

# Cochin Shipyard delivers aircraft carrier to Navy

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New Delhi:

The final countdown for the commissioning of India's first indigenous aircraft carrier (IAC) as INS Vikrant has now begun, with the 45,000-tonne warship built at a cost of almost Rs 20,000 crore being delivered to the Navy by the Cochin Shipyard on Thursday.

In a related development, the first two of the 24 submarine-hunting MH-60 'Romeo' helicopters, armed with Hellfire missiles, MK-54 torpedoes and precision-kill rockets, also arrived from the US at Kochi, with the third slated to come next month.

All 24 choppers, also equipped with multi-mode ra-dars and night-vision devices, will arrive by 2025 under the Rs 15,157 crore (\$2.13 billion) contract inked with the US in February 2020.

The MH-60Rs will operate from the IAC as well as other frontline warships.

The 262-metre long and 62-metre wide IAC, which has the capacity to carry 30 fighters and helicopters, will be commissioned in the second half of August. She will then be christened INS Vikrant after India's first aircraft carrier that was acquired from the UK in 1961, played a major role during the 1971 war and eventually was decommissioned in 1997.

Powered by four gas turbines totalling 88 MW power, the IAC has an overall indigenous content of 76%. It will have a crew of 1,700 and an operational endurance of around 7,500 nautical miles at a cruising speed of 18 knots.

But while the Navy has conducted extensive sea trials of the long-delayed IAC over the last one year, the aviation trials of the MiG-29K fighters and helicopters like Kamov-31 and MH-60R from her deck will only kick off later this year. In effect, the carrier — which was first sanctioned by government way back in January 2003 — will become fully operational only by mid-2023.

In sharp contrast, China already has the world's largest navy with 355 warships and submarines as compared to India's 130-warship force, and also 'launched' its third aircraft carrier, the over 80,000-tonne Fujian, last month. It is also fast building a fourth carrier, while cranking up its

presence in the Indian Ocean Region.

Fujian has CATOBAR (catapult assisted take-off but arrested recovery) configuration to launch fighters as well as heavier aircraft for surveillance, early-warning and electronic warfare from its deck.

The US has 11 “super” 100,000-tonne nuclear-powered carriers, each of which carries 80-90 fighters and aircraft.



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