India has spent USD four million on demining operations in Sri Lanka's North and East to facilitate resettlement of Tamil civilians displaced during the ethnic conflict which ended in May last year following the defeat of the LTTE. The seven Indian demining teams in Sri Lanka are fully funded by New Delhi, an Indian High Commission release said on Tuesday (March 23). They have been deployed at a cost of Sri Lankan Rs 450 million (USD four million), it said.

Indian High Commissioner Ashok K Kantha, accompanied by Maj Gen Atula Jayawardena, SF commander (Mullaitivu), recently visited the field camp of an Indian demining team at Oddusuddan and Kathaliyarsamalankulam Grama Niladhari divisions. The camp is managed by Sarvatra Technical Consultants, an India-based demining organisation, which along with another Indian group Horizon Assignments runs all the seven demining teams in Sri Lanka.

The Indian teams have so far cleared an area of approximately 63,012,876 square metres in the districts of Vavuniya and Mannar, making them fit for habitation and resumption of cultivation and other economic activities. In addition to these, the demining teams have been engaged in carrying out a non-technical survey in vast areas in Mullaitivu district in the Kokkilaim and in the Vavuniya district's Puliyankulam region. This is to identify the exact areas that require demining, while releasing the balance areas for re-settlement.

During the field visit, the Indian High Commissioner was briefed about the work of the seven Indian teams, the progress registered in demining and future tasks and objectives assigned to the demining teams by Sri Lanka. He was also briefed about the new and innovative methods used by the Indian teams and the high-risk exposure to the personnel deployed for such operations. Kantha also witnessed a field demonstration of the demining operations by members of the Indian demining teams. On the occasion, the High Commissioner thanked the Indian demining teams for their exemplary work and service despite high risks involved in the operations.

He observed that this was a "sterling example" of India-Sri Lanka cooperation that provided major contribution to accomplishment of the shared objective of the two governments to ensure early rehabilitation and resettlement of the Internally-Displaced Persons (IDPs) in northern Sri Lanka. India had deployed four demining teams -- two each from Sarvatra and Horizon - comprising 50 members each in June 2009. Subsequently, in order to speed up the process of demining, India, at the request of Sri Lanka, decided to deploy three more demining teams -- two from Sarvatra and one from Horizon -- in November 2009. The demining teams have recovered several anti-tank and anti-personnel mines.

The areas that have been cleared of mines by Indian teams are located in Giant Tank, Paranthan, Puliyankulam, Anandarpuliyanakulam, Palaiperumalkaddu, Valavithakulam, Vilathikulam, Vaddakandal, Periyakaddu, Periyapatulankulam, Parasankulam, Nainamadu and Olumadhu. The Indian demining teams have now been deployed at Mullaitivu district and along the A-9 Highway in Puliyankulam, the release said. In execution of the tasks assigned to the Indian teams, a total of 173 expatriates and 172 Sri Lankan personnel have been deployed, apart from the use of modern demining machines, equipment, detectors and other body protection gear, it said.