

INSV Kaundinya Sets Sail: Reviving India's Ancient Maritime Heritage

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INSV Kaundinya Latest News

- INSV Kaundinya, the Indian Navy's stitched sailing vessel built using traditional shipbuilding techniques, has begun its maiden overseas voyage from Porbandar, Gujarat, to Muscat, Oman.
- The voyage symbolically retraces ancient maritime routes that once linked India with the wider Indian Ocean world.
- Constructed with wooden planks stitched using coconut coir rope and sealed with natural resins, the vessel reflects an indigenous shipbuilding tradition prevalent along India's coasts.
- This technology enabled Indian mariners to undertake long-distance voyages to West Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia long before modern navigation methods.
- The project was executed under a tripartite agreement between the **Ministry of Culture**, the **Indian Navy**, and Hodi Innovations, as part of India's broader effort to revive and showcase its indigenous knowledge systems and **maritime heritage**.

INSV Kaundinya: Revival of an Ancient Indian Vessel

- INSV Kaundinya is a stitched sail ship inspired by a **5th century CE vessel** depicted in the paintings of the Ajanta Caves.
- It represents an effort to recreate India's early maritime traditions using historically authentic methods.

Traditional Construction and Craftsmanship

- After the keel laying in September 2023, the ship was built using the traditional stitching technique by a team of skilled artisans from Kerala, led by master shipwright **Babu Sankaran**.
- Wooden planks forming the hull were stitched together with coir rope, coconut fibre, and sealed using natural resin.
- The vessel was launched in February 2025 at Goa.
- Navy formally inducted the naval sailing vessel in May 2025 at the Karwar Naval base, in Karnataka.

Indian Navy's Role and Interdisciplinary Design

- The Indian Navy played a central role by overseeing the vessel's design, technical validation, and construction.
- With no surviving blueprints or physical remains, the design was extrapolated from two-dimensional artistic depictions.
- The project required an interdisciplinary approach, combining archaeological interpretation, naval architecture, hydrodynamic testing, and traditional craftsmanship.

Dimensions, Crew, and Tankai Method

- INSV Kaundinya is about 19.6 metres long, 6.5 metres wide, with a draft of 3.33 metres.
- Powered solely by sails, it is operated by a crew of around 15 trained sailors.
- Construction follows the indigenous **Tankai method**, where the hull is stitched first and ribs are added later—completely avoiding the use of metal.

INSV Kaundinya: A Ship Built Without Engines or Metal

- INSV Kaundinya is a non-combat sailing vessel constructed entirely using a stitched shipbuilding technique dating back to at least the 5th century CE.
- Wooden planks are stitched together with coir rope made from coconut fibre and sealed with natural resins, cotton, and oils.
- This flexible hull design allows the vessel to absorb wave energy—an essential feature for ancient sailors navigating the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal.
- Hydrodynamic testing and stability studies were carried out with assistance from academic institutions, including **IIT Madras**, to ensure seaworthiness for open-ocean voyages.

Symbolism Embedded in INSV Kaundinya's Design

- INSV Kaundinya's structure incorporates culturally rich elements that reflect India's ancient maritime heritage.
- Her sails carry motifs of the **Gandabherunda** and the **Sun**, symbolising power and continuity, while the bow features a sculpted **Simha Yali**, a mythical guardian figure associated with strength and protection.
- A symbolic **Harappan-style stone anchor** placed on the deck evokes the subcontinent's early seafaring traditions.
- Named after **Kaundinya**, the Indian mariner who sailed across the Indian Ocean to Southeast Asia, the vessel stands as a living representation of India's long history of maritime exploration, trade networks, and cultural exchange, underscoring the civilisational depth of India's engagement with the seas.

Reviving Ancient Maritime Highways

- The Porbandar-Muscat route retraced by INSV Kaundinya was once a vital maritime corridor for trade in spices, textiles, and ideas across West Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia.
- By sailing this route again, the vessel demonstrates the sophistication of ancient Indian shipbuilding and reaffirms India's identity as a historic maritime civilisation.

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