

HDZH SETS A NEW BENCHMARK FOR TIME TAKEN TO CONSTRUCT FRIGATES

Rear Admiral Monty Khanna (Retd) – Issue No 1 dated 01 Jan 2024

Hudong-Zhonghua (HDZH) shipyard launched the first Type 076 vessel, Sichuan (Hull Number 51) on 27 Dec 2024 with considerable fanfare. Buried under the media blitz is the fact that two Type 054A frigates, one for the PLA Navy and the other for China Coast Guard were simultaneously launched from the same dry-dock. Given the drumbeat at which 054A frigates are being launched, this may appear to be inconsequential. However, it is a notable event as it sets a new benchmark for compressing the time line between keel laying on the dry-dock floor and launch of a frigate sized vessel.



As can be seen from the Google Earth image above dated 08 May 2024, when construction of the Type 076 commenced at the new drydock of HDZH on Changxing Island in Shanghai, construction of three Type 054A frigates commenced simultaneously. Work on these progressed rapidly. On 16 August 2024, the drydock was reportedly flooded to launch these vessels. The Type 076 at the time was simply floated and redocked once the frigates were hauled outside the dock. Soon thereafter, work commenced on two more Type 054A frigates, one for the PLA Navy and the other for China Coastguard.



A photograph of the drydock dated 28 August 2024 taken in a flyby and posted on X by @horobeyo shows the commencement of work on the two frigates on the dock floor. The picture also shows large pre-fabricated modules of the vessels placed adjacent to the dock awaiting to be lowered and mated with the vessels. From this image, it may be assessed that formal keel laying of the vessels on the dock floor took place in mid-August 2024.



A satellite update posted on SinoDefenceForum on 08 October 2024 shows the considerable progress made in construction of the two vessels. The hulls appear to be complete with only sections of the superstructure yet to be placed on the ships.

The drydock was once again flooded on 27 December 2024 for launch of the Type 076. This was done with considerable media coverage as may be expected given the significance of the event. Strangely, none of the official reports spoke of the simultaneous launch of the two frigates. In

fact, insofar as the CGTN videos of the event are concerned, there seems to be a conscious effort not to post any footage of the two frigates.



An image grab from the CGTN video (above) shows the PLA Navy Type 54A frigate in the background with a high proportion of outfitting completed at the time of launch.



Another image from the video (above) shows a small part of the stern of the Coast Guard Type 54 while the dock is being flooded.

It can thus be seen, that the time elapsed between keel laying on the dock floor and launch of the vessels is an amazing four and a half months. This feat is all the more noteworthy as the HDZH drydock and associated fabrication facilities are almost brand new and still being augmented. At its infancy, the yard has set a new benchmark for speed of construction of a frigate sized vessel; a timeline which will be difficult for any yard to outdo.