U.S. returns stolen idols to Nepal

Two statues were on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York
A pair of rare idols stolen from Nepal three decades ago were returned to the country on Wednesday by New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art.
The two statues — one of Buddha and the other of the Hindu god Shiva and his wife Parvati — were stolen in the 1980s when rampant looting saw many important artefacts whisked out of Nepal and into the hands of private collectors.
“The government was unaware of the whereabouts of the statues until historian Lain Singh Bangdel mentioned (in a book) that the statues were on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York,” Shyam Sundar Rajbanshi of Nepal’s Department of Archaeology said.

The 11th-century Shiva statue, known as the Uma Maheshwor idol, was given to the Met in 1983 while the Buddha — estimated to be around 700 years old — was donated by a private collector in 2015.
The two statues were removed from display after the Met learned they were stolen, local media reported.
The statues will now be showcased at the National Museum of Nepal in the capital Kathmandu, Mr. Rajbanshi confirmed.
Nepal’s rich cultural heritage was ravaged by decades of theft from the 1960s to 1980s. Natural disasters and unchecked development also encroached on ancient sites.
A devastating earthquake in April 2015 caused extensive damage in the Kathmandu Valley, home to hundreds of sacred Buddhist and Hindu sites.
The UN’s cultural agency UNESCO warned if not properly conserved those sites could lose their coveted world heritage status.