

Ministry of Culture Takes Steps to Halt Auction of Piprahwa Relics by Sotheby's Hong Kong

Sotheby's responds to the legal notice with the assurance that full attention is given to this matter.

Posted On: 05 MAY 2025 8:35PM by PIB Delhi

The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, has taken swift and comprehensive measures to prevent the auction of the sacred Piprahwa Relics by Sotheby's Hong Kong, underscoring India's commitment to protecting its cultural and religious heritage. These relics, excavated from the Piprahwa Stupa—widely recognized as the ancient city of Kapilavastu, the birthplace of Lord Buddha—hold immense historical and spiritual significance.

The Piprahwa Relics, which include bone fragments, soapstone and crystal caskets, a sandstone coffer, and offerings such as gold ornaments and gemstones, were excavated by William Claxton Peppé in 1898. An inscription in Brahmi script on one of the caskets confirms these as relics of the Buddha, deposited by the Sakya clan. The majority of these relics were transferred to the Indian Museum, Kolkata, in 1899 and are classified as 'AA' antiquities under Indian law, prohibiting their removal or sale. While a portion of the bone relics was gifted to the King of Siam, a selection retained by Peppé's descendants has now been listed for auction.

Upon learning of the proposed auction, the Ministry of Culture initiated the following actions:

1. The Ministry collected detailed background information on the auction and issued a legal notice to Sotheby's Hong Kong to stop the auction immediately. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) also requested the Consulate General of Hong Kong to take up the matter with authorities there demanding the immediate cessation of the auction.
2. During a bilateral meeting on May 2, 2025, Culture Minister Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat raised the issue with Rt Hon Lisa Nandy, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, United Kingdom. The Minister emphasized the cultural and religious significance of the relics and urged immediate action to halt the auction and facilitate their repatriation.
3. On May 5, 2025, the Secretary of Culture convened a high-level review meeting to outline further steps. The Ministry of External Affairs has been requested to engage with embassies in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong through its Europe West and East Asia Divisions to ensure the auction is stopped.
4. The Financial Investigation Unit (FIU) has been asked to coordinate with its counterpart in Hong Kong to highlight the illegality of the auction and ensure compliance with international laws.
5. Ivy Wong, Ivy Wong, Associate General Counsel Sotheby's in her reply to the legal notice assured that our full attention is given to this matter.

The Ministry of Culture remains steadfast in its efforts to protect India's cultural heritage and ensure the repatriation of the Piprahwa Relics. We call upon Sotheby's Hong Kong to immediately withdraw the relics from auction and cooperate with Indian authorities to return these sacred artifacts to their rightful place.

[click here](#) to see the Legal Notice served by the Government of India:-

[@MinOfCultureGoI](#) has issued a legal notice to Sotheby's Hong Kong & Mr Chris Peppé, heirs of William Claxton Peppé, demanding the immediate halt of the auction titled "The Piprahwa Gems of

the Historical Buddha, Mauryan Empire, Ashokan Era, circa 240-200 BCE,"-set for May 7,2025.
pic.twitter.com/Begczzp9SE

— Ministry of Culture (@MinOfCultureGoI) [May 5, 2025](#)

Sunil Kumar Tiwari

pibculture[at]gmail[dot]com

(Release ID: 2127159)