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INS Aridhaman — India Commissions Its Third Nuclear Ballistic Missile Submarine

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INS Aridhaman — India Commissions Its Third Nuclear Ballistic Missile Submarine

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WHY IN NEWS

India commissioned **INS Aridhaman (S4)**, its third nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), at the Ship Building Centre (SBC) in Visakhapatnam on April 3, 2026. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh confirmed the commissioning with a cryptic post: *"It's not words but power, 'Aridhaman'!"* The event was conducted under a security blackout, consistent with India's practice for nuclear submarine commissionings.



WHAT IS INS ARIDHAMAN?

| PARAMETER | DETAILS |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Class | Arihant-class SSBN |
| Designation | S4 |
| Displacement | ~7,000 tonnes (largest in class) |
| Reactor | 83 MW pressurised water reactor (BARC-developed) |
| Vertical Launch Tubes | 8 (vs 4 on INS Arihant) |
| Builder | Larsen & Toubro (at SBC, Visakhapatnam) |
| Programme | Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) project |
| Key Missiles | K-15 Sagarika (750 km), K-4 (3,500 km) |

INS Aridhaman is the third and most capable submarine in India's Arihant class. Its 8 vertical launch tubes — double the capacity of INS Arihant — allow it to carry significantly more submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), dramatically increasing India's sea-based nuclear deterrence payload.

INDIA'S SSBN FLEET — COMPLETE PICTURE

| SUBMARINE | STATUS | NOTES |
|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| INS Arihant (S2) | Operational (2016) | India's first SSBN; 4 launch tubes |
| INS Arighat (S3) | Operational (2024) | Second SSBN |
| INS Aridhaman (S4) | Commissioned (April 2026) | Largest; 8 launch tubes |
| INS Arivarthha (S5) | Under construction | Expected mid-2020s |

With three SSBNs simultaneously operational, India can for the first time maintain **continuous at-sea deterrence (CASD)** — ensuring at least one submarine is always on patrol with nuclear-armed missiles, making a disarming first strike impossible.



H2: STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

Nuclear Triad Completion

India's nuclear doctrine rests on a **No-First-Use (NFU)** policy backed by a **credible minimum deterrent**. The triad — land (Agni missiles), air (Rafale/Mirage 2000), sea (SSBNs) — is the gold standard of deterrence. SSBNs are the most survivable leg of the triad because they are virtually undetectable when submerged.

Second-Strike Capability

The key value of an SSBN is **assured second-strike**: even if India's land-based nuclear infrastructure is destroyed in a surprise first strike, the submarine at sea can still retaliate. INS Aridhaman's expanded payload (8 tubes vs 4) makes this deterrent significantly more credible.

Joining the Exclusive Club

Only **six nations** operate SSBNs: USA, Russia, UK, France, China, and India. India is the only non-P5 nation with SSBNs, and the only one that has built them entirely indigenously without foreign technology transfer for the hull design and reactor.

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY VESSEL (ATV) PROGRAMME

The ATV project, one of India's most classified defence programmes, began in the **1970s** under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. After decades of slow progress due to sanctions and technological challenges, INS Arihant was launched in 2009 and commissioned in 2016. The programme is managed by the **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)** in coordination with the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** and the Navy.

The 83 MW reactor was designed by the **Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC)** — a landmark achievement as nuclear propulsion for submarines requires miniaturised, highly reliable reactor technology that few countries have mastered.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3 — Internal Security & Defence

- India's nuclear doctrine: No First Use, Credible Minimum Deterrent
- Nuclear triad and second-strike capability
- Aatmanirbhar Bharat in defence: ATV programme as a case study
- DRDO, BARC, and L&T roles in strategic programmes



Prelims Fast Facts:

- India's first SSBN: **INS Arihant** (commissioned 2016)
- India's third SSBN: **INS Aridhaman** (S4, commissioned April 2026)
- SSBN stands for: **Ship Submersible Ballistic Nuclear**
- ATV project oversight: **Department of Atomic Energy + DRDO**
- Building location: **Ship Building Centre (SBC), Visakhapatnam**

FACTS CORNER

- **INS Aridhaman** means “destroyer of enemies” in Sanskrit — following the naming tradition (Arihant = destroyer of enemies; Arighat = destroyer of foes)
- India's SSBNs carry the **K-15 Sagarika** (range: ~750 km) and are being upgraded to the longer-range **K-4** (range: ~3,500 km)
- The **K-4 missile**, once fully deployed on Aridhaman's 8 launch tubes, would give India a credible deterrent against targets deep inside any adversary's territory
- Nuclear submarines in India are operated under the **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)**, which reports directly to the Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) chaired by the Prime Minister
- India's NFU policy means nuclear weapons are only for retaliation — SSBNs give this retaliation capability a **survivable platform** that makes NFU credible

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