

# INS Kursura : The Submarine Museum

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On completion of our training, the majority of the original fourth submarine batch had formed the crew for *INS Kursura*. We had travelled all the way from Ruski Ostruv (literally – Russian Island), off the far-eastern coastal town of Vladivostok, a Baltic Sea port town on the other side of the globe. This was 35 years ago. The crew had undergone a gruelling and tough training of 12 months to become qualified submariners, whereas earlier submariners, who manned *Kalvari*, *Kandheri* and *Karanj*, had been trained for 15 months each. Our fourth submarine was commissioned on a cold, blistering morning of 18 December 1969, at Riga, with temperatures around minus 20 degree Celsius. Interestingly, our fifth submarine (*INS Vela*) was also commissioned there on 31 August 1973, at minus 38 degree Celsius, far cooler than in a freezer. The Indian Naval ensign was hoisted on *INS Kursura* and commissioned under the watchful command of Commander Arun Auditto, NM with a few additional officers coming from India.

The submarine had sailed homeward bound on her maiden passage from the Baltic Sea on 20 February 1970. She headed for home waters through the North Sea, the English Channel, the Bay of Biscay and the Atlantic Ocean. She headed for the Bay of Bengal around the Cape of Good Hope through the Indian Ocean, crossing the equator again, and arrived at Visakhapatnam on 11 May 1970. En route, she had called at Gothenburg (Sweden), La Coruna (Spain), Takoradi (Ghana) and Port Louis (Mauritius).

The induction of *Kursura* into the Navy's fold distinctly showcased the augmentation of the third dimension of the Indian Navy. As she joined the 8<sup>th</sup> Submarine Squadron, she was rightly considered the last cornerstone of the fledgling submarine arm.

She had also contributed exceptionally well by working in all the three fleets of the Navy, within a few months of her arrival at home port for the impending war. Interestingly from 15 November 1971 till the beginning of the war, she was patrolling off the coast of Makran in the Arabian Sea, while the Pakistani submarine, *PNS Ghazi*, was off the Visakhapatnam port in the Bay of Bengal. During *Kursura*'s glorious service of nearly 31 years, the submarine had sailed over 73,000 nautical miles and clocked over 10,000 dived hours participating in almost all types of naval operations. She had her share of goodwill visits abroad.

13 officers had the honour of commanding *INS Kursura*, the last being Commander KM Sreedharan. The submarine, having served the nation for over three decades, was decommissioned on 27 February 2001, in the city of submariners, at the present site (in Visakhapatnam).

Unlike other decommissioned submarines, *INS Kursura* will continue to serve in her new role. She is now immortalised, having been converted into an imposing and impressive submarine museum, the first ever on our subcontinent, and perhaps the fifth in the world. She stands tall for all to see what a submarine looks like from the outside and from within. A joint effort by all (the submariners, non-submariners and civilian-workers from the Dockyard) has tried to preserve and display the layout of equipment actually in use during her operational life. Perspex sheets and glass have been used extensively to expose the views along restricted passages inside the submarine as well as that of the main machinery. Mannequins have also been used with the names of quite a few commissioning crew members to give a semblance of originality. The submarine is majestically placed on a pedestal at Rama-Krishna Beach, in Visakhapatnam. She is only 50 metres from the seashore, where the waves of the Bay of Bengal salute her. Coincidentally, these very waves encompass the final place of resting for *PNS Ghazi*, the Pakistani submarine. As mentioned above, *Ghazi* had come all the way from Karachi, 33 years ago. She had come hunting for our aircraft carrier, *INS Vikrant*, with a view to sink her. Ironically, the remains of the submarine lie invisible, at the bottom of the sea, less than two nautical miles from this museum.

As a museum, our fourth submarine commands the attention and focus of present and future generations of submariners, as well as of the youth of our country. While fostering rich maritime traditions and heritage of our great nation, this unique museum also serves as a beacon of inspiration and pride that runs deep in the hearts of Indians. She will always be cherished and honoured for her distinguished history.

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