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சுற்றாடல் அமைச்சு
Ministry of Environment

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துணை அமைச்சர் அலுவலகம்
Deputy Minister's Office

දුරකථන } 0112034140
தொலைபேசி }
Telephone }

ෆැක්ස් } 0112879954
பெக்ஸ் }
Fax }

විද්‍යුත් තැපෑල } deputyminister@env.gov.lk
மின் அஞ்சல் }
E-mail }

"සොබාදම් පියස", අංක 416/සී/1, රොබට් ගුණවර්ධන මාවත, බත්තරමුල්ල, ශ්‍රී ලංකා.
"சொபாதம் பியச", இல. 416/சீ/1, ரொபர்ட் குணவர்தன மாவத்தை, பத்தரமுல்ல, இலங்கை.
"Sobadam Piyasa", No. 416/C/1, Robert Gunawardhana Mawatha, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka.

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Sulakshi Ratnayake
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Press Release

An Unstoppable Mission to Ensure Human-Elephant Coexistence

On World Elephant Day, which falls tomorrow (August 12), global attention is directed toward the protection and survival of wild elephants—an iconic symbol of ecosystems and a crucial link in biodiversity. The Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus maximus*) is not merely the largest terrestrial animal on our land, but is recognized as a unique “umbrella species” that dictates the survival of the entire ecosystem. Securing the safety of elephants is synonymous with safeguarding our overall biodiversity, natural ecosystems, tourism industry, national economy, and priceless cultural heritage.

Years of unplanned development across the country have obstructed natural migration paths and elephant corridors. The lack of systematic management of ecological boundaries and the adverse impacts of global climate change have rendered the human-elephant conflict an unavoidable socio-economic crisis. Departing from the temporary, short-term fixes of the past, the Ministry of Environment—under the direct guidance and instructions of the President—has dedicatedly engaged in bringing a permanent, scientific, and sustainable solution by coordinating with scientifically aligned institutions in Sri Lankan history. This commitment continues relentlessly through new proposals and practical initiatives.

To avoid interrupting wild elephants' natural movement patterns, three key elephant corridors—Watahira Kanda, Hadapanagala, and Koholankala—centered around the Hambantota and Monaragala districts have been officially gazetted and opened. Preliminary work is currently underway to free up elephant corridors in the Anuradhapura district in the near future.

To meet the natural food and water needs of wild elephants within forests, invasive plant species surrounding the Kalawewa and Tabbowa reservoirs have been successfully cleared to create elephant enrichment zones and new grasslands. Similar restoration efforts are underway around other lake systems. Notably, with the activation of enrichment zones in protected forests—including Nilgala, Sri Lanka's second-largest forest, under the "Wanaspathi" national program—the tendency for wild elephants to remain inside reserves has significantly increased, substantially reducing village intrusions. Furthermore, restoration work on tanks and water sources inside forest reserves is actively ongoing.

At the Pinnawala Elephant Conservation Centre, opening Asia's first "Free Elephant Sanctuary"—which frees musth elephants from chains and allows them to move freely in a natural environment—marks another enriched animal welfare initiative by the new government. To establish a regulatory mechanism for captive elephants in Sri Lanka and their deployment for cultural ceremonies, the Ministry of Environment's Secretary has appointed a committee chaired by the Additional Secretary (Policy, Legal Reforms & Parliamentary Affairs) of the Ministry of Environment. This committee is tasked with reviewing the draft "2026 Registration and Licensing of Elephants Regulations" prepared by the Department of Wildlife Conservation, formulating recommendations, and submitting a report on captive elephant welfare and deployment procedures for cultural and religious pageants. Legal solutions in this regard will be provided expeditiously.

Parallel to these short-term steps, human resources have been strengthened by recruiting Elephant Fence Assistant Officers to enhance the Department of Wildlife Conservation's operational efficiency. This includes recruiting 5,000 Civil Defence Force personnel and Multi-Purpose Development Officers, alongside the swift provision of required vehicles and physical assets. Utilizing major allocations from the national budget, all institutions under the Ministry of Environment are collaboratively constructing systematic new electric fences. Additionally, to prevent elephant-train collisions, the installation of terminal camera systems on trains has commenced, and specialized warning signboards have been erected along the Gal Oya–Trincomalee, Gal Oya–Batticaloa, Northern, and Mannar railway lines.

Recognizing the urgent need to provide swift medical care to injured and sick wild elephants, the Department of Wildlife Conservation is establishing a mobile hospital service dedicated primarily to wild elephants. The Ministry of Environment provides the necessary institutional, technical, and resource support for this program.

On the President's guidance, an Expert and Monitoring Committee for Human-Elephant Conflict Management has been appointed—comprising the Ministry of Environment, Department of Wildlife Conservation, Forest Department, field experts, District Secretaries, District Development Committee representatives, and Ministers. This committee actively considers constructive ideas and proposals from environmental experts, scholars, environmental

organizations, and local communities to construct a systematic, scientific, long-term action plan that creates a fear-free environment for both people and wildlife. Utilizing parameters established by this body, human-elephant conflict management is being carried out using modern methodologies.

Ensuring human-elephant coexistence by protecting lives and property in conflict areas while safeguarding the country's precious wildlife heritage for future generations represents the practical realization of the government's "Sustainable Biosphere, Green Life" policy. We firmly believe that scholars, officials, and the people of Sri Lanka and the world will actively contribute to making this national endeavor a success.

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"இப் பூமியும், மரஞ் செடி கொடிகளும் மனிதனுக்குப் போன்றே வானில் பறந்து திரியும் பறவைகளுக்கும், பூமியில் வாழும் உயிரினங்களுக்கும், அனைத்து விலங்குகளுக்கும் ஒருமித்துச் சொந்தமானது"
"This great earth and the flora on it equally belong to the man and the birds flying in the sky, the quadrupeds and all creatures living on earth"