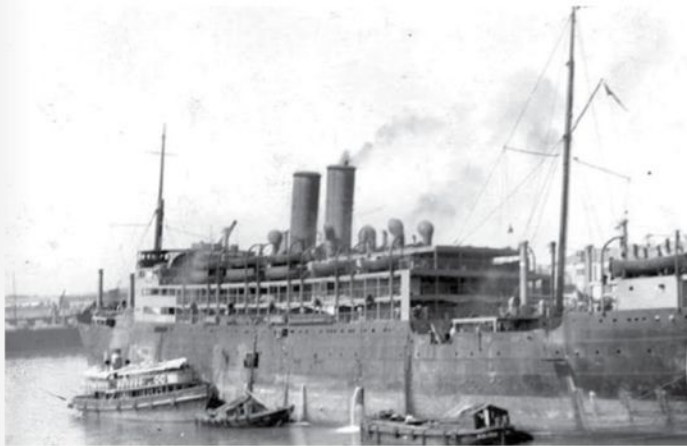


COMMEMORATING THE MARITIME TRAGEDY OF THE SUNKEN SHIP, SS TILAWA

Remembering Indian Titanic



A campaign to highlight the maritime tragedy of a sunken ship, the 'SS Tilawa' (dubbed the Indian Titanic) has been spearheaded by a British-Asian broadcast journalist, Kash Kumar who lives in the city of Leicester in England and whose grandfather, Nichhabhai Chibabhai Solanki, drowned when the ship sank.

On 23 November 1942, during the Second World War, the SS Tilawa, transporting mostly Indian nationals en route from Bombay's Ballard Pier to Mombasa, Maputo and Durban, was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine near the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean. SS Tilawa had left Bombay on 20 November, 1942 at 5 pm IST. British India Steam Navigation Company-owned and a 10,006-tonne armed passenger cum cargo liner, the SS Tilawa was on her way from India to Africa with 6,472 tonnes of general cargo. After the first torpedo hit on that fateful night at 1 am, most passengers abandoned the ship in 10 lifeboats and 43 life rafts. The second torpedo hit SS Tilawa an hour later. Out of 958 people on board SS Tilawa, 252 passengers and 28 crew members died. The survivors were eventually rescued by British Navy vessel HMS Birmingham and another vessel SS Carthage, and brought back to Bombay.

Commissioned in 1924, the SS Tilawa used to transport passengers, mail and cargo between various ports in India and East Africa. The devastation the sinking of the SS Tilawa wreaked on the lives of survivors and descendants of those who

perished continues decades later. And, the mystery as to why the SS Tilawa was sunk remains unanswered to this day.

The final known living survivor of SS Tilawa is 83-year-old Arvind Jani who currently lives in south London and whose mother wrapped him in a sari before jumping into the last lifeboat. Jani was a 3-year-old when this tragedy took place.

"In association with Mumbai-based 'Maritime Mumbai Museum Society', I intend to hold a commemoration event in Mumbai on 23 November, 2022 to officially acknowledge the forgotten tragedy of the ill-fated SS Tilawa, and memorialise the loss of 280 passengers who sadly drowned as this is the 80th year since the Japanese Imperial Navy attacked the British passenger cargo liner," said Kash Kumar.

Outreach initiative A senior functionary of the Maritime Mumbai Museum Society, Vice Admiral (retd) Indrashil C Rao said that the proposed SS Tilawa commemoration event in Mumbai is a part of their Society's outreach initiative. "We endeavour to capture our glorious maritime heritage and bring to the people an immersive experience of all things maritime from the past, current activities and peep into the future," he added.

It was always known that 60 tons of silver bullion was on-board the ill-fated SS Tilawa. In 2017, a British exploration

company visited the wreck site of SS Tilawa using a subsea vessel. It took over six months to find 2,364 silver bars with a value of approximately £40 million.

A senior Indian mariner and a resident of Mumbai, who preferred to remain anonymous, said: "The ship is unfortunately in the news often, mainly due to its silver bullion cargo that sank on that fateful night. It is very sad that till today, the exact reason as to why the SS Tilawa was sunk by the Japanese navy has not been thoroughly investigated by the maritime NGOs, trusts, non-profit societies, or such other bodies or associations. Concerned citizens in India and elsewhere, preferably the family members of

those passengers who died aboard the ill-fated SS Tilawa should take up this sensitive issue with the governments of the United Kingdom and Japan, and seek a detailed report on the classified information on this incident or accident that killed innocent passengers during the voyage in deep seas during midnight hours during the Second World War."

"Our goal is to help bring some closure for thousands affected by the SS Tilawa incident, and solve many unanswered questions," said Kash Kumar.

The proposed commemoration of SS Tilawa on 23 November, 2022 in Mumbai has also inspired the stakeholders of Bollywood to shoot a web show series based on the ill-fated maritime tragedy. "Incorporating both historical and fictional aspects, I plan to write an exhaustive script for shooting a web show depicting the tragedy of SS Tilawa at the earliest," said Mitesh Chitalia, a veteran director of the Indian television industry. Chitalia said his plan is to co-produce the 'SS Tilawa' Hindi language web show in association with a British or Japanese producer. The plan is to dub the 'SS Tilawa' into the English and Japanese languages.

HEMANG PALAN

hemang.palan@businessindiagroup.com