

Further, on the vitality of



An artist's Impression of what INS Vishal might have looked like before the Navy decided on the EMALS

India's next Aircraft Carrier

The Navy has made its choices. When INS *Vishal*, the Indian Navy's second indigenous aircraft carrier enters service, it will be a technologically cutting edge warship, on par with the world's most advanced carriers. The Navy's finalised specifications include nuclear propulsion, a catapult launch system based on the new American Electro-Magnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS) and the capacity to embark 55 combat aircraft.

But advanced technologies also mean delay. Naval planners, talking

anonymously, say INS *Vishal* will not enter service before 2030, and might take as long as 2035 to join the fleet as India's third operational carrier.

Already, the Navy faces six years of delay in the first indigenous carrier, the 44,000-tonne INS *Vikrant*, which Cochin Shipyard Ltd was supposed to deliver in 2015. Until the *Vikrant* is commissioned in 2021, the Navy will operate just a single carrier - the 45,000-tonne INS *Vikramaditya*, built in Russia and commissioned in 2013.

Yet the Navy's decision is clear : delay is acceptable, but INS *Vishal* must pack the power needed to effectively dominate India's extended area of operations. Over the years, the Navy has defined this as extending across the Indian Ocean, from the Strait of Hormuz in the west, to the Malacca Strait in Southeast Asia.

To dominate this swathe of sea, the Navy believes *Vishal* would need at least 55 aircraft on board. These will include two fighter squadrons, electronic warfare (EW) aircraft, airborne early warning (AEW)



USS Gerald R Ford will be the first operational aircraft carrier to employ EMALS (photo: US Navy/MC3 Cathrine Mae O. Campbell)