



PRESS RELEASE: MUMBAI TO HOST 80TH COMMEMORATION OF S.S. TILAWA

Written by www.tilawa1942.com

The iconic Grand Hotel at the Ballard Estate, in Mumbai India will hold a historic event on Wednesday November 23rd 2022. This commemoration will officially acknowledge the forgotten tragedy of the ill-fated S.S. Tilawa, and memorialize the loss of 280 passengers who sadly drowned. This is the 80th year since the Japanese Imperial Navy attacked the British passenger cargo liner.

This commemoration is being organized by Mr. Mukesh R. Solanki residing in the U.K. (aka Kash Kumar, radio broadcaster), and his son Mr. Emile Solanki now residing in Toronto, Canada. Both are descendants of the late Mr. Nichhabhai Chibabhai Solanki, who drowned during the Tilawa incident.

This is truly a British Indian Story. A British Ship built by a British company sunk in British Ocean Indian Territory. 280 overseas British citizens and Indian nationals sadly perished.

"We in the Maritime Mumbai Museum Society are assisting the families (of the deceased and the survivors) who live in the UK and Canada to organize the commemoration on November 23, 2022," vice admiral (retd) I C Rao told the Times of India.

Those attending the commemoration will have an opportunity to meet the last known survivor, Mr. Arvinbhai Jani from South London U.K, who was just 3 years old when his mother, Vasantagauri, tied her little baby with her saree on her back, grabbed a rope and jumped into a lifeboat. There will also be other families from the U.K and hopefully South Africa whose relatives were onboard Tilawa. The program will include a presentation as well as some interviews.

The Grand Hotel is a fitting location for this event. S.S. Tilawa had departed from Ballard Pier, Bombay, and all 678 survivors were brought back to this pier, thanks to the rescue mission of HMS Birmingham and SS Carthage. The Grand Hotel is a short walk away from this area. The hotel owners have done a marvelous job preserving the building to its original condition, and this setting will add a historical ambience.



The Tilawa incident occurred 3 years before the end of the second world war, and 5 years before independence from British rule. This piece of missing maritime history represents the Indian immigrant story. Throughout the war thousands from India endeavored to break free from primitive village life. The region of East and South Africa presented new opportunities with better prospects.

S.S. Tilawa was a passenger cargo liner built by the British India Steam Navigation company in 1924 named after a Burmese port, and used for about 18 years. Its last route was from Mumbai to South Africa via the Seychelles, Mombasa, and Maputo, ending in Durban. Passengers were mainly Indian nationals. On November 20th 1942 at 17:00, the ship left the Ballard Pier Mumbai. There were 222 crew members, 732 passengers, 4 gunners, 9 lifeboats, over 6,000 tons of cargo, including 60 tons of silver bullion.

On November 23rd, in the early hours of the morning, 930 miles northeast of the Seychelles, Tilawa was attacked by the Japanese Imperial Navy. The I-29 B-1 Submarine, twice torpedoed Tilawa. After the first torpedo attack, the first officer transmitted SOS messages to no avail. Within the short time of approximately one hour, a second torpedo was fired and sunk the ship. For the next 2 days, all aboard would fight for their lives, attacked by barracuda, seeing their fellow passengers and loved ones drown to death. Eventually a rescue mission led by a Royal Navy Cruiser HMS Birmingham and SS Carthage ensured 678 people were rescued and taken back to Mumbai by November 27th 1942.

In 2017 a British exploration company, Argentum Exploration Ltd., visited the wrecksite using a subsea vessel. It took Argentum 6 months to find and salvage 2364 silver bars with a value of approximately £32 million. Documents reveal the Indian government sold 2391 silver bars to the government of South Africa for the purpose of coinage. The bullion was the last of 4 consignments.

This year an interesting development in the U.K. took place. At the court of appeals the Republic of South Africa again challenged Argentum claiming state immunity. Originally the case acknowledged RSA is the rightful owner of the silver. However RSA could not claim state immunity because this cargo was considered a commercial transaction, especially in light of some of the silver intended to produce Egyptian coinage. Therefore the court again concluded RSA should pay Argentum Exploration Ltd. for their labour. This time



ruled in favour of Argentum 2-1. More can be read about the latest ruling at www.tilawa1942.com

The exciting discovery of Tilawa sheds new light on this tragedy, with an opportunity to further research and increase awareness. Many questions are triggered by this precious find. What was the condition of the wreck? Were photographs and video footage taken? What was it like navigating the ship via a subsea vessel? What remains were seen?

It has been suggested that S.S. Tilawa was the only passenger liner to be sunk in the Indian Ocean during the second world war. Why would the Japanese torpedo a passenger liner? Was Tilawa a military threat? Were they provoked by Tilawa personnel? Did the Japanese know of the silver cargo? Are the Japanese solely responsible for this tragedy, or is there context to suggest Britain and India contributed to Tilawa's fate? The one hour or so gap between both fired torpedoes is of most interest.

Was Tilawa used in the war effort? The Indian Government ordered merchant ships, such as Karanja and Tilawa, to allow British soldiers onboard and provide bed and food for them. Did the British and Indian Government indirectly contribute to the Tilawa's fate? Indeed there are many unanswered questions. There has been no government effort to investigate this further. Being able to examine the wreck site may provide insights on the ship and incident.

It is of worthy note that in April 1943 when HMS Birmingham traveled to the U.K, an interesting opportunity was left unattended when a German U-boat brought Subash Chandra Bose to meet the I-29 Japanese Submarine in the Indian Ocean for safe passage to Japan. Think of this! An Indian political leader and British citizen becomes an ally of Adolf Hitler, and is given protection by the very Japanese crew that attacked his own people considered an enemy only 5 months before.

Over time historic disasters such as the Titanic have attracted much attention, yet little has been said of the ill-fated S.S. Tilawa.

Tilawa 1942 The Forgotten Tragedy was created by Mr. Emile Solanki originally from London U.K, and now residing in Toronto Canada. Along with his father Mr. Mukesh R. Solanki of Leicester U.K. (aka Kash Kumar, radio broadcaster), Emile hopes to seek any support for further research and prominently feature the S.S. Tilawa incident at various maritime museums and similar. The Solanki's are descendants



of the late Mr. Nichhabhai Chibabhai Solanki who sadly drowned after Tilawa was torpedoed. His wife and one son of 9 years old waited a month for their loved one to return. "We are grateful our great-grandfather was survived by one child, otherwise we would not be alive today."

Many families in India suffered traumatic loss. Recently the team has connected with several families in the U.K. and South Africa who had relatives onboard Tilawa.

"We are grateful to the Maritime Mumbai Museum Society (MMMS) for their kind support in assisting us" says Emile.

Live streaming of the commemoration will be made available.

Please visit www.tilawa1942.com for a comprehensive review on S.S. Tilawa. Any remaining survivors, descendants of victim's, or others with information are encouraged to share what they know and email info@tilawa1942.com

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