

COLOMBIA



The remains of the Spanish galleon *San Jose*, sank off the Caribbean coast of Cartagena, Colombia. Colombia announced on Saturday that on Nov 27, the Institute of Anthropology and History of Colombia found the treasure near the Colombian Caribbean Coast, and it corresponds to the *San Jose* galleon, which sank as it tried to outrun rival British warships more than 300 years ago. COLOMBIAN CULTURE MINISTRY VIA AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



# Treasure worth billions found

A Spanish galleon that sank in 1708 was loaded with gold coins, silver and jewels

By ASSOCIATED PRESS in Cartagena, Colombia

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos on Saturday hailed the discovery of a Spanish galleon that went down off the South American nation's coast more than 300 years ago with what may be the world's largest sunken treasure.

At a news conference in the northern port city of Cartagena, Santos said the exact location of the galleon *San Jose*, and how it was discovered with the help of an international team of experts, was a state secret that he'd personally safeguard. The ship sank somewhere in the wide area off

Colombia's Baru Peninsula, south of Cartagena.

While no humans have yet to reach the wreckage site, autonomous underwater vehicles had gone there and brought back photos of dolphin-stamped bronze cannons in a well-preserved state that leave no doubt to the ship's identity, the government said.

The discovery is the latest chapter in a saga that began three centuries ago, on June 8, 1708, when the galleon with 600 people aboard sank as it was trying to outrun a fleet of British warships.

It is believed to have been carrying 11 million gold coins and jewels from then Spanish-controlled colonies that

**213 meters**

below the water's surface is where they found the remains of the ship

could be worth billions of dollars if ever recovered.

The ship, which maritime experts consider the holy grail of Spanish colonial shipwrecks, has also been the subject of a legal battle in the United States, Colombia and Spain over who owns the rights to the sunken treasure.

In 1982, Sea Search Armada, a salvage company owned by US investors, including the late actor Michael Landon and convicted Nixon White House adviser John Ehrlichman, announced it had found

the *San Jose*'s resting place 700 feet (213 meters) below the water's surface.

Two years later, Colombia's government overturned well-established maritime law that gives 50 percent to whoever locates a shipwreck, slashing Sea Search's take to a 5 percent "finder's fee."

A lawsuit by the US investors in a federal court in Washington was dismissed in 2011 and the ruling was affirmed on appeal two years later.

Colombia's Supreme Court has ordered the ship to be recovered before the international dispute over the fortune can be settled.

Santos didn't mention any salvage company's claim during his presentation, but the government said the ship had been found on Nov 27 in a

never-before referenced location through the use of new meteorological and underwater mapping studies.

Danilo Devis, who has represented Sea Search in Colombia for decades, expressed optimism that the sunken treasure, whose haul could easily be worth more than \$10 billion, would finally be recovered.

But he bristled at the suggestion that experts located the underwater grave anywhere different from the area adjacent to the coordinates Sea Search gave authorities three decades ago.

"The government may have been the one to find it, but this really just reconfirms what we told them in 1982," he told The Associated Press from his home in Barranquilla, Colombia.

BRAZIL

# Group rails against 'risque' sculptures

By AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE in Rio de Janeiro

Sand sculptures of curvaceous, full-bottomed women on Copacabana beach may be one of Rio de Janeiro's wackier tourist attractions, but now they're under fire from a resident's association claiming the risqué creations promote prostitution.

Jassim al-Alawadhi was one of several tourists stopping to take a selfie in front of a larger-than-life sculpture of a woman lying on her front, with her sand backside, clad in a tiny string bikini, sticking prominently in the air.

"It's just sand. I don't think it is an excuse for prostitution or vice. It's just a sculpture and it's what the poor man here does to make a little money," said al-Alawadhi, a 26-year-old financial analyst visiting from Kuwait.

The creator, 63-year-old Ubiratan dos Santos, said he'd been working on sand sculptures at the famous beach for 23 years.

"I've made women of all types — one day in a bikini, another in a skirt. To want to ban me shows a lack of respect for my work," he said.

As he spoke, he delicately spread seawater over the controversial backside. The damp treatment is needed "because otherwise if there's wind, it will be all finished."

But disapproving residents may do what the wind cannot.

Horacio Magalhaes, 48, a lawyer and head of the Friends of Copacabana association, said that given the area's reputation for prostitution, the sculptures are "at least of questionable taste."

"There is this sexual message for tourists coming to Rio not to see our beautiful landscapes and beaches, or to learn about our culture or our historic patrimony, but rather to learn about the 'bum area' of our women," he said.

"It's definitely not the kind of tourism that the public authorities or the residents want," he added.

"We want Copacabana, the cradle of bossa nova music, to recover its charm, to become a residential and family neighborhood again — and these sculptures do not help that."

A representative of the mayor's office recently turned up to request he stop making the sculptures, citing neighbors' concerns, dos Santos said.



Ubiratan da Conceicao dos Santos has created "risque" sand sculptures of women on Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for 23 years. CHRISTOPHE SIMON / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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