

Egypt says stolen pharaonic tablet repatriated from UK

An ancient Egyptian pharaonic stone tablet that was stolen from Karnak temple was repatriated this week from Britain where it had been touted for sale, Egypt's antiquities ministry said. "The piece was last seen in the open museum in Luxor temple in the early 1990s," Shaaban Abdel Gawad, who is in charge of archaeological collections at the ministry, told AFP on Wednesday. "The necessary legal measures" were taken to recover the object, he added. The artefact was stolen from the Karnak temple's open museum and was spotted on online auction sites, the ministry said. The sale was

cancelled, the statement said.

The artefact is part of a cartouche—an ornamental tablet—of Pharaoh Amenhotep I, of the 17th dynasty, who ruled in the 16th century BC. The antiquities ministry said that the piece had been retrieved by Egypt's London embassy in September 2018 in coordination with British authorities. Egypt regularly retrieves stolen archaeological treasures from abroad. Cairo is still campaigning for the repatriation of key items, including some on display in European museums, such as the celebrated bust of Queen Nefertiti in Berlin. —AFP



A handout picture released by the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities shows an ancient Egyptian relief which was previously on display in the Temple of Karnak in Luxor. —AFP

Singapore eco-tourism plan sparks squawks of protest



This photograph shows animal crossing traffic signboard installed to warn motorists during nearby infrastructure roadworks in the city-state's remaining green area in Mandai district leading to Singapore Zoo. —AFP photos



Michael Barclay, group CEO of Mandai Park Holdings, feeding white rhinos at Singapore Zoo.

Singapore is creating a vast eco-tourism zone in a bid to bring in more visitors, but environmentalists fear the development will damage natural habitats and are already blaming it for a series of animal deaths. While it may be best known as a financial hub with scores of high-rise buildings, tropical Singapore is still home to patches of rainforest and an array of wildlife, from monkeys to pangolins—also known as scaly anteaters. In one green corner of the city sits a zoo and two sister attractions—a night safari and river safari—that have long been big draws for foreign and local visitors. Now jungle is being cleared in the same area to make way for a bird park, a rainforest park and a 400-room resort, to create a green tourism hub it is hoped will eventually attract millions of visitors a year.

But the project in the Mandai district has ruffled the feathers of environmentalists. They believe that rather than promote biodiversity, it is too imposing for the area, will destroy forest habitats and they say insufficient safeguards were put in place before work began—leading to animals being killed on roads. The row has highlighted concerns about rapid development in space-starved Singapore, and worries that some of the country's more wild and green corners are being lost only to be replaced with something more artificial. "I think you are getting your priorities wrong if you are replacing natural heritage with captive breeding," Subaraj Rajathurai, a veteran wildlife consultant, told AFP. With the new development, it appears that "making money was more of a priority than finding the balance and preserving biodiversity", he added.

Roadkill worries

But Mandai Park Holdings, which is overseeing the project through its development arm, insists work is being carried out sensitively and will bring improvements. The district, which sits next to a protected nature reserve and has been earmarked for development for years, is mostly abandoned villages and farmland that have been swallowed by the surrounding jungle. Work is already well under way in an area that is home to animals including flying lemurs and deer, with construction cranes looming over hillsides stripped bare of jungle. A major focus of concern has been the animal deaths on the main road leading up to the zoo as forest is cleared.

Several deer, a critically endangered pangolin and a leopard cat are among animals to have perished after straying in front of vehicles, according to environmentalists. Subaraj blamed the deaths on a lack of protective measures, pointing in particular to a failure to put up temporary barriers around the road quickly enough. "It's crazy—it would have been so easy to avoid that happening," he said. But Mandai Park Holdings insists it is doing everything it can to prevent animal deaths on the roads.

Barriers have now been put up along much of the road, as well as a rope bridge for monkeys to cross above the traffic and road signs warning motorists about animals in the area. A permanent bridge covered in shrubs and trees to allow animals to cross the road, which divides two major parts of the development, will be ready later this year. "We have been working with the nature community, really from the word go, to work out what we should do to actually

protect animals and keep them off the roads," Mike Barclay, Mandai Park Holdings CEO, a former senior airline executive, told AFP. "Is it perfect? No. But we are doing everything that we can to mitigate."

Rapid development

The new bird park—which will replace an existing one elsewhere in Singapore—will feature nine aviaries, while the rainforest park will have walkways among treetop canopies. The hotel is being developed by Singapore-based resort chain Banyan Tree. Work started in 2017 and the 126-hectare (311-acre) development is due to be completed by 2023. Green groups have raised concerns that besides the roadkill deaths, noise and light pollution from the large resort could affect the surrounding area, although the developer insists it will be designed carefully to limit any impact.

Mandai Park Holdings, a subsidiary of Singapore's state investor Temasek, did not disclose the cost of the project. It is being funded by Temasek and the government. Defenders of the development insist it is better than throwing up more high-rises in a city that has developed at breakneck speed in recent decades. But for green activists such as Ho Hua Chew, vice president of the Nature Society (Singapore), a project on such a vast scale is another setback for the country's natural environment. "We don't say don't develop it—just leave some more space for the wildlife," he told AFP.

"Over the past decade, development has increased very fast. We have fought hard but a lot of areas have been lost." —AFP

Director M Night Shyamalan merges past storylines in new movie 'Glass'



M Night Shyamalan

M Night Shyamalan, the director known for his film-ending twists, brought his latest offering "Glass" - a tale merging two of his previous movies. Starring Bruce Willis, Samuel L. Jackson and James McAvoy, "Glass" blends storylines from Shyamalan's "Unbreakable", which came out in 2000 and 2016's "Split". "There's a sense of reflecting a lot ... that these characters ... are in one movie," Shyamalan, also known for "The Sixth Sense" and "Signs", said at the film's London premiere.

"It was almost like I didn't want to make it for 15 years and then started to open my mind up to 'hey, you know, let's go back to those characters and finish telling those stories.'" Willis and Jackson, who both starred in "Unbreakable" - about a train crash survivor who discovers he has a new superpower - were joined at the screening by McAvoy, who played Kevin Wendell Crumb, a man with multiple identities, in "Split". In the new film, Willis reprises his role as security guard David Dunn as he chases one of Crumb's frightful personalities. Jackson returns as the fragile Elijah Price, also known as Mr Glass.

"I always thought Elijah was unfinished business," Jackson said. "Night promised that it was part of a trilogy ... so, this is closure." McAvoy revisits his role as well as his character's multiple personalities. "I love acting so getting to do more of it is not a bad thing," the Scottish actor said.

"Playing one character in a movie can be tricky. You've got to do a lot of preparation, doing that 20 times ... it was like cramming for an exam that you forgot was coming." "Glass" also stars Anya Taylor-Joy, whose character Casey was kidnapped along with two classmates by Crumb in "Split", as well as "American Horror Story" actress Sarah Paulson, who plays a psychiatrist treating the three main characters. —Reuters