Towards second Indigenous aircraft carrier

Why in news?

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The Navy Chief Admiral has recently made a strong case for a second indigenous aircraft carrier.

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What is the present status?

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- India currently has only one aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya, which was the erstwhile Russian Admiral Gorshkov, inducted into service in 2013.
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- The country's first Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC-1), to be formally named INS Vikrant, is being built in Cochin Shipyard.
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- INS Vikrant has been delayed since its approval in 2003, and it is now expected to be out for sea trials only by 2020.
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- However, a statement was made that the Navy Headquarters was working on a second Indigenous Aircraft Carrier or IAC-2, which would give India a fleet of three aircraft carriers.
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- The Navy Chief did not reveal the estimated cost of IAC-2, but it is expected to be around Rs 1.6 lakh crore.
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- The Navy has reportedly budgeted for funds for IAC-2 in its financial plans from 2024 onwards.
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- However, the government has already deferred the decision on the proposal for IAC-2, which it consider to be unaffordable to build and operate.
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What is the need for new carriers?

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- The ability of a country to project military force away from its shores is largely dependent on the aircraft carriers, which are mainly used for force projection.
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- The Indian Navy has reached a minimum essential requirement of two operational aircraft carriers to meet its overall maritime security requirements.
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- But the Maritime Capability Perspective Plan of the Navy envisages a force level of three aircraft carriers, to ensure development of a capability to operate two Carrier Battle Groups (CBGs) at any given time.
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- CBGs are large task formations centred around a carrier, and provide unmatched flexibility, reach and sustainability.
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- These are primary assets for the projection of power, and provide credible deterrence through visibility.
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- Also, there is an aggressive effort by China to gain a foothold in the Indian Ocean Region.
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- China currently operates two carriers, and is likely to have four by 2028, with the eventual aim of 10 by 2050.
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- This would be a quantum leap for the Chinese Navy, which plans forays deep into the Indian Ocean Region by 2020.
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- India’s carrier-based aircrafts can provide limited air defence to the fleet only when operating close to the coast and limited range with inherent time delays.
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- Hence, there is a demand for new aircraft carrier that accommodate to the needs of carrier-aircrafts in a changing geopolitical scenario.
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What are the plans regarding the design of IAC-2?

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- CATOBAR (Catapult Assisted Take-Off But Arrested Recovery) is a system

used for the launch and recovery of aircraft from the deck of an aircraft carrier.
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- Until now, steam, generated preferably by a nuclear plant, has been considered the optimum propulsion for a ship of this size.
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- But the US is currently developing Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS), which launches carrier-based aircraft by means of a catapult employing a linear induction motor rather than the conventional steam piston.
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- Since IAC-2 is capable of operating aircraft with higher payloads and displace about 65,000 tonnes, it is planning to utilize the CATOBAR-EMALS launch system and has to be designed accordingly.
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What should be done?

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- An aircraft carrier is a dynamic capability that can be deployed over four decades, and is, therefore, one of the most optimum utilisations of resources spent on such an acquisition.
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- Given the time it will take to construct IAC-2, and the speed and determination of the Chinese naval progress, the government has to make a decision to build and operate a third aircraft carrier as quick as possible.
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Source: The Indian Express

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