

INDIAN NAVY COMPLETES “OPERATION SAMUDRA SETU”

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Indian Diaspora

Operation *Samudra Setu*, which was launched on 05 May 2020 as part of the national effort to repatriate Indian citizens from overseas during the COVID-19 pandemic has culminated after successfully bringing 3,992 Indian citizens back to their homeland by sea. Indian Naval Ships *Jalashwa* (Landing Platform Dock), and *Airavat, Shardul and Magar* (Landing Ship Tanks) participated in this operation which lasted over 55 days and involved traversing more than 23,000 kilometers by sea. Indian Navy has previously undertaken similar evacuation operations as part of *Operation Sukoon* in 2006 (Beirut) and *Operation Rahat* in 2015 (Yemen).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impact on ships and seafarers due to the compact environment and forced ventilation systems onboard ships. It was in these trying times and difficult conditions that the Indian Navy took up the challenge to evacuate our distressed citizens from overseas.

The greatest challenge for the Indian Navy was to avoid any incident of outbreak of infection onboard the ships during the evacuation operation. Rigorous measures were planned and medical/ safety protocols unique to the operating environment of ships were implemented. These were strictly followed onboard the ships undertaking *Op Samudra Setu* resulting in the safe return of 3,992 of our citizens to their homeland.

Op Samudra Setu was undertaken utilising Indian Naval ships best suited for the operation, catering for COVID-19 related social distancing norms vis-à-vis medical arrangements and carrying capacity. Ships used for the operation were specially provisioned and the Sick Bay or the clinic onboard was especially equipped with COVID-19 related equipment and facilities. Women Officers and military nursing staff were also embarked for the women passengers. Basic amenities and medical facilities were provided to all evacuees during sea passage on these ships. One of the expectant mothers who undertook passage on *Jalashwa*, Mrs Sonia Jacob, also gave birth to a baby boy within a few hours of reaching Kochi on International Mother’s Day.

Indian Naval ships *Jalashwa, Airavat, Shardul and Magar* steamed more than 23,000 kilometres during *Op Samudra Setu* and undertook the evacuation operation in a smooth and coordinated manner. Details of the evacuation are as follows: -

Ship

Date Embarked

Port of Embarkation

Number of Citizens

Date Disembarked

Port of Disembarkation

Jalashwa

8 May

Mal

698

10 May

Kochi

Magar

10 May

Mal

202

12 May

Kochi

Jalashwa

15 May

Mal

588

17 May

Kochi

Jalashwa

1 June

Colombo

686

2 June

Tuticorin

Jalashwa

5 June

Mal
700
7 June
Tuticorin
Shardul
8 June
Bandar Abbas
233
11 June
Porbandar
Airavat
20 June
Mal
198
23 June
Tuticorin
Jalashwa
25 June
Bandar Abbas
687
1 July
Tuticorin

Along with other Government agencies, the Indian Navy has also been at the forefront of national efforts to assist our citizens. Indian Naval IL-38 and Dornier aircraft have been used for ferrying of doctors and COVID-19 related material across the country. Indian Naval personnel also innovated various customised equipment such as Personnel Protection Equipment *NavRakshak*, hand-held temperature sensors, assisted respiratory system, 3-D printed face shield, portable multi-feed oxygen manifold, ventilators, air-evacuation stretcher pod, baggage disinfectants etc. Most of these innovations were carried onboard the ships

undertaking *Op Samudra Setu* and niche equipment was also provided to host countries from where evacuation was undertaken.

Indian Navy utilised its amphibious sea-lift ships for *Op Samudra Setu*, which has reinforced the flexibility and reach of these multi-faceted platforms. Whilst *Jalashwa*, *Magar*, *Airavat* and *Shardul* were undertaking *Op Samudra Setu*, another Landing Ship (Tank) *Kesari* undertook 'Mission SAGAR', carrying 580 tonnes of food aid and medical stores including ayurvedic medicines to Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros Islands and Seychelles, covering over 14,000 km in 49 days. One medical team each was also deployed at Mauritius and Comoros Island as part of the mission.

The 3,992 Indian citizens evacuated during *Op Samudra Setu* were disembarked at various ports as indicated in the table above and entrusted to the care of respective state authorities. This operation was undertaken by the Indian Navy in close coordination with Ministry of External Affairs, Home Affairs, health and various other agencies of the Government of India and State Governments.

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