

Made in India Submarines— A history of 50 years (Part 1)



In the quest of becoming a twenty first century blue water navy, India has taken a number of initiatives to exponentially expand its naval assets. This can only be successful with a powerful fleet of modern submarines, a large fleet of which will not only protect Indian interests in the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean region, and the Arabian Sea but also maintain dominance from the Malacca Strait or beyond to the East Coast of Africa, ensuring India's strategic autonomy. Post India's independence, the charismatic, brilliant heads of the Indian Navy correctly comprehended the requirements of both aircraft carriers and submarines. India's submarine arm was born in 1967, when the Soviet-origin 'Foxtrot Class' entered into service as the 'Kalvari Class' with the commissioning of the INS Kalvari (S23). While India inducted eight submarines from 1967 to 1974, all of them were manufactured at a Soviet facility.

Project Type 1500 – German Type 209

The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 propelled India's quest for a made-in-India submarine. Post the war,

a staff requirement of a 1500 ton platform was drafted. While the Mazagon Docks (MDL) of Mumbai (then Bombay) was picked up as the preferred manufacturing facility, the Indian Navy evaluated five contenders in great detail. Quite interestingly, the Soviet Union at that time did not have any feasible platform to meet the Indian requirements. Finally, the Type 209-1 of Howaldtswerke (HDW) of Germany (then FRG) was selected, and a contract was signed on 11 December 1981. Eventually, the Type 1500 model (also known as Type 209/1500) was developed by IKL (Ingenieurkontor Lubeck) to meet the Indian staff requirement. According to the agreements, two submarines would be manufactured at Germany's HDW facility, followed by four (originally two, but in 1985 the decision for two additional ones was taken) boats in an Indian shipyard (MDL) under transfer of technology (ToT). The Type 209/1500 submarine came to be known as the 'Shishumar' class in the Indian Navy. The first boat of the class, INS Shishumar (S44), was commissioned on 22 September 1986, followed by the INS Shankush (S45) on 20 November 1986.