

## President commissions patrol boats gifted by Australia

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President Mahinda Rajapaksa yesterday ceremonially commissioned the 'Mihikatha' and 'Rathnadeepa' patrol boats that were gifted by the Australian Government to Sri Lanka, at the Port of Colombo.

Australia's Minister for Immigration and Border Protection Scott Morrison also participated in the ceremony. The two patrol boats were gifted as a gesture of goodwill to the Sri Lanka Navy.



Following the ceremony, President Rajapaksa and Minister Morrison held discussions during which the President thanked Australia for the patrol boats and Australia's continuous support for Sri Lanka in the international arena.

Morrison commended what he described as “very close cooperation” between Australian authorities and Sri Lanka’s Police and Navy towards preventing illegal boats carrying asylum-seekers.

He also said that despite the measures both countries are taking to prevent illegal migration, groups with vested interests are likely to continue promoting it. Therefore, continued collaboration is crucial.

The Australian Minister, who had visited Sri Lanka previously, including Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu also commented on Sri Lanka’s post-war development.



“On the economic development front, the progress is significant,” Morrison said during the meeting with President Rajapaksa. “The progress is fairly evident,” he added, noting that the election that took place in the north was also a significant step. About any political process that takes place in the country, Morrison said: “The processes that work best are the ones that come from within the country.” Morrison added that Australia stands ready to support Sri Lanka’s post-war progress in any way that it can.

The Minister also spoke about Sri Lanka's potential for tourism. Having experienced travel on the Katunayaka Expressway for the first time during this visit, the Minister described it as "a critical piece of infrastructure," noting that proper infrastructure is crucial in facilitating tourism.

Australian Parliamentarian Don Randall and Australian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka Robyn Mudie accompanied Minister Morrison.

Deputy Minister of Ports and Highways Rohitha Abeygunawardena, Secretary to the President Lalith Weeratumgala, Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Secretary to the Ministry of External Affairs Kshenuka Senewiratne, Chief of Defence Staff General Jagath Jayasuriya, Commander of the Navy Vice Admiral Jayantha Perera and Commander of the Army Lieutenant General Daya Ratnayake were also present at the event.