

Australia to return 14 artworks of disputed provenance to India



The religious and cultural artefacts include sculptures, photos and a sword and are worth around \$2.2m (£1.7m).

Gallery director Nick Mitrovich said their return would close "a very difficult chapter of our history".

All but one of the works are connected to Subash Kapoor, a former New York art dealer and alleged trafficker.

Kapoor, who is awaiting trial in India, denies all charges, says a 12th Century sculpture of the

dancing child saint Santabandhage wereNational Gallery of Australia

Some of the disputed pieces date back to the 12th Century, when the Chola dynasty presided over a flourishing of Hindu art in Tamil Nadu.

The Canberra gallery has already returned several other artworks acquired via Kapoor, including a bronze statue of the Hindu god Shiva bought for \$5m (£3.6m) in 2008.

Australia to return Hindu statues, India's world Hindu summit

Mr. Mitrovich told the AFP

new agency that the works would be returned to the Indian government within months.

India's High Commissioner to Australia welcomed what he called an "extraordinary act of goodwill and gesture of friendship".

The National Gallery said it had researched a new framework for assessing provenance that can address "both the legal and ethical aspects of work of art's history".

"If, on the balance of probability, it is considered likely that an item was stolen, illegally excavated, exported in contravention of the law of a foreign country or

unethically acquired, the National Gallery will take steps to recover and repatriate," its statement reads.

Subash Kapoor was the sole just of a massive US federal investigation known as Operation Hidden that had led to the seizure of hundreds of historically significant artworks.

He previously pleaded the not guilty to the charges of being the owner of the Past gallery or Madhava's Upper East Side, which was raided by US authorities in early 2017.

Kapoor is also subject to an extradition request from the Manhattan District Attorney.

BBC

How The Concert For Bangladesh Changed The Celebrity Fundraiser

Fifty years ago, on August 1, 1971, the music world descended on Madison Square Garden for an event like no other. It was the first major charity concert of its kind — the Concert for Bangladesh. In that corner of South Asia, civil war, cyclone and floods had created a humanitarian disaster.

"There are six million displaced Bengalis, most of them suffering from malnutrition, cholera and also other diseases that are the result of living under the most dehumanizing conditions," wrote Ali Fikri, Coordinator, East Miko. Waters reported in July of 1971.

The situation was deeply painful for Indian musician Ravi Shankar, a star virtuoso, whose family came from the region. So, Shankar reached out to a close friend, former Beatles George Harrison.

"And he resolved to do something about it... It was simple as that," music journalist Graeme Thomson notes. "And of course, being in Beatles, he was very, you know — very well connected. So, he called his friends."

He marched in the anti-nuclear march. Harrison was able to attract "You love Beatles... no Beatles in fact — but you have Ringo Starr and... You love Bob Dylan," Thomson notes. "None of these people had played professionally many in the preceding years. So, that was an event in itself. You have a well-known band, people like Eric Clapton... Including of course, Shankar on the case."

Uzbekistan uses a Russian stan-

Uzbekistan's long-awaited path to Indian Ocean trade



On 7 February 2021, Uzbekistan held the event of the century for Central Asia — hosting trade and negotiations with Afghanistan and Pakistan on the construction of a 600-kilometre rail road through Afghanistan.

Government officials agreed on a "road map" for rail-road construction that will connect Uzbekistan and other landlocked Central Asian countries to the Indian Ocean through Kabul and export to Karachi and Colombo.

This trans-Afghan corridor is the expression of an agreement signed in late 2017 between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan on the construction of the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan railway and electricity transmission lines. Uzbekistan's Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade (MIFT) estimates concluded that the project will take up to five years and require US\$4 billion in funding.

But critics have argued that funding figures for the trans-Afghan corridor are misleading. The topography of Afghanistan is mountainous, so the rail-road construction will require drilling tunnels through mountains and constructing bridges over gorges — the cost of which are hard to estimate. Another technical issue is the state of the railroad tracks. Uzbekistan uses a Russian stan-

the gauge used at 1520 millimetres, while Pakistan uses an Indian broad gauge standard of 1676 millimetres. The size gauge difference implies that on arrival in Pakistan, the cargo will need to be transported further by road transport because a train running on standard-gauge cannot proceed to broad gauge. To proceed the shipment from Pakistan, the cargo will either be transloaded in a different container running on broad gauge or will be shipped via road transport.

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strategic importance of the project lies in its potential for economic expansion and growth dynamics, show that the South Asian region is a priority for Uzbekistan. For the last decade, South Asia has experienced only slow GDP growth at an average of 4.3 per cent. The region's labour force is almost 25 per cent of the global population. So South Asia has the potential to become a significant engine for Uzbekistan's economic growth.

Uzbekistan, like other landlocked countries, faces relatively high transportation costs. Goods from Uzbekistan are transported using the existing railway between Tashkent and Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan, which costs around US\$2800 for each standard 21-foot container. According to estimates by Uzbekistan's Institute of Strategy and Regional Studies, the new trans-Afghan corridor will provide the shortest possible route for export access and drive down current transportation costs by almost half, to around US\$950 per container.

Uzbekistan holds a strategic trade position between the Middle East, South Asia and Central Asia. But in the face of political uncertainty, Afghanistan has partially lost its position as a country with high transit potential. Despite this, as reported by MIFT, trade via railroad through Afghanistan has been increasing by about 25 per cent annually for the last couple of years.

Border closure deepens isolation of Tajikistan's Pamir highlands

A good off-road vehicle in Marghob, the largest settlement in the highlands of Tajikistan's autonomous district, is a lifeline in many ways than one.

"My family combined motorcycle so that I could buy a car and take people to work," said Marghob resident Mahid, referring to Kyrgyzstan's second-largest city, which lies several hours to the north. "I made a good income for my family."

And a good-sized vehicle can make a 50-kilometre freight transport.

"When there are no clients, I bring back foodstuffs from Osh and sell them in the market," said Mahid.

COVID-19 had severely complicated travel across the border with Kyrgyzstan, but the traffic ground to a halt following a bout of fighting between the two countries in late April.

"We haven't seen fresh fruit or vegetables for two months," Komarova Tadjibayeva, the owner of the town's Pamiy Hotel, said. "We're completely forgotten about daily products."

The Marghob district, home to around 14,000 people, is too high up in the mountains for fruit and vegetables to grow. Osh, set within the vegetative phytomade of the Fergana Valley, around 400 kilometres away, would normally be the most natural place from

which to bring in those items.

With that truncated, the only option remaining is to carry things from the capital, Dushanbe, some 650 kilometres drive to the west.

"In recent centuries, only electric power made through to so-called state reserves, which require special assignments of those parties in charge," said Mahid.

"We provide supplies to all villages, administrative centres, the Marghob region," said Marashbek Gulsharif, a representative of the state reserve body. "We sell directly to the population. It's not to local independent, then they will add a markup and the prices in the market will rise."

The state reserve's commitments too have been partly in part because of a shortage in the availability of containers.

They have taken to this during a body blow to one of the area's few self-sufficient sectors.

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