Ministry of Defence summoned before COPA

Date : 05-12-2023

- **Committee directs to expedite the amendment of the Firearms (Amendment) and Explosives (Amendment) Acts which have been delayed for many years.**
- **Instructions to set up a proper system related to crediting the revenue generated by the services provided to external parties by the Armed Forces to the Consolidated Fund.**
- **Focus on the procurement of food items for the three-armed forces**

The Committee on Public Accounts (COPA) recently directed the officials of Ministry of Defence to expedite the amendment of the Firearms (Amendment) Act No. 22 of 1996 and the Explosives (Amendment) Act, which have been delayed for many years.

The Committee on Public Accounts met recently under the chairmanship of the State Minister Hon. Lasantha Alagiyawanna and the Auditor General's reports for the years 2020, 2021 and 2022 and the current performance of the Ministry of Defence were discussed.

Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, General (retired) Kamal Gunaratne and a group of officers participated in this meeting.

Although the committee had recommended to amend the Firearms (Amendment) Act No. 22 of 1996 and the Explosives (Amendment) Act since 2012, it was revealed that it has been delayed due to various reasons. Officials also said that so far about 37,000 firearms have been licensed in the country. The officials mentioned that the amendment of the Act is in the final stage and the draft bill will be completed soon. The committee emphasized the need to speed up the process as the license fees should be revised and the state revenue will be lost due to this delay. Accordingly, it was also advised to submit a report on the progress.

Although it was mentioned in the constitution that the revenues generated by the services provided to external parties by the armed forces should be credited to the consolidated fund, attention was also drawn to the fact that it was not implemented properly. Although it was previously informed to prepare a proper system related to it and report to the committee, the committee asked about the fact that it has not yet been prepared. Auditor General’s Department pointed out that since most of the income goes to the welfare associations, a proper system should be set up. Although the services are being successfully carried out, the committee also advised to prepare a clear system in this regard. He also instructed the ministry officials to review this process extensively.

Special attention was also paid to the procurement of food items for the three-armed forces. It was revealed at the committee that although earlier recommendations had been given to set up an information management system connecting all the institutions involved in the food items procurement process for the three-armed forces, it is being implemented only in the Navy and the Air Force. Accordingly, the officers were ordered to expedite the preparation of the system for the Army and to submit a report on this. Also, it was emphasized in the committee that parties including the soldiers should receive a meal commensurate with the money spent by the government.

There was also a discussion regarding hiring a housing complex with 24 house units on a lease agreement for 72 million rupees, in order to provide accommodation for the 31 officers participating in the course of the National Defence Academy. Instead of getting houses on such a rent, the Committee Chair advised to pay attention to the possibility of providing accommodation facilities by constructing a new building. The Defence Secretary pointed out that since the construction has been stopped due to the current economic situation, measures will be taken in the future.

Attention was also drawn to the misplacement of materials worth 12 million rupees in the consumer goods warehouse. The officials said that the all those persons related to this have been suspended and steps have been taken to collect the related money from the storekeeper. It was discussed why this incident was not revealed by the internal audit until it was uncovered by the audit of the Auditor General's Department.

Apart from this, attention was also paid to the strategic communication network project, procurement process, role of Disaster Management Centre (DMC) etc.

State Ministers Hon. Mohan Priyadarshana, Hon. Diana Gamage, Hon. Chamara Sampath Dasanayake, Hon. Dr. Suren Raghavan, Members of Parliament Hon. Tissa Attanayake, Hon. Hector Appuhami, Hon. J.C Alawathwala, Hon. Jayantha Katagoda, Hon. Major Pradeep Undugoda, Hon. Weerasumana Weerasinghe, Hon. Isuru Dodangoda and Hon. Sahan Pradeep Withana were also present at this committee meeting.