

## 'Op SUKOON' – Making 'Sweet Music' : 24 July 2006

The largest post-Independence civilian-evacuation operation undertaken by the Indian Navy, is currently underway at Beirut, Lebanon, with four Indian Naval Ships — *Mumbai*, *Brahmaputra*, *Betwa* and *Shakti*, all under the tactical command of Rear Admiral Anup Singh, Flag Officer Commanding Western Fleet, having already evacuated a total of 1495 stranded Indian, Nepalese, Sri Lankan and Lebanese nationals.



This multi-national character of the Indian Naval 'lift', nicknamed 'Operation SUKOON' (meaning peace-and-tranquillity) is in itself somewhat unique, as

while the Indian Navy is certainly not the **only** navy engaged in what is known as 'non-combatant evacuation operations', the other navies are, for the most part, evacuating only their own nationals and not those of any other country.

Insofar as the Indian effort is concerned, two 'waves' of evacuation have been completed thus far. In the first 'lift' (on 21 July 2006), 608 persons were evacuated, while in the second 'lift', (on 23 July 2006), another 887 persons were taken aboard the Indian-designed-and-built warships INS *Mumbai* (a guided-missile Destroyer), INS *Brahmaputra* and INS *Betwa* (both guided-missile Frigates) and brought to the safety of the port of Larnaca, in south-east Lebanon. As was the case in the aftermath of the devastating Tsunami of December 2004, and, more recently, in the provision of relief-material by ships of the Indian Navy to the victims of the earthquake that struck Indonesia in May 2006, the Indian Navy has risen to the occasion with its uniquely Indian blend of speed, professionalism, panache, and, humaneness.

These humanitarian operations offer vindication (if any was ever needed) of the Indian Navy's current policy of vibrant and progressive regional engagement. The fact that Indian Naval warships are constantly 'on the beat', so-to-speak, is what makes them readily available to be deployed in the best interests of the country, even in far-flung places. In keeping with this philosophy, the presence of these four Indian Naval warships in the vicinity was part of a regional deployment-pattern that is increasingly



becoming routine for the Indian Navy.

Naturally, no symphony can be generated by a single instrument, and, even in the present case, a number of agencies of the Government of India — most especially the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of External Affairs, our Embassies in Lebanon and Cyprus, the Indian Navy, and, the country's national air carrier, Air India, have all worked in smooth cohesion to produce what has thus far been 'sweet music' indeed.

