

# CAG raps UPA govt for buying 'aging' US ship

Rajat Pandit | TNN

**New Delhi:** Has the US sold a lemon to India in the shape of the huge amphibious transport warship USS Trenton? Yes, says the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) about the 37-year-old ship rechristened INS Jalashwa by Indian Navy.

Being the first-ever American warship to be inducted by the navy, INS Jalashwa has been brandished as a visible symbol of the rapidly-expanding strategic embrace between India and US since it was bought for \$50.63 million in 2006-2007.

The latest CAG report, tabled in Parliament on Friday, however, has rapped the UPA for buying the 'aging ship' in a 'hasty manner' without 'proper physical assessment' and technical evaluation of its sea-worthiness.

Considering that an officer and five sailors were killed on board INS Jalashwa

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just last month, from leaking of toxic hydrogen sulphide from sewage pipes, the CAG report will only fuel the criticism over its procurement.

The navy, however, poohpoohs such talk. "Accountants can pick holes in virtually everything. We got the ship cheap. It gives us immense strategic sea-lift capabilities as it can transport 1,000 soldiers or material over long distances," said an officer.

The CAG report holds that as the ship has already outlived most of its service life, envisaged at 40 years, the decision for its acquisition 'does not appear prudent'.

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The CAG notes the US navy was to decommission the 173-metre-long Trenton, which entered service in 1971, in 2006 after finding that nothing much could be achieved by further modernisation.

The US offered to sell it to India at 10% of its original cost in 2004. But the ship's 'poor condition' entailed significant refurbishment, that cost \$36.94 million.

The navy claimed the ship would run for a good 12-15 years more, but the CAG rubbished this, holding that 'no basis' for reaching this conclusion has ever been furnished.

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