

The Daily Times, 1 June 2005

Mukherjee inaugurates India's largest naval base

KARWAR: India's largest naval base opened for business on Tuesday, fulfilling a long-standing navy demand for a dedicated facility capable of accommodating most of its warships. "This base is of strategic importance," said Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee while inaugurating the base in Karwar. The base is less vulnerable to an attack by Pakistan than the existing main Arabian Sea naval base in Bombay. Karwar is nearly 1,450 kilometres from Pakistan's main naval base in Karachi as compared to Bombay which is 900 kilometres away. Once completed, the base will have 11 piers accommodating 42 warships. A repair and maintenance system for warships will be in place by December. The total project cost is estimated at US\$800 million, half which has been spent on the first phase, which went into operation on Tuesday. "With the commissioning of this base, the navy will fulfil its responsibility of defending the country and safeguarding its exclusive economic zone," said Mukherjee.

The Times of India, 4 June 2005

Navy gets a new teeth

NEW DELHI: The indigenously-developed advanced light-weight torpedo, after a delay of several years, is now finally getting ready for induction into the Navy. This makes India only the eighth country in the world to have the technology to manufacture such torpedoes for anti-submarine warfare. The Naval Science and Technological Laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organisation was tasked with developing this torpedo as far back as in 1987 but the project was dogged by several time and cost overruns. "But the torpedo has now undergone successful user trials and is now ready for induction," said an official. The torpedo can be launched by both warships and helicopters against enemy submarines. "Made of light-weight high strength material, it can attack targets at a depth of 540 metres and attain a maximum speed of 33 knots. Its dynamic frontal sealing system makes it more reliable at higher depths and less noisy," said the official. But there has been criticism over the long delay in the torpedo's "free flow production". The project was conceived by the Navy, which had a requirement for 900 such torpedoes that were otherwise to be met through imports at huge costs. The delay has meant that the Navy has had to continue using many vintage torpedoes.

The Tribune, 7 June 2005

Joint Indo-French exercises from June 16

New Delhi, June 6: The second Indo-France joint exercises, Garuda II, will be held at the French Istres Air Force Base between June 16 and 30.

The Indian Express, 8 June 2005

Navy to rush spares to Vietnam Deal was arrived at during Vietnam Defence minister visit in March

NEW DELHI, JUNE 7: Taking ahead its south-east Asia policy, the Indian Navy is all set to reach more than 150 tonnes of critical spares to Vietnam on June 9 for its Petya and OSA-II class Russian-made missile boats. Shortly after Admiral Arun Prakash's fruitful visit to the region, which included an agreement with Thailand on monitoring common waters, the Navy will send its amphibious vessel INS Magar with 900 boxes of crucial spares that the Vietnamese Navy desperately needs. An understanding on this was struck when the Vietnamese Defence Minister visited New Delhi in March. "The spares would be of immense value to the Vietnamese Navy that operates a number of Russian-built Petya and OSA-II class missile boats," a Navy spokesperson said. "Vietnam is an important part of extended maritime neighbourhood and the Indo-Vietnam friendly bilateral relations have gone from strength to strength in recent years." Vietnam, which shares borders with Cambodia, Laos and China, has a coast all along the South China sea, across from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and Philippines. The South China Sea area is a region the Indian Navy has set its sights on for comprehensive power projection. With warming relations between India and China - and the possibility of Sino-Indian joint Naval exercises this year in the Arabian sea - the Navy is keen to get an "equal share" of recognition in the area for progressive deep water capabilities, far from Indian shores.

The Tribune, 11 June 2005

Spare parts for Vietnam

In a bid to expand its maritime diplomacy with the strategically significant Southeast Asian nations, the Indian Navy is offering them spare parts of the same type of equipment which is being used by both countries. An Indian ship has carried almost 150 tonnes of spare parts for Vietnam. These include spare parts of missiles and warships. The spare parts have been carried by Indian ship INS Magar and the consignment, comprising of 900 boxes were handed over to the Vietnamese Navy at a ceremony earlier in the week. The spares are for the Russian-built Petya class frigate and OSA II class missile boats. The two boats are also used by the Indian Navy which feels that Vietnam has been a key partner in maritime cooperation.

The Indian Express, 18 June 2005

Scorpene deal not far off, says Pranab

NEW DELHI, JUNE 17: Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee has hinted that the government may finally procure six French Scorpene submarines. Speaking in Kolkata today, the Minister said the deal was "not final" but added, "As per procurement procedures, the negotiations will be completed and the government's decision on buying submarines will be completed. Only then will it be possible to say by what time we will get the submarines." His comments will be welcome to the Navy, which stands to lose if the process is unduly delayed. "There are different stages and all stages in respect of the procurement of Scorpene submarines are yet to be finalised," Mukherjee said. There have been numerous hitches in obtaining CCS clearance this year, among them CCS members' criticism about the price and capabilities of the Scorpene. The deal had nearly been cleared at the end of March when one CCS member questioned the price. The CCS delay itself has resulted in a cost escalation of hundreds of crores. The Navy is confident of the Scorpene's capabilities, and Navy chief Admiral Arun Prakash has dismissed reports that the submarine is being chosen uncompetitively. It has persistently told the government that the HDW attack subs it has tested do not match some of the Scorpene's capabilities. However, the Navy is satisfied with the four HDW Shishumar-class submarines it bought in the 1980s.

The Hindu, 24 June 2005

"Delay in purchase of submarines can hit preparedness" (Sandeep Dikshit)

NEW DELHI: Procrastination in modernising the submarine fleet can hit the Navy's war preparedness, say naval officers. India has 16 submarines, the youngest of which is 15 years old. Two have reached the end of their service life and the remaining will be decommissioned in phases from 2010. "Even if the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) signs the contract today, it will take at least five to six years for the first submarine to join the fleet. By then the first of the Kilo class submarines would be nearing retirement," said an officer. Chief of the Naval Staff Arun Prakash told The Hindu recently that of the two contenders for the multibillion-dollar submarine building contract, the Navy rejected one in 2002. He implied that the Navy had expressed its preference for the French Scorpene submarines. However, the Central Bureau of Investigation told the Delhi High Court that it found no case of mala fide against HDW, a German company, accused of giving kickbacks. With the CBI's clean chit, the company believes that it is back in the reckoning and has been petitioning politicians and the media for a fresh look at its proposal.