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India's first missile tracking ship is readying for sea trials

Built by Hindustan Shipyard Ltd., the hi-tech vessel will enter elite global club

By Santosh Patnaik

Once ready, it will be India's first, a force multiplier and cruise the country into a global elite club. Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL) is gearing up to undertake sea trials of India's first missile tracking ship by the first week of October.

The keel of the ship, which was laid on June 30, 2014, is being built for the National Technical Research Organisation, the technical intelligence agency working directly under the supervision of the Prime Minister's Office and the National Security Adviser.

Considered a "topmost secret project", a lot of confidentiality is being maintained in executing the project costing about ₹750 crore. It will be named after its induction into the Indian Navy. For now, it is simply referred as VC 11184.

Strategic Weapons Prog.

This will be the first of its kind ocean surveillance ship being built as part of the efforts under the NDA government to strengthen the country's strategic weapons programme.

When asked about the commencement of sea trials, HSL Chairman and Managing Director Rear Admiral L.V. Sarat Babu told The Hindu that the sea trials would be carried out either by September-end or the first week of October and they were confident of handing over the vessel to the Indian Navy by the year-end. "This would put India in the elite of club of a few countries that have such a sophisticated ocean surveillance ship," the Rear Admiral pointed out.

Declining to comment further, he said they had successfully completed the basin trials sometime ago.

300-Strong Crew

The ship was built inside the covered dry dock. It has the capacity to carry 300-strong crew with hi-tech gadgets and communication equipment, powered by two diesel engines, and a large deck capable of helicopter landing.

HSL, set up in 1941, achieved a total income of ₹651.67 crore and a value of production of ₹644.78 crore during 2017-18, the highest since inception. It is poised to get orders for construction of five fleet support ships costing ₹9,000 crore and finalise request for proposal for design collaborator for construction of two Special Operation Vessels called mini submarines. It is also banking on the order for medium refit of Russia-made third Sindhughosh class submarine INS Sindhuratna for which it has submitted technical bids.

Visakhapatnam is considered a strategic location on the East Coast for the Indian defence forces as it is home for Ship Building Centre to build nuclear powered submarine INS Arihant class, Naval Alternate Operational Base at Rambilli, the second naval base after Eastern Naval Command headquarters, training centre for Marine Commandos and headquarters of the submarine arm.

Army mulling increasing retirement age of jawans

Plans to hike it to 20 years in a phased manner

The Army is considering a proposal to increase the retirement and pensionable age of jawans in service from the current 15 years to 20 years in a phased manner. This will have a major impact as Other Ranks (OR) constitute most of the rank and file of the 1.3 million army.

As of now Jawans and Lance Naiks retire after 15 years of service, which is also the pensionable service limit with the option of a two year extension.

Dual Benefit

The idea is to increase the pensionable service limit in phases to 20 years as the life expectancy has gone up in general since independence and soldiers retire relatively young, a defence official said. This will serve the dual benefit of giving longer tenure in service for soldiers while reducing the pension burden for the Army.

On Tuesday, Army Chief General Bipin Rawat held a meeting with the seven Army Commanders to review the progress of the four studies being currently undertaken on Army transformation. The studies by separate groups of 7 to 8 officers each will look into the restructuring of the Army headquarters; force restructuring, which includes cutting down the strength; cadre review of officers and review of terms and conditions of Junior Commissioned Officers (JCO) and Other Ranks (OR).

Revenue to Capital Ratio

The Army is facing an increasing burden of revenue expenditure and pensions, leaving very little funds for new purchases and modernisation. In this year's Defence Budget, the Army's share was Rs. 1,28,076 crore for revenue stream, while Rs. 26,688 crore was the capital allocation. This does not include pensions. The current revenue to capital ratio is around 83:17. "While the ideal ratio is 60:40, the target is 65:35 which itself will be a great achievement," another defence source said.



Wed, 12 Sept 2018

Army to trim forces to better its armoury

Army Chief General Bipin Rawat held a brainstorming session with top generals on Tuesday, to draw a road map to trim forces aimed at reducing expenditure on salaries that can help in enhancing military capabilities.

The idea is to achieve an ideal 60:40 ratio for payment of salaries and capital acquisitions for the Army, sources said. Currently 83 per cent of budget is for salaries and only 17 per cent is earmarked for buying arms and ammunition.

The exercise is expected to save the Army Rs 6,000-7,000 crore annually, according to estimates. "Reduction of manpower to save on salaries and pensions will aid modernisation plans of the Army," said an Army official.

The plan is to cut down the total Army strength by nearly 1.5 lakh from the existing 12.6 lakh by restructuring different wings of the Army including the staff posted at the head quarters in New Delhi.

The Army commanders and the chief took a close look at findings that are likely to take final shape next month at the Army commanders' conference. This is the biggest reform since independence, the Indian Army plans to undertake.

Clubbing of different branches in the Army Headquarters, functions of which overlap, is being considered. This is being planned to cut down on duplicity of responsibilities.



Wed, 12 Sept 2018

Mountain warfare training for Indo-US Armies

Some 700 Indian and US soldiers will hone their counter-terrorism skills in mountainous terrain in the foothills of Himalayas in Uttarakhand from next week, furthering interoperability between the armies of the two countries.

The two-week joint military training "Yudh Abhyas 2018" will be conducted in Chaubattia from September 16 to 29.

This will be the 14th edition of the joint military exercise hosted alternately by both countries.

"The joint exercise will simulate a scenario where both nations will work together in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism environment in mountainous terrain under United Nation charter," an army spokesperson said here.

"The exercise will witness participation of about 350 personnel of the US Army and similar strength of the Indian Army."

The military drill curriculum is progressively planned where the participants are initially made to get familiar with each other's organisational structure, weapons, equipment, confidence training and tactical drills.

Subsequently, the training advances to joint tactical exercises wherein the battle drills of both the armies are coherently unleashed.

The training will culminate with a final validation exercise in which troops of both countries will jointly carry out an operation against terrorists in a fictitious but realistic setting.

"Over the years, the two countries have decided to progressively increase the scope and content of this joint exercise. Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2018 will witness a Division Headquarter based Command Post Exercise, an Infantry Battalion carrying out field training exercise and discussions on issues of mutual interest by experts of both countries."

The spokesperson described the exercise as "a great step for the armies of the two democratic countries to train together and gain together from each other's rich operational experiences" to help further build interoperability between the forces of the two countries.



Wed, 12 Sept 2018

Indo-Kazakh military exercise begins

A fortnight-long Indo-Kazakhstan joint military exercise Kazind-2018, began in Otar military area, Kazakhstan, with the opening ceremony held on Tuesday in which Kazakhstan and Indian soldiers stood side by side and gave ceremonial salute to General Major Dzhumakeev Almaz, Deputy Commander for battle training, Kazakhstan Army reviewing the ceremony.

This is the third edition of joint military training exercise between the two armies and will be on till 23 September. Welcoming the Indian contingents, General Major Dzhumakeev Almaz highlighted the common shared beliefs of freedom, equality and justice that are precious to both the nations.

Wed, 12 Sept 2018

Russia launches biggest ever war games

Russia launched on Tuesday what it called its largest ever military drills, with hundreds of thousands of troops taking part along with Chinese soldiers in a show of force NATO condemned as a rehearsal for "large-scale conflict." President Vladimir Putin is expected to attend the games after hosting an economic forum in Russia's far eastern city Vladivostok where his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping is one of the prominent guests.

The week-long war games dubbed "Vostok-2018"(East-2018) "have kicked off" in far eastern Russia, the defence ministry said. Taking part in the drills are around 300,000 soldiers, 36,000 military vehicles, 80 ships and 1,000 military aircraft. Some 3,500 Chinese troops will take part in the games.

The defence ministry released video footage of military vehicles, planes, helicopters and ships getting into position for the initial stage of the drills. Putin praised Russia's increasingly close ties with China as he met with Xi at the economic forum in Vladivostok on Tuesday. "We have trustworthy ties in political, security and defence spheres," the Russian leader said. Xi for his part said the two countries' "friendship is getting stronger all the time." The drills, which also include Mongolian soldiers, have been condemned by NATO as a rehearsal for "large-scale conflict". The military exercises come at a time of escalating tensions between Moscow and the West over accusations of Russian interference in western affairs and conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. The Russian army has compared the show of force to the USSR's 1981 war games that saw between 100,000 and 150,000 Warsaw Pact soldiers take part in "Zapad-81" (West-81) — the largest military exercises of the Soviet era. But Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said these exercises are even larger. "Imagine 36,000 military vehicles moving at the same time: tanks, armoured personnel carriers, infantry fighting vehicles — and all of this, of course, in conditions as close to a combat situation as possible," Shoigu said. The exercises will be held across nine training ranges and three seas: the Sea of Japan, the Bering Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk. The Russian army is rolling out all of its latest additions for the event: Iskander missiles that can carry nuclear warheads, T-80 and T-90 tanks and its recent Su-34 and Su-35 fighter planes. At sea, the Russian fleet is deploying several frigates equipped with Kalibr missiles that have been used in Syria. Wednesday will see games featuring anti-aircraft technology, while the main event will be on Thursday, the defence ministry told journalists covering the event in eastern Siberia and the Far East. NATO said that Vostok-2018 "demonstrates Russia's focus on exercising large-scale conflict". "It fits into a pattern we have seen over some time -- a more assertive Russia, significantly increasing its defence budget and its military presence," the alliance's spokesman Dylan White said late August. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov dismissed such concerns on Tuesday. "These are very important drills but they are part of routine annual work to develop the armed forces," he told journalists.

Wed, 12 Sept 2018

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Post Cold War, Moscow flexes muscle with 3 lakh troops in Serbia

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THE ASIAN AGE

Wed, 12 Sept 2018

NASA lists hazards of human spaceflight to Mars

Washington: In order to make an organised effort to overcome the obstacles that lie before a human journey to Mars, Nasa has listed five hazards that astronauts can encounter on the red planet. These hazards are being studied using ground-based analogues, laboratories, and the International Space Station (ISS), which serves as a test bed to evaluate human performance and counter-measures required for the exploration of space, the US space agency said in a statement. Nasa's Human Research Program divides the hazards into five classifications -- radiation; isolation and confinement; distance from Earth; gravity (or lack thereof); and hostile or closed environments. "Various research platforms give Nasa valuable insight into how the human body and mind might respond during extended forays into space," Nasa researchers said. "The resulting data, technology and methods developed serve as valuable knowledge to extrapolate to multi-year interplanetary missions," they said. The first hazard of a human mission to Mars, Nasa says, is also the most difficult to visualise because, space radiation is invisible to the human eye. Radiation is not only stealthy, but considered one of the most menacing of the five hazards. Behavioral issues among groups of people crammed in a small space over a long period of time, no matter how well trained they are, are inevitable, according to Nasa. Crews will be carefully chosen, trained and supported to ensure they can work effectively as a team for months or years in space, it said. The third and perhaps most apparent hazard is the distance. Mars is, on average, 140 million miles from Earth. Rather than a three-day lunar trip, astronauts would be leaving our planet for roughly three years, the statement said. Nasa noted that the variance of gravity that astronauts will encounter is the fourth hazard of a human mission. On Mars, astronauts would need to live and work in three-eighths of Earth's gravitational pull for up to two years, it noted. Nasa also understands that the ecosystem inside a vehicle plays a big role in everyday astronaut life. Important habitability factors

include temperature, pressure, lighting, noise, and quantity of space, the statement said. It's essential that astronauts are getting the requisite food, sleep and exercise needed to stay healthy and happy, it said.

THE ASIAN AGE

Wed, 12 Sept 2018

INDIAN BAGS YOUNG SCHOLAR AWARD IN U.S.

Washington, Sept. 11: Rajalakshmi Nandakumar, an India-born woman scholar in the US, has been chosen for a prestigious award for her work to help detect potentially life-threatening health issues using smartphones. Nandakumar, studying at the University of Washington, has created a technology that turns an ordinary smartphone into an active sonar system capable of detecting physiological activities, such as movement and respiration, without requiring physical contact with the device. She has been selected for the 2018 Marconi Society Paul Baran Young Scholar award. She took inspiration from bats, which use sonar technique to navigate in the dark by sending out acoustic signals and using the reflections to identify objects. Her system works by transmitting inaudible sound signals from the phone's speaker and tracking their reflections off the human body. The reflections are then analysed using a combination of algorithms and signal processing techniques, a media release said. Nandakumar received her bachelor's degree in Computer Science.