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INS Dunagiri and Project 17A: India's Indigenous Stealth Frigates

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY



Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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INS Dunagiri and Project 17A: India's Indigenous Stealth Frigates

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WHY IN NEWS

On June 21, 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi commissioned **three indigenously built naval vessels at Kolkata**: the stealth frigate (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/frigate/>) **INS Dunagiri**, the survey vessel **INS Sanshodhak**, and the anti-submarine warfare craft **INS Agray**. All three were built by **Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE)**, Kolkata.

The simultaneous commissioning of a frontline frigate, a survey vessel and an anti-submarine craft from a single shipyard underscores the maturing of India's indigenous warship-building ecosystem and the deepening of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat push in defence.

THE THREE VESSELS

VESSEL	CLASS / TYPE	PRIMARY ROLE
INS Dunagiri	Project 17A, Nilgiri-class stealth frigate (5th ship)	Multi-role surface combat
INS Sanshodhak	Survey Vessel (Large)	Hydrographic survey, charting
INS Agray	Arnala-class ASW Shallow Water Craft	Coastal anti-submarine warfare

INS Dunagiri and Project 17A

INS Dunagiri is the fifth ship of **Project 17A**, the **Nilgiri-class** stealth frigates. Project 17A is the follow-on to the earlier Project 17 (Shivalik-class) frigates and incorporates significant improvements in stealth shaping, sensors and weapons.

Key features of the Project 17A frigates include:

- **Weapons: BrahMos supersonic** (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/supersonic/>) **cruise missiles for surface strike** and the **MRSAM (Medium Range Surface to Air Missile) for air defence**.
- **Indigenisation** (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/indigenisation/>): Roughly **75% indigenous content**, with more than **200 MSMEs** in the supply chain.
- **Design:** Developed by the Navy's in-house **Warship Design Bureau (WDB)**.
- **Stealth:** Reduced radar cross-section through hull shaping and radar-absorbent practices.

THE SHIPBUILDING ECOSYSTEM

The vessels were built by **Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE)**, a Kolkata-based Defence Public Sector Undertaking. Project 17A frigates are constructed in a split arrangement between GRSE and Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai, using **integrated construction** (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/modular/>) blocks built in parallel and then joined), which compresses build timelines.

Why Indigenisation Matters

DIMENSION	SIGNIFICANCE
Strategic autonomy (https://ujivari.com/terms/strategic-autonomy/)	Reduces dependence on foreign arms suppliers
Economic	MSME participation, jobs, technology spillovers
Operational	Easier maintenance, upgrades and spares
Export potential	Builds a base for defence exports

The roughly 75% indigenous content and involvement of 200-plus MSMEs reflect the maturing of a domestic defence-industrial base, aligning with the government's emphasis on **Aatmanirbharta** in critical sectors.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

India's naval modernisation responds to a contested **Indo-Pacific** maritime environment and the expanding footprint of regional navies in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). A blue-water navy capable of sea control and sea denial requires a steady induction of frontline combatants. The addition of a survey vessel (for accurate charting that underpins navigation and operations) and an anti-submarine craft (for the persistent undersea threat) shows attention to the full spectrum of maritime capability, not just headline frigates.

ANALYSIS AND WAY FORWARD

While the commissioning is a milestone, challenges remain:

- **Timelines:** Indigenous projects have historically faced delays; integrated construction is helping, but consistency is key.
- **Critical sub-systems:** Some propulsion and electronic components still have import dependencies that need indigenisation.
- **Lifecycle support:** Building an ecosystem for maintenance, refits and mid-life upgrades is as important as construction.

The way forward lies in sustaining a predictable order book for shipyards, deepening MSME participation, and investing in indigenous propulsion and sensor technology.

UPSC RELEVANCE

- **GS Paper 3 (Security / Defence Technology):** Indigenisation of defence production, Aatmanirbhar Bharat in defence, and naval modernisation.
- **Prelims:** Project 17A (Nilgiri-class), builder GRSE, weapons (BrahMos, MRSAM), designer Warship Design Bureau.
- **Mains:** “Indigenous warship construction is central to India’s strategic autonomy. Discuss the achievements and challenges.”

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INS Dunagiri: 5th ship of Project 17A, Nilgiri-class stealth frigate.

Builder: Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata.

Weapons: BrahMos supersonic cruise missile and MRSAM air-defence missile.

Indigenous content: Around 75%, with 200-plus MSMEs in the supply chain.

Designer: Warship Design Bureau (WDB) of the Indian Navy.

Also commissioned: INS Sanshodhak (Survey Vessel Large) and INS Agray (Arnala-class ASW Shallow Water Craft).

Sources: Press Information Bureau (<https://pib.gov.in>), Indian Navy (<https://www.indiannavy.nic.in>), The Hindu (<https://www.thehindu.com>)

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