do there in the name of a cultural festival," said Farzand Masih.

But local authorities in the Sindh government who are arranging the festival say there is no risk to the ruins. A provincial archaeology official, Qasim Ali Qasim, says he is supervising arrangements for the festival to make sure no harm is caused to the site. In a statement Zardari said he had personally visited the site Thursday. He said every step is being taken to protect the site, and people will not be allowed to roam freely over the ruins.

Mohenjodaro, which is listed on UNESCO's list of [world heritage sites](#), was built from unbaked brick in the 3rd millennium BC, according to the organization's website. Excavations since 1922 have uncovered only one-third of the site. A UNESCO campaign ending in 1997 raised money to protect the site from flooding and to control the ground-water table.

The 25-year-old Zardari is the head of the Pakistan People's Party which was headed by his mother until her death in a gun and bomb attack in 2007. His father served one term as the country's president but it has been the younger Zardari who has become the public face of the party. The festival is seen as part of efforts to raise the younger Zardari's profile on the national political stage.

**More information:** [unesco.org.pk/culture/moenjodaro.html](https://unesco.org.pk/culture/moenjodaro.html)

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