PUCSL chairman makes a personal statement in COPE that petrol and diesel can be sold at a price of approximately Rs. 250

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According to the data, petrol and diesel can be sold at a price of approximately Rs. 250 in Sri Lanka, said Mr. Janaka Ratnayake, Chairman of the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka (PUCSL).

He stated this when the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) met in Parliament yesterday (06) under the chairmanship of the Member of Parliament (Prof.) Charita Herath to examine the Auditor General's report for the years 2018 and 2019 and current performance of the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka.

Explaining this further, Mr. Rathnayake mentioned that this is revealed when checking the statistics on the import prices of petroleum and the taxes levied by the government. Accordingly, he pointed out that petrol and diesel can be provided in Sri Lanka at Rs. 200 less than the current price. According to this, petrol and diesel can be sold at a price of approximately Rs. 250 . He also said that the government has collected a tax of Rs. 280 for one liter of diesel imported on July 1st.

He said that this is his personal statement and he would make the statement after consulting the data. Accordingly, the members present asked about the awareness of the officials of the commission and the officials of the board of directors said that they are not aware of it. It was also mentioned here that the Ministry of Finance has not formally informed about this.

COPE members asked Mr. Ratnayake about his qualifications for becoming the chairman of this commission. He pointed out that he has obtained a Special Degree in Public Administration from the University of Sri Jayawardenepura and a Postgraduate degree in Business Administration (MBA) from the University of Colombo. He also said that he has also studied at Harvard University. As his political qualifications, he stated that since 2005, Rajapaksa has been greatly supported in forming governments.

COPE chairman mentioned that the statement made by PUCSL Chairman regarding the fuel price is more serious and the attention of the country is being drawn on this. Therefore, officials from the Ministry of Power and Energy and the PUCSL Chairman are expected to be summoned before the COPE to inspect the matter in the future, said Prof. Herath.

Also, it was discussed at length about the purchase by the commission of a “Benz” car manufactured in the year 2005 without fuel or driver from a company called General Business (Private) Ltd without entering into any agreement for a period of one year from December 07, 2021. Thus, the annual rent for this vehicle was Rs.4,500,000 and on 31 May 2022, Rs. 2,187,500 had been paid to the aforesaid company. However, the COPE questioned the fact that the files regarding the hiring of this vehicle were not submitted for audit, recommendations were given to hire a 15-year-old vehicle, as well as the irregularities in calling for bids for the hiring of this vehicle, and the issues of transparency in the payment of rent for this vehicle. In particular, the committee instructed the officer who signed the approval to provide money for this institution to act responsibly.

Accordingly, the COPE Chairman recommended that an investigation be conducted and a full report be submitted to the COPE.

Also, although it was informed that the Organization Structure and Salary Structure of the PUCSL should be developed under the recommendation of the National Salary and Cadre Commission and the approval of the Department of Management Services and that the Finance Minister should submit an amendment to the Cabinet and approve it, the committee discussed spending on certain functions without doing it by the end of 2021.

In particular, the COPE paid attention to the fact that Rs. 45,873,483 were paid to the staff of the institution under 11 types of allowances. Also, the committee paid more attention to the fact that Rs. 86,808,538 of the total operating cost, (49% of the total amount) had been spent on public awareness programs.

In particular, attention was paid to the approved electricity generation plan for the years 2018-2037. The officials present mentioned that data on another new generation plan was submitted in the year 2021 and was not approved as the appropriate requirements were not met. Here, the Committee mentioned that when the political authorities change, problems arise due to the change of these plans, so all parties should pay more attention to this.

Furthermore, under the Electricity (Distribution) Performance Standards Orders mentioned in a special gazette notice issued in 2016, the commission was assigned the responsibility of preparing and implementing the performance rules. Thus, the work that should be implemented within 36 months after the decree came into effect, although almost 4 years have passed, the committee drew attention to the fact that even the adaptation phase, which was planned to be completed in 2018, has not yet been completed. The officials who were present mentioned that this was planned to be done in 3 phases in 3 years and that it has not happened yet due to the need to change the system and the problems in the relationship between the parties involved.

The members of the committee Hon. Minister Mahinda Amaraweera, Hon. Mahindananda Aluthgamage, Hon. Indika Anuruddha, (Dr.) Hon. Harsha de Silva, (Dr.) Hon. Nalaka Godaheva, Hon. Jayantha Samaraweera, Hon. Premnath C. Dolawatta and Hon. Mr. Madura Withanage were present. Also, several MPs who are not members of the committee also participated with the permission of the chairman of the committee.

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