

# Culture dept given custody of seized Gandhara-era artefacts

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI, July 26: A court allowed on Thursday the Sindh culture department to take possession of the recently seized Gandhara-era artefacts.

The police had seized a large number of artefacts during a search of a trailer-mounted container in Korangi on July 6 and found more such pieces in a warehouse on a lead given by the detained suspects.

Judicial Magistrate (east) Aleem Ahmed allowed an application of the culture department seeking custody of the artefacts since the investigating and prosecuting agencies had not opposed the plea.

The court directed the police authorities to hand over the articles to the culture department for safe custody.

Sindh culture department director Qasim Ali Qasim had moved an application a couple of days ago with a file of pictures of the seized articles and submitted that the artefacts, dating from the Gandhara civilisation and enjoying protection under the Antiquities Act of 1975, were unprotected as they were dumped in the police station compound.

He prayed to the court to give the possession of the artefacts to the culture department, which would display them at the National Museum in Karachi.

The investigating officer had told the court that they had no objection if the court granted the possession to the culture department. The public prosecutor also submitted that it was the responsibility of the government (culture depart-

ment) to look after the articles and, therefore, they be handed over to the department concerned.

According to the prosecution, the police held driver Zafar and helper Asif Majeed of the trailer within the remit of the Awami Colony police station for allegedly transporting the artefacts to Sialkot and later also apprehended a third suspect, Tahir Butt. They found a large number of artefacts in a container as well as in the warehouse in Korangi, it added.

A case was registered against the suspects under Sections 26, 27, 29, 32 and 34 of the Antiquities Act at the Awami Colony police station. Atif Butt and Asif Butt, said to be the prime suspects, are on interim pre-arrest bail till Aug 4.