

# Stolen Nataraja idol may appear in court as evidence

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**CHENNAI:** The 1000-year-old Nataraja idol, stolen from Tamil Nadu and allegedly sold to the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) in Canberra, may return to stand as evidence in the ongoing trial. A court in Tamil Nadu has sent a letter to the Australian Attorney-General's department, asking it to facilitate the return of the idol.

The State investigating agency has provided unique identifying features of the idol from the Sripuranthan temple, and claims that they match with the one displayed at the NGA. To establish this and also as trial requirement, the idol has to be produced in court.

Sources familiar with the investigation say the letter has been sent from the Judicial Magistrate Court at Jayamkondam near Tiruchi, where the trial against Subhash Kapoor, U.S.-based an-



*The Nataraja idol from Sripuranthan temple. —*

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tiquities dealer, is under way. The police allege that he masterminded the idol theft.

However, the Ministry of External Affairs, in an earlier email to *The Hindu*, said the Indian government would make a formal request only

after the conclusion of the investigation and trial of Mr. Kapoor.

The Ministry said the case was “currently being investigated by the Tamil Nadu police. Australian authorities have been assisting in conducting the investigation in Australia as per the Letter Rogatory request from India. The details of the investigation cannot be revealed as the matter is sub judice.”

Sources familiar with the case disagree. They say that it appears that the Ministry is unaware of the rules and procedures of a fair trial, particularly of this kind. It is likely that the Ministry does not know that the production of the Nataraja idol is a prerequisite to identify that it was stolen from the Sripuranthan temple.

Even if the idol is not returned for trial purpose, a video conference that visually captures the details of the idol is expected to take place.