

# 'Save Iraq's historical treasure'

By Our Special Correspondent

**DHARWAD, APRIL 14.** S.Settar, art historian and former Chairman of the Indian Council for Historical Research, has expressed concern over the safety of the rich historical and cultural treasure in war-ravaged Iraq.

While the war was almost coming to an end, the time had come for the international community and intellectuals to call for concerted efforts to preserve the cultural treasure of Iraq.

He said the Indian Government should also make efforts to save the Iraqi cultural heritage in the wake of reports of rampant looting breaking out in that country.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Dr. Settar said: "We can mobilise opinion at the international level to prevail upon the United States to ensure that the cultural treasure (of Iraq) is not disturbed."

Dr. Settar said the Iraqi civilisation was one of the oldest, and the country had museums and structures that highlighted its rich heritage.

The 1991 war caused some damage to it, and if efforts were not made to the lawlessness in Iraq, the precious treasures would be lost to looters.

Local people might not target the antiques as they would be satisfied with consumer goods

such as sofas, furniture, and refrigerators. And they also knew how difficult it was to sell the antiques.

These priceless possessions could well become the target of antique traders who were prepared to pay any price for them, Dr. Settar said.

The Americans and the British also had a desire for collecting antiques and were prepared to pay fabulous prices for them, he added.

Dr. Settar said the American Association of Museums had already voiced its apprehension and it was time others too joined and made the UNESCO initiate steps to preserve the cultural heritage of Iraq.

What happened in Afghanistan should not be allowed in Iraq, he said.

In Afghanistan some damage was done when it was under the occupation of the Soviet forces, and irreparable damage was done under the fundamentalist regime thereafter, he said.

It was imperative that steps were taken to ensure that the possession of antiques be made a criminal offence, and that whatever had been taken away for any reason was restored. The word should go round to auctioneers and others that the sale and purchase of antiques from Iraq should not be entertained, Dr. Settar said.