

NEWS WRAP

AGD

On an average, ten *dhow*s (small boats) from Gujarat are being hijacked by Somali pirates, every month. The *dhow*s have been defying warnings by the Union Government of India and threats of pirates, to venture into the dangerous Somalian waters. There is a trade off between the dhow owners and businessmen in Dubai. The Directorate of Shipping, of the Union Government, has issued several warnings to the *dhow*s, for strictly avoiding entering the Somalian waters, stretching from Salalah port to Male. The *dhow*s keep entering the dangerous waters, undeterred by these advisories. Several of the boats have been captured by pirates, more than once, while ferrying small articles, eatables, textiles and electronic items to war-torn Somalia. Most of the dhow owners based in Kutch and Veraval in Gujarat, generally, get their boats fitted with engines and other modern gadgets in Dubai. After the boats are towed from Kutch to Dubai, the dhow s are kept in the service of the engine supplier, for a specific number of days.

The engine supplier, despatches the dhow s to ferry goods, like cloth, salt and other small articles, to the coast of Somalia. These *dhow*s usually ferry from Dubai to Somalia, twice a month. The Indian authorities fail to regulate the movements, as the *dhow*s operate from Dubai to Somalia. Unlike larger vessels, the small boats, which fall in the category of Merchant Sail Vessel (MSV) can be registered easily at local ports, all over India. The *dhow*s normally weigh 100 tons. Fitted with modern engines and other gadgets, the *dhow*s upgrade to 500 to 1000 tons, and are usually available at competitive rates, and occasionally for free in Dubai. The well equipped *dhow*s are never hijacked for ransom, but used as “mother ships” for pirating bigger merchant ships, traversing the Gulf of Aden. After a fortnight, when diesel, drinking water and food supplies near exhaustion, the *dhow*s are released. About a month later the temptation of economic gains drives the small boats back in the Somali waters. Since 2008, the Indian Navy has deployed a warship in the 500 nautical mile long Gulf of Aden, to escort Indian flag carrying merchant ships. More than twenty warships of different NATO countries are sailing off Somalia coast, as part of anti-piracy operations. When a dhow is used as mother ship for hijacking by Somali pirates, the Indian crew could get killed or injured, in the event of armed action. Till date, not a single ship escorted by the Indian navy has been attacked or hijacked.

DEVELOPMENT AND LAND RIGHTS

The ‘adivasis’ are indigenous people, who were settled in the Indus Valley, thousands of years before the Aryans, Afghans and Mughals invaded. Today, “scheduled tribes” comprise 85 million of India’s population. The majority live in hilly forest belts, that extends over several states, across southern and eastern India. The vast majority of “scheduled tribes” speak mutually unintelligible

languages, of which often there is no written form. While the former “untouchable” scheduled castes have been able to infiltrate the political process, for articulating their grievances, the tribal inhabitants remain even more deprived. The state has never been close enough to engage, in respect of the tribal population. Since independence, the forest lands of the ‘adivasis’ comprise a fifth of India’s landmass. But benefits from the Union Government’s Developmental Planning have not reached them. Nearly three-quarters of the ‘adivasis’ are illiterate. In order to make way for dams, industrial townships, national parks and mining companies, around twenty million adivasis have been driven from their land. Indian democracy continues to throw up wonders. Tatas have lost to farmers in Singur (West Bengal), who refused to make way for a factory, to manufacture Nano cars. In a recent case, the inmates of a prison in Andhra Pradesh, successfully sued the owners of a nearby paper mill, for emitting foul-smelling pollutants.

BUDDHIST NOODLES FACTORIES IN NORTH KOREA

Christians have been persecuted brutally in North Korea, under communism. With North Korean attitudes toward Buddhism being more ambivalent, there are around 10,000 people who practise some kind of Buddhist rites, out of North Korea’s population of 24 million. Buddhist temples have often remained tourist sites. In North Korea, Buddhism is regarded as a patriotic institution, associated with the nationalist movement, and fighting Japanese colonial rule. But Buddhism in North Korea has been waning. The proper study of ancient texts has been prevented by the outlawing of Chinese script in North Korea. Some monks also defy tradition by marrying. Religion is officially banned. Anyone who believes in any religion, must practise in secrecy. Protestant missionaries and the Catholic Church are eagerly seeking North Korean converts. In a possible landscape after unification, special training is being imparted to priests, to specialise in the North from Seoul.

Buddhism has been a Korean religion for 1500 years. The venerable Buddhist abbot, Bop Ta, decided in the late 1990s, to construct noodle factories in North Korea. Besides feeding the hungry, the factories were expected to increase the role of Buddhism in inter-Korean rapprochement. Bop Ta now operates two noodles factories in North Korea. The Pyongyang factory and the Sariwon factory, in a city 56 kms to the south, is also a counter to the Christian attempts to monopolise Korean souls. A strong Buddhist culture prevails in Sariwon. The factories, which import ingredients from South Korea, employ seventy staff, for producing noodles. Bop Ta despatched 60 tons of ground wheat a month, feeding 7700 people, during the “sunshine policy” of South Korea’s two previous leftwing presidents. President Lee Myung-bak, a conservationist, is less warm towards North Korea. Consignments of ground wheat have fallen to 20 or 30 tons, every two months. Donations have been reduced due to North Korea’s missile tests. Mr Lee, a Presbyterian, is accused of sidelining South Korea’s 23% Buddhist population. Bop Ta raises funds through a Buddhist charity, which is registered with South Korea’s unification ministry. He has visited North Korea several times, and trusts the noodles are given to the needy, and not to the military.

North Koreans are unaware that Bop Ta's "Keumgang Noodles" hail from Buddhist charity in South Korea. Only sixty of North Korea's 500 shrines survived the 1950-1953 Korean war. Buddhist monks are now helping restore Buddhist temples. □