

Press Release on the Transfer of Plai Sak Surin (Muthu Raja) to Thailand

On 2 July 2023 the mission of sending the tusker Plai Sak Surin or Muthu Raja to Thailand for medical treatment was well completed. Sak Surin was safely transferred from the Dehiwala Zoo to the Colombo Bandaranaike International Airport on the late night of 1 July 2023 and arrived safely at the Chiangmai International Airport by Ilyushin IL-76 freighter at 2.00 p.m. on Sunday 2 July, and proceeding to Lampang the same evening. The tusker is currently under a 30-day quarantine and will stay at the Thai Elephant Conservation Center in Lampang for necessary care and treatments.

The positive outcome of this “Jumbo Operation” is attributed to collective efforts and close cooperation between the Thai and Sri Lankan Governments at all levels. A few non governmental organizations and well-meaning individuals have also played a supportive role in this much public interest issue. The Embassy has involved related agencies and the Government of Sri Lanka in realizing the need for ailing Sak Surin to be moved from the Kande Vihara Temple for rehabilitation at the Dehiwala Zoo and to be sent to Thailand for thorough medical treatment where proper facilities are readily available. On 13 June 2023 the Honourable Dinesh Gunawardena, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, presided over a meeting between the Thai delegation and all relevant agencies of Sri Lanka. The Prime Minister urged all parties to collaborate and give full cooperation for the mission, which is a catalyst for success.

The tusker transfer process encompassed a year long preparation with concerted efforts between the Embassy in Colombo and the agencies of Thailand and Sri Lanka. These include the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Thai Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, which has been assigned by the Thai Prime Minister as a prime agency, the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation of Thailand, the Forest Industry Organization of Thailand, the Department of Livestock of Thailand, the Thai Elephant Conservation Center, the Kande Vihara Temple and its Chief Prelate and the Dehiwala Zoo in Sri Lanka, along with veterinarians, experts, and mahouts from both sides.

The Royal Thai Embassy wishes to reiterate that the transferring of Sak Surin to Thailand has raised greater sustained awareness and actions for animal rights and rearing. The Embassy will continue cooperation with Sri Lanka in the areas of mutual interests, which have been identified throughout the task. This will cover the exchange of personnel and sharing of best practices in the fields of wild-life and natural resource protection, training, and medical treatment and research, among others. The constructive outcome of this operation would not have been made possible without the long-standing relations and unique Buddhist ties of Sri Lanka and Thailand.