Anaimangalam copper plates to go back to their place of origin

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News

Madurai MP Su. Venkatesan had written to Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat asking that the Chola-era Anaimangalam (Leiden) copper plates, recovered from the Netherlands, be brought to Tamil Nadu and displayed permanently. In his reply the Minister said that the provenance of recovered antiquities is verified from records and that, as per procedure, they are generally returned to their place of origin (reported 12 Nov 2026). Welcoming this, Venkatesan noted that the plates originated in Nagapattinam; the date of handing over and the place of display have not yet been announced. The set – 21 large and 3 small plates (the 3 small plates are a separate grant of Kulottunga I; each set has its own bronze ring with a Chola seal), weighing about 30 kg – was handed over to India at The Hague on 16 May 2026 during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the Netherlands (the formal transfer was completed later; Leiden University's 7 Sep 2026 update says the objects have been handed over). It had been at Leiden University since the mid-19th century; India had sought its return since 2012.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Name	Anaimangalam copper plates (Larger Leiden Plates)
Form	21 large + 3 small plates; bronze ring, Chola seal; ~30 kg
Languages	Sanskrit and Tamil (separate sections)

Point	Details
Kings	Rajaraja I's oral order; recorded on copper under Rajendra I
Grant	Anaimangalam village – to Chudamani Vihara, Nagapattinam
Taken to Netherlands	1700s, from Dutch-held Nagapattinam (Florentius Camper)
Handed over	16 May 2026, The Hague (Modi and Rob Jetten present)
Minister's reply	Return to place of origin is the procedure (reported 12 Nov 2026)

Background

- History: in his 21st regnal year Rajaraja Chola I (985–1014 CE) granted the village of Anaimangalam, tax-free, to the Chudamani Vihara, a Buddhist monastery at Nagapattinam built by the Sailendra king Sri Mara Vijayottungavarman of Srivijaya–Kadaram. His son Rajendra I (1014–1044 CE) had that oral order engraved on copper plates. A Shaiva king's gift to a Buddhist institution shows Chola religious tolerance and maritime ties with Southeast Asia.
- Naval power: around 1025 CE Rajendra I led a naval expedition against ports of the Srivijaya empire including Kadaram (today's Kedah, Malaysia) and took the title 'Kadaram Kondan'. The Ganga expedition gave him the title 'Gangaikonda Chola' and the capital Gangaikonda Cholapuram. 'Mummudi Chola' was Rajaraja's title.
- European contact: the Dutch East India Company settled at Pulicat (Pazhaverkadu) around 1610 and built Fort Geldria in 1613 – its first headquarters on the Coromandel Coast. It took Nagapattinam from the Portuguese in 1658 and moved its headquarters there in 1690. The plates were taken to the Netherlands in this period.
- Law/return of cultural property: export of antiquities from India is controlled by the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972; objects at least 100 years old are 'antiquities'. The 24th session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for promoting the return of cultural property accepted India's claim as the country of origin of these plates, after which the Netherlands decided to hand them over.

Tamil Nadu link: The grant recorded in the plates – the village of Anaimangalam given to the Chudamani Vihara at Nagapattinam – both lie in today's Nagapattinam district. Many Buddha bronzes were later found at Nagapattinam and are now in the Government Museum, Egmore, Chennai. Tamil Nadu leaders demanded in May 2026 that the plates be kept at the Nagapattinam museum.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

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What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Name: Anaimangalam copper plates (Larger Leiden Plates); Form: 21 large + 3 small plates; bronze ring, Chola seal; ~30 kg; Languages: Sanskrit and Tamil (separate sections); Kings: Rajaraja I's oral order; recorded on copper under Rajendra I.

What is the background to this news?

History: in his 21st regnal year Rajaraja Chola I (985–1014 CE) granted the village of Anaimangalam, tax-free, to the Chudamani Vihara, a Buddhist monastery at Nagapattinam built by the Sailendra king Sri Mara Vijayottungavarman of Srivijaya–Kadaram.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. In which port town was the Chudamani Vihara, which received the Anaimangalam village grant?

A) Mamallapuram

B) Poompuhar

C) Nagapattinam

D) Korkai

Answer: C – Explanation: Nagapattinam – a major Chola port and Buddhist centre. Korkai was a Pandya port and Mamallapuram a Pallava port.

2. The Sailendra king who built the Buddhist Chudamani Vihara in Rajaraja's time belonged to which empire?

A) Khmer Empire

B) Srivijaya Empire

C) Champa Kingdom

D) Anuradhapura Kingdom

Answer: B – Explanation: Srivijaya (Sumatra–Malay Peninsula) – King Sri Mara Vijayottungavarman. Angkor Wat belongs to the Khmer Empire.

3. Which title did Rajendra Chola I take after his naval raid on Southeast Asian ports around 1025 CE?

A) Gangaikondan

B) Madhurantakan

C) Mummudi Chola

D) Kadaram Kondan

Answer: D – Explanation: Kadaram Kondan (c. 1025 CE; Kadaram = Kedah, Malaysia). Gangaikondan marks the Ganga campaign; Mummudi was Rajaraja's title.

4. Which law controls the export of antiquities from India?

A) Ancient Monuments Act 1958

B) Antiquities Act 1972

C) Treasure Trove Act 1878

D) Copyright Act 1957

Answer: B – Explanation: Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 (in force from 1976); objects over 100 years old are antiquities. The 1958 Act protects monuments.

5. Which coastal town was the first Dutch headquarters on the Coromandel Coast?

A) Tharangambadi

B) Puducherry

C) Pulicat

D) Cuddalore

Answer: C – Explanation: Pulicat – Fort Geldria (1613); the headquarters moved to Nagapattinam in 1690. Tharangambadi was Danish and Puducherry French.

Sources: Daily Thanthi (12 Nov 2026); Vikatan (Nov 2026); PTI (16 May 2026); News On AIR (16 May 2026); Leiden University Libraries (May 2026; update 7 Sep 2026); DT Next (31 May 2026); Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972. © Shanmugam IAS Academy.