

UPSC Civil Services Examination

Current Affairs & GS-III (Science & Technology) – Indian Defence Forces

Topic: INS Vikrant

INS Vikrant: India's first aircraft carrier

INS Vikrant was the first aircraft carrier to ever grace the arsenal of the Indian Navy. Initially starting life as the HMS Hercules of the British Royal Navy, the ship was re-christened as 'Vikrant' after purchase by the Indian Navy. The construction aircraft carrier began when World War II was in full swing, but would not be completed even after the end of the conflict. The incomplete ship was sold to the Indian Navy in 1957, who would finish its construction by the year 1961.

What is INS Vikrant's ship design?

INS Vikrant measured a length of 700ft, with a beam of 128 ft. wide, considerably less shorter than her sister ship, the INS Viraat, at 748 ft. in length and 160 ft. in width. The INS Vikrant was a bridge between full-sized fleet carriers and smaller, more economical escort carriers. In other words, INS Vikrant can be categorised as a "light fleet carrier". Formally, INS Vikrant falls under the Majestic-class of aircraft carriers.

The indicated horsepower of the ship totalled up to 40,000 (30,000 kW). It gave a speed of 25 knots which is about 46 km/hr. INS Vikrant could house about 1100 officers, men and aircrew.

What is the operational history of INS Vikrant?

After its commissioning in 1961, the INS Vikrant went on its maiden voyage to Tamil Nadu for initial refitting and re-armament. When the war of 1965 broke out between India and Pakistan, the carrier was being refitted in Mumbai. It would not leave its moorings until the end of the conflict. Its warplanes, meanwhile, had to operate from air bases located on dry land during the conflict. The war ended with an UN-mediated ceasefire with no clear winner, but with both sides claiming victory on the basis of the percentage of territories held at the end of the war.

It would be in the 1971 Indo - Pak war when Vikrant would see its first combat operations. This time INS Vikrant would launch airstrikes and Combat Air Operations led primarily by Hawker Sea Hawk fighter - bombers. The war of 1971 would end in a decisive victory for the Indian Armed forces, resulting in the creation of the infant nation of Bangladesh. Vikrant would play a leading role by using its aircraft squadron in suppressing Pakistani Army ground movements and blockading East Pakistan from vital supplies through air and sea.

The warship was again refitted between the years 1991 - 1994, which did allow some degree of stability in her operations. But it was evident that her best days were behind her, as even the mightiest of ships have a shelf life. The decision was taken to finally decommission her. She was formally decommissioned in the year 1997. INS Vikrant was laid up in Mumbai, where she became a museum ship from 2001 until 2012 before public safety issue and lack of funding from both the Indian Navy and the State Government of Maharashtra proved to be a death-knell for the ship. INS Vikrant was auctioned off in 2013 and ultimately scrapped in November 2014.