

Second carrier nears launch



The construction site of China's first home-made aircraft carrier.
[Photo/People.cn]

China's first domestically built aircraft carrier is being outfitted with equipment and the work is progressing smoothly, Defense Ministry spokesman Wu Qian said on Thursday.

As for the carrier's launch, Wu said the date is coming soon and "we won't keep the public waiting for too long".

Wu made the remark in response to media speculation that the new carrier would be launched on April 23—the 68th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army Navy.

Outfitting usually implies installing radar, engines and other key components. But some equipment, like the weapons systems, also has to be installed after the ship has been launched into the water, said Zhu Chenghu, a professor at National Defense University.

"The launch is only the first step," he said. "By current progress, the new carrier would still have to undergo one to two years of testing, both at the dock and at sea, before it could be officially handed to the Navy.

"Nevertheless, China launching its first domestically designed aircraft carrier is a monumental step toward building a world class navy," he said. "The valuable lessons learned from building a carrier from scratch will help China build more carriers faster in the future and enable them to reach combat readiness quicker."

According to the Defense Ministry, the new aircraft carrier is under

construction in Dalian, Liaoning province. It will have a displacement of about 50,000 metric tons, as well as conventional engines and fighter jet launch systems similar to those of the CNS Liaoning—China’s first aircraft carrier.

The most important difference lies in the roles of the two vessels, Zhu said. While the Liaoning is primarily for training and research purposes, the new carrier will focus on combat and defense.

The new carrier will have more cargo room, more sophisticated radar, more advanced weapons systems, and more reliable engines than the Liaoning, which was refitted from an unfinished Soviet-era carrier—the Varyag—that “did not leave much leeway for optimization and improvement due to its old design,” he added. It was commissioned by China in 2012.

PLA Major General Peng Guangqian, a military strategist, said China’s carriers, as well as the carriers from other nations, are still far behind US carriers in terms of size, scale and combat capability, “because US Navy doctrine requires unchallenged global dominance, while Chinese carriers are mainly used for self-defense”.

When asked about the Chinese military’s recent drills on the Chinese side of the Sino-Myanmar border following clashes between Myanmar security forces and ethnic rebels, Wu said the drills were part of the annual training schedule and China had informed Myanmar of the drill before it began.