

All at sea: Indian shipbuilding under scrutiny

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The pace of the Indian Navy's shipbuilding under its LTIPP and MCPP has been slow to deliver platforms in a timely manner, according to public project delivery timelines. Mazumdar Mrityunjoy reports

India's Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP) called in 2012 for the Indian Navy (IN) to have a fleet of more than 200 vessels by 2027, although exact details were never released. However, in December 2018 then Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Sunil Lanba admitted that 2050 is a more realistic timeframe for the IN to become a 200-ship, 500-aircraft, world-class navy.

The LTIPP and the Maritime Capability Perspective Plan (MCPP) 2012–27 are internal navy guidance documents stamped with the Ministry of Defence's (MoD's) "approval in principle", but without financial support. As one observer said, "It appears the clearance for shipbuilding projects is sought separately once necessity has been formally accepted." It also appears "allocations are case-specific" and not based on a larger blueprint.



The Indian Navy's first indigenously built aircraft carrier, Vikrant , was floated out at Cochin shipyard in southern India on 10 June 2015. (Indian Navy)

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India's process for warship procurement and funding is complex. A former senior IN officer said it involves "a set of detailed and intensely iterative interactions" between the MoD, its

finance division, higher levels of India's defence establishment, and the navy. It eventually leads to strategic guidance documents from the defence minister. These documents, such as the Strategic Planning Guidelines or the Operational Directive, inform the LTIPP, as well as its five-year and annual acquisition plans. The IN must then make a statement of case for each warship project to obtain funding. The former senior officer noted that "funding support is seldom firm" beyond the annual plan and "certainly not" beyond the five-year one.

Known plans

By mid-2019 there were about 47 naval vessels directly funded by the IN on order with Indian shipyards, not including strategic projects such as the Advanced Technology Vessel Project (ATVP) for nuclear-powered submarines, an ocean surveillance ship (OSS) for India's National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO), or, it is believed, a technology demonstrator vessel (TDV) for India's Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO), which are funded separately from the naval budget. These projects, which are monitored by the Prime Minister's Office, the National Security Advisor, and the DRDO, will move forward without the bureaucratic hurdles facing regular naval projects. The OSS started its maiden sea trials in January and will likely be delivered later this year, while the TDV delivery is expected later in 2019 and the ATVP has been quietly delivering hulls.

Most of these ship projects – both the IN-funded and strategic – are being built at large, state-owned Defence Public Sector Undertaking (DPSU) shipyards that have historically built warships in India. This group includes Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL), and Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL). Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL), a commercial public-sector undertaking, was also selected to build the aircraft carrier as DPSUs lacked a suitably large drydock.

The only private-sector firms involved in Indian naval shipbuilding are engineering group Larsen & Toubro (L&T), the Hazira shipyard, and other shipbuilding facilities that have been integral to India's secretive ATVP from the outset, as well as Reliance Naval and Engineering Limited (RNEL), formerly known as Pipavav Defence and Offshore Engineering. The subsidiary L&T Shipbuilding, which can draw on its parent for financial sustenance, was only ever awarded an order for a single floating dock, delivered in 2017, despite the firm building many Indian Coast Guard (ICG) patrol craft and offshore patrol vessels on time.

Four Project 11356M frigates are also on order from Yantar Shipyard in Russia, alongside a lease deal for another Akula-class submarine from Russia, initially to complement the extant leased Akula-class boat INS *Chakra* and eventually to replace it in 2025–27.

Beyond these firm orders MoD approvals are in place for the construction of 46 warships, submarines, and auxiliaries. These include six submarines under the Project 75(I) programme, four landing platform dock (LPD) ships, five fleet support ships (FSSs), six next-generation missile vessels (NGMVs), six next-generation offshore patrol vessels, 12 mine

countermeasure vessels (MCMVs), three cadet training ships (CTSs), and a large survey training vessel.

Other known plans include a second aircraft carrier, and 5–10 next-generation frigates and destroyers, the latter of which are believed to be much larger than the Project 15B class hulls, also known as the Visakhapatnam class. Other plans include smaller vessels like five 30 m-lob dive support craft and 20 patrol vessels of various types.

Project details

India's first 30-year submarine building plan, dating back to the late 1990s, was for 24 submarines by 2030. There were to be two production lines with two designs, known as Project 75 and Project 75(I), with a Western builder and a Russian builder each building six submarines. At the same time the IN would develop an indigenous submarine design called Project 76, leading to 12 boats on the two production lines.

Thus far only Project 75, promising six Kalvari (Scorpène)-class hulls, has borne fruit. In view of protracted delays and an inability to make any headway with Project 75(I) for six more hulls, the IN has apparently recast its plans to include 18 conventional and six nuclear attack boats (SSKs and SSNs), believed to be 6,000-tonne-class hulls. Timelines appear to have been extended to the 2050s. This submarine plan does not include the IN's strategic assets like nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs).

According to local media reports and limited public information, India's classified strategic nuclear submarine projects call for two more modified Arihant-class hulls, a new class of five or six larger 13,500-tonne SSBNs and a new class of six 6,000-tonne attack boats.

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