U. S. – Indo Joint Working Group on Aircraft Carrier Technology Cooperation Meets in India



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WASHINGTON NAVY YARD, DC – The sixth meeting of the U.S. – Indo Joint Working Group on Aircraft Carrier Technology Cooperation (JWGACTC) concluded on Mar. 3 in India, marking a successful, bilateral exchange of information and best

practices in the areas of ship construction and maintenance.

The five-day meeting, co-chaired by Rear Adm. James P. Downey, program executive officer for aircraft carriers, representing the U.S. delegation; and Rear Adm. Sandeep Mehta, Assistant Controller Carrier Projects for the Indian Navy, deepened a successful legacy of cooperation between the two Pacific nations—sessions launched in August 2015 as part of a U.S. – India Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI).

"India is a vital strategic partner for the United States," said Downey, "and our program office takes pride in the collaborative spirit we've built with our Indian Navy counterparts. Our technology is diverse, while our goal is linked foundationally—to accelerate our respective missions of building and maintaining these extremely capable ships and systems that deliver readiness to our fleets."

In mid-February, India logged an important milestone when it completed initial flight deck trials on its first indigenous aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant.

"Back in 2015, the first Indian Navy delegation visited Norfolk and toured the Gerald R. Ford [CVN 78] when she was still in construction at Newport News Shipbuilding," Downey recalled. "And this week, our U.S. team stood on board India's new INS Vikrant, the largest naval ship ever built in India—that was an inspiring moment." INS Vikrant is expected to begin operations later this year, a step reflective of the government's vision of *Atmanirbhar Bharat,* or greater self-reliance.

JWGACTC Tour Highlights

In a robust slate of events conducted from 27 February to 3 March, JWGACTC representatives gathered in New Delhi at the Kota House and visited India's Directorate of Naval Design, discussing areas of mutual interest in several technology areas, including topside aircraft carrier systems and aircraft

/ ship integration. Meeting participants delivered updates and discussed opportunities for the two navies to expand cooperation under the initiative. Rear Adm Downey also met with Vice Chief of Naval Staff Vice Adm. SN Ghormade, DTTI Interagency Task Force (DIATF) Co-Chair Lt. Gen. Manjinder Singh, and Vice Adm. Kiran Deshmukh, Controller of Warship Production and Acquisition.

The combined delegation then flew to Kochi, Kerala, on India's southwest coast, for a tour of Cochin Shipyard Limited, where INS Vikrant was built. Vikrant is the third ship to bear the name, and the first aircraft carrier built entirely by the Indian government and industrial base.

Capt. Brian Metcalf, who leads the Gerald R. Ford-Class New Construction Program Office (PMS 378), appreciated the first-hand look at India's indigenous ship building capability and Cochin's modern facilities, tasked with designing and manufacturing the country's next generation aircraft carrier.

"Looking at our ships, the designs are clearly different: from propulsion to how we launch aircraft—Ford, for instance, using EMALS [Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System] and AAG [Advanced Arresting Gear]; while India employs a STOBAR [short takeoff barrier-assisted recovery] system to launch aircraft off a ski-jump ramp," said Metcalf.

"In terms of the art and science of shipbuilding and sustainment and the need for building efficiencies into everything we do, whether that's leveraging resources or building smarter, we share similar challenges and goals. So we can benefit from hearing new operating philosophies and ideas for streamlining business practices. All of that goes a long way toward enhancing interoperability at sea."

While in Kochi, Downey also visited India's Southern Naval Command, meeting with Vice Adm. M.A. Hampiholi and visiting the Naval Institute of Aeronautical Technology and the School

for Naval Airmen.

Hampiholi afforded Downey the opportunity to meet with trainees at the Advanced Aero Engine Training Centre and to see the school’s Basic and Specialist Vehicle Simulator, mockup helo decks, and Virtual Reality-Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting Training Facility, as well as the Indian Navy’s P-8I long-range, multi-mission, maritime patrol aircraft simulator.

After several years of interruptions due to COVID-19, JWGACTC participants were pleased to return to this annual in-person meeting format, with the face-to-face interaction fostering closer relationships, particularly among newer team members.

“One-on-one as well as face-to-face team engagement is so important,” said Downey. ”These forums and exchanges build trust and teamwork. That’s when you learn across the joint team and when you establish solid foundations and protocols that enhance operations and interoperability for our futures.”

Building on this highly successful meeting, the seventh JWGACTC meeting is scheduled to be held in the United States in 2024.