Australia Supports Mine Clearance In Sri Lanka



Australia released additional Rs 480 million (A$4.25 million) for demining in Sri Lanka. Australian funding was released in conjunction with the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, observed on April fourth.

This additional funding will enable local and international demining agencies to continue accelerated mine surveys, clearance and mine risk education in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. It will also support mine action coordination activities led by the Sri Lanka National Mine Action Centre.

In November 2009, during a visit to Sri Lanka, Stephen Smith MP the former Minister for Foreign Affairs announced Australia's commitment to helping the Government of Sri Lanka achieve its goal of a mine free nation by 2020. Australia's most recent contribution of Rs 480 million builds on assistance valued at approximately Rs 1.4 billion (A$14 million) provided over the last two years, including for the procurement of much needed equipment for mine clearance activities. Australian funding so far has enabled more than 70 square kilometres of land to be released for resettlement.

Australia's contribution recognises the critical need to help displaced people to return home safely and to
re-establish their livelihoods in their places of origin. Australia's support to mine action remains a key component of its overall support for reconstruction and rehabilitation activities in the north. Almost two years after the end of the war, about 506 square kilometres remain to be demined. Despite significant progress on demining, the presence of landmines and explosive remnants of war is one factor that continues to restrict the safe return and resettlement of people to their communities of origin. Demining is also a critical component in restoring livelihoods in the Northern Province, as 80 percent of these communities depend on agriculture as their main source of income. Australia remains committed to support the demining effort in Sri Lanka.