



YEMENI KINGDOM OF SABA', ANCIENT CIVILIZATION ON BRINK OF RUIN

The Kingdom of Saba', an ancient civilization once home to a highly advanced prosperous nation now standing on the brink of ruin, was put on UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger, a resolution protecting it from the woes of crises. On the 25th of January, during a UNESCO meeting in Paris and chaired by Saudi Arabia, the congregation decided on protecting the ancient civilization from the detriments of a war-torn country.

Yemeni Minister of Information and Culture Muammar Al-Eryan commented in a press statement that this underscores the individual and authentic nature of the Yemeni civilization. The decision, he added, urged Yemeni government to invite specialists to examine the sites, submit reports and provide necessary materials. Permanent Yemeni delegation

to UNESCO mentioned in a statement that this monumental achievement not only holds exceptional global significance but is also an appreciation of the Yemeni civilization.

The sites of Saba' sprawl across Marib governorate, comprised of seven sites bearing witness to the architectural and technological advancements of a civilization dating back to the first millennia BC and extending all the way to the Islamic era. These sites tell the story of highly intricate centralized management of a trading nation that reigned over Bakhour (Arabian Incense) road across the Arabian peninsula, and contributed to a wide range of cultural exchange prompted by trade with Mediterranean and north Africa.

Standing in the midst of barren lands, rocky mountain and steep valleys, the

sites display an advanced irrigation system, unrivaled by any in the area, contributed to establishing the largest man-made oasis in the region. Queen Balkees' throne, is perhaps the most famed archaeological site, was built during her reign in the 10th century BC. The temple was enshrined in sands until 1988 when the sands were swept away unveiling geometric harmonized shapes; six adorned pillars standing 12 meters high and weighing around 17 tons, a front yard with a well in its midst, alabaster seats and a clay wall with towers and a north-facing gate surrounding it.

As for the temple of Awwam, one of the oldest temples in the Arabian peninsula where pilgrims from all over the peninsula flocked to worship the lunar deity, is enclosed by a wall inlaid with stones and carrying ancient Arabian inscriptions, the

Musnad script. The Great Dam of Marib, an architectural wonder built in first millennium BC, was erected to capture monsoonal rains and serve around 98,000 square kilometers of farming lands.

The complex design stands 15 meters high extends for about 650 meters with many entryways opening and closing to manage the accumulated waters. The Yemeni war threatening to demolish all the stands in its way, coupled with natural factors, had the Yemeni government determined on protecting its valuable heritage, especially as much of it remains undiscovered. The recent UNESCO resolution, which facilitates international technical and financial aid, could perhaps save history from blowing away into the wind. — KUNA

UK CLIMATE ACTIVISTS FINED FOR DA VINCI GLUE STUNT

Five environmental protesters from the "Just Stop Oil" group who glued themselves to the frame of a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" were each fined £486 (\$588) on Wednesday. The activists, who caused disruption at the Royal Academy in London last July, were fined by City of London Magistrates' Court for criminal damage. District Judge William Nelson said their "primary intention ... was to gain media attention and not to cause damage to a work of art", but they were "reckless" and knew it would be a "by-

product" of their actions.

The stunt was one of a flurry of so-called "direct action" protests last year by environmental activists, which also included tomato soup being thrown over one of Vincent van Gogh's "Sunflowers" paintings at London's National Gallery. Protest group Just Stop Oil, which was behind many of the stunts, wants to end UK government approval for exploring, developing and producing fossil fuels.

The group says since its campaign began last April, there have been over 2,000 arrests and 138 people have spent

time in prison. Jessica Agar, 22, an art student from western England and one of the five fined Wednesday, said she took part "to highlight the responsibility that cultural institutions have to the public". "The concept of a 'last supper' is a reality for millions around the world, as crop failures from climate breakdown force us into widespread famine," she said in a statement released by the group. — AFP



Residents and visitors arrive to Machu Picchu, Peru on the first train after the service from Ollantaytambo was renewed. — AFP photos

PERU REOPENS TRAIN SERVICE TO MACHU PICCHU

Train services to Peru's historic Machu Picchu partially resumed on Wednesday following nearly three weeks of suspension caused by anti-government protests. The service to the jewel in Peru's vital tourism industry resumed with locals looking to return to the small town at the foot of the ancient Inca site. The Machu Picchu citadel itself remains closed. Peru has been shaken by two months of protests by supporters of former president Pedro Castillo, who was impeached and arrested on December 7 after attempting to dissolve parliament and rule by decree.

At least 48 people have been killed since then in clashes between security forces and demonstrators. Protesters have blocked dozens of roads and placed rocks on the train tracks serving Machu Picchu. The first train arrived at the small town just after dawn Wednesday with around 80 people on board, including a handful of tourists, AFP reporters saw.

The train left again with about 280 passengers. The town had been suffering from shortages after it was cut off for 18 days. The train is the only way to reach the town other than by foot and takes an hour and a half from the tourist town of Ollantaytambo. On Tuesday, the Machu Picchu municipality said there was "a shortage of food, medicines,

health personnel and emergency supplies."

For now the train will make two journeys a day on Wednesdays and Sundays. Tourism is crucial to the Peruvian economy with the country attracting 4.5 million visitors a year. Some 4,000 visitors a day pass through the Andean city of Cusco, a UNESCO World Heritage site and gateway for exploring Machu Picchu and other surrounding Inca ruins. The tourism ministry estimated in late January that the sector had lost \$6.2 million due to the political crisis. There is still no fixed plan for the reopening of Machu Picchu. — AFP



Residents and visitors arrive to Machu Picchu, Peru on the first train after the service from Ollantaytambo was renewed.



In this file photo Spanish matador Enrique Ponce performs a pass on a bull during a bullfight in Osuna on August 1, 2020. — AFP

SPAIN COURT RULES CULTURE VOUCHER MUST INCLUDE BULLFIGHTS

A Spanish court has ruled that a government scheme that grants youths a voucher to spend on cultural activities must be extended to include tickets for bullfights. Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's coalition government in 2022 began offering a 400-euro (\$430) voucher to young people after they have turned 18 to spend on books or tickets to the theatre, concerts or

cinema.

The goal is to help Spain's culture-related business recover from the loss of revenue during Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns. The scheme was modeled after similar initiatives in France and Italy. Bullfighting businesses wanted to be included in the scheme too but the government ultimately decided that recipients could not use the voucher to buy tickets for bullfights.

The Fundacion del Toro de Lidia, an NGO that promotes bullfighting in Spain, took the government to court and on Tuesday Spain's Supreme Court ruled that there was "no justification" for excluding bullfights from the cultural voucher scheme for youths. Spain's cultural min-

istry said Wednesday that in the wake of the court ruling it was opening "the possibility of including" companies that organize bullfighting events or sell tickets to them in the voucher scheme.

Bullfighting retains a passionate following in Spain and leading matadors are treated as celebrities. But the practice's mass appeal has faded, with polls showing a rising disinterest across Spain, especially among the young. In 2021, the last year statistics are available, 279 bullfights were held in Spain, down from 387 in 2017 and 810 in 2008, according to culture ministry figures. — AFP