

Boom time for India's nuke subs in 2020

COULD 2020 be the year that India's long-delayed nuclear submarine building programme finally picks up speed? Two Arihant-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) are slated to pass key milestones this year.

The INS Arighat, currently on sea trials is likely to be commissioned by the middle of the year. The submarine was launched in 2018. A third, yet unnamed submarine, known only by its project number — 'S4' — is scheduled to be launched towards the year end, on or around Navy Day on December 4. The S-4, or the 'stretched' Arihant-class, the

Silence on women in command

IN its February 17 verdict, the Supreme Court directed the Army to grant its women officers permanent commissions. The defence ministry told the Lok Sabha that the Army was committed to comply with the SC verdict. The MoD was silent about women officers being granted command positions. The Army has the largest number of women officers at 6,892 compared to 685 in the Navy and 1,872 in the IAF. The pendency of the SC case seems to have affected the intake of women into the Army. Figures presented in Parliament show that only 364 officers were commissioned into the Indian Army in 2019 compared to 949 in 2017 and 819 in 2018.

third unit to be launched for trials later this year, will be a true gamechanger. It carries eight missiles instead of the four carried by the Arihant class.

The three-decade long project to build five nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines has crept along at snail's pace as it wrestled with technological challenges and long build-times of the first unit, the INS Arihant. INS Arihant's construction began in 1998. It was launched in 2009 and commissioned in 2016. It completed its first deterrent patrol in November 2018 and was operationally deployed during the February 2019 standoff with Pakistan. The follow-on SSBNs will not take as long. The last unit of the class the S-4* (S-four star) is slated to be launched by around 2023 and induction by 2024. The Arighat's induction this year will be a shot in the arm for India's program to field a robust sea-based nuclear deterrent. Recent successful test firings of the DRDO's K-4 submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM) in the Bay of Bengal — have enhanced the reach of the sea-based deterrent. The 3,500 km K-4 missile triples the range of the existing K-15 missiles carried by the Arihant class, allowing the targeting of potential adversaries at longer distances without coming in range of their shore-based anti-submarine warfare assets.

The sea leg of the nuclear deterrent is said to be the most secure

and survivable. When a nuclear submarine sails out, it is virtually undetected in millions of cubic miles of ocean. A second-strike weapon in nuclear weapons theory is meant to dissuade an adversary from launching a crippling first strike using nuclear weapons.

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