

# MUMBAI'S ORIGINAL INHABITANTS FEAR WORLD'S TALLEST STATUE

**MUMBAI:** A fitting tribute to a local legend or a grotesque misuse of money? The decision to build the world's tallest statue just off Mumbai's coast has divided the city. But the traditional Koli community, who depend on fishing for their livelihoods, fear they will be worst hit by the construction, warning that it threatens their centuries-old existence. India will spend 36 billion rupees (\$530 million) on the controversial memorial to 17th century Hindu warrior king Chhatrapati Shivaji. Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone in December.

At 190 meters it will be twice the height of America's Statue of Liberty and almost 40 metres taller than the world's current tallest memorial—a statue of Buddha in China. The Koli fishing community, Mumbai's original inhabitants and whose goddess "Mumbadevi" lends her name to the city, say the decision to build it on a rocky outcrop a couple of kilometers off the coast will sound the death knell for their traditional way of life. "The breeding ground for fish will be completely destroyed," Krishna Tandel tells AFP, unfurling a net at Machhimar Nagar bay, which is tucked behind the high-rises of Mumbai's southern financial district.

The project has divided India's commercial capital and highlights a political obsession with statues in the country as parties seek to appeal to regional identities with ever greater effigies of historical figures. Supporters say the memorial is a fitting tribute to someone many locals consider a hero of Maharashtra state, of which Mumbai is the capital. Shivaji fought the Muslim Mughal empire, is revered by the Maratha caste and trumpeted by Hindu nationalist politicians. Opponents insist it is

a gross waste of money which would be better spent on improving health, education and infrastructure in the teeming metropolis of more than 20 million people.

### Environmental destruction

A petition on the change.org website opposing the bronze statue, which will

of fish to sell at markets and feed their families. Residents say disruption caused by construction will decimate their fishing stocks—including pomfret, Bombay mackerel, seer fish, prawns, and crabs—while heavy traffic ferrying tourists from three terminals will block access to the sea and disrupt wave patterns.



**MUMBAI:** Indian fishermen from the Koli community get off their boat onto a hand-made polystyrene dinghy to come ashore in Mumbai. A fitting tribute to a local legend or a grotesque misuse of money? The decision to build the world's tallest statue on Mumbai's shores has left the city divided. But the traditional Koli community, who depend on fishing for their livelihoods, fear the construction threatens their centuries-old existence. — AFP

depict Shivaji brandishing a sword while charging on a horse, has received almost 43,000 signatures. Some 2,000 fishermen, many of whom live in shanties surrounding Machhimar Nagar, operate 350 boats out of the picturesque cove, catching a melange

"We have been fishing for generations. It is our business and now our livelihoods are at stake," 32-year-old Tandel says, demanding the statue be built on land. Environmentalists agree that the project, which is due to be completed by 2021, will

cause immense harm to a vibrant marine ecosystem. "There's a huge diversity of fish, fauna and invertebrates there. Fish catches, sewage, and tidal currents will change," wildlife biologist Anand Pendharkar said. "It's going to affect the food base of the city, it's going to affect the economy. There is going to be a huge amount of damage."

Critics question why Mumbai needs such a lavish statue when the city already has several smaller Shivaji memorials. The city's airport, main train station and museum are named after the Hindu hero while there is also a Shivaji Park. IndiaSpend, a non-profit data journalism website, estimates that a micro-irrigation project could provide water to thousands of farmers in the drought-prone state for the cost of building the statue. For the same sum, dozens of decaying Shivaji-era forts could be restored instead, it says.

### India's 'Statue of Liberty'

The Bharatiya Janata Party-led Maharashtra government, in coalition with Shiv Sena, which means "Shivaji's Army", dismiss environmental concerns and say the project will draw 10,000 visitors every day. Shaina NC, a spokeswoman for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, claims it will be an "iconic" memorial akin to the Statue of Liberty that will make its money back through tourism. Shiv Sena spokesman Sanjay Raut says the sea is the best site because Shivaji created India's first navy. The development comes as the BJP government in neighboring Gujarat builds a 182-metre statue to Vallabhbhai Patel, a former Indian statesman who was one of the senior figures in the country's independence movement and an icon of the Congress Party.— AFP

CLINIC  
PAGE



Kuwait Times  
THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem  
فهد علي المخيزيم

Consultant Pediatrician استشاري أطفال  
M.B. Bch. FRCPC. FAAP. PEM

Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St. 1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B - Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368