Utilize the experienced Samurdhi Officers who have been appointed in connection with social welfare activities in the implementation of the second phase of Aswasuma - A recommendation from the Committee on Ways and Means

Date : 19-12-2023

A discussion on obtaining the services of Samurdhi Development Officers for the implementation of the second phase of the Aswasuma Benefit Scheme was held in the Committee on Ways and Means of the Parliament. Officials from government institutes such as Department of Samurdhi Development, Welfare Benefits Board and representatives of professional associations of Samurdhi Development Officers were also called for that. The Committee on Ways and Means met on December 13th under the chairmanship of Member of Parliament Hon. Patali Champika Ranawaka.

Due to the refusal of the Samurdhi Development Officers to implement the first phase of the Aswasuma benefit scheme, the task was handed over to the Grama Niladhari officers. However, due to the issues related to their service constitution and allowance, it was not possible to get the contribution of the Grama Niladhari officers for that, so the process had to be brought in by apprentice officers, so many practical problems arose, the Chairman of the Committee said. He further emphasized the importance of utilizing Samurdhi Development Officers who have been appointed to carry out social welfare activities at the village level in the implementation of the second phase of Aswasuma.

Since it was revealed that there is no legal obstacle to that, the chairman advised starting the survey to find beneficiaries by giving less weight to the fields of education and health and more weight to the fact of poverty. He also pointed out that necessary steps should be taken to take into account the importance of measuring poverty based on the electricity bill so that the process can be completed according to a strong parameter that cannot be denied or challenged.

He asked the Samurdhi Development officials whether they were ready to join the national task of preparing an accurate list of the poor. Samurdhi officials pointed out that they are willing to involve in the implementation of the second phase of the Aswasuma, but in accordance with Sections 21 and 22 of the Welfare Benefits Act No. 24 of 2002, where they have been found guilty of acting on false information in the performance of their duties, subjected to punishment and recovered in wrong payments. Because of that, they requested to remove the legal difficulties caused to them due to the provision.

Chair of the Committee Patali Champika Ranawaka said that so far, the officers have not been inconvenienced by those clauses in the act.

The Chairman stated that one of the options should be chosen among the options of amending the relevant Act, reaching an agreement in writing between the parties, fulfilling the responsibility based on trust and amicable agreement based on the needs of the country. He also pointed out that the work that can be done the most and should be done with compassion and thinking about the surroundings of the poor is to approach duty based on trust.

However, Samurdhi officials emphasized the need of amending the Act on a legal basis rather than a verbal agreement. Accordingly, the Chai of the Committee stated that the Committee had previously made a recommendation to the Ministry of Finance to amend Sections 21 and 22 of the Welfare Benefits Act No. 24 of 2002, and that the recommendation would be forwarded to the Ministry of Finance again.

Members Committee on Ways and Means Hon. Ashok Abeysinghe, Hon. SMM Muszhaaraff, Hon. Nalaka Bandara Kottegoda, State Minister Hon. Anupa Pasqual and Member of Parliament Hon. Dayasiri Jayasekara were also present with the permission of the Committee Chair.