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# 'They asked us every little detail about Gujarat coast defence'

Sunday Mid DAY meets Porbandar fisherman Ramesh Karva who was on board MV Kuber, the trawler which was confiscated by the Pakistani Navy in 2007. Information revealed by the Indian boatmen during interrogation could have been used to carry out the Kuber hijack that preceded the 26/11 attacks

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**Sunday Mid DAY meets Porbandar fisherman Ramesh Karva who was on board MV Kuber, the trawler which was confiscated by the Indian Navy in 2007. Information revealed by the Indian boatmen during interrogation could have been used to carry out the Kuber hijack that preceded the 26/11 attacks**

There's a reason why most say MV Kuber is cursed. The boat that was hijacked by terrorists during the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai, had met a similar tragedy a year before.



Ramesh Karva, a local fisherman, who was spotted and arrested by a Pakistan patrol vessel in 2007. PIC/ Pradeep Dhivar

In November 2007, 28-year old Ramesh Karva was on board the MV Kuber as it was manoeuvring off Sir Creek, a 96-km strip of disputed water between India and Pakistan in the Rann of Kutch marshlands, when a Pakistani patrol vessel closed in.

Karva along with other the crew members was rounded up by Pakistani naval personnel and the boat was escorted into the Karachi harbour. Exactly a year later, on November 23, 2008, the fishing trawler was hijacked by Pakistani terrorists, who landed in Mumbai on the eve of the terror attack.

Karva was released from a Pakistani prison with 447 others in 2009, but while in there, he and the other Indian prisoners were subjected to rigorous interrogation by the Pakistani Inter Service Intelligence officials. "They asked us every little detail about ports in Gujarat, how many defence ships were positioned in the area. There were a lot of questions related to security in and around Gujarat," Karva remembers.

This could possibly be the reason why Pakistani ISI mastermind Sajid Mir and his group of terrorists were able to intercept and take the crew of MV Kuber hostage on November 23 in Jakhau area within Indian territorial waters.

The operation eventually culminated with the Mumbai carnage three days later.

"The cell in the Karachi jail was dark. The Pakistani mafia was highly active. Fights are common, and Indian prisoners were assaulted on the slightest provocation. If an Indian prisoner was taken away for questioning, nobody knew if he'd return safely," Karva says.

Boat owners say several vessels are confiscated by the Pakistani navy, and never returned, rendering hundreds of fishermen unemployed in the coastal districts of west Gujarat.

"In prison, we were asked to cut grass from the lawns and cook it. They

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provided us with chapatis to eat with this grass paste," Karva says.

Karva's employer Hiralalbai Masani says he was given Rs 9,000 on his release from the Pakistani jail, and his family had no means of getting by in his absence.

Manishbhai Lodhari, president of the Porbandar Boat Owners' Association in Porbandar says it is the lure of a big catch such as Rani and Rayban (species of fish), that takes hundreds of Indian fishermen close to common fishing grounds off Sir Creek.

A local Border Security Force officer said the BSF and the Coast Guard were doing their best to prevent Indian fishermen from straying into international waters. The line dividing India and Pakistan is a fine one, with hundreds of square kilometres of marshy land between the two borders. "It is often tempting to slip into Pakistan for a big catch," says Vinodbhai Tandel, a fisherman from Koteswar that overlooks Sir Creek.

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