

Reclaiming national treasures: Exploring the 'illicit' trade in Indian Antiquities

Mr Anuraag Saxena

Asia Head for the World Education Foundation, UK

I ABSTRACT I Cambodia, Syria, Italy and India have been the target of art-heists and heritage-theft. Sophisticated criminals disguised as art-dealers have developed a global network (comprising petty thieves, shippers, agents, runners, advisors, middlemen and 'reputed' auction-houses) to facilitate this illicit trade. Experts estimate that India has lost 15,000 to 17,000 heritage pieces to the illicit trade. Most of these are now housed in museums and private collections worldwide.

Governments of developing nations, faced with pressing developmental challenges, tend to de-prioritise prosecution of those engaged in this trade. Likewise they have made little headway in the restitution of antiquities, even when criminal activity is *prima facie* apparent. The lack of concrete action, along with the promise of considerable profit, has ensured that the well-funded art-mafia continues to operate with impunity across South and South-East Asia.

This seminar focuses on how the India Pride Project – a privately-led volunteer initiative – has sought to recover stolen Indian heritage smuggled across the globe. In so doing, it elucidates on:

- a. the extent of Indian heritage and art pieces looted and circulated globally; and the network of actors involved in this illicit trade;
- b. the structural, legal and diplomatic hurdles in the process of restitution; and
- c. the challenges in gaining the support of government-agencies to bring heritage-recovery back on their agenda.



I ABOUT THE SPEAKER I Anuraag Saxena is the Asia Head for the World Education Foundation, UK and the founder-member of the India Pride Project (www.ipp.org.in) – a global network of volunteers and enthusiasts – which, since 2014, has sought to recover India's stolen heritage. A chartered accountant and lawyer from India with an MBA from the University of Texas, Anuraag spent his corporate years with GE Capital, Deutsche Bank and Credit Suisse, where he headed strategy and change teams across the Americas, Europe and Asia. Anuraag writes for journals and trade publications and speaks frequently at conferences and summits internationally.

I DATE I Wednesday, 23 March 2016

I TIME I 2.00pm to 3.30pm

I VENUE I Malay Studies Seminar Room, AS7 #04-13, Kent Ridge Campus, NUS,
Singapore 117570