Colombo probes claims of cruelty to elephants gifted by Thailand

Sri Lanka THE government is investigating allegations that two elephants gifted by Thailand have been subjected to cruel treatment at their homes in Buddhist temples, the environment minister said.

Dammika Patabendi on Monday said Bangkok had raised concerns about the welfare of the two animals it presented to Sri Lanka in 1980 and 2001 as symbols of close ties between the two Buddhist nations.

"We have appointed a panel of vets to examine the two elephants and provide a comprehensive report on the health and well-being of the animals," he said.

"There is a discussion at diplomatic level between the two countries about the welfare of these animals."

Animal-rights activists in Sri Lanka said authorities in Thailand had contacted them to ask about the living conditions of the elephants the Sri Lankan government had handed over to the temples.

"Thailand wants to take back both elephants," said the Colombo-based Rally for Animal Rights and Environment.

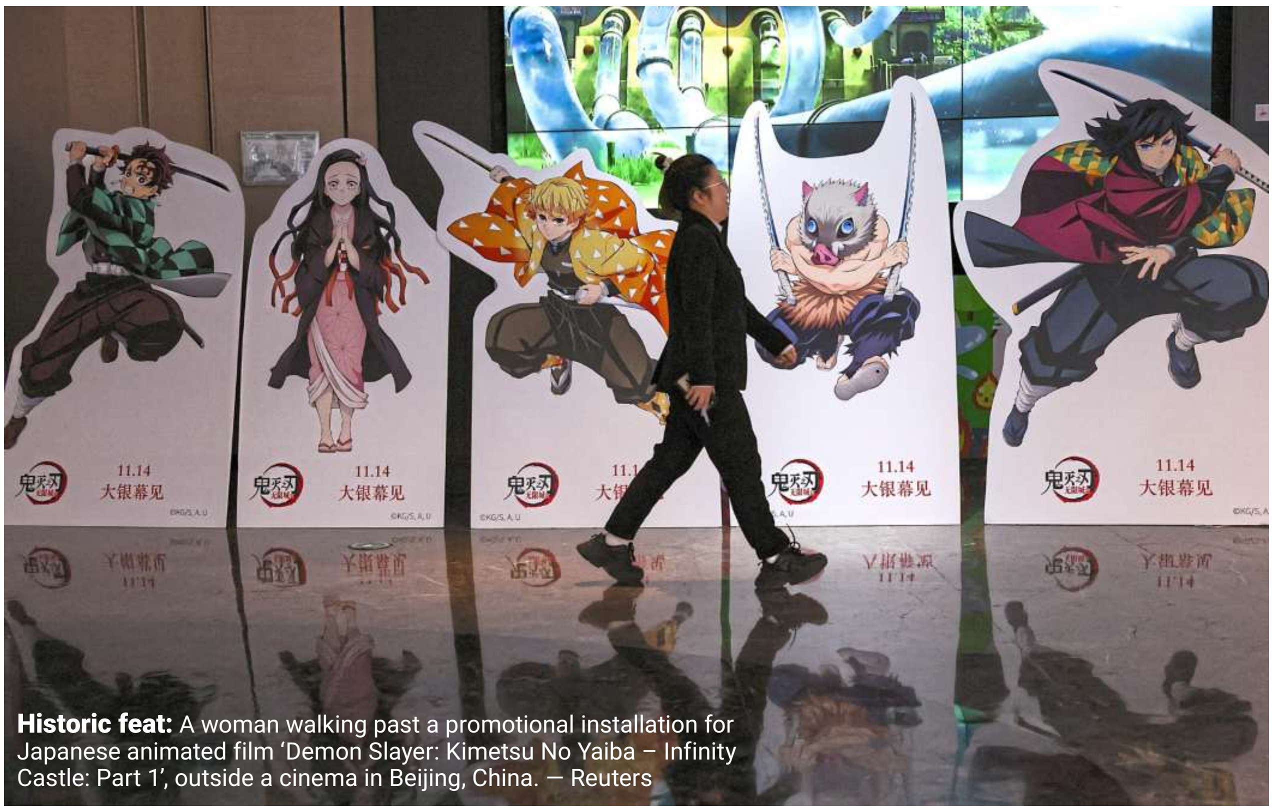
Elephants are considered a national treasure in Sri Lanka and are venerated as a Buddhist symbol, but there have been reports of cruelty by private owners and monks.

Authorities repatriated a 29-year-old Thai elephant, known locally as Muthu Raja, in 2023 after reports it had been neglected and mistreated at a Buddhist temple.

Muthu Raja, known in Thailand as Sak Surin, was gifted to Sri Lanka in 2001.

A Sri Lankan court sentenced a private elephant keeper to 15 years in jail in September for trafficking protected animals.

The illegal trade in calves has been blamed for a decline in Sri Lanka's elephant population, with conservationists noting that mothers were often killed so their young can be captured. — AFP



Historic feat: A woman walking past a promotional installation for Japanese animated film 'Demon Slayer: Kimetsu No Yaiba – Infinity Castle: Part 1', outside a cinema in Beijing, China. — Reuters

'Demon Slayer' sets new ¥100bil record

Japan THE latest film adaptation of the *Demon Slayer* manga franchise has become the first Japanese movie to gross more than ¥100bil (RM2.67bil) worldwide, its distributors said.

Demon Slayer: Kimetsu No Yaiba – Infinity Castle: Part 1, about sword-swishing Tanjiro Kamado's final showdown to slay demons and make his sister human again, is part of a planned trilogy.

Released outside Japan from August, including in North America and last Friday in China, the caper has attracted 89.17 million viewers internationally, Aniplex and Toho said on Monday.

In Japan, it remains in second place by revenues behind a previous *Demon Slayer* movie, a massive hit during the Covid-19 pandemic, having already overtaken Studio Ghibli's *Spirited Away* (2001).

Originally penned by comic book artist Koyoharu Gotouge and then animated by studio Ufotable, *Demon Slayer* is often lauded for setting a new standard for anime cinematography.

Dazzling visual effects permeate the latest movie featuring acrobatic, lightning-fast battles with demons at a kaleidoscopic castle with an infinite array of floors.

The original manga also sets it apart from other Japanese juggernauts like *One Piece*, which spans over 100 volumes compared to just 23 for *Demon Slayer*. — AFP

Seoul moves towards coal exit

Govt pledges to shut plants lacking emission controls at COP30

South Korea SEOUL pledged to phase out coal power plants that lack emission-reducing measures, an ambitious step for a country that generates a third of its electricity from the fossil fuel.

The country announced its decision to join the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA) of governments and organisations pushing to eliminate unabated coal as a power source, as Brazil hosts UN climate talks in Belem.

"Our long-term goal is to create a decarbonised green society where renewable energy takes up a large share in our power mix and use nuclear power as a complementary source, phase out coal and use gas as an emergency source," South Korea's Climate Minister Kim Sung-whan told reporters in the Amazonian city on Monday.

The pledge does not give a date for an end to all of South Korea's use of unabated coal, but represents the first official government commitment to stop building new unabated coal plants and to phase out existing ones.

"We will kickstart our coal phase-out," Kim said, adding that the pledge will "help the Alliance advance the coal transition worldwide".

Unabated refers to coal burned without any measures to reduce its emissions, such as carbon capture and storage. Most coal-fired power plants do not capture their CO2 emissions.

"Out of 61 existing coal power plants, 40 coal power plants are confirmed to phase out by 2040," the PPCA said in a statement.

The remaining 21 plants will have their closure date "determined based on economic and environmental feasibility", with a detailed roadmap to be finalised in 2026, the group added.

Asia's fourth-largest economy currently operates the world's seventh-largest coal fleet and is the fourth-largest coal importer, according to the PPCA.

The pledge demonstrates South Korea's "commitment to accelerating a just and clean energy transition", Kim said.

The transition will "create thousands of jobs in the industries of the future", the minister added.

South Korea has already begun cutting its dependence on coal, with its share of electricity generation falling to 30.5% last year from 46.3% in 2009, according to energy think tank Ember.

On a global level, renewable energy overtook coal generation for the first time on record in the first half of 2025, according to Ember.

The new commitment builds on Seoul's 2020 pledge to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. — AFP