Pride and nostalgia filled the air as India's first indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant was commissioned into the Indian Navy on Friday by Prime Minister Narendra Modi— a milestone event for the force, which saw hundreds of naval personnel and veterans inside a packed hall at the Cochin Shipyard Limited premises.

It was a moment of sheer pride for most serving naval officers and sailors, as the commissioning of INS Vikrant—referred to as a floating airfield—takes India into a league of select nations who have got the capability to build an aircraft carrier with a displacement of over 40,000 tonnes.

WORTHY SUCCESSOR

For many others, it brought nostalgia too, for INS Vikrant is a reincarnation of her predecessor and India's first-ever aircraft carrier, which had played a pivotal role in the 1971 war between India and Pakistan, among other critical operations.

Top naval officers present at the occasion best explained the huge significance of the event. They told News18 that the commissioning marks a big achievement for India for a multitude of reasons.

Referring to INS Vikrant as the "poster girl" of Atmanirbhar Bharat, the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Eastern Naval Command Vice Admiral Biswajit Dasgupta told News18 that she catapults India into a league of a handful of countries that have the capability of building an aircraft carrier. He said it also testifies to our design capability acquiring a niche.
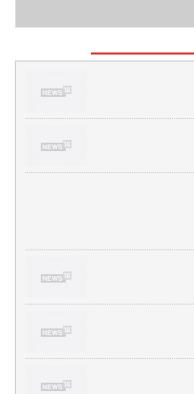
"She is more than twice as large as her predecessor and has been built in 13 years, which is brisk for any nation by any standard," he said. "INS Vikrant has proved our capability to integrate aircraft and systems from across the world from Russian, Indian and American aircraft, Russian aviation complex, American gas turbines, Israeli weapons and radars as well as indigenous weapon systems including electronic warfare equipment, gun mounts and others."

"She tells a story of competence, capability and confidence," he said.

Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Western Naval Command Vice Admiral AB Singh told News18 that old ships never die and they only fade away to be reborn again.

"We had served in the erstwhile INS Vikrant and it is a matter of great happiness for us that INS Vikrant is back again and I'm still in service," he said, laying emphasis on the importance of the day for the Navy.

The senior naval officer said that thorough aircraft landing trials would follow in the months to come and that would take some

time. "There is no shortcut to this," he said.

He added that the ship is well equipped for women to serve aboard and all streams of the Navy have been opened up to admit them.

With a displacement of 42,800 tonnes, the mighty INS Vikrant stood tall as spectators poured in to catch a glimpse of her. The ship is powered by four 22 MW gas turbine engines and has a range of 7,500 nautical miles, which effectively makes for a journey via sea from India to Brazil in one go without a need for refuelling in between.

On the scorching Friday afternoon at Cochin, hundreds had flocked to the deck of INS Vikrant to capture her vast runway in their lenses or just to have a feel of being aboard the formidable ship. One end of the flight deck displayed the ALH Dhruv, Kamov-31 helicopters and the MiG-29 K fighters, while the other end had the ski-jump for aircraft to take off from the runway.

FORMIDABLE

About an hour ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his speech had said that Vikrant is huge, massive, and vast. "Vikrant is distinguished, Vikrant is also special. Vikrant is not just a warship. This is a testament to the hard work, talent, influence and commitment of India in the 21st century," he told an excited audience.

The features of INS Vikrant best describe what PM Modi said. It is 262.5 m long and 62.5 m wide and has a speed of 28 knots and a cruise speed of 18 knots.

The ship would be capable of operating an air wing consisting of 30 aircraft, comprising MiG-29K fighter jets, Kamov-31, MH-60R multi-role helicopters, in addition to indigenously manufactured Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) and Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) (Navy).

Using a novel aircraft-operation mode known as "short take-off but arrested recovery" (STOBAR), the IAC is equipped with a ski-jump for launching aircraft, and a set of three "arrestor wires" for their recovery onboard.

It is also equipped with 32 Medium Range Surface to Air Missile (MRSAM), the AK-630 fully automatic naval rotary cannon close-in weapon system, and stabilised remote-controlled guns (SRCG).

INS Vikrant has the RAN-40L 3D air surveillance radar, DRDO-developed Shakti Electronic Warfare suite, and the Rezislor-E Aviation Complex as well as the Kavach Chaff (anti-missile) decoy system, along with Torpedo Decoy System.

The ship has a height of 61.6 metres (14 floors high), and the flying deck is about 12,500 sq m (the size of two-and-a-half hockey fields).

The cabling used in the ship is 2,600 km long and the power generated by the vessel is enough to light up a small town.

INS Vikrant can carry a crew of over 1,600, and has its own hospital, fitness centre, kitchen, and laundry, among other facilities.

The kitchen, in fact, can churn out 4,800 meals a day with three automated galleys producing 16,000 chapatis and 6,000 idlis daily.

The medical complex is spread over 45 compartments on three decks and has a 16-bed ward. The medical team comprises five officers and 15 sailors and includes a 64-slice CT scan centre, two operation theatres, a dental centre, an X-ray and scanning facility, and a full-fledged laboratory, aside from other facilities.

As India aims to be a blue-water navy, INS Vikrant will significantly up its offensive and defensive capabilities in the Indian Ocean Region and will be a huge force multiplier. INS Vikrant will eventually be based in Vizag in a year and will be part of the Eastern Naval Command which takes care of the entire Bay of Bengal area from the east coast of India, except the area under the Andaman and Nicobar Command.

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