ASI begins fresh excavation at Kashipur, Uttarakhand – occupation from Painted Grey Ware times; Xuanzang's 'Govisana'; Mahabharata legend

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News

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) began a fresh excavation in the third week of October 2026 at a roughly 90-acre mound at Kashipur, Udham Singh Nagar district, Uttarakhand; it will run until March 2027. The aim is to scientifically validate earlier finds and establish the site's cultural sequence. Pottery from the site shows continuous occupation from the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) period to the early medieval period. The site is identified with 'Govisana', described by the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang; local legend says Dronacharya trained the Pandavas here (Drona Sagar lake).

Key facts

Site	Kashipur, Udham Singh Nagar district, Uttarakhand – about 90-acre mound
Excavation	ASI – from Oct 2026 till March 2027
Identification	Xuanzang's 'Kiu-pi-shwang-na' = Govisana; identified by Alexander Cunningham
Earlier digs	1939–40, 1965–66, 1970–71 – temple complex in three phases, Gupta to early medieval

Pottery	PGW, Kushan, Gupta and medieval wares – continuous habitation
Legend	Dronacharya's training ground; Drona Sagar lake said to be the Pandavas' guru dakshina

Background

- Painted Grey Ware (PGW): fine, smooth grey pottery with black / deep-brown geometric designs; bowls and dishes. Dated c. 1100 BCE – 500/400 BCE; Upper Ganga plains and the Ghaggar–Sutlej region. Associated with the Iron Age / Later Vedic culture.
- In the 1950s B.B. Lal (later ASI Director General) excavated Hastinapur near Meerut and linked PGW to the Mahabharata period. This remains debated among archaeologists; the Kashipur link too is a matter of legend.
- Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang): the 'Prince of Pilgrims'; travelled in India c. 629–645 CE; stayed at Harshavardhana's court; studied at Nalanda; work 'Si-Yu-Ki' (Records of the Western World). (Some reports wrongly say '6th century' – it is the 7th century.)
- ASI: founded in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham; now under the Union Ministry of Culture. Cunningham himself identified Kashipur as Govisana in the 19th century.

Tamil Nadu link: Xuanzang visited the Pallava capital Kanchipuram around 640 CE during the reign of Narasimhavarman I (Mamalla) and described it as a centre of learning and Buddhism. Iron Age: Tamil Nadu's 'Antiquity of Iron' report (Jan 2025), based on finds at Sivakalai (Thoothukudi), traces iron use in Tamil Nadu to the first quarter of the 4th millennium BCE.

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