The Fauna and Flora Protection (Amendment) Bill receive the Consultative Committee approval for the Second Reading

Date : 24-02-2022

- **A decision taken to reduce the closure of the Yala National Park from 2 hours to one hour during the day**
- **Steps to build a special leopard center in Polonnaruwa**
- **Minister instructs to refrain from taking over the ancestral lands of the people**

The Ministerial Consultative Committee on Wildlife & Forest Conservation held recently (22) agreed to present the Fauna and Flora Protection (Amendment) Bill in Parliament for the second reading.

The Ministerial Consultative Committee on Wildlife & Forest Conservation met in Parliament yesterday under the chairmanship of Hon. C. B. Rathnayake, Minister of Wildlife & Forest Conservation and Hon. Wimalaweera Dissanayake, State Minister of Wildlife Protection, Adoption of Safety Measures including the Construction of Electrical Fences and Trenches and Reforestation and Forest Resource Development. Accordingly, this Bill will be introduced in Parliament today (24), Hon. C. B. Rathnayake, Minister said.
The Bill empowers the Minister to make orders to enforce the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Mr. Somarathna Vidanapathirana, Secretary to the Ministry of Wildlife & Forest Conservation said that this amendment, which also takes into account the GSP concession, has been under discussion for nearly 15 years and was finally able to come into force.

Hon. Sajith Premadasa, Leader of the Opposition who spoke at the meeting on the need to develop Eco-tourism to increase foreign tourist attractions and the possibility of the Department of Wildlife Conservation to introduce more attractive programs such as leopard centers in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism which are considered as special tourist attractions.

Accordingly, Hon. C. B. Rathnayake instructed the officials to take necessary steps in this regard as well as to take steps towards establishing a Leopard Center at the Training Center of the Polonnaruwa Wildlife Conservation Department.

The Leader of the Opposition also addressed the need to make permanent volunteers who have served for many years and have not been made permanent. The Minister instructed the officials to look into the matter immediately and take necessary action.

The Yala National Park being closed for two hours during the day, causes an inconvenience to both local and foreign tourists, the MPs said. Officials were thus instructed to reduce the daytime park closure to one hour by Hon. Wimalaweera Dissanayake. He also instructed the officials to take maximum measures to ensure the safety of wildlife.

Hon. C. B. Rathnayake, Minister instructed the officials not to take over ancestral lands where people live over to the Forest Department during the process of taking over lands. The Hon. Members of

Parliament also drew the attention of the Minister to a number of issues such as the human-elephant conflict, the construction of elephant fences and the concerns pertaining to the national parks.

Members of the Committee Hon. Kapila Athukorala, Hon. Chamara Sampath Dasanayake, Hon. Kumarasiri Rathnayaka including many Hon. Members of Parliament and Government Officials were present at this meeting.