

# Imperatives of India's future aircraft carrier

## Rear Admiral Devender Sudan on the IAC-2

The Defence Minister Mr Rajnath Singh, who was recently onboard the Indian Navy's aircraft carrier *INS Vikramaditya* in the Arabian Sea, witnessed the multi-dimensional operational capability of the Navy and its capacity to undertake a wide range of offensive and defensive missions. The Indian Navy has a proud legacy of being a three-dimensional navy, with capability to conduct operations on, above and below the surface. With its balanced fleet, and following a strategy of 'Sea Control', the Indian Navy is capable of conducting operations in a chosen area as required. Relatively smaller Navy's work on the 'Sea Denial' approach, attempting to deny the use of sea areas to an adversary. On the other hand, aircraft carriers are main platforms for conduct of 'Sea Control' operations, and thus a vital component for the Indian Navy.

The aircraft carrier is a moving airfield at sea on which is based the core of sea-borne air power, which can be utilised according to demands of the situation. The presence of integral fighter aircraft and other air platforms provide the nation with

unmatched ability to influence and intervene at a time and place of its political choice.

Air power is ubiquitous and highly effective, be it over land or sea, an important constituent and a key enabler of maritime power. Application of air power in conjunction with maritime forces increases operational effectiveness at sea by considerable magnitude. Offensive operations by aircraft are the biggest threat to the enemy, be they warships, submarines or even merchant shipping. Employed for surveillance, air defence, anti-ship, anti-submarine, or long range strike, ashore or at sea, air power has a preeminent role in engaging threats and creating space for the Navy's freedom of operation.

Of course, the aircraft carrier also is a symbol of national power and an expression of the nation's will to pursue its foreign policy objectives, making a major contribution in all roles, military, diplomatic or constabulary. By its mere presence, the aircraft carrier can influence events and be a major manner of deterrence. The aircraft carrier plays a role in various situations - benign, humanitarian assistance

and disaster relief (HADR), from low intensity conflict to full military operations. In naval operations on the high seas, survival of the surface fleet is severely compromised without integral air support. The aircraft carrier provides an extensive surveillance 'bubble', protects ships from the threat of enemy aircraft, hunts and prosecutes submarines at extended ranges, engages enemy warships even while serving as a command and control centre. The aircraft carrier provides air power across the oceans, without requiring friendly air bases on land, but of course can also project power over swathes of land.

At the dawn of India's independence, Sardar KM Pannikar had stated that "the long term policy should be to develop India as a 'naval power' capable by itself of defending its interests in the seas as vital to it and of maintaining supremacy in the Indian Ocean Region". The first perspective plan for the Indian Navy, made in 1947 itself, envisaged at least two aircraft carriers for India. The Indian Navy has now been successfully operating carriers continuously for six decades.



*INS Vikramaditya, with MiG-29 and Ka-31s on deck*