The Sectoral Oversight Committee draws attention to the measures that can be taken to reduce plastic waste and to ban the use of lunch sheets

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Further discussion regarding reduction of plastic and polythene waste and development of recycling process in Sri Lanka was held at the Sectoral Oversight Committee on Environment, Natural Resources & Sustainable Development.

This was taken up for discussion when the Sectoral Oversight Committee on Environment, Natural Resources & Sustainable Development met in Parliament recently (Jan. 10) under the Chairmanship of Hon. Ajith Mannapperuma.

Officials representing the Ministry of Environment, Central Environment Authority, Sri Lanka Customs, Department of Trade and Investment Policy were called before the Committee meeting held.

Hon. Ajith Mannapperuma, Sectoral Oversight Committee Chair, explained the objectives of the Committee and stated that about 1200 tons of PET plastic is imported into Sri Lanka per month and only 350 tons of that plastic is recycled. He further pointed out that manufactured plastic fibers (monofilament) are being imported in Sri Lanka in large quantities and due to this there have been obstacles for the sale of other products including plastic fibers (monofilament) produced by the institutions engaged in recycling pet plastic bottles in Sri Lanka. The industrialists who were present before the Committee pointed out that by using PET plastic bottles and importing the raw materials produced in this country at a low price, it is not possible to pay the right price for the PET plastic raw materials collected for recycling the used PET plastic bottles in the country.

The Sectoral Oversight Committee instructed the Ministry that attention should be paid to the problem that has arisen and it is appropriate to direct the Ministry of Finance to get recommendations on the formulation of necessary legislation to levy an appropriate tax on the import of plastic fibers (monofilament) produced by this pet waste and take a decision accordingly.

Furthermore, the Central Environmental Authority has already recognized that the import of plastic brooms and besoms should be banned in this country, and microplastics are added to the environment by the use of plastic products should be banned as they can be produced from Sri Lanka's plastic waste, the officials said.

It was mentioned in the Committee that the Central Environment Authority has already identified many types of goods that should be banned after one time use. Thus, the attention of the Committee was focused on the complete ban on the import of these or other measures that could be taken in this regard. Moreover, the Committee Chair, Hon. Ajith Mannapperuma., Member of Parliament, ordered the Central Environment Authority to provide a report to the Committee on the importation of plastic products that should be banned and that hinder the production of waste plastic in Sri Lanka.

Addressing the Committee, the Sri Lankan customs officials stated that if the plastic imported as raw material for products that can be produced from waste plastic is also imported into the country, tax

should also be imposed on it.

Furthermore, the Committee focused on the environmental damage caused by the use of lunch sheets as well as the alternatives that can be used for lunch sheets. Considering the serious damage caused to health and environment, a recommendation was given to the Central Environment Authority by the Sectoral Oversight Committee on Environment, Natural Resources & Sustainable Development to remove from use and to ban lunch sheets by giving a grace period of 6 months to the manufacturers to adapt. Also, the officials representing the Ministry of Environment pointed out that lunch sheets are not used in any country in the world and pointed out the importance of not using lunch sheets to the Committee.

The Committee also pointed out that the amendments currently presented for the revision of the Environment Act were considered in the House and also the proposal approved by the cabinet to introduce a QR code for the manufactured pet plastic bottles and give more money to the consumer when giving an empty bottle to the recycling center should be implemented immediately.

Moreover, a biodegradable paper that can be introduced instead of lunch sheets was introduced to the Committee by the respective manufacturer and he requested to give a guarantee that the lunch sheet ban will be done permanently so that he can invest in the said product. Thus, the Sectoral Oversight Committee instructed the relevant authorities to accept the issuance of the gazette related to the lunch sheet ban and to work towards informing the people of Sri Lanka to not change it due to any pressure and to do so through environmentalists and social organizations.

Members of Parliament Hon. Jayantha Samaraweera, Hon. Akila Ellawala, Hon. (Dr.) Thilak Rajapakshe, Hon. Nalaka Bandara Kottegoda, and Hon. (Prof) Charitha Herath were present at the Committee meeting held.