



**Tenth Parliament of the
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
(First Session)**

Parliamentary Series No. 449

**First Report of the Ministerial Consultative
Committees
(From 24.01.2025 to 07.03.2025)**

Presented by

**Hon. (Dr.) Rizvie Salih
Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees**

on 23rd January 2026

Minutes of the following Ministerial Consultative Committee Meetings are included in the report as the Committees have confirmed them.

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**Staff of the Ministerial Consultative Committee Office
(From 24.01.2025 to 07.03.2025)**

- Mr. D. D. U. K. Munasinghe, Assistant Director (Administration) – Secretary to the Committee
- Mrs. Chandima Subasinghe, Principal Officer
- Mrs. D. R. A. M. D. Sewwanthi Ranasuriya, Assistant Principal Officer
- Mrs. Udeshika Thathsarani Weerasiri, Parliamentary Officer
- Mrs. W. P. U. Hansanee Munasinghe, Parliamentary Officer
- Mrs. Madhavee Arthanayaka, Parliamentary Officer
- Mrs. Madhushani Weerasekara, Parliamentary Officer
- Miss. Prabha Hettiarachchi, Parliamentary Officer
- Mrs. A. Rukmanidevi, Senior Translator
- Mr. M. L. M. Fathhulla, Computer Operator

**Secretaries to the Ministries
(From 24.01.2025 to 07.03.2025)**

- Mr. H. S. S. Thuyacontha - Ministry of Defence
- Mr. K. M. M. Siriwardana - Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
- Mr. Waruna Sri Dhanapala - Acting Secretary, Ministry of Digital Economy
- Mr. K. M. G. S. Nalaka Kaluwewa - Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education
- Mr. D. P. Wickramasinghe - Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Land and Irrigation
- Ms. Aruni Ranaraja - Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism
- Mr. M. A. L. S. N. K. Manthrinayake - Ministry of Fisheries, Aquatic and Ocean Resources
- Ms. J. M. Thilaka Jayasundara - Ministry of Industry and Entrepreneurship Development
- Senior Prof. Kapila C. K. Perera - Ministry of Transport, Highways, Ports and Civil Aviation
- Mr. B. K. Prabath Chandrakeerthi - Ministry of Plantation and Community Infrastructure
- Dr. Anil Jasinghe - Ministry of Health and Mass Media
- Mr. K. A. Vimalenthirarajah - Ministry of Trade, Commerce, Food Security and Cooperative Development

- Mr. S. M. Piyatissa - Ministry of Labour
- Mr. U. G. Ranjith Ariyaratne - Ministry of Urban Development, Construction and Housing
- Mr. S. Alokabandara - Ministry of Public Administration, Provincial Councils and Local Government
- Ms. Malarmathy Gangatharan - Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment
- Mr. Y. L. Mohamed Navavi - Ministry of Science and Technology
- Mr. D. W. R. B. Seneviratne - Ministry of Public Security and Parliamentary Affairs
- Prof. K. T. M. Udayanga Hemapala - Ministry of Energy
- Mr. A. H. M. U. Aruna Bandara - Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports
- Ms. K. D. R. Olga - Ministry of Women and Child Affairs
- Mr. K. R. Uduwawala - Ministry of Environment
- Mr. A. M. P. M. B. Atapattu - Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs
- Ms. A. B. Ayesha Jinasena, PC - Ministry of Justice and National Integration

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**Ministerial Consultative Committee on Transport, Highways, Port
and Civil Aviation
First Meeting – 24th January 2025**

Committee Members present

Hon. Bimal Rathnayake (Chair)
Hon. Janitha Ruwan Kodithuwakku (Deputy Minister of Ports and
Civil Aviation)
Hon. (Dr.) Prasanna Gunasena (Deputy Minister of Transport and
Highways)
Hon. Chathuranga Abeysinghe
Hon. Gayantha Karunathilleka
Hon. K. Sujith Sanjaya Perera
Hon. Ajith Agalakada
Hon. U. P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law
Hon. Sugath Wasantha de Silva
Hon. Thanura Dissanayake
Hon. Sujeewa Dissanayake
Hon. Ravindra Bandara
Hon. Danushka Ranganath
Hon. (Mrs.) Deepthi Wasalage
Hon. R. G. Wijerathna
Hon. Jagath Vithana
Hon. Dinindu Saman
Hon. Shantha Pathma Kumara Subasingha
Hon. Dewananda Suraweera
Hon. Chandana Sooriyaarachchi
Hon. (Ms.) Lakmali Hemachandra, Attorney at Law

Non - Committee Members present

Hon. Chrishantha Abeysena
Hon. Eranga Gunasekara
Hon. (Dr.) Namal Sudarshana
Hon. Rauff Hakeem, Attorney at Law
Hon. Ravi Karunanayake
Hon. (Dr.) M. L. A. M. Hisbullah
Hon. Arjuna Sujeewa Senasinghe, Attorney at Law
Hon. Nihal Galappaththi
Hon. G. G. Ponnambalam
Hon. Kaveenthiran Kodeeswaran
Hon. Gnanamuththu Srineshan
Hon. Roshan Akmeemana
Hon. Aboobucker Athambawa
Hon. (Dr.) Nihal Abeysinghe

Hon. M. K. M. Aslam
Hon. M. S. Uthumalebbe
Hon. Thilanka U. Gamage
Hon. (Dr.) Jagath Gunawardana
Hon. Ruwanthilaka Jayakody
Hon. Mayilvaganam Jegatheeswaran
Hon. (Dr.) Sellaththamby Thilaganathan
Hon. Dharmapriya Dissanayake
Hon. Mohamed Sali Naleem
Hon. Aruna Panagoda
Hon. Chithral Fernando, Attorney at Law
Hon. Stepni Fernando
Hon. Nanda Bandara
Hon. Wijesiri Basnayake
Hon. Jagath Manuwarna
Hon. (Dr.) Nandana Millagala
Hon. Riyas Farook
Hon. Manjula Sugath Rathnayaka
Hon. Suranga Rathnayaka
Hon. Priyantha Wijerathna, Attorney at Law
Hon. Asitha Niroshana Egoda Vithana
Hon. Fasmin Sharif
Hon. (Dr.) Elayathamby Srinath
Hon. Major General (Rtd.) G. D. Sooriyabandara
Hon. Champika Hettiarachchi
Hon. Muhammad Faizal

1. Consideration of Annual Reports

The Hon. Chair informed that consideration of the Annual Report of the Sri Lanka Ports Authority for the year 2023 will be taken at a future meeting of the Ministerial Consultative Committee after reviewing.

2. Discussion on Ministerial Matters

The Hon. Chair informed that it is supposed to accept suggestions and proposals from Hon. Members of Parliament to address the issues in the transport sector through concepts that are beneficial to the transport sector, environment, business, and the people friendly.

The Hon. Chair further informed that it is expected to establish three Sub-Committees as described below, which will be responsible to the Ministerial Consultative Committee of Parliament, in order to achieve the above objective.

2.1 Ensuring job security for workers in the informal transportation sector – First Sub-Committee

Accordingly, the Hon. Chair informed that steps will be taken to establish the first Sub - Committee with the membership of Hon. Jagath Vithana, Hon. Dinindu Saman, Hon. Dewananda Suraweera and Hon. Chandana Sooriyaarachchi, targeting the workers in the transport sector who are not formally organized - such as private bus drivers, conductors, three-wheeler drivers, and those who are engaged in transport services through electronic applications (app-based workers) and that this Sub-Committee would focus on ensuring professional recognition for these workers, facilitating their inclusion in the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) and Employees' Trust Fund (ETF), and the establishment of a contributory pension scheme or a social security fund through Provincial Councils for the benefit of these workers.

The Hon. Chair directed that Dr. B. D. Witharana, Chairman of the National Transport Commission, be included in the said Sub - Committee as the representative of the Commission.

The Hon. Chair further informed that the Sub-Committee shall have the authority to summon before it any official supposed necessary and to conduct site visits to any location as required and the Hon. Chair instructed that the sub-committee shall convene and nominate a Chair among members.

2.2 Guiding the transport sector towards a productive direction by strengthening the legal framework associated with the transport sector - Second Sub-Committee

The Hon. Chair informed that a Second Sub-Committee is being established, chaired by Hon. (Ms.) Lakmali Hemachandra, Attorney at Law, with Hon. Sugath Wasantha de Silva, Hon. Thanura Dissanayake, Hon. Sujeewa Dissanayake, as members, and with the active participation of Hon. Gnanamuththu Srinshan, to submit legal and administrative proposals for the development of the transport sector, aiming to strengthen its legal framework, address issues such as determining the prescribed capacity of bus seats, define the future direction of Sri Lanka's transport sector after the next five years, and pay special attention to the challenges faced by women and the people with disability.

The Hon. Chair directed the relevant Sub-Committee to involve Mr. L. H. Thilakaratne (Additional Secretary - Administration) representing the Ministry of Transport, Highways, Ports and Civil Aviation in the Sub-Committee.

The Hon. Chair instructed the Chairperson of the Sub-Committee to conduct the necessary site inspections and other observations and to submit a report within about two months, proposing solutions and proposals to strengthen the legal framework.

2.3 Formulating business models for creating additional services associated with the transport industry - Third Sub-Committee

The Hon. Chair informed that the third Sub-Committee would be established under the Chairmanship of Hon. Chathuranga Abeysinghe, with the membership of Hon. Ravindra Bandara and Hon. Danushka Ranganath, and with the active participation of Hon. (Dr.) Elayathamby Srinath and Hon. Suranga Rathnayaka, to develop the sectors related to the basic objectives of the transport sector using the existing resources and to develop business models for creating additional services and thereby generate additional income.

The Hon. Chair instructed that the involvement of Mr. V. S. Polwattage (Additional General Manager - Operations) representing the Department of Sri Lanka Railways and Mr. G. G. M. Mahesh Kulathilaka (Chief Executive Officer) representing the Sri Lanka Transport Board be obtained for the said sub-committee.

3. Other Matters

3.1 Shortage of SLTB buses - Hon. Ravindra Bandara

The Hon. Member requested that action be taken in this regard as the buses belonging to the Sri Lanka Transport Board are not plying on the roads adequately, due to the shortage of bus drivers and conductors.

3.2 Hon. Chandana Sooriyaarachchi

3.2.1 Disruption of bus services operated by Sri Lanka Transport Board in rural areas

The Hon. Member informed that observations made regarding depots have revealed that there is a considerable drop in buses operated by the Sri Lanka Transport Board in rural areas, as some of those buses are taken away from the service and used when buses plying on main roads encounter faults.

Further, the Hon. Member informed that some of the buses in a non-operative state out of the Sri Lanka Transport Board Bus fleet can be put back to running after minor repairs.

The Hon. Member pointed out that many requests are received on public days for having Sri Lanka Transport Board buses for rural areas and requested that the above-mentioned problematic situations be rectified for this purpose.

3.2.2 Inquiring on the projects that were submitted for road construction under the World Bank's projects

The Hon. Member informed that a road construction project was initiated under the World Bank projects previous year, unloading and heaping of over one hundred cubes of crushed stone had been carried out in several places for these projects and so far no approval has been received for such projects.

The Hon. Member inquired about the status of such projects, specifically whether they have been received, what the approved projects are, and the possibility of using government funds to unload stone cubes at various locations along the road as described.

3.2.3 Issues arising when purchasing spare parts for buses belonging to the Sri Lanka Transport Board

The Hon. Member informed that replacement and spare parts have to be purchased from areas far from the depot due to weaknesses existing in the arrangement of the institutional procedure for purchasing parts for buses belonging to the Sri Lanka Transport Board and as a result, highly problematic situations are encountered.

The Hon. Member further informed that uncertainties surface with regard to whether the ones purchased are genuine parts or counterfeit ones in purchasing parts for vehicles.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Sri Lanka Transport Board informed that the approval of the Board of Directors has been obtained to give regional procurement committees powers to purchase parts for vehicles, then necessary parts can be purchased from a supplier close by without a hassle, and every depot has been given the ability to store replacement parts necessary for two weeks.

The Hon. Chair inquired whether depots have the potential to conduct businesses associated with vehicle replacement parts.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Sri Lanka Transport Board informed that starting such a business is possible, yet there are challenges such as insufficient storage facilities and a shortage of qualified engineers.

3.3 Interdiction of a group of conductors attached to the Sri Lanka Transport Board - Hon. Dewananda Suraweera

The Hon. Member informed that 18 conductors attached to the Sri Lanka Transport Board at the Homagama and Maharagama depots have been interdicted within a short period of time, and due to this, the provision of services without interruption has become a major problem.

3.4 Problems faced by SLTB season ticket holders - Hon. Shantha Pathma Kumara Subasingha

The Hon. Member requested that measures be taken to provide season ticket holders with the opportunity to travel on long-distance buses so that such situations do not arise as students and government officials who are season ticket holders are not given the opportunity to travel on long-distance buses belonging to the SLTB.

3.5 Shortage of staff at the Homagama Depot - Hon. Aruna Panagoda

The Hon. Member informed that it was reported during the visit to the Homagama Depot that staff had not been recruited for many years.

Further, the Hon. Member informed that due to the shortage of staff, even a minor problem arising in the institution takes a long time to resolve, and the current staff of the institution is requesting that the necessary staff recruitment be made and arrangements be made to resolve the problems that have arisen institutionally.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Sri Lanka Transport Board informed that a Board Paper has been submitted and approval has been obtained to recruit drivers, conductors and technicians as a solution to the shortage of staff in all depots, and that these activities are expected to be carried out soon.

The Hon. Member further informed that a large number of buses that have been discarded as being unfit for operation have also gathered in the depot premises, and appropriate action should be taken in this regard.

3.6 Establishment of a joint Sri Lanka Transport Board - Private bus service for the Kirindiwela-Nittambuwa route 182 - Hon. U.P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law

The Hon. Member informed that only private buses operate on the 182 Kirindiwela - Nittambuwa route and that these buses do

not operate after 6.00 pm, citing the fact that the number of passengers travelling on buses at those times is minimal.

The Hon. Member requested that a joint timetable be prepared for the buses of the Sri Lanka Transport Board and the private sector buses to facilitate passengers, to overcome this situation.

3.7 Issues arising from the KL 02 contract package implemented through the i-Road Project – Hon. Danushka Ranganath

The Hon. Member informed that issues have arisen regarding roads in the Agalawatte and Mathugama areas constructed under the KL 02 contract package of the i-Road project and no maintenance work was permitted on these roads for eight years, not even for the Pradeshiya Sabha.

The Hon. Member informed that although legal proceedings related to the matter have now concluded and a reassignment was made, the roads have become unmaintainable.

The Director General of the Road Development Authority informed that, the i-Road project, funded by the Asian Development Bank has been halted due to a suspension of funding, and project activities could be continued if funding resume in the future.

3.8 Renovation of Kiralawa Bridge – Hon. Suranga Rathnayaka

The Hon. Member requested that immediate actions be made for the complete renovation of the Kiralawa Bridge across the Kiralawa - Dambulu Oya on the road from Madatugama to Pabbogama.

3.9 Renovation of dilapidated bridges – Hon. Muhammad Faizal

The Hon. Member informed that two bridges on the main road leading to the ocean from Madurankuliya in Puttalam have broken down and, although temporarily repaired using metal plates, both are in a condition of imminent collapse.

The Hon. Member further informed that the bridge across Viruthodai village is also in a very poor condition, causing significant constraint to transportation.

The Hon. Member requested that attention be paid regarding this matter and appropriate action be taken.

The Director General of the Road Development Authority informed that, apart from the bridge on the Puttalam coastal road, the other three bridges mentioned by the Hon. Members fall under the purview of the Road Development Authority, and

discussions are currently underway with the relevant institutions for their renovation.

3.10 Strengthening the Sisu Sariya SLTB bus service – Hon. Champika Hettiarachchi

The Hon. Member requested that steps be taken to strengthen the Sisu Sariya SLTB bus service used by school students.

The Chairman of the National Transport Commission informed that, while school, rural, and night services are provided by the SLTB, funds have been allocated by the General Treasury for the Sisu Sariya and Nisi Sariya bus services and that there is opportunity to improve these services through government subsidies.

The Chairman of the National Transport Commission further informed that since these services can be provided based on public requests, awareness should be raised among the people in this regard.

3.11 Creating a transport service that is convenient for people with disabilities - Hon. Sugath Wasantha de Silva

The Hon. Member informed that the people with disabilities in Sri Lanka makes up only 8.7% of the population and that there's no transport service or road system that is convenient for that community in Sri Lanka.

The Hon. Member requested that action be taken in future decisions pertaining to the transport sector, noting that previous requests to address issues concerning the construction of the Northern Railway Line appear to have been disregarded.

The General Manager informed that special ramps and access roads were constructed for people with disabilities during the construction of the railway station on the Northern Railway Line, and however, sanitary facilities have not been built for that community thus far and that necessary steps would be taken regarding the matter in future.

The General Manager of further informed that the platforms of many railway stations have been raised to the level of the trains, and that steps will be taken in the future to identify the platforms of the stations where this feature is not found and to promptly modernize them and to facilitate their use by people with disabilities.

3.12 Hon. Dharmapriya Dissanayake

3.12.1 Re-introducing inactive buses into transport service

The Hon. Member requested that the attention to be paid regarding the matter of approximately 23 buses currently in an inactive state at the three depots located in Kurunegala, as these buses have the potential to be returned to service following minor maintenance.

Furthermore, the Hon. Member informed that unsuitable individuals have been appointed as Depot Superintendents at the said depots, which has resulted in a state of severe inefficiency within the institution.

Additionally, the Hon. Member also requested that a bus be deployed to ply to Colombo from Kurunegala via the expressway.

3.12.2 Extension of the Express Train running up to Polgahawela to Kurunegala

The Hon. Member requested that the express train running up to Polgahawela at present be extended to Kurunegala.

The General Manager of the further informed that a response could be provided within a week regarding the proposal to extend the express train service to Kurunegala, after observing whether there is a station to park the train overnight and assessing the congestion on the single-track line between Kurunegala and Polgahawela.

3.13 Managing hidden costs in the entire transport system - Deputy Minister of Industry and Entrepreneurship Development, Hon. Chaturanga Abeysinghe

The Hon. Deputy Minister informed that when considering the entire transportation system, there is a hidden cost, that is, when considering employee transportation, freight transportation and clearance, there is a hidden production cost close to 10% in each of those sectors.

The Hon. Deputy Minister further informed that hidden costs can be controlled by planning to work according to the criteria given for each of the sectors referred to above and it is possible to resolve the problems in the transport sector and its associated issues by working towards an ultimate goal.

3.14 Development of Karaithivu Mavadipalli bridge and Kittangi bridge - Hon. M. S. Uthumalebbe

The Hon. Member requested that to reconstruct the Mawadipalli Bridge to prevent the hazardous environment that arises near the Karaithivu - Mawadipalli Bridge in the Ampara area during flood conditions.

The Hon. Member also requested that action be taken to develop the Kittangi Bridge, which is used for transport from Kalmunai to the Navidanveli area.

3.15 Hon. Jagath Vithana

3.15.1 Obtaining the approval to transfer the ownership of the buses under the National Transport Commission.

The Hon. Member informed that two cabinet approvals had been received to change the ownership of the buses which fall under the National Transport Commission and the implementation of the said task had been stalled as no approval had been obtained from the Parliament yet.

The Hon. Member further informed that approximately a thousand bus owners have deployed the buses through Powers of Attorney and various issues have arisen by such practice.

Therefore, the Hon. Member requested that steps be taken to change the ownership of the buses.

The Chairman of the National Transport Commission informed that the transfer of the ownership of the buses is not possible in terms of the existing National Transport Commission Act and that an amendment to the act has been submitted to Parliament in order to enable the transfer of the ownership.

3.15.2 The acts of decorating buses outside the existing legal framework

The Hon. Member informed that 18 decorative items have been legally approved in decorating buses that some fraudulent acts have been reported in executing such legal procedures and an association has been established to decorate buses and buses are decorated illegally, fraudulently charging excessive fees.

The Hon. Member further requested that attention be paid to such matters and steps be taken by the Department of Motor Traffic to prevent them, if such activities are being carried out outside the law, by employing intermediaries.

3.15.3 Providing an opportunity to put long distance bus services in Kalutara district by tender process.

The Hon. Member requested the National Transport Commission to provide an opportunity to put long distance bus services by calling tender, since only a very limited number of long distance service buses are operated by the National Transport Commission in Kalutara district.

3.16 Hon. Ravi Karunanayake

3.16.1 Revenue flowing into the country through Central Cargo Examination Directorate

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that approximately 139,000 containers were circulated through the Central Cargo Examination Directorate during the past year and that attention should be paid to whether the revenue generated from it is flowing into the country properly.

3.16.2 Current status of dry ports

The Hon. Member inquired regarding dry ports.

The General Manager, Department of Sri Lanka Railways informed that there is a report presented during the years 2011/2012 regarding Dry Port Concept while Veyangoda and some areas in Colombo suburbs have been identified for construction of Dry Port and the Department of Sri Lanka Railways can assist that effort as the transport provider.

The Chairman, Sri Lanka Ports Authority informed that it is expected to operationalize the Veyangoda Dry Port under the Dry Port concept and although the railway line has not been extended to the new port, since the railway line passes through the Bloumendhal area belonging to the port, the railway line can be used as a logistics centre and for cargo transshipment from the Dry Port as stated in its master plan.

3.16.3 Timeline for opening the Eastern Container Terminal of Colombo Port

The Hon. Member inquired regarding the timeline for opening the Eastern Container Terminal of Colombo Port.

The Chairman, Sri Lanka Ports Authority informed that operations of the first phase of the Eastern Terminal of the Colombo Port is expected to commence by the end of June.

3.16.4 Resumption of Mattakuliya Colombo North 155 and Dehiwala Elakanda-172 bus services

The Hon. Member requested to direct attention to and take necessary action regarding the suspension of the 155 - Mattakuliya - North Colombo and the 172 - Dehiwala - Alakanda bus services, which have been halted due to a shortage of staff.

The Chairman, National Transport Commission informed that discussions are expected to be held with the Road Passenger Transport Authority regarding the 155 and 172 bus routes.

3.17 Hon. Mohamed Sali Naleem

3.17.1 Renovation of Eravur Depot

The Hon. Member requested that attention be paid to the deficiencies in the sanitary facilities, administrative building and restroom facilities for the employees of the institution at the Eravur depot and an air-conditioned bus be provided to the depot.

Further, the Hon. Member requested that since the said depot has been established on a land belonging to the Department of Sri Lanka Railways, appropriate steps should be taken in relation to the said land.

The General Manager, Department of Sri Lanka Railways informed the Committee that a possibility exists for the said land to be allocated to the Sri Lanka Transport Board for its development purposes.

3.17.2 Renovation of the Eravur Road

The Hon. Member requested that necessary action be taken to renovate the Eravur Road and the drainage system on both sides of the road.

The Director General, Road Development Authority informed that steps are being taken to examine the renovation of the Eravur Road.

3.18 Hon. Dinindu Saman

3.18.1 Appointment of a Provincial Director for Uva Province for Road Development Authority

The Hon. Member informed the committee that, as an Acting Director is currently performing duties attached to the Uva Province within the Road Development Authority, an interview was held on 13th December last year to appoint a permanent

Director. However, no appointment has yet been made, and therefore the Hon. Member requested the committee that attention be drawn to this matter.

The Director General, Road Development Authority informed the committee that structured interviews have been held for the recruitment of Provincial Directors and that necessary action will be taken to appoint the most suitable candidate selected through this process as the Provincial Director.

3.18.2 Development of the Rajamawatha and Beragala Roads in the Uva Province

The Hon. Member requested the committee that attention be given to expedite construction activities on the Rajamawatha Road, which connects the Badulla District with Kandy.

The Hon. Member also requested the committee that attention be paid to the development of the Beragala Road located in the Wellawaya - Koslanda area, citing its direct relevance to the progress of the tourism sector.

The Director General, Road Development Authority informed the committee that the development of both the Rajamawatha and Beragala roads is expected to be carried out in due course.

3.19 Educational qualifications considered for recruitment to driver positions in the Sri Lanka Transport Board – Hon. Ruwanthilaka Jayakody

The Hon. Member informed the committee that the educational qualification specified for recruitment to driver positions in Sri Lanka Transport Board includes having passed the G.C.E. (Ordinary Level) examination with six subjects and at least two credit passes, within no more than two sittings and due to this requirement, no applicants come forth for the post of driver.

The Chief Executive Officer, Sri Lanka Transport Board informed that recruitment is carried out in accordance with the recruitment procedure approved by the Department of Management Services.

The Hon. Chair inquired the Chief Executive Officer, Sri Lanka Transport Board on the time taken to make recruitment to the Sri Lanka Transport Board.

The Chief Executive Officer, Sri Lanka Transport Board informed that it takes about two months; the candidates selected following the interview are subjected to a test after a 21-day training, and those who pass it are sent for practical training on driving along the road.

The Hon. Chair also inquired whether heads of depots have the ability to recruit drivers and conductors retired from the Sri Lanka Transport Board for depots on contract basis for a period of six months if it is possible to pay salaries in view of the time necessary for new recruitments.

The Chief Executive Officer, Sri Lanka Transport Board stated that it is necessary to look into whether the health condition of the persons to be recruited after the age of sixty are adequate to provide service after subjecting them to a medical examination.

The Commissioner General, Department of Motor Traffic informed that a person gets the chance to work as a driver of a public transport service only up to 65 years of age.

The Chief Executive Officer, Sri Lanka Transport Board informed that it is possible to obtain the approval of the Board of Directors and take follow-up action.

The Hon. Chair asked what institution the salaries would be paid through to such employees if recruited in such manner.

The Chief Executive Officer, Sri Lanka Transport Board stated that salaries could be paid through the respective depots.

Hon. Ravi Karunanayake inquired about the possibility to recruit women as drivers to the Sri Lanka Transport Board.

The Hon. Chair informed that the request could be considered when new recruitment would be made.

The Hon. Chair directed the officers to let respective Members of Parliament have the replies regarding measures that could be taken pertaining to the issues and concerns raised by the Members of Parliament at the Committee.

4. The Committee was adjourned at 12.50 p.m. *sine die*.
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**Ministerial Consultative Committee on Trade, Commerce, Food
Security and Cooperative Development
First Meeting - 5th February 2025**

Committee Members Present

Hon. Wasantha Samarasinghe (Chair)
Hon. Upali Samarasinghe (Deputy Minister of Cooperative
Development)
Hon. Ajith Agalakada
Hon. (Prof.) L.M. Abeywickrama
Hon. M. K. M. Aslam
Hon. Sarath Kumara, Attorney at Law
Hon. Thilanka U. Gamage
Hon. Ajith Gihan
Hon. Nimal Palihena
Hon. Wijesiri Basnayake
Hon. Sunil Biyanwila
Hon. Riyaz Farook
Hon. Sunil Rathnasiri
Hon. R.G. Wijerathna
Hon. Fasmin Sharif
Hon. Kitnan Selvaraj

Non – Committee Members present

Hon. (Dr.) Harshana Suriyapperuma
Hon. Asoka Sapumal Ranwala
Hon. (Dr.) Harsha de Silva
Hon. Arkam Ilyas
Hon. Thilina Samarakoon

1. Consideration of Regulations

- **Regulations made by the then Minister of Trade, Commerce, Food Security, Co-operative Development, Industry and Entrepreneurship Development under Section 204 read with Sections 160A, 161B, 161C, 161D, 161E, 161F, 161G, 161I, 161K and 161L of the Intellectual Property Act, No. 36 of 2003 and published in the Gazette Extraordinary No. 2407/04 of 22nd October 2024**

(Presented to the Parliament on 21.01.2024)

Hon. (Dr.) Harsha de Silva stated that due to a policy decision taken by Parliament, the approval of the Committee on Public Finance is required for the orders regarding charging fees.

The Director General, National Intellectual Property Office of Sri Lanka informed, once these regulations are approved that the geographical indication is registered as one law, previously the geographical indications were given to the applicants under the trademark law as a certified sign.

The Director General, National Intellectual Property Office of Sri Lanka further informed that individual applications for geographical indication are not permitted and applications must be submitted by institutions or groups.

The Director General, National Intellectual Property Office of Sri Lanka informed, geographical indication recognizes the value of a product based on its unique characteristics, the concept originated in 1994 through the facts related to trading activities on intellectual property rights.

The Director General, National Intellectual Property Office further informed that Sri Lanka joined at a later stage, and the Act was amended in 2003 to incorporate provisions for geographical indications.

The Director General, National Intellectual Property Office of Sri Lanka stated that, between 2014 and 2016, action was taken to introduce a unified law on geographical indication, as suggested by exporters and entrepreneurs.

The Director General, National Intellectual Property Office of Sri Lanka further informed that approval was obtained for the law on geographical indication by the Act No.08 of 2022 and the regulations required for the registration process of it has been submitted to Parliament.

Hon. (Dr.) Harsha De Silva inquired whether a cinnamon planter (an individual planter) with a 05 acre holding is eligible to register a geographical indication through the Export Development Board and the Sri Lanka Tea Board.

The Director General, Intellectual Property of Sri Lanka informed that the registration of geographical indications cannot be carried out directly through the National Intellectual Property Office, but registration can be done by submitting a detailed application along with the required fees through the Sri Lanka Export Development Board (EDB)

The Director General, Intellectual Property of Sri Lanka further informed that a sticker is used for this purpose.

The Hon. Chair also commented on this matter.

Hon. (Dr.) Harsha de Silva inquired from the officials about the goods for which geographical indications have been registered to date.

The Director General, Intellectual Property of Sri Lanka informed that separate geographical indications exist for cinnamon and Ceylon Tea based on the distinct flavours of each region, through the Sri Lanka Export Development Board (EDB), and that this facilitates the registration of such goods in foreign countries with ease.

The Director General, Intellectual Property of Sri Lanka further informed that products such as Ceylon Golden Pineapple, kithul, cashew, and gems are eligible for registration under geographical indications.

The Hon. Chair stated that these are only functioning under a certification mark, and the objective is to eventually issue a certificate specifically for the registration of the geographical indication.

Hon. (Dr.) Harshana Suriyapperuma informed that although a Act regarding geographical indications has existed up to now, there were no accompanying regulations under it and that these regulations would provide the framework for submitting applications for the registration of geographical indication and for rejecting such applications where necessary.

The Secretary to the Ministry commented on this.

Hon. (Prof.) L.M. Abeywickrama inquired whether it is possible for multiple institutions to separately apply for the registration of geographical indication for the same export product.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that, in order to obtain several Geographical Indication Registration Certificates for the same product, there should be a variety in the quality of each of those products such as highland tea and lowland tea, and that an application should be submitted through an association specialized for that.

The Director General, Intellectual Property of the National Intellectual Property Office of Sri Lanka informed the Committee that the certification mark will be issued only to the relevant recognized institution, and that institutions such as the Sri Lanka Export Development Board (EDB) and the Ceylon Tea Board have the exclusive right to operate in this regard.

The Hon. Chair inquired as to whether Geographical Indications can be registered for gems.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed the Committee that only one Geographical Indication registration can be issued for one product in a certain area under the existing production system and only one Geographical Indication registration can therefore be given to one product.

Hon. (Prof.) L. M. Abeywickrama pointed out that, in India, geographical indications have been registered for each sector such as Kanchipuram and Varanasi for silk sarees, and inquired as to whether separate geographical indications can similarly be registered for the products of “Mathurata Plantation” for tea.

Hon. (Dr.) Harsha de Silva informed that, since companies such as Dilmah sell Single Origin Tea and do not sell blended tea, geographical indications can be registered from factory to factory and that, as far as a single factory is considered, the taste of tea can vary due to various environmental factors.

Hon. (Dr.) Harsha de Silva further informed that there are types of wine specific to different countries where geographical indications have been registered, and that there are products which are produced at a minimum cost based on factors including the taste and the colour of tea as well as products that are blended with imported tea according to the prescribed percentage.

Hon. (Dr.) Harsha de Silva furthermore informed the Committee that the composition of tea products blended with imported tea should be in accordance with the prescribed percentage.

Hon. (Prof.) L. M. Abeywickrama informed the Committee that composition of tea products blended with imported tea will be taken into consideration through the TRIPS Agreement.

Hon. Fasmin Sharif inquired as to whether geographical indications can be registered for spices such as pepper and cloves as well as for the products for which geographical indications are to be registered in the future.

The Hon. Chair stated that the relevant geographical indication registration could be obtained when the relevant application forms for the product were submitted through the Department of Minor Export Crops under the Ministry of Plantation Industries, and the necessary intervention required for that would be made in due course.

- The Chair of the Committee on Public Finance, Hon. (Dr.) Harsha de Silva, and the officials who attended the Committee to

consider the regulations under the Intellectual Property Act departed the Committee.

2. Consideration of the Performance Report and Annual Accounts

- Performance Report and Annual Accounts of the Measurement Units, Standards and Services Department for the year 2023 (Presented to the Parliament on 17.12.2024)

The Director, Department of Measurement Units, Standards, and Services informed the Committee that the main role of the institution is to create a secure consumer society through an accurate and reliable measurement system for the consumers through the implementation of the Measurement Units Standards, and Services Act No. 35 of 1995 and that the relevant performance report has been submitted to Parliament based on the performance of 25 districts including the Head Office.

The Hon. Chair directed the officers to submit the annual performance reports at the earliest without delay and said that the Annual Performance Report for the year 2023 should be submitted by 31.05.2024 since it has to be approved by the Committee in advance before referring it to the approval of the Parliament.

The Director, Department of Measurement Units, Standards, and Services stated that the Annual Performance Report for the year 2024 is expected to be submitted on the due date and the delay in performance in one district would affect the delay in the overall report.

The Director of the Department Measurement Units, Standards, and Services further, informed that they intend to submit these performance reports more efficiently than the online system by networking 25 districts in the year 2025 and about 35% of the work is already complete.

After the consideration, the Ministerial Consultative Committee on Trade, Commerce, Food Security & Cooperative Development, agreed to the above mentioned Regulations, Annual Performance Report and Annual Accounts referred to the Committee by Parliament and resolved that the Report of the Committee regarding the aforesaid Regulations, Annual Performance Report and Annual Accounts, thereon be presented to Parliament by Hon. Wasantha Samarasinghe, Chair of the Committee.

3. Discussion on the Ministerial Matters

The Hon. Chair directed the Secretary to the Ministry to deliver a clarification on the institutions coming under the Ministry of Trade, Commerce, Food Security and Co-operative Development.

Accordingly, the Secretary to the Ministry delivered a brief clarification on the institutions that coming under the purview of the Ministry.

The Hon. Chair intimated that steps are being taken to stabilize the market and the future course of action of the institutions related to the Ministry would be presented to the next Ministerial Consultative Committee.

The Hon. Chair further informed that a comprehensive programme is underway regarding food security.

The Hon. Chair also informed the Hon. Members of Parliament to submit suggestions and criticisms regarding the upcoming program of the Ministry.

4. Other Matters

4.1 Hon. M. K. M. Aslam

4.1.1 Forecasting the rice consumption in the country

The Hon. Member asked whether the Ministry had made any forecasts regarding the current rice shortage before it occurred.

1. The Secretary to the Ministry informed that, based on data regarding the annual rice consumption in the country and harvest from the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Land and Irrigation, it had been projected that 7,000 metric tons of rice would be required by last October.

The Hon. Chair further informed that the Consumer Affairs Authority, the Department of Agriculture and the Ministry had jointly held discussions with the Hon. President and that according to statistics, there would be a rice surplus for two months and that the data would change due to various environmental reasons.

The Hon. Chair furthermore informed that the Cabinet of Ministers has decided to import 70,000 metric tons of Nadu rice, which is consumed by approximately 65% of the population, for a duration of two weeks and also noted that while importing 170,000 metric tons of rice should be sufficient for three and a half months, there are issues with the data used for these forecasts, stemming from the current rice shortage.

The Hon. Chair informed that small rice mill owners contribute 62% of the total rice supply and according to previous data, the Maha season harvest is expected to be sufficient for seven months, with an anticipated surplus of approximately 400,000 metric tons.

The Hon. Chair also stated that the Ministry will oversee this matter, furthermore, rice imports will only be permitted through the Sri Lanka State Trading (Miscellaneous) Corporation (STC) and the Co-operative Wholesale Establishment (CWE) and that the current rice supply is predicted to be adequate.

4.1.2 Updating data systems

The Hon. Member proposed that data systems should be updated whenever issues arise in forecasting due to inconsistencies in the existing data systems across all sectors.

The Hon. Chair informed that the Presidential Secretariat, along with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Lands and Irrigation, and the Ministry of Trade, Commerce, Food Security, and Cooperative Development, had jointly formed a Committee on Food Security and focused on developing an accurate data system that can be utilized by all stakeholders which was also emphasized that data entered into the system by the Ministry and other institutions should be properly stored, with relevant institutions held accountable for that data.

4.1.3 Establishment of a formal system to regulate rice production in the country

The Hon. Member proposed to take measures to address the current gaps in the operations of Lanka Sathosa Limited and the Cooperative Wholesale Establishment, as well as to establish a formal system to calculate the amount of rice available in the market.

The Hon. Chair informed that the distribution network of Lanka Sathosa Limited had been handed over to the Cooperative Wholesale Establishment, which is currently being established, and that the previous political authority had sold fifty-two vehicles owned by the Corporation last September at a price lower than the market value, thereby completely collapsing the distribution network.

The Hon. Chair further informed that, since these institutions are controlled separately under the Ministry and the Provincial Councils without being coordinated in a networked manner, the

customer service and financial processes are not being implemented properly.

The Hon. Chair furthermore informed that the establishment of the Co-operative Wholesale Establishment and the process of distributing goods to villages are currently being implemented.

The Hon. Member requested that the telephone numbers of the heads of institutions under the Ministry be provided to the Committee Members.

4.2 Hon. Fasmin Sharif

4.2.1 Irregularities in currently operating cooperative societies and companies

The Hon. Member requested that, due to major irregularities, corruption, and fraud occurring in these institutions, the Chairmen of those institutions should be reappointed.

The Cooperative Development Commissioner of the Department of Cooperative Development and the Registrar of Cooperative Societies informed that elections in cooperative societies and companies should be held only after amending the by-laws, that members seeking to vote should have at least one year of membership.

The Cooperative Development Commissioner of the Department of Cooperative Development and the Registrar of Cooperative Societies further informed that the amended by-laws must be approved by the Provincial Commissioner or the Central Government Commissioner.

The Hon. Chair informed that the approval of Cabinet of Ministers has been received to reorganize these institutions and that a comprehensive discussion on cooperative societies and companies is expected to be held at next Consultative Committee meeting.

Hon. Nimal Palihena also expressed his views on this matter.

4.2.2 Losses incurred by Lanka Sathosa Limited

The Hon. Member stated that attention be paid to the fact that the range of diversified products available for sale at Lanka Sathosa Limited branches is less compared to other supermarkets, and that Lanka Sathosa Limited incurs losses due to the high cost of maintaining its establishments in rented buildings in urban areas.

The Chairman of Lanka Sathosa Limited informed that, out of approximately 3,300 registered products, around 450 high-demand products have been identified, that the proper

distribution of products to each branch is regulated daily, and that if any specific product other than red rice is unavailable, should be informed to the institute.

The Chairman, Lanka Sathosa Limited further informed that 225 out of 451 branches of Lanka Sathosa Limited are incurring losses, steps have been taken to make 40 branches out of it profitable this month, a loss of Rs. 24 billion for the period from 2013 - 2024 and a loss of about Rs. 650 million and 1.2 million respectively in the years 2023 and 2024 has been estimated, there had been the issue of inventory loss and non-documentation in the former Lanka Sathosa Limited and that these issues were being rectified according to a three-month plan and that the estimated revenue of Rs. 4.8 billion in January 2025 had increased to Rs. 4.9 billion.

The Hon. Chair informed that Lanka Sathosa Limited, which was founded under various political pressures, will be relocated and applications have been called to increase the number of branches up to 600 and steps will be taken to open those branches after conducting a market study.

The Hon. Chair further stated that it had been decided to close Lanka Sathosa Limited by September 2024.

4.2.3 Improper selling of commodities of Lanka Sathosa Limited to external retailers

The Hon. Member stated that although Lanka Sathosa Limited provides goods at concessionary prices, sells most of them in undue manner to shopkeepers.

The Hon. Member inquired whether this process is regulated by the Consumer Affairs Authority.

The Hon. Chair informed that although this had happened previously, it is not happening currently and if it happens, legal action is expected to be taken in this regard.

The Chairman, Lanka Sathosa Limited informed that the information system of Lanka Sathosa Limited has been set up in such a way that the goods are automatically released in limited quantities at the time of payment.

4.3 Hon. Wijesiri Basnayake

4.3.1 Theoretical program ahead for co-operative branches

The Hon. Member inquired about the future program by stating that the vision, strategies and management of more than 300 co-

operative branches should be changed to suit the twenty-first century consumer.

The Hon. Chair informed that there are various issues in 68 Credit Co-Operative Societies in the Western Province and work is being done in this regard.

4.3.2 Providing Mahapola Scholarship to children Appropriately

The Hon. Member informed that Mahapola Scholarship is not being provided to children properly.

The Chairman, the Lalith Athulathmudali Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund informed that the required funds that have been in arrears to provide scholarships to children for the past few months are being paid from the General Treasury and that Rs. 2650/= is borne by the Mahapola Trust Fund and Rs. 2450/= by the University Grants Commission in providing Mahapola to university students.

The Chairman, Lalith Athulathmudali Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund further informed the Committee that the General Treasury has not disbursed funds for Mahapola scholarships for students for several months, and that last week, the scholarships for October 2024 were issued following the arrival of a portion of the said funds.

The Chairman of the Lalith Athulathmudali Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund informed the Committee that a sum of Rs. 563 million should be received from the government on the basis of paying Rs. 5000, and that if payments are exclusively sourced from the Lalith Athulathmudali Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund, the Fund would need to be terminated after the next three years.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that this matter was discussed with the University Grants Commission, and that the process will be updated in the next three months, with an anticipated increase in this year's budget for the Lalith Athulathmudali Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund.

4.4 Hon. Riyas Farook

4.4.1 The prevailing prices of paddy

The Hon. Member inquired regarding the prevailing prices of paddy.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that the Cabinet approval has been received to announce today's paddy prices as Nadu paddy at Rs. 120 and Samba paddy at Rs. 125, with a moisture level of 14 percent.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that a decision regarding the prices of rice will be made in the future after summoning suppliers.

4.5 Hon. Nimal Palihena

4.5.1 Creating a programme to maintain co-operative-affiliated institutions in a formal manner.

The Hon. Member proposed creating a programme required to efficiently maintain the Polgolla National Co-operative Development Institute and the Regional Training Institutes through both theoretical and practical training.

4.6 Hon. Asoka Sapumal Ranwala

4.6.1 Utilizing of Multi-Purpose Co-operative Societies to reduce the regional shortage of goods

The Hon. Member proposed that since there are Multi-Purpose Cooperative Societies and warehouse complexes in every Divisional Secretariat Division, these institutions could be leveraged to reduce the shortage of goods in the region.

The Hon. Member also inquired whether it could be arranged for these institutions to directly import and distribute goods given the inactivity of the Cooperative Wholesale Establishment (CWE).

The Chairman of the Cooperative Wholesale Establishment informed the Committee that a proposal for the reactivation of the Cooperative Wholesale Establishment (CWE) has been prepared and submitted by the Hon. Chair, and discussions are ongoing regarding the distribution of goods via the Cooperative Wholesale Establishment (CWE) while rebuilding institutions using all available resources.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that it is expected to establish three Cooperative Wholesale Trade Centres in Colombo, Matara and Kurunegala, and to create and strengthen a distribution network that will also facilitate purchases by the private sector by the end of 2027.

The Chairman of the Co-operative Wholesale Establishment informed the Committee that after auctioning about 90 Lorries, the remaining 41 lorries have been parked for over 12 months.

The Hon. Deputy Minister informed the Committee that due to the lack of a proper market for local grains, they have been imported in the past and that it is expected to start about 1000 production Co-operative societies for this purpose.

The Hon. Deputy Minister further informed that the first discussion will be held in Vavuniya this month and that it is expected to establish 06 production cooperatives for grains such as maize, dry chilies, cinnamon, green beans, chickpeas and sesame seeds, initially in collaboration with companies like Anlene.

The Hon. Deputy Minister further informed that it is expected to improve the livelihood of the planters, to transmit the profits earned by the intermediaries to the planters, as well as to set a fixed price for these products and provide the necessary financial facilities to the planters through this process.

4.6.2 Granting direct import permission to Co-operative Wholesale Establishment (CWE)

The Hon. Member enquired regarding the feasibility of allowing direct imports to the Co-operative Wholesale Establishment (CWE) to meet the shortage of a certain commodity in the market.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that certain commodities require Cabinet approval for direct import, while other commodities can be imported openly, and that any entrepreneur can import rice when it is opened for direct import.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that, arrangements are being made to provide the necessary commodities to every Co-operative stores and Lanka Sathosa Limited stores through the Co-operative Wholesale Establishment (CWE) in the future and

that then a successful solution can be found to overcome the shortages of commodities in the market.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that salt can also be imported until 28th February, 2025 by submitting an application form to the Ministry of Industry & Entrepreneurship Development.

Hon. (Prof.) L. M. Abeywickrama enquired regarding the accuracy of the existing data on salt.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that the salterns have a production capacity of 200,000 metric tons and the salt consumption is 150,000 - 180,000 metric tons and the decrease in the production last year due to environmental factors has led to a shortage of salt in the market and that the industrialists have expressed their opinions to the effect that the import of 30,000 metric tons would be sufficient for such a situation.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that it is expected to establish salters in Puttalam and three in the South and to export the surplus salt as well.

4.7 Use of funds from the Lalith Athulathmudali Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Funds for the establishment of the Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT) - Hon. Sunil Rathnasiri

The Hon. Member inquired from the Committee regarding the utilization of funds from the Lalith Athulathmudali Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund for the establishment of the Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT).

The Chairman of the Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund informed the Committee that, at present, there are two private companies operating under the Mahapola Trust Fund, which are currently operating without proper Top Management.

The Chairman of the Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund further informed the Committee that accurate information pertaining to these companies are not presently available with the institution, and that an audit will be conducted with the expectation of uncovering the relevant facts.

The Chairman of the Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund informed the Committee that SLIIT currently pays a sum of Rs. 24 million as tax to the Lalith Athulathmudali Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund.

The Hon. Member informed dissatisfaction with the response provided and emphasized the urgent need for legal action to be taken and further mentioned that it is essential for all the political authorities including public officials to work with a unified objective towards the development of the country.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that approximately 70,000 students are given financial assistance by the Lalith Athulathmudali Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund.

The Chief Internal Auditor informed the Committee that only an internal audit has been conducted with respect to the said funds and although it has been reported that a Forensic audit was previously conducted by the government audit section and an audit report was submitted to the Parliament, it has not been submitted to any institution.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that the Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT) was constructed at a cost of Rs. 1,900 million borne by the Lalith Athulathmudali Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund, and that the land on which the institution is located remains the property of the Lalith Athulathmudali Mahapola Higher Education Scholarship Trust Fund. It was further informed to the Committee that Rs. 97 million had been taken and Rs. 37 million had been repaid.

4.8 Development of Consumer - Oriented Cooperative Societies – Hon. Kitnan Selvaraj

Hon. Member informed the Committee that, on the Thaipongal festival day, red rice was sold at an excessively high price of Rs. 360 in the Haputale town area, and informed the Committee on the need of taking immediate actions towards the development of these Cooperative societies.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that proposals from Hon. Members of the Parliament to be submitted in order to strengthen the Multi-Purpose Cooperative Societies.

4.9 Hon. Thilanka U. Gamage

4.9.1 The prices of certain goods at cooperative outlets are higher than those at regular retail shops.

The Hon. Member informed that certain goods are priced higher in cooperative outlets compared to regular retail shops, and as a result the board of directors is showing large profits.

4.9.2 Establishing a Lanka Sathosa branch in Yakkalamulla area

The Hon. Member requested that a Lanka Sathosa branch is not available in the area and the nearest branch is 18 km away, and proposed that a Lanka Sathosa branch be established there.

The Chairman of Lanka Sathosa Limited said that there are four types of Lanka Sathosa branches and a branch is expected to be opened as a franchise shop.

4.10 Restructuring the Multi-Purpose Cooperative Societies - Hon. Upali Samarasinghe (Deputy Minister)

The Hon. Deputy Minister informed that a Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society consists of a Board of Directors as well as state officials, that it is difficult to handle such a Board of Directors, and plans are being formulated.

The Hon. Chair informed that the course of action to be implemented with regard to Multi-Purpose Cooperative Societies will be put forth at the next meeting of the Committee.

5. The Committee was adjourned at 12.45 p.m. *sine die*.
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Ministerial Consultative Committee on Women & Child Affairs First Meeting - 21st February, 2025

Committee Members Present

- Hon. (Mrs.) Saroja Savithri Paulraj (Chairperson)
Hon. (Dr.) Namal Sudarshana (Deputy Minister of Women and Child Affairs)
Hon. Harshana Nanayakkara, Attorney at Law
Hon. (Dr.) Hiniduma Sunil Senevi
Hon. (Mrs.) Sagarika Athauda, Attorney at Law
Hon. U. P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law
Hon. (Dr.) (Ms.) Kaushalya Ariyaratne
Hon. (Mrs.) Nilusha Lakmali Gamage, Attorney at Law
Hon. (Mrs.) Samanmali Gunasingha
Hon. (Mrs.) Anushka Thilakarathne, Attorney at Law
Hon. (Dr.) S. Sri Bavanandarajah
Hon. (Mrs.) A. M. M. M. Rathwaththe
Hon. (Mrs.) Hiruni Wijesinghe, Attorney at Law
Hon. (Dr.) Pathmanathan Sathiyalingam
Hon. (Ms.) Lakmali Hemachandra, Attorney at Law
Hon. (Mrs.) Geetha Herath, Attorney at Law

Non - Committee Members Present

Hon. (Mrs.) Hemali Weerasekara
Hon. Ramalingam Chandrasekar
Hon. Kathiravelu Shanmugam Kugathanan
Hon. Manjula Suraweera Arachchi
Hon. (Ms.) Krishnan Kalaichelvi
Hon. (Mrs.) Chamindranee Kiriella, Attorney at Law
Hon. (Mrs.) M.A.C.S. Chathuri Gangani
Hon. Rajeevan Jeyachandramoorthy
Hon. M.A.M. Thahir
Hon. (Dr.) Elayathamby Srinath
Hon. Ismail Muththu Mohamed

1. Other matters

1.1 Hon. Harshana Nanayakkara, Attorney at Law

1.1.1 Inquiring about the further action taken to amend the Children and Young Persons Ordinance No. 48 of 1939

The Hon. Minister inquired whether further actions taken to amend the Children and Young Persons Ordinance No. 48 of 1939 which is under the purview of Ministry of Justice and National Integration.

The Hon. Minister further informed that child protection is a provincial subject, and the subject of justice belongs to the line ministry, which presents a problem.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that the final decision regarding the amendment of the Children and Young Persons Ordinance No. 48 of 1939 has been entrusted to the Ministry of Justice and National Integration, and that discussions are currently being held concerning a new Act for the elimination of domestic violence.

The Senior Probation Officer informed that a committee of experts which includes the representatives of National Child Protection Authority, the Department of Probation and Child Care Services, several other institutions, and non-governmental organizations has been established under the leadership of Mr. Suhada Gamlath, Chairman of the National Authority for the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses and the subject of child protection was undertaken by the Ministry of Justice and National Integration itself at the time of the formation of the aforesaid committee.

The Senior Probation Officer informed that but it has now been gazetted under the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs.

The Senior Probation Officer further stated that the previous committee was abolished following the appointment of a new Minister, and since establishing a new committee would take a considerable length of time, a letter was sent to the Secretary of the Ministry of Justice and National Integration inquiring the agreement to proceed with action through the existing committee, for which a reply is currently awaited.

The Senior Probation Officer requested that a timeline should be provided for this process.

The Hon. Minister informed the Committee that concurrence on the timeline would be communicated in writing.

1.1.2 Corporal Punishment

The Hon. Minister inquired about the prohibition of corporal punishment, which is applicable to cruel forms of punishment to children.

The Legal Officer informed that a Cabinet Memorandum was submitted last year regarding the prohibition of corporal punishment as an amendment to Section 308 (a) of the Penal Code and a Cabinet Memorandum should be resubmitted by the Ministry of Justice and National Integration under the new government in order that the course of action be implemented accordingly.

The Senior Probation Officer informed that organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had agreed to provide the necessary support for this purpose at a conference held in Colombia last year and that the draft bill should be amended prior to the raising awareness of the relevant parties and preparation of the other circulars in this regard.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that the prohibition of corporal punishment affect both schools as well as parents.

The Hon. Minister informed that he is personally in agreement with this and that corporal punishment has been stopped in schools after 2005.

The Director (Law Enforcement) of the National Child Protection Authority informed that in addition to the prohibition of corporal punishment, psychological harassment has also been included in these amendments in a manner that applies to both teachers and parents.

The Director (Law Enforcement) of the National Child Protection Authority further informed that out of 10,000 complaints received by the National Child Protection Authority, 3000 are about harassment of children committed by those who have the custody and the responsibility of protecting children and that such physical or psychological harassment is an offence punishable with imprisonment for a term of 2-10 years, under the section 308 of the Penal Code.

The Director (Law Enforcement) of the National Child Protection Authority further informed that even assault and psychological abuse should be considered as cruelty if the law is strictly enforced, and that there are difficulties to implement the law due to the cultural aspects prevailing in the society.

The Hon. Chairperson inquired about the methodology for proving psychological abuse in a court of law.

The Hon. Minister informed that it can be proven by summoning medical reports relating to mental health.

The Hon. Chair informed that the protection of the rights of children is a key element in a country where the protection of the law prevails at the optimum level and that discipline in schools should be assimilated to a common framework and teachers should be educated through workshops.

The Director (Law Enforcement) of the National Child Protection Authority informed that a teacher's manual (module) on disciplining children has been prepared by the Psycho-social Division of the National Child Protection Authority and that there is a problem as regards its implementation due to the lack of necessary allocations.

Hon. (Dr.) (Ms.) Kaushalya Ariyaratne also expressed views in this regard.

1.1.3 Separating a child from the biological family

The Hon. Minister informed the Committee that, after signing the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, if the child is to be separated from the biological family, it should be done by an authorized official.

The Hon. Minister further informed the Committee that, since the guardians do not change even when children handed over to a temple to be ordained, the person who will be the guardian of the child after the child has been ordained should be named and legally registered at the time the child is getting ordained in terms of the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Ordinance.

The Hon. Minister further informed the Committee that the ordained child can be provided with healthcare and other treatment through the same person who has been named as the guardian.

The Hon. Chairperson informed the Committee that, when male children are ordained, preparation of the identity card, naming of guardianship and naming of the temple are done systematically, and that these problems arise only in the case of Buddhist nuns.

The Hon. Minister informed the Committee that it is the common practice for a Sil Matha to live as a Sil Matha (mother who obeys precepts) under the Bhikkuni (female priest) under whom she was ordained.

Hon. (Dr.) Hiniduma Sunil Senevi, Minister of Buddhasasanna, Religious and cultural affairs brought to the notice of the Committee that female Buddhist priest and Christian sisters are not accorded the same recognition as enjoyed by Buddhist priests in public places.

1.2 Hon. (Dr.) S. Sri Bawanandaraja

1.2.1 Appointment of a female officer who can speak Tamil to police stations in the Jaffna District

The Hon. Member informed that although there are many cases of gender-based violence and child abuse in the Jaffna District, complaints are not made to the police due to various cultural issues and that there are only male officers who speak Sinhala at police stations.

The Hon. Member requested that a female officer who could speak Tamil be appointed to the police stations to facilitate reporting on the same day that the complaints were submitted in association with the Grama Niladhari.

1.2.2 Establishment of Psychological Counselling Service Centres in every area

The Hon. Member informed that unemployment among women in the Northern Province is high and proposed that Psychological Counselling Service Centres should be established in every area.

Hon. Harshana Nanayakkara, Attorney at Law, Minister of Justice and National Integration informed that women facing domestic violence especially need detention centres as well as legal assistance.

Hon. (Ms.) Chamindrani Kiriella, Attorney at Law also expressed views in this regard.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that there are currently 10 detention centres including areas such as Kilinochchi, Batticaloa and Nuwara Eliya and a domestic violence desk has been established at every police station and a facility has been provided to submit problems to it.

The Legal Officer intimated that women who are subjected to violence can seek free legal advice provided at detention centres.

Hon. (Dr.) Pathmanathan Sathyalingam informed the Committee that women who have been victims of domestic violence may be referred to these detention centers if they cannot return home after being discharged from the hospital.

Hon. (Dr.) Pathmanathan Sathyalingam stated that those centers provide a variety of services such as food and counselling, and Hon. Member proposed that similar centers be established in every district.

1.3 Hon. (Dr.) Pathmanathan Sathyalingam

1.3.1 Implementation of a timely and streamlined survey of children's homes

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that 50% of children's homes lack basic facilities, and it has become a business to run children's homes as these children's homes receive grants and donations from various parties.

The Hon. Member suggested that a timely and systematic survey should be carried out on children's homes, and a standardized administrative structure should be executed in that regard.

The Hon. Member further informed that after the end of the period of war in the North and Northeast, there were children who had lost their parents, and in some cases, the mother of the family had to go abroad for work in the Middle East and also added that poverty also aggravated in these areas.

The Hon. Member further pointed out that guardians themselves are compelled to hand over children to children's homes in the circumstances.

The Chairman of the National Child Protection Authority stated that all state and non-state children's homes have been monitored by local officials and reports have also been submitted since 2005.

The Hon. Chair directed that specific information be submitted regarding the children's homes since it would be easier to take action if regarding irregular children's homes are submitted referring to their names as well.

The Hon. Chair informed that the participation of the Deputy Inspector General of Police of the Children and Women's Bureau, Mrs. Renuka Jayasundara, should be summoned in the next committee meeting.

Hon. Harshana Nanayakkara, Attorney at Law, Minister of Justice and National Integration proposed that obtaining the approval of the Commissioner of Probation be made mandatory both for starting such a children's home and for admitting children to these homes as a solution to parents sending their children to children's homes due to economic problems.

The Senior Probation Officer informed that A Model Law has been sent to the provinces for this subject, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Provincial Councils, and five provinces have currently approved statutes on Child Development Centres as statutes and that children's homes will be surveyed once a year and that unnecessary children's homes may be closed.

The Senior Probation Officer informed that it has become difficult to carry out other law-making activities due to the expiration of the term of the Provincial Councils.

Hon. Harshana Nanayakkara, Attorney at Law, Minister of Justice and National Integration informed that there are difficulties in implementing those regulations in practice.

The Senior Probation Officer informed that the number of children in children's homes in the Northern Province, which had exceeded 20,000, has now been reduced to about 9,000, and that the number of children in children's homes island wide has been reduced by approximately 50%.

The Senior Probation Officer further informed that the Alternative Care Policy introduced in 2019 is implemented at provincial level, and that a child can be provided with the care of a family relative by providing an allowance.

The Senior Probation Officer furthermore informed that discussions were held at the provincial level to the effect that, when there is no family relative to adopt the child, such children be referred, as soon as possible, to more than 5,000 local applicants who are willing to adopt children.

The Senior Probation Officer informed that, instead of strengthening children's homes, the focus is on strengthening families; the Department provides foreign aid, ad hoc grants, and maintenance funds for children's homes; and it has been proposed to provide Rs. 5,000/- under this Aswesuma scheme.

The Senior Probation Officer further informed that, through all these means, each child in a children's home receives about Rs. 30,000/- per month, and that there is no system in place to audit these funds.

The Senior Probation Officer informed that if these provisions can be provided directly to the family, the number of children admitted to children's homes can be reduced and that a survey has revealed the fact that 85% of these children have a living mother or father.

The Senior Probation further informed that 47 of the 379 children's homes currently run in the island are governed under the government and the remaining children's homes are run voluntarily receiving foreign aid, and that these children's homes should be regulated formally.

The Senior Probation Officer informed that Five hundred million rupees has been allocated through the budget this year for the welfare of about 9000 children in children's homes and that the Hon. President had announced that these children can remain in the children's homes even after receiving vocational training at the age of 18.

The Senior Probation Officer further informed that the Hon. President had also stated about initiating a program to provide housing loans for girl children up until the marriage.

The Commissioner of Probation informed that although an applicant wishing to adopt a child can be given a child within the same province for adoption, there are no provisions regarding trans-provincial adoption of children.

1.3.2 Changing the religion of children in children's homes

The Hon. Member informed that the religion of children in children's homes is changed.

1.3.3 Preparation of a special program for women-headed households in areas affected by the war situation

The Hon. Member proposed that a special course of action be prepared for the protection and guidance of these families, as women in areas where there was war, are interested engaging in illegal activities in order to earn income.

1.3.4 Regulating of the preschool system

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that the stage at which a child should be admitted to a preschool, the curriculum, the qualifications of preschool teachers, as well as the entire preschool system should be regulated.

The Hon. Member further informed the Committee that, since preschools conduct classes on Sundays as well, the time children have for spending with their parents is limited.

The Director National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development informed the Committee that there is a National Policy on Early Childhood Development and Care, and that through the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, preschools have been assigned as a Provincial Council subject, with the management, registration, and supervision of preschools being delegated to the Provincial Council.

The Director, National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development further informed the Committee that the Constitution itself has delegated authority to the Ministry of Education for supervision by introducing national standards, and that certain issues arise during coordination activities due to the fact that preschools are a subject that falls under the Concurrent List.

The Director, National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development informed the Committee that a policy for preschools is currently being drafted under the initiative of the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education with the help of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs.

The Hon. Chairperson informed the Committee that a set of common guidelines is being prepared for all preschools, and that some party is also needed to regulate the practical implementation of these guidelines.

The Director, National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development informed the Committee that, since the central government does not have a separate law or authority to regulate institutions that come under the purview of Provincial Councils, legal authority can be obtained by passing the Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development as an Act and by establishing a regulatory body for that purpose under the said Act.

Hon. (Mrs.) Samanmali Gunasingha proposed that an agreement should be reached with Provincial Councils after discussion for the regulation of preschools until an Act is introduced.

Hon. (Mrs.) Samanmali Gunasingha also requested that starting new preschools be suspended until existing preschools are properly regulated, since preschools are being conducted as a form of self-employment.

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that a committee should be established in every district for the regulation of preschools and that coordination should be done through an annual meeting held with the participation of all such Committees.

The Hon. Deputy Minister informed the Committee that every preschool teacher should possess an NVQ Level 4 training provided by “Sakura” training centres operating under the Provincial Councils.

1.4 Hon. Ramalingam Chandrasekar

1.4.1 Devising of a proper mechanism for reliefs provided by the Diaspora

The Hon. Minister informed the Committee that sexual abuse is prevalent among over 28,000 children who are without parents, and that solutions should be implemented for that at regional level.

The Hon. Minister further informed the Committee that the lack of proper statistics on widows in the Jaffna District is an issue, and, as the Diaspora provides relief, a proper mechanism should be prepared to manage it.

1.4.2 Lack of facilities in the monasteries inhabited by Buddhist Nuns

The Hon. Minister informed the Committee that facilities available in the monasteries inhabited by Buddhist Nuns are minimal.

The Probation Commissioner informed that during the discussion held with all relevant institutions regarding issues such as sexual harassment faced by individuals in religious places, discussions were held on the need to impose a minimum age limit for ordaining and further informed that discussions were also held on issues such as nutrition and personal hygiene of the people who have been ordained.

1.5 Hon. (Mrs.) Samanmali Gunasingha

1.5.1 Monitoring of children's homes in Ratmalana area

The Hon. Member informed that five children's homes in the Ratmalana area are to be closed down and it has been decided to close four of them through raids by probation officers.

The Hon. Member further informed that many crimes have occurred in connection with these children's homes and that no supervision of these children's homes has been carried out.

1.5.2 Regulation of the amount of Rs. 30,000 that a child in a children's home should be entitled to

The Hon. Member proposed that systematic monitoring should be carried out to ensure that the children in the children's homes receive the amount of approximately Rs. 30,000 that is due to them.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that a transparent audit should be conducted regarding this money.

1.5.3 Children in children's homes are not being sent to schools

The Hon. Member informed that no actions are taken to send orphans and inmates in children's homes to schools.

The Hon. Member informed that a course of action should be formulated to provide counseling to these families through probation officers and to regulate children's homes through regional coordination committees.

Hon. U.P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law, informed the Committee that a woman, Child Rights Promotion Officer should be engaged for this purpose.

1.5.4 Conducting district-based supervision on the subject of women and children

The Hon. Member proposed that a district-based monitoring should be conducted on the subject of women and children by including them in the agenda of the District Coordination Committees and involving Members of Parliament and officials of state institutions.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that discussions were held involving officials regarding the matters discussed in the Matara Regional and District Coordination Committees and that issues and suggestions were presented.

The Hon. Member informed that even though development proposals are discussed in these Coordination Committees, since women and children are removed from the agenda, a request should be made through the Members of Parliament.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that instructions have been given to the Secretary to the Ministry to inform the District Secretaries in writing in this regard.

Deputy Chair of Committees, Hon. (Mrs.) Hemali Weerasekara informed the Committee that there are separate sub-committees in some districts to discuss these issues.

The Director General (Planning and Operations) informed that awareness campaigns are also being conducted through the Ministry of Public Administration, Provincial Councils and Local Government.

1.6 Hon. Saroja Savithri Paulraj (Hon. Chairperson)

1.6.1 The difficulties faced by Buddhist Nuns in obtaining passports

The Hon. Chairperson informed that the Buddhist Nuns face difficulties in getting medical treatments and making passport due to the unavailability of an identity card.

1.6.2 Uplifting social welfare through the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs

The Hon. Chairperson informed the committee that, since the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs is not a revenue-generating ministry but a ministry that provides social welfare, all the provisions allocated to the Ministry through the budget should be used to elevate social welfare in accordance with the government's policy statement.

The Hon. Chairperson further informed the committee that provisions should be made to empower women to eradicate poverty, to improve the living standards of displaced children and children who have lost their parents and to establish a more secure society and further stated that a programme should be formulated to create an advanced human community.

The Hon. Chairperson emphasized that all five institutions under the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs should work towards achieving the vision of the Ministry.

**1.7 Legally handing over a child to an applicant for adoption -
Hon. Anushka Thilakarathne, Attorney at Law**

The Hon. Member informed the committee that when giving children who do not have a legal biological father for adoption to applicants, the courts face difficulties in transferring the custody of the children, due to the absence of a biological father and further informed that, even though the children are being cared for by other parents, they do not have any documents which enable them to function as citizens.

Hon. Harshana Nanayakkara, Attorney at Law, Minister of Justice and National Integration informed that, in cases where the biological parents cannot be found, after giving a public notice and after studying the probation records under the relevant circumstances, an applicant may be granted adoption under a provision of the Adoption of Children (Amendment) Act.

Hon. Harshana Nanayakkara, Attorney at Law, Minister of Justice and National Integration further informed to the committee that there is no proper understanding within the judicial system in this regard.

Hon. U.P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law proposed that some specific methodology should be established for this purpose.

The Senior Probation Officer informed the Committee that this matter was discussed when amending the Child Adoption Act and that the public is reluctant due to the long process, when a child being adopted by a foreigner, the Probation Commissioner's report must be sent within fourteen days.

The Senior Probation Officer further informed the committee that when it comes to identifying a child's true biological parents, the fact that the father resides outside the district can lead to a long delay in placing children for adoption by a local applicant.

1.8 Children being employed in begging by natural parents themselves – Deputy Chair of Committees, Hon. (Mrs.) Hemali Weerasekara

The Hon. Deputy Chairperson of Committees informed that children are sent to school in the morning and in the evening, the natural parents themselves engage children in commercial activities and begging.

The Director (Law Enforcement) of the National Child Protection Authority informed that in accordance with the amendment to the Penal Code under Act No. 29 of 1998, engaging children in begging constitutes a criminal offence and

that when complaints received through the National Child Protection Authority's hotline 1929 are referred to the police, a major issue encountered is that the relevant individuals are often not present at the locations mentioned in the complaints.

The Director (Law Enforcement) of the National Child Protection Authority further informed that there are no infrastructure facilities to detain women with children at a police station and that a female officer should be appointed as a "Protective Mother" at every police station.

The Director (Law Enforcement) of the National Child Protection Authority informed that considering the many complaints received at the 1929 emergency hotline, when mothers go abroad for work due to economic difficulties, child abuse incidents are reported as children are unsafe due to their fathers being addicted to drugs.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that the age of five years for children to go abroad for work has now been reduced to two years.

The Director (Law Enforcement) of the National Child Protection Authority informed that the fact that most legislation and implementation of laws are carried out by two institutions and the lack of coordination between those institutions can be seen as weaknesses.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that officials from the Ministry of Public Security and Parliamentary Affairs, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education, as well as the Ministry of Health and Mass Media should be invited to the next committee meeting to discuss the issues arising relating to the health and nutrition of children and women to overcome these problems.

The Hon. Chairperson further informed that a request can be made through the Ministry of Health and Mass Media for a Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) to be deployed in a hospital 24 hours a day, as the delay in medical examination reports is a problem when the report has to be submitted to the court in an emergency.

1.9 Hon. Manjula Suraweera Arachchi

1.9.1 Ensuring that the production process includes the participation of children who have experienced a variety of forms of child maltreatment

The Hon. Member proposed that these children who have been subjected to various forms of child abuse should be provided

with counselling and contribution of these children should be obtained to the production process of the country.

1.9.2 Contribution to children living with various illnesses

The Hon. Member proposed that a contribution should be made to children who have had to bear high expenses for treatment of various illnesses.

The Hon. Member informed that out of 50 children admitted to the first grade of school, 15 to 20 children are children deprived of parental care who cannot meet their basic needs and further informed that due to various problems, these children may become bandits or commit suicide later.

Hon. (Mrs.) Geetha Herath, Attorney at Law informed the Committee that children are tempted to commit suicide even in the face of minor problems due to parents' employment, children being isolated and constant use of mobile phones.

Hon. (Mrs.) Geetha Herath, Attorney at Law further informed the Committee that suicides are increasing due to the constant use of mobile phones by children and the increasing tendency of exposure to various social media.

1.9.3 Regulation of non-governmental organizations

The Hon. Member proposed that these institutions should be regulated.

1.10 Expediting the implementation of the law in matters relating to women and children - Hon. (Ms). Lakmali Hemachandra, Attorney at Law

The Hon. Member proposed that a methodology be developed in consultation with the Ministry of Public Security and Parliamentary Affairs to overcome the current setbacks in the implementation of the law regarding women and children.

Hon. U.P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law, also expressed his views in this regard.

2. The Committee was adjourned at 12.50 p.m. *sine die*

**Ministerial Consultative Committee on Justice and National
Integration
First meeting - 27th February 2025**

Committee Members Present

Hon. Harshana Nanayakkara, Attorney at Law (Chairman)
Hon. Munir Mulafar (Deputy Minister of National Integration)
Hon. G.G. Ponnambalam
Hon. U.P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law
Hon. M. K. M. Aslam
Hon. (Dr.) (Ms.) Kaushalya Ariyaratne
Hon. Sarath Kumara, Attorney at Law
Hon. (Mrs.) Nilanthi Kottahachchi, Attorney at Law
Hon. (Mrs.) Nilusha Lakmali Gamage, Attorney at Law
Hon. (Mrs.) Thushari Jayasinghe, Attorney at Law
Hon. Susanta Dodawatta, Attorney at Law
Hon. Chithral Fernando, Attorney at Law
Hon. (Dr.) S. Sri Bavanandarajah
Hon. (Major General) (Retd) G.D. Suriyabandara
Hon. Chandima Hettiarachi

Non – Committee Members present

Hon. (Prof.) Chrishantha Abeysena
Hon. Sunil Watagala, Attorney at Law
Hon. Ravi Karunanayake
Hon. Kavindiran Kodeeswaran
Hon. Gnanamuththu Srineshan
Hon. M.S. Udumalebbe
Hon. Mohamed Sali Naleem
Hon. Thurairasa Ravikaran
Hon. (Dr.) Pathmanathan Sathyalingam
Hon. (Dr.) Elayathamby Srinath

**1. Brief Introduction to the Ministry of Justice and National
Integration**

The Additional Secretary (Development) made a presentation regarding the Ministry of Justice and National Integration and the institutions coming under the preview of the Ministry, their functions and the vacancies currently existing in those institutions.

Hon. (Mrs.) Nilanti Kottahachchi, Attorney-at-Law, informed that an error was observed in the data of the approved number of employees and the number of available vacancies of the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation and the National Institute

of Language Education and Training, and therefore, it should be corrected.

Hon. U. P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law, inquired on how the amount of 1.1 million cases that have been delayed hearing in the courts are distributed.

The Deputy Director (Policy Planning) informed that there are a total of 1,131,818 cases pending before the courts, viz. 5785 Supreme Court Cases, 4572 Court of Appeal Cases, 6286 Cases being heard before Criminal Courts, 6146 Commercial High Court Cases, 03 cases at the Trial-at-bar Cases, 27,324 High Court Cases, 262,665 District Court Cases, 813,726 District Magistrate Court and Magistrates' Court criminal cases, 1260 Juvenile Magistrate's Court cases and 4051 cases in the Labor Tribunals.

Hon. Chithral Fernando, Attorney at Law, requested that these numerical data be submitted to Parliament.

2. Consideration of Annual Reports and Annual Performance Reports

- Annual Report of the Bureau of Rehabilitation for the year 2023
(Presented to the Parliament on 05.02.2025)
- Annual Report of the Superior Courts Complex Board of Management for the year 2023
(Presented to the Parliament on 05.02.2025)
- Annual Performance Report of the Department of the Law Commission for the year 2023
(Presented to the Parliament on 04.12.2024)
- Performance Report of the Attorney General's Department for the year 2023
(Presented to the Parliament on 10.01.2025)

After consideration, the Ministerial Consultative Committee on Justice and National Integration agreed to the above annual reports and annual performance reports referred to the Committee by Parliament and decided that the Committee regarding the Reports be presented to Parliament by Hon. Harshana Nanayakkara, Attorney at Law, Chair of the Committee.

3. Other Matters

3.1 Hon. (Dr.) Elayathamby Srinath

3.1.1 Relocation of Batticaloa Prison

The Hon. Member inquired about the possibility of establishing the overcrowded prison located very close to the Batticaloa Teaching Hospital at another location in the future.

The Hon. Chair informed that attention will be paid in this regard.

3.1.2 Waste management system of Batticaloa Prison and Batticaloa Teaching Hospital

The Hon. Member informed that the waste management system of the prison and the waste management system of the Batticaloa Teaching Hospital exist separately.

Hon. Member inquired that this is the only teaching hospital in the Batticaloa district that provides services to over a million people in the Eastern Province and inquired about the possibility of relocating the prison established very close to the hospital in case land is required for construction or further development according to emergency plans.

The Commissioner General of Prison informed that although Land has been acquired from the Batticaloa area for the prison headquarters, at present no priority has been given to establishing the Batticaloa prison at another location and the provision allocated this year will solve the problem of sanitary sewage disposal.

The Additional Secretary (Engineering) informed that a separate waste water treatment plant unit may be introduced for the Prison subject to allocation of provision if there is no common waste disposal system for these two institutions.

The Hon. Member informed that there is a 14-acre land allocated by the Divisional Secretariat within the area of the Batticaloa Municipal Council some years ago and no construction has been done on it till now and as the fishermen are engaged in fishing activities in the Batticaloa Lagoon, it is not safe to dispose of waste directly into the Lagoon.

Hon. Chair informed that since this is a health related problem, the officials will be given instructions to deal with this issue on priority basis.

3.2 Hon. (Dr.) S. Sri Bavanandarajah

3.2.1 Shortage of Stenographers at Courts of Jaffna district

The Hon. Member requested that there is a delay in giving judgments due to a shortage of stenographers in the courts of Jaffna district and to pay attention to this matter.

The Additional Secretary (Administration) informed that this is yet another appointment given by the Judicial Service Commission and that action will be taken to recruit translators and stenographers for courts in the future.

The Hon. Chair informed that requests have been made to the Commission to fill 753 vacancies in the institutions under the Judicial Service Commission.

The Additional Secretary (Administration) informed that the work in this regard is in progress and it would be possible to make appointments within the next 06 months.

The Secretary to the Ministry inquired about the submission made to the Department of Management Services to fill these vacancies and its progress.

The Additional Secretary (Administration) informed that the Department of Management Services has written to the Judicial Service Commission for an explanation in this regard and that approval for the recruitment will be obtained by submitting it to the Committee of the Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Hon. Chithral Fernando, Attorney-at-Law inquiry that whether these 753 recruitments would be made encompassing all the departments within the Ministry of Justice and National Integration and it includes stenographers and interpreters.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed the committee that there is a staff shortage of 6026 in the Justice sector alone and at this time requests have been made to the Department of Management Services to fill 753 vacancies on an emergency basis, which includes stenographers and translators.

3.2.2 Mallakam Magistrate Court

The Hon. Member requested since it is difficult for the Mallakam Magistrate Court to handle the judicial affairs of 09 police jurisdictions for establishing a new or additional Magistrate Court.

The Hon. Chair informed that it is a normal situation for one court to have 09 police jurisdictions and that the judicial affairs

of all 09 police jurisdictions are not conducted on the same day and separate days are given for each police jurisdiction.

The Hon. Chair informed that if there is justification for the construction of a new Magistrate Court, it will be considered in light of the number of existing cases pending.

3.3 Courts Complex, Pugoda - Hon. U.P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law

The Hon. Member inquired about the progress of the Pugoda Courts Complex, which is under construction, as the Pugoda Court has been functioning at an inappropriate location obtained on lease basis for a long period of 04 years.

The Hon. Member requested the Hon. Chair to visit the Pugoda Courts Complex for an observation and to give a date for the purpose.

The Hon. Chair informed that dates will be fixed for observing the Pugoda Court and holding discussions with the Planning and Engineering Divisions of the Ministry of Justice and National Integration.

The Hon. Chair informed that since no provision was allocated for constructions in the last 2 years, the work has stopped partway and however, the work could be resumed this year and implemented promptly.

The Additional Secretary (Engineering) informed that due to the economic downturn in the years 2021 and 2022 and the increase in the price of goods, the construction contractors could not finish the projects commenced in the years 2019-2020 at the agreed prices, and therefore, permission of Parliament has been obtained and the price variations of more than 20% have been approved and these projects are being restarted and that the Pugoda Courts complex is built in association with a government agency, which experienced setbacks due to the financial situation of the institution concerned.

The Additional Secretary (Engineering) informed that steps would be taken to end it soon.

The Hon. Chair inquired that the Ministry of Justice and National Integration has made payments to the construction company concerned and provisions have been set aside for that purpose.

The Additional Secretary (Engineering) informed that sufficient amount of provisions has been reserved for this purpose and

there is currently a delay from the relevant construction company.

The Hon. Chair instructed the Additional Secretary (Engineering) to intervene as a ministry regarding this delay and make inquiries regarding the time when the construction work can be completed.

The Additional Secretary (Engineering) informed that it is appropriate to hold a discussion within the Ministry in this regard.

3.4 Hon. M. S. Uthumalebbe

3.4.1 Performing of funerary rituals of Muslims

The Hon. Member requested when Muslim people die of normal causes, the funeral rites are performed within 24 hours and a special Circular has been issued in this regard, but some hospitals act in violation of these circulars, therefore, further requested those concerned to look into this matter.

The Hon. Chair informed that this circular will be reconsidered and the Burial and Cremation Rights Bill, which has been approved by the Cabinet of Ministers, will be submitted to Parliament.

3.4.2 Appointment of High Court Judges by seniority

The Hon. Member requested that seniority be considered in the appointment of judges to the High Courts and make appointments accordingly.

The Hon. Chair informed that the Judicial Service Commission is an independent institution and the Attorney General's Department is under the Ministry of Justice and National Integration and the Minister of the Line Ministry cannot interfere with the decisions taken by those institutions.

The Hon. Chair also informed that appointment of High Court Judges is done by the Judicial Service Commission and the Judicial Service Commission has an independent system to consider not only seniority but also their performance and complaints received regarding them and if there is any complaint in this regard, the Judicial Service Commission should be informed and the Minister cannot interfere in this matter.

The Hon. Member requested that to investigate this matter.

3.4.3 Appointment of a Muslim representative and a Tamil representative for the “Clean Sri Lanka” programme

The Hon. Member requested a Muslim representative and a Tamil representative be appointed to the committee established for the "Clean Sri Lanka" programme.

The Hon. Deputy Minister informed that the Ministry of Justice and National Integration does not have the authority to appoint representatives to the "Clean Sri Lanka" program and it is a process carried out through the Presidential Secretariat.

3.5 Hon. Susantha Dodawatta, Attorney at Law

3.5.1 Grant of bail to persons arrested for possession of poisons, opium and dangerous drugs

Hon. Member informed that according to the Poisons, Opium and Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Chapter 218), the High Court had the power to grant bail to a person arrested for possession of more than 10 grams and according to the Poisons, Opium and Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Act, which was presented after that, the Court of Appeal has been given that power.

The Hon. Member requested that some action be taken in this regard as the people who are arrested for this offense in any place in Sri Lanka are very inconvenienced by having to come to the Colombo Court of Appeal to get bail.

The Hon. Chair informed that this is the main reason for the difficulty of coming to Colombo to get bail for the offense of drug possession as well as for the overcrowding in the remand prisons because about 8000 - 9000 people are remanded in prison due to the delay in the Government Analyst's report.

The Hon. Chair further informed that a committee has been appointed to reduce overcrowding in remand prisons, where this matter will be taken into consideration and also the recommendation and reasoning of the committee based on the proposal should be looked into.

Hon. U. P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law, also expressed views in this regard.

The Hon. Chair informed that the matters relating to it will be examined and focused.

3.5.2 Courts overcrowding

The Hon. Member informed that due to the overcrowding in the courts, the people face inconvenienced and the judges of some

courts have voluntarily prepared a system of summoning cases (displaying the cases that will be considered on the next court day beforehand etc.) and further pointed out that it will be a great convenience to people and lawyers by implementing such courses of action by giving similar guidelines to the whole of the courts system.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that the Judicial Service Commission and the Institute of Judges of Sri Lanka are conducting training in this regard.

The Deputy Director of the Institute of Judges of Sri Lanka (High Court Judge) informed that it is planned to implement a case management system in the year 2025 and to introduce a uniform numbering system and colour code for cases in the entire Justice system.

The Deputy Director of the Institute of Judges of Sri Lanka (High Court Judge) also informed that 02 rounds of training have been conducted so far and especially the provisions of the Act related to Small Claims Courts, the existing provisions related to pre-trial hearings and the case management system are being implemented in 21 model courts and steps have been taken to introduce this program to other courts as well.

The Deputy Director of the Institute of Judges of Sri Lanka (High Court Judge) further informed that this program is in operation in the Western Province District Court and it will soon be introduced to the Magistrate Courts and by the end of this year it will be possible to conduct the proceedings according to a methodical process.

Hon. U. P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law, also expressed views in this regard.

The Hon. Member inquired whether there is a program to provide the necessary technical facilities to the courts for these activities.

The Hon. Chair informed that these activities should be done systematically and first of all uniform program should be established in the institutions while the Courts in Kandy and Negombo have been selected for the implementation of the Rapid Digitization Program.

3.6 The delay in the affairs of the Attorney General's Department - Hon. Sarath Kumara, Attorney at Law

The Hon. Member inquired regarding the measures taken regarding the delay in the work of the Attorney General's Department.

The Hon. Chair informed that there are 606 vacancies in the Attorney General's Department and the reason for this delay is lack of criminal law professionals available to handle the number of cases coming from the police stations and last year about 28 Senior State Counsels left the service and recently steps were taken to recruit 37 state counsels.

The State Counsel of the Attorney General's Department informed that there are delays due to reasons such as appearing in court, dealing with files, inability to give a specific answer due to deficiencies in the files received, and consequently having to re-call relevant documents etc. and currently the Attorney General's Department has about 80 officers in the Criminal Division from senior officers to those handling cases at courts.

The State Counsel of the Attorney General's Department said that the number of approved state counsels is 218, but currently there are only 144 State Counsels and only 70 of them are working in the criminal division.

The Hon. Chair informed that the number of State Counsel vacancies in the Attorney General's Department should be filled and even if new recruitments are made, it will take considerable time to reach the position of leading the charges in complex cases.

The State Counsel of the Attorney General's Department informed that there are 157 vacancies for legal officers from Additional Solicitors General to State Counsels in the Attorney General's Department.

The Hon. Chair informed that all necessary facilities should be provided to speed up the work of the Attorney General's Department.

The Hon. Chair informed that 06 Additional Solicitor Generals with around 30 years of service experience will remove this year and due to the current situation in the country, it is difficult to retain talented officers in the country.

3.7 Description on Ministry of Justice and National Integration - Hon. M. K. M. Aslam

The Hon. Member requested for a description about the Ministry of Justice and National Integration.

The Hon. Deputy Minister informed that the Ministry of Justice and National Integration is going to start several reconciliation programs this year and plans have been prepared to build reconciliation in Sri Lanka through various sectors such as education, conflict management, using art for reconciliation and media.

The Hon. Member informed that in carrying out national integration programs involving education, participation of universities and schools should be obtained and a system integrating the curriculum and extracurricular activities should be formulated and this project should be carried out for at least three years and these activities should be started from schools to bring about a change in attitude among the children.

The Hon. Member further informed that this should be done as a project in such a way that the events that have happened in the past can be reviewed and evaluated.

The Hon. Chair informed that such suggestions will be included in the planning of the future work of the Ministry.

3.8 Hon. Mohamed Sali Naleem

3.8.1 Storage of goods seized in Eravur area

The Hon. Member informed that since about 40 years ago, there were 12,000 families in a jurisdiction where there was a rural court, but by now it has increased to 45,000 and due to the lack of a specific place to store the goods seized by the police in Eravur area, the seized goods have been placed by blocking the road near Veerapathiran kovil.

The Hon. Member requested that the seized items be relocated to a different location, as it has become increasingly challenging to conduct religious activities at the kovil, access the kovil, and park vehicles.

3.8.2 Appointment of Muslim Coroners

The Hon. Member requested that the Tamil coroner currently assigned to that area for the relevant activities be provided with the advice and assistance of the Muslim coroner who previously served in that area since the bodies of the Muslim community in

the Batticaloa area must be released within a few hours during funerals.

The Hon. Deputy Minister informed that since this problem exists not only in Batticaloa but also in other parts of the island, action will be taken to fill the vacancies.

The Additional Secretary (Reforms) informed that two coroners into Sudden Deaths are to be appointed for Batticaloa hospitals and one of them has been appointed already and also said that a request had been made by the coroners into Sudden Deaths named Mr. M. S. Nasir and due to a problem in his file, an inquiry has to be conducted in this regard and the appointment can be given after its completion.

3.9 Hon. Chandima Hettiarachi

3.9.1 Relocating the Kalutara Courts Complex

The Hon. Member inquired about the progress of the new courts complex in Kalutara.

The Additional Secretary (Engineering) informed that the construction of a new courts complex in Kalutara district has been included in this year's plans, but there is no decision regarding the accelerated completion of its work.

The Hon. Member informed that the Urban Development Authority has been assigned to prepare the Kalutara city plan and although a discussion was held about the use of the location of the Kalutara court complex for another purpose, but if the court complex is not moved to another place, the ideas have to be abandoned.

The Additional Secretary (Engineering) informed that the work related to moving the Kalutara Court Complex to another place is currently under discussion and the consultation in this regard has been temporarily stopped.

The Deputy Director (Planning) informed that there was a program to construct 86 court buildings before the economic crisis and since the Kalutara Court Complex is a large construction project, a decision has been made to stop it temporarily and give priority to the completion of the 23 court complexes that have been stopped in the middle of construction.

The Deputy Director (Planning) informed that after the completion of the construction of the 23 court complexes, it has been planned to carry out about 1-2 large projects per year and once the economy improves, construction of the Kalutara Courts Complex could be given priority.

3.9.2 The land in Beruwala Hapugoda area belongs to the Ministry of Justice and National Integration

The Hon. Member informed that a land owned by the Ministry of Justice and National Integration located in Beruwala Hapugoda area has been released on a court order and after that the related activities have stopped and the documents relating to it could be provided.

Therefore, the Hon. Member requested that the land concerned be taken back to the Ministry and used for a public purpose.

The Hon. Chair informed that have to pay attention to this and take the necessary action.

4. The Committee was adjourned at 11.30 a.m. *sine die*

Ministerial Consultative Committee on Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment First meeting – 03rd March 2025

Committee Members present

Hon. (Dr.) Upali Pannilage (Chair)
Hon. Wasantha Piyathissa (Deputy Minister of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment)
Hon. (Mrs.) Samanmali Gunasingha
Hon. Rajeevan Jeyachandramoorthy
Hon. Chandana Thennakoon
Hon. Sugath Wasantha de Silva
Hon. Nandana Pathmakumara
Hon. (Mrs.) A. M. M. M. Rathwaththe
Hon. Manoj Rajapaksha
Hon. Kanchana Welipitiya
Hon. Dewananda Suraweera

Non – Committee Members present

Hon. Nihal Galappaththi
Hon. T. K. Jayasundara
Hon. (Dr.) Elayathamby Srinath
Hon. Ismail Muththu Mohamed

1. Other Matters

1.1 Services related to Social Protection and Community Empowerment - Hon. (Dr.) Elayathamby Srinath

The Hon. Member informed that the information provided by the officials of the ministry is very useful and since there are various problems related to the process of obtaining subsidies and compensation for the people, the public can easily get the services of the ministry by informing the relevant government institutions and its officials through local officials.

The Hon. Chair also informed that arrangements are being made to implement a series of awareness programs throughout the island so that government officials will also be aware, that some of them have already been implemented and that if any problem arises, the ministry should be informed about it.

The Hon. Member inquired regarding as to whether the pension that had been previously provided for the fishing community had been stopped.

The Hon. Chair informed that a pension system was introduced for people in non-formal jobs, and that the employees in fisheries and agricultural sectors do not contribute to it, and that other pension fund systems are currently in place for them.

The Hon. Member pointed out that since the people who have suffered due to the protracted war situation that prevailed in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, especially the Batticaloa District are in the midst of numerous difficulties (e.g. disabilities, loss of parents, etc.), it is appropriate to prepare a relief program for them.

The Hon. Chair informed that the welfare activities carried out throughout the island will cover the people who are in various difficulties and risky situations in the North and East.

The Hon. Member informed that it is important to pay attention to leprosy patients as there is no palliative care program.

1.2 Problems arising in the implementation of social security programs - Hon. Dewananda Suraweera

The Hon. Member informed that there are problems associated with payment of premium when people suffering from poverty contribute to pension schemes such as “Surekuma”/ “Arakshawa”, which have been introduced by Sri Lanka Social Security Board for the poverty-stricken population and as a

preparation for the growing elderly population in the time to come.

The Hon. Member informed that it is practically difficult for the people to access the funding systems currently maintained by the Social Security Board, and there is a need to pay special attention to it.

The Hon. Chair informed that everyone should be entitled to a pension based on the theme "a happy retirement for every citizen", and increasing the basic salaries of government employees is also a way to provide an opportunity to receive a higher pension.

The Hon. Chair informed that, there are problems with the non-formal employment sector pension funding systems as mentioned by the Hon. Member of Parliament, that only about 40,000 beneficiaries have made an active contribution although there are about 1,000,000 beneficiaries, that it will be done in a target-oriented manner with the goal of expanding the necessary provisions and providing opportunities (which had been limited to about 45,000) to about 300,000 beneficiaries through a new pension scheme.

The Hon. Chair further informed that because of the existing circumstances, a contributory pension system is currently in operation, instead of relying solely on the tax money of the public, and if there is a need to amend the relevant Acts for this purpose, as suggested, it is possible to do so in the future.

The Hon. Member requested that the Grama Niladhari, Development Officers and other officials who are constantly working with the rural people have minimal knowledge regarding these pension schemes and as this process is currently taking place through a social security board co-ordination officer and requested that it be supervised.

The Chairman of the Social Security Board informed that while the enrolment has exceeded 1,000,000, there are only 350,000 active contributions and there are various underlying reasons for this.

The Chairman of the Social Security Board further informed that there are nevertheless a program to empower about 250,000 people and plans to recruit people engaged in various fields (self-employment etc.) this year, linking with Samurdhi Development Department and Aswasuma program.

The Chairman of the Social Security Board further informed that coordination activities are currently being carried out through a

coordinating officer and social security officers have been appointed to about 90% of the divisional secretariats and all other officers will be coordinated by those officers.

The Chairman of the Social Security Board informed that as per the instructions of the Hon. Chairman, it has been proposed to appoint the Social Security Committee as a sub-committee of the District Coordinating Committee, and a sub-committee of the Divisional Development Committee has been appointed, and plans have been made to recruit beneficiaries, regularly informing officials in the relevant fields about social security.

Also, Chairman of the Social Security Board informed that there is a problem with premiums as mentioned by the Hon. Member but all self-employed groups who do not receive pensions should be enrolled for it, and in the future, it is expected to present a program for all individuals with a new premium system that matches their purchasing power, with a flexible premium that they can contribute according to the International Labor Organization (ILO) program (in addition to Surekuma and Arassawa).

1.3 Hon. Rajeewan Jeyachandramoorthy

1.3.1 Drug menace invading the youth community

The Hon. Member informed that many economic and social problems have been created among the schoolchildren and the youth community in the Northern Province by the spread of drug menace, which is spreading throughout the society at present.

The Hon. Member further informed that necessary awareness programs and correct guidelines are essential for schoolchildren and the youth community, which will also reduce the number of thefts and illegal activities in the area.

The Hon. Chair complained that there are also many matriarchal families, and inquired whether there is any kind of relief system in terms of how they face the pressures caused by the drug menace.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that awareness programs, rehabilitation programs and social counselling programs are currently being implemented targeting school students.

The Director (Counselling) informed that anti-drug programs are planned to be implemented at the school level for the mental well-being and promotion of schoolchildren and simultaneously, a program for the mental well-being of the youth community is

planned to be implemented at the regional level, including Jaffna and Batticaloa districts.

The Hon. Member informed out that even if the programs are implemented as stated, it is not enough to cover the entire target community and a more effective practical process should be used for this purpose.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that Programs are being implemented at school level and in coordination with the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education and the Ministry of Health and Mass Media to combat the drugs menace, and the support of parents, teachers and the entire society is expected for these tasks to control the threatening problems that are spreading in the society.

The Hon. Chair informed that the government is committed to combating drugs in every aspect, drug importation, distribution and use, and that huge quantities of drugs have been seized recently.

The Hon. Chair further informed that the main task of the government through this action is to break the drug importation network and for this, a number of ministries including the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Public Security and Parliamentary Affairs are working together.

The Hon. Chair informed that only a few social security activities such as rehabilitation of drug victims, education at school level and provision of necessary counselling services are carried out under this ministry.

The Hon. Chair further informed that the public has a huge responsibility to save the society from the menace of drugs that efforts will be made to accomplish these tasks more successfully in the coming period, while accepting the proposals of the Hon. Members to improve the ongoing process.

1.3.2 Provision of 'Aswesuma' fund

The Hon. Member requested that information be presented on the criteria used to determine eligibility for providing Aswesuma funds to the rural people, along with the related comparative considerations.

The Hon. Member informed and that there is a need to digitize the process of maintaining those data files.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that even though these activities were carried out through a digital platform as previously informed the ministry is working to resolve these issues to some extent by updating the data system by correcting the existing deficiencies and since the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development regulates the said “Aswesuma” Fund, it is also essential to inform the Ministry concerned regarding the matter.

1.4 Informing people about the social security program - Hon. Nandana Pathmakumara

The Hon. Member informed that an elderly person should receive a substantial amount of money to live on in the social security schemes and requested that an understanding of the aforementioned social security funds be created.

The Hon. Member requested all to pay special attention to this matter as a significant number of “Aswesuma” beneficiary families are getting addicted to drugs.

The General Manager of Social Security Board informed that it is possible to choose schemes of the Social Security Board based on age, expected pension and need.

The General Manager of Social Security Board informed that the persons who joined in the year 1996 can be seen to be at the Rs.500/= level in payment of pension and at present there are those who receive a salary of about Rs. 50,000/=.

The General Manager of Social Security Board informed that there are about 400,000 active members and about one million new members have joined, but due to non-payment of premiums, those accounts have become dormant and they are working to collect the premiums.

The General Manager of Social Security Board further informed that as mentioned by the Hon. Member, there is a system of paying pensions only with the contribution of the government and a new pension scheme is being planned under a minimum premium system covering the cost.

The General Manager of Social Security Board further informed that this has been planned to provide a minimum pension of Rs.

18,000 and a member who joins at the age of 18 will be entitled to a monthly pension of Rs. 50,000 and plans have been proposed to get a monthly pension of Rs. 18,000 - 20,000 for members aged 55-56 years.

1.5 Problems faced by elderly allowance beneficiaries - Hon. Kanchana Welipitiya

The Hon. Member requested that attention be paid to the matter as the elderly people in the rural areas are inconvenienced by crediting the elderly allowance to the Aswesuma account.

The Hon. Chair informed that, even if the Elderly Allowance is credited to the same account as the same account given by the Aswesuma beneficiaries, nearly 410,000 elderly persons over 70 years of age who do not receive Aswesuma benefits are also paid the same as before.

The Hon. Chair informed that there is a general need to resolve these problems on the basis of several social security processes based on the system, because the non-updating of the only data system maintained by the Welfare Benefits Board has caused this problem.

The Hon. Chair informed that a questionnaire has been prepared to be included in the data system, and despite the shortcomings of the existing data system, on the basis that it is the only source that includes the data of all welfare beneficiaries, and amendments are being made in a short period of time and efforts are being made to provide the required service efficiently overcoming challenges.

The Hon. Chair further pointed out that a committee has been appointed at the village level, including three officers (Grama Niladhari, Economic Development Officer and Samurdhi Officer) and a community representative to consider the appeals of the beneficiaries of the relief at the regional level in order to work minimizing problems.

The Hon. Chair informed that arrangements are being made to hold discussions with all relevant parties including the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to update this data system by the month of May by resolving the existing deficiencies as pointed out by the Hon. Member.

1.6 Hon. Sugath Wasantha de Silva

1.6.1 Concept of ‘Smart Villages’

The Hon. Member requested that to give an introduction on the concept of "Smart Villages".

The Director General, National Institute of Social Development informed that the Institute of Social Development, established in Seeduwa in 1952, is an institution awarding degrees in social work and is mainly maintained with the aim of empowering the society through the triad of School of Social Work and Research and Training Division.

The Director General, National Institute of Social Development informed that vulnerable social groups will be identified as focus groups for social empowerment and the required knowledge will be provided with a view to rescuing them from vulnerabilities.

The Director General, National Institute of Social Development informed that a concept of creating ‘Smart villages’ will be included in the program starting from this year, where the village officials in different provinces will select a domain name and after identifying the families who need to be empowered there, the beneficiaries will be directed to various programs by using the students following the degree in social work to implement awareness and empowerment programs and direct them to self-employment programs.

The Director General, National Institute of Social Development informed that this was implemented as a pilot project in 9 selected by Grama Niladhari divisions and it is expected to be implemented as a practical program by involving students in the year 2025.

The Director General, National Institute of Social Development further informed that the Need Assessments are currently being formulated.

1.6.2 Need for reassessment of low income threshold

The Hon. Member pointed out the need to reassess the current low income threshold.

The Hon. Member suggested that when providing assistance to a family, it is better to look into the status of the family members (family background) and the assistance received by the family (eg: - families with disabled children).

The Hon. Member pointed out the need to set appropriate criteria in selecting the beneficiaries as some people are not at the level of receiving assistance but can be seen receiving assistance.

The Hon. Member also pointed out that the classification of people with disabilities has been subjected to discussion for over a decade, but there is no correct classification or definition, the Mihimith community is not considered as a group of people with disabled, and blood disorders (e.g., thalassaemia, leukaemia) are not classified as disabilities.

The Hon. Member also inquired about the need to carry out this census in the next few months in such circumstances, the course of action in place for it, and the ability to achieve the aforementioned goals.

The Director, National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities informed that the Glomerular Filtration Rate (GFR) was to be considered up to 30 to be eligible for the kidney allowance, since this is a critical stage that requires blood dialysis, it is suggested that the GFR be raised to 90 in the most severe case of this disease in order to make arrangements to award this grant earlier.

The Director, National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities also informed that it was mentioned in the discussions that according to the discussions, 47,000 patients are given kidney grant at present and it will be possible to increase it further (by 3000).

The Hon. Chair announced by proposing to further increase the number of kidney allowances which have already been increased to a certain extent based on the existing need.

The Director (National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities) informed the committee that, according to the classification provided by the Ministry of Health and Mass Media, the people with disabilities have been classified in the 7 categories: that is deafness, blindness, intellectual disability, immovability, speech impairments, psychiatric issues, and epilepsy.

The Hon. Member requested that the classification is not practical at present and that it should be considered as a sociological problem beyond the health conditions indicated by the doctors and necessary changes should be effected.

The Hon. Chair informed and agreed these criteria should be changed in the face of globalization changes, deviating from the medical model and into a social model, and that the officials of National Secretariat for Person with Disabilities (NSPD) would be instructed to do the necessary work in consultation with the relevant experts.

1.7 The social security process should take place in an efficient and correct direction - Hon. Chandana Thennakoon

The Hon. Member suggested that in considering the poor people empowerment programmes are taken into consideration, the “Aswesuma” beneficiaries are relatively uninfluential and relegated to providing financial assistance, with minimal interest, and so this social security process should be taken in an efficient and correct direction and it would be more appropriate to streamline this in a specific format and with the continuous involvement of officials.

The Hon. Member requested whether a course of action is currently being implemented to encourage a few families in a selected village to prevent the growth of poverty of the people of the country through the implementation of a program to improve the financial subsidies as well as the production subsidy sector.

The Hon. Chair informed that the “Aswasuma” program is being implemented through the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and that the task of this ministry is to empower the community and accordingly the Samurdhi Development Department has already taken steps to redirect it.

The Hon. Chair informed that there is a practical problem regarding the situation of commitment and empowerment through two Ministries and in monitoring this, the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development should have the responsibility to act as mentioned in the said Welfare Act.

The Hon. Chair further informed that the aim is to empower 400,000 families this year and all the institutions under the Ministry are already working towards this.

The Hon. Chair pointed out that a five-pronged methodology has been introduced for this purpose, and that there is a situation in which both groups, that is people who should receive benefits but are not included in it, as well as people who are currently receiving benefits but are not eligible for it, are included.

The Hon. Chair informed the Committee that plans have been made to implement one single programme by obtaining aid of the World Bank, the aid of the Asian Development Bank and the government funds.

The Hon. Chair informed that as the first step, awareness programs are carried out in districts and the primary task of the Ministry will be to fully implement this empowerment program since April.

1.8 Assistance for kidney patients - Hon. T. K. Jayasundara

The Hon. Member informed The Hon. Member informed that, as notified through the Divisional Secretariat offices, a limitation exists in providing assistance to kidney patients, and resulting in many patients being rendered helpless.

The Hon. Member inquired whether there is any possibility of providing some relief in this regard.

The Hon. Member further inquired, since kidney patients can be identified with certainty and there is no ambiguity in granting the relevant allowances to them, to what extent the number of patients receiving this assistance could be increased, and whether it is not possible to carry out this process without imposing a limit.

The Director (National Secretariat for Disabled Persons) informed that 47,000 patients are currently being given kidney allowance and according to the discussions, it was mentioned that it can be further increased by about 3,000.

The Hon. Chair informed that the issue related to giving this assistance to kidney patients as well as people with disabilities has arisen and the allowance given to both parties has been increased from 7,500 rupees to 10,000 rupees from the budgeted month of April.

The Hon. Chair informed that gazette notification was published to give allowances to 420,000 people with disabilities before the appointment of this government, but since only 136,000 were given these allowances, it is possible to increase the number as it had been gazetted.

The Director, National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities informed that, at present, the disability allowance is provided to 136,057 individuals and the kidney allowance to 47,027 individuals, and that following a recently held discussion, at the

request of the Hon. Minister, it has been proposed by the Welfare Benefits Board to take action to further identify persons in need of this welfare and to grant the relevant allowance.

The Hon. Member also requested to be informed about the existing criteria for defining and distinguishing people with disabilities.

The Director National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities presented with the relevant definitions in the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 of 1996 both individuals disabled from birth and those who became disabled later due to an accident are classified under the category of disabled persons.

The Hon. Chair informed that there are practical problems and after submitting and verifying the medical reports regarding the disabilities, the ministry officials will be informed to take proper action.

Hon. Chandana Thennakoon informed that there are waiting lists related to kidney patients in every divisional secretariat and requested that an explanation be made about the legal framework in this regard.

The Hon. Chair informed that low income earners are always identified and the value of allowances will be increased but action has to be taken subject to some restrictions.

The Hon. Chair informed that the accurate calculations regarding the people with disabilities have not yet been found and that his government is considering making the necessary updates in the data system as mentioned earlier, and the relevant officers will be further informed about this process.

The Hon. Chair further informed that a medical report should be provided to confirm the disability of the persons concerned and low-income earners should be certified by the Divisional Secretary or Grama Niladhari.

The Hon. Chair further informed that the additional allocation of 100 million allocated from this year's budget will be used to prepare the data system for the classification of people with disabilities and that the purpose of this is to enable the identification of all the people who need social protection.

**1.9 The problem of microfinance loans associated with poverty -
Hon. (Mrs.) Samanmali Gunasingha**

The Hon. Member informed that there is a strong need to properly inform the officers of the Divisional Secretariats about the limitations mentioned earlier, or otherwise the public will be inconvenienced due to the inability to provide correct data to the people.

The Hon. Member also requested that community groups affected by the problem of microfinance loans associated with poverty in the North and East provinces basically be identified and some relief programs be implemented through the projects implemented by this Ministry.

The Hon. Member further requested that special attention should be given to women who have faced these situations and that the necessary background should be looked into and taken care of.

2. The Committee was adjourned at 11.50 a.m. *sine die*.

**Ministerial Consultative Committee on Education, Higher Education
and Vocational Education
First Meeting - 7th March 2025**

Committee Members present

Hon. (Dr.) Harini Amasuriya (Chairperson)
Hon. (Dr.) Madhura Seneviratne, (Deputy Minister of Education and Higher Education)
Hon. (Dr.) Upali Pannilage
Hon. Aboobucker Athambawa
Hon. Manjula Suraweera Arachchi
Hon. Chandana Thennekoon
Hon. Sugath Wasantha de Silva
Hon. Nimal Palihena
Hon. Ruwan Mapalagama
Hon. (Dr.) Nandana Millagala
Hon. Manjula Sugath Rathnayaka
Hon. Sunil Rajapaksha

Non – Committee Members present

Hon. Gamagedara Dissanayake
Hon. Ravi Karunanayake
Hon. Nihal Galappaththi

Hon. Kavindiran Kodeeswaran
Hon. Gnanamuththu Srineshan
Hon. U. P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law
Hon. Thilanka U. Gamage
Hon. T. K. Jayasundara
Hon. Rajeewan Jeyachandramoorthy
Hon. Nishantha Perera
Hon. Lal Premanath
Hon. Sudath Balagalla
Hon. E. M. Basnayaka
Hon. Thurairasa Ravikaran
Hon. (Dr.) Pathmanathan Sathyalingam
Hon. (Dr.) Elayathamby Srinath
Hon. Chandana Sooriyaarachchi
Hon. Aravinda Senarath
Hon. Kitnan Selvaraj

1. Consideration of Annual Reports

- i. Annual Report of the University of Ruhuna for the year 2022**
(Presented to the Parliament on 17.12.2024)
- ii. Annual Report of the Swamy Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies of the Eastern University of Sri Lanka for the year 2022**
(Presented to the Parliament on 17.12.2024)
- iii. Annual Report of the Eastern University of Sri Lanka for the year 2022**
(Presented to the Parliament on 07.01.2025)
- iv. Annual Report of the Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture of the University of Peradeniya for the year 2023**
(Presented to the Parliament on 07.01.2025)

After consideration, the Ministerial Consultative Committee on Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education agreed to the annual reports presented by Parliament and decided that the report of the committee with regard to the reports should be presented to Parliament by Hon. (Dr.) Harini Amarasuriya, Chairperson of the Committee.

2. Discussion on the Ministerial Matters

The Hon. Chairperson informed the Committee that significant decisions regarding education would be made during the year, and several sub committees on education are expected to be formed in this regard.

The Hon. Chairperson further informed the Committee that sub committees would be formed to provide consultation for the planned transformational process in the education sector, conduct studies in this regard and gather input from MPs regarding the problems in the existing education system.

2.1 Delays in presenting Annual Reports

The Hon. Chairperson informed the Committee that there was a delay in the submission of annual reports from some institutions and mentioned that certain issues within these annual reports were being discussed at the audit and management committee meetings.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that everybody should focus on the matters included in the annual reports.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that the audit and management report is part of the annual report and is under review at ministerial and institutional levels.

The Hon. Chairperson informed action should be taken to respond to observations contained in the Report of the Audit and Management Committees and to make corrections wherever necessary.

2.2 Appointing Sub – Committees

The Hon. Chairperson informed the Committee that several sub committees would be formed to address education reforms, shortage in human and physical resources in schools, admitting children grades other than the formal points of admission, establishment of a council education, higher education sector and skills education sector.

2.3 Education Reforms

The Hon. Chairperson informed that it has been planned to implement the education reforms by the year 2026, and, preparations for these reforms will be made during the year 2025 giving priority to general education and that these education reforms include five main pillars: the introduction of a new syllabus, human resource development, development of infrastructure required for implementing the education reforms, public awareness, evaluation, and assessment.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that the reforms will be introduced for Grade 1 and Grade 6 in 2026, and according to these reforms, this group of students will sit for the G.C.E.

Ordinary Level examination in 2029 and that the Grade 10 curriculum for the G.C.E. Ordinary Level will be reviewed in par with these reforms since it has not been revised for a long time.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that it would be necessary to train approximately 100,000 individuals including teachers, principals, zonal directors of education and other relevant officials during the year 2025 to implement these education reforms and that this would be one of the main tasks of the Ministry of Education, Higher Education, and Vocational Training in 2025

3. Other Matters

3.1 Hon. T. K. Jayasundara

3.1.1 Early childhood education

The Hon. Member inquired whether education for early childhood development falls under the scope of the Ministry of Education, Higher Education, and Vocational Education.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that the Ministry would take action to prepare the relevant curriculum and initiates teacher training for early childhood education and it was further informed that education is provided for 13 years categorized into Primary, Junior Secondary, and Senior Secondary levels, and that two years are allocated for early childhood education.

3.1.2 Inequality in resource distribution

The Hon. Member inquired about the measures taken through this new methodology to address the inequality in the distribution of educational resources within the district.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that special attention is being paid to reduce disparities and a discussion is made as to how the technology could be utilized to address these inequalities and action should be taken to provide training to teachers as they play a significant role in this.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that it is expected to take steps to improve the quality of teachers and other personnel in the education sector through the Education Council as well.

3.2 Delay in establishing the Special Education Advisory Council – Hon. Sugath Wasantha de Silva

The Hon. Member informed that the inclusive education concept should be incorporated into education reforms and that it is expected to include the community with disabilities in all areas including classrooms, curricula, and teacher training and create positive attitudes towards them in children.

The Hon. Member requested that attention be paid to the fact that the Special Education Advisory Council had not yet been appointed.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that although there had been a delay establishing the Special Education Advisory Council, appointments had now been made, and an announcement regarding the establishment of the council would be made before the end of March.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that there had indeed been a delay in establishing the Special Education Advisory council.

3.3 Hon. U. P. Abeywickrama, Attorney at Law

3.3.1 Development of infrastructure facilities in schools through Educational Reforms

The Hon. Member inquired about the solutions provided by the reforms for issues such as lack of adequate space and toilet facilities in schools while there is a discussion on modernizing the school system through educational reforms.

The Hon. Chair informed that a considerable amount of funds allocated to the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education in the year 2025 will be spent on establishing the basic facilities in schools and that it is expected to develop schools that can meet expected criteria, by identifying the minimum standards which should prevail in the learning environment of a child and in a school.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that there are 1502 schools with less than 50 students, 3000 schools with less than 100 students and about 5000 schools with less than 500 students, out of the 10,000 schools and further stated that there is a problem regarding the availability of minimum expected criteria in schools with less than 50 students and it was also stated that a pilot project to identify such schools is already underway and

that currently the required arrangements were being made to reorganize the schools.

The Hon. Member informed that it is very important to consider issues like lack of transportation facilities and the location of schools with political intentions and further to identify schools that deserve proper resources.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that a field visit should be carried out in order to take decisions in this regard due to the differences that exist in each of these schools.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that 200 schools in 09 Provinces had been physically inspected thus far, that there was a significant potential for the reorganization of schools, that action would have to be taken according to the observations provided by the Provincial Education Offices and Divisional Education Offices and that decisions would have to be taken separately on school to school basis.

Hon. Chandana Thennakoon informed that many schools throughout Sri Lanka have been established based on the ethnicity of students, creating obstacles to the social integration of students studying in such schools, and emphasized on the requirement to pay attention towards this aspect in the process of relocating schools.

3.3.2 Appointment of a Principal to the Siyane National School

The Hon. Member informed that the Siyane National School does not have a principal yet despite several requests made to get a principal for the school, the problem still exists in several other Provincial Council schools as well.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that applications had been called from Grade I officers of the Education Administrative Service for the posts of principals in 49 national schools across the island, including major schools in Colombo, and that interviews had been conducted thus far considering 29 applications received and further stated that the vacancies could be filled in only 15 schools in this way and that, according to the current situation, it is planned to give the opportunity to the Grade II officers of the Education Administrative Service after the Grade I officers who had sent applications, gradually moving down the hierarchy.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that agreement of the Public Service Commission would be necessary for the proposal concerned and that steps would be taken to provide opportunities to lower-grade officers in that way when principals are recruited again.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that if applications were to be called only from Grade I officers of the Education Administrative Service, the number of applications received might not be sufficient even to fill the vacancies of major schools, which could lead to a dearth of principals in major schools as well.

3.4 Hon. Chandana Sooriyaarachchi

3.4.1 Decrease in student admissions to Grade 01 in schools

The Hon. Member informed that there is a decrease of student admissions to Grade 01 in the new year and that the reason for this can be attributed to the decline in the number of births in the country in the years 2021 - 2022 and that there is a threat for the gradual closure of rural schools, due to the lack of student admissions to Grade 01.

The Hon. Member informed that a practical program should therefore be initiated to overcome this situation.

3.4.2 Current shortage of teachers and the recruitment process of teachers

The Hon. Member informed that a shortage of about 40,000 teachers was reported in schools throughout Sri Lanka, and there was however a delay in conducting competitive examinations and making recruitments due to previously-existing problems and previous decisions, and that the formal administrative measures should be expeditiously taken to minimize the shortage of teachers.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that as at present, only the holders of the National Diploma in Teaching, who pass out from the National Colleges of Education, could be appointed as teachers, and that about 4000 could be recruited as trainee teachers by the end of the month.

The Secretary to the Ministry further informed that teachers are recruited on provincial basis, and that there was a problem in

conducting teachers' examinations due to certain court orders and stated that it was expected to get some relief regarding the conducting of teachers' examinations, since a recommendation had been submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers in this regard and the recommendation was expected to be submitted to the court through the Attorney General.

3.4.3 Lack of physical and human resources in provincial council schools

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that, due to the dilapidated condition of school buildings and due to the danger it poses, 05 classes of M. D. H. Jayawardana Vidyalaya in Padukka are being conducted in a temple, and that such problems have not arisen suddenly, but have been gradually developed over a long period of time, and requested that urgent action be taken to resolve such problems.

The Hon. Member further informed the Committee that this situation is a problem prevailing island-wide and that there is difficulty in obtaining such data and information depending on the availability and absence of functioning regional structural committees.

The Secretary to the Ministry of Education informed the Committee that, out the provisions that have been allocated to the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education in the 2025 budget, Rs. 11.0 billion has been allocated for the development of buildings and infrastructure facilities, and money has been allocated from the funds of the provincial councils for the development of provincial council schools, and that priority will be given this year to identify and renovate the buildings that have been constructed through various projects and are currently posing a risk and of which work has been stopped halfway.

The Secretary to the Ministry further informed the Committee that, it is hoped that the policy decisions taken in this regard by the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education will be taken into consideration by the Provincial Ministries of Education and that it is expected carry out discussions in this regard.

The Hon. Chairperson informed the Committee that priority will be given to schools considering the criteria such as availability of buildings of which construction work has not been completed,

developing constructions which pose a risk into safe conditions, completing toilets and sanitation facilities etc., and that such work should align with this education reform process.

The Hon. Chairperson further informed the Committee that more attention will be paid to schools that are expected to be reorganized and that the Provincial Ministries of Education will be informed that the activities of Provincial Council schools should be carried out in accordance with this priority basis utilizing the provisions allocated to the Provincial Councils.

Hon. Manjula Suraweera Arachchi also informed regarding conducting of examinations to recruit teachers and regarding teacher recruitment and balancing of the carder of teachers between schools in remote areas and in urban areas.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed the Committee that balancing of the teacher carders need to be carried out in the approximately 9,500 provincial council schools in the country.

Hon. Sudath Balagalla inquired about the progress of the action regarding request made to recruit 264 teachers for the schools in the Uva Province.

The Additional Secretary, Educational Service Establishment informed the Committee that the list of those recruitments has been submitted for approval.

The Provincial Director, Education of the Uva Provincial Ministry of Education informed the Committee that, since there is no proper guidance for these activities in the current situation where the Provincial Councils are not functioning, the intervention of the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education is expected.

The Hon. Chairperson informed the Committee that meetings are held with the Governors and the Secretaries of the provinces and with the relevant officials once in every three months.

Hon. Member informed the Committee that going for a balancing of teacher carders would further complicate the problem at this moment when teacher transfers are in effect and that, if the teacher recruitment examinations can be held before the determination of the court to be given in July, some solution to this problem can be given by recruiting a larger number of teachers in year 2025.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed the Committee that all directives have been issued for the transfer of teachers and that the Teacher Transfer Boards are functioning and the recommendations given by those Transfer Boards are being implemented as they are, and the Hon. Minister, Deputy Ministers or any other official will not interfere with the transfer of teachers.

3.5 Hon. (Dr.) Elayathamby Srinath

3.5.1 Recruitment of Bachelor of Education Graduates to the Teachers' Service

The Hon. Member stated that a large number of Bachelor of Education graduates in the Batticaloa District of the Eastern Province are willing to join the Teachers' Service and, therefore, requested that the recruitment process be expedited as the current process in this regard is very slow.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that a court case, upon which an interim injunction to prevent holding the examination to recruit the graduate teachers had been granted, was being heard for several years, and that a policy decision should be taken in this regard and it should be conveyed to the court.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that the recruitment of the teachers could be carried out only after the policy decision was conveyed to the court, and priority had been given to resolve this case and particular recruitment of the teachers would be at issue until then.

3.5.2 Appointment of a permanent Zonal Director of Education for the Batticaloa Zonal Education Office

The Hon. Member inquired about the reason for the delay in appointing a permanent Zonal Director of Education for the Batticaloa Zonal Education Office.

The Provincial Education Secretary to the Eastern Provincial Ministry of Education informed that even though the newspaper advertisements had been prepared in this regard, relevant documents had been submitted to the Election Commission to get permission as the local government election was scheduled to be held.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that there would be no need to obtain permission from the Election Commission since the date for the local government elections had not been fixed.

The Provincial Education Secretary of the Eastern Provincial Ministry of Education informed that the relevant newspaper advertisement could be published by the following Friday.

The Hon. Member informed that there had been no permanent Zonal Director of Education in the Batticaloa Zonal Education Office since the conclusion of the general election.

Hon. (Dr.) Upali Pannilage also expressed his views on this matter.

The Hon. Chairperson inquired the Provincial Education Secretary of the Eastern Provincial Ministry of Education whether the process for appointing a permanent Zonal Director of Education in Batticaloa Zonal Education Office could be expedited.

The Provincial Education Secretary of the Eastern Provincial Ministry of Education informed that the advertisements would be published in the newspapers by the following Monday inviting applications.

3.5.3 Appointment of a Vice-Chancellor for the Eastern University

The Hon. Member informed that even though the last date for holding the election to appoint a Vice-Chancellor for the Eastern University was March 14th, the Council had not been appointed thus far.

The Chairman, University Grants Commission informed that the issue of appointing the Dean of the Faculty of Postgraduate Studies by the Eastern University without having an approved cadre, must first be resolved and that the resignation of the members of the Council of the Eastern University had been awaited and as it had been completed by now, the process of appointing a Vice-Chancellor for the Eastern University could be initiated immediately.

3.5.4 Establishment of the Faculty of Law at the Eastern University

The Hon. Member requested that a Faculty of Law be established, as there was no Faculty of Law at the Eastern University.

3.6 Appointment of Principals - Hon. Aravinda Senarath

The Hon. Member informed that it had been about one and a half years since the principals of the Angunukolapelessa Mahanaga National School and the Katuwana National School had been transferred for political reasons and two principals had then been appointed to the same school and removed, putting these schools in a state of chaos, weakening the educational and administrative activities of these schools.

The Hon. Member further informed that it had taken a long time to resolve the problem at the ministerial level and even though the Provincial Education Office and the Zonal Education Office had made recommendations regarding Angunukolapelessa Mahanaga National School, such had not been implemented thus far.

The Additional Secretary (Education Service Establishment) informed that when a principal vacancy occurs in a school, an acting principal is assigned to cover the duties, meantime, when a principal is appointed after formal interviews, it so happens that the principal who is appointed to cover the duties of the respective school does not hand over the duties to the new principal or the principal who is appointed on acting basis is not willing to go on transfer from that school.

Hence, the Additional Secretary (Education Service Establishment) informed that a decision had been taken to appoint the most Senior Deputy Principal as the Acting Principal when a vacancy arises for the post of Principal in a particular school and further added that if another officer was appointed as the Principal of Angunakolapelessa Mahanaga National School through a formal interview, that would be an injustice on the part of the officer who currently works as the Acting Principal.

The Additional Secretary (Educational Service Establishments) furthermore informed that this officer had been recommended from another education zone to cover the duties of the Principal of the Mahanaga National School in Angunukolapelessa.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that this matter would be examined and that officers would be deployed for these two schools to cover the duties considering the matter as a special case.

3.7 Hon. Nimal Palihena

3.7.1 Vacancies of principals

The Hon. Member informed that the officer concerned assigned to cover the duties when the post of Principal becomes vacant had not taken the necessary steps in that regard.

The Hon. Member informed that there had been 2573 teacher vacancies in the Anuradhapura District and that there was no Grade-I Principal of Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service in Anuradhapura Central College and that rank holders were not interested in applying for the post of Principal due to the lack of suitable environment for it.

The Hon. Chair informed that long-term policy implementation failures had led to numerous crises in the education system, and necessary intervention would be made to adequately train human resources in the system while making expeditious decisions on those issues.

The Additional Secretary (Education Service Establishments) informed that arrangements had been made to include provision in the coming budget proposals to provide an allowance for Grade-I officers of the Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service as a solution for their reluctance to work as Principals in the schools and also added that it would give them a glimpse of motivation.

The Secretary to the Ministry intimated that more attention would be paid to Education Zones and Provincial Councils in the appointment of the officers in the future.

3.7.2 Insecure conditions in school premises

The Hon. Deputy Minister requested that urgent action be taken during the upcoming school vacation to remove unsafe conditions in schools with the intervention of the Line Ministry, as numerous unsafe conditions had been encountered in many schools in considering specifications of school premises.

3.8 Hon. Gamagedara Dissanayake

3.8.1 Shortage of Principals

The Hon. Deputy Minister informed that there was a shortage of Zonal Education Directors and only acting officers were covering duties in those posts and urged that a permanent solution be provided in that regard.

The Hon. Deputy Minister added that it would be possible to carry out administrative work in the Zonal Education Offices if it is possible to attach Grade I officers of the Sri Lanka Educational Administrative Service, working in the 1AB and National Schools to these Zonal Offices.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that there were vacancies in the posts of Sri Lanka Educational Administrative Service in the Divisional Education Offices.

The Secretary to the Ministry also added that all arrangements had been completed for the recruitment of officers for the Sri Lanka Educational Administrative Service on a limited basis and a list of 800 officers had already been sent to the Public Service Commission.

The Secretary to the Ministry further informed that it had been decided to deploy the above-mentioned group of officers, who are being recruited on a limited basis, in regional service rather than retaining them within the Ministry of Education, and that it would alleviate the problem to some extent.

3.8.2 Appointment of Provincial Directors of Education

The Hon. Deputy Minister inquired whether it is the Line Ministry or the Provincial Council that had the authority to appoint the Provincial Directors of Education.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that although the Provincial Council has the authority to appoint Provincial Directors of Education, the Provincial Directors of Education must work with the Line Ministry in carrying out their duties and that the connection between the Provincial Council and the Line Ministry exists through the Provincial Directors of Education.

The Additional Secretary (Education Services Establishments) informed that the post of Provincial Director of Education is a coordinating post and that when appointing officers to that post through the Line Ministry, a Provincial Council representative should also be present in the interview panel.

The Additional Secretary (Education Services Establishments) also informed that the Provincial Governors of the North Western and Uva Provinces have appointed Provincial Directors of Education in those provinces.

**3.9 Giving priority to remote areas in the recruitment of teachers -
Hon. Manjula Suraweera Arachchi**

The Hon. Member informed that in some areas like Nuwara Eliya, there are problems in making recruitments according to the Teacher Service Minute and the Principal Service Minute and that as solutions to the teacher shortage, development officers have been deployed, volunteer teachers have been recruited, those who have passed the Dharmacharya examination have been recruited and teaching assistants have been recruited.

The Hon. Member requested that although teacher appointments have been made in the Nuwara Eliya district on the basis of faculties and degrees, the teacher shortage cannot be met and priority be given to areas that require special attention in order to bring rural schools up to the national level.

Hon. Nihal Galappaththi inquired about the steps that the Ministry would take if an officer currently covering the duties of a school principal does not relinquish their responsibilities upon the permanent appointment of a new principal by the Ministry.

In response to this concern, the Secretary to the Ministry stated that in the past, certain parties had interfered in this process and failed to comply with the orders issued by the Line Ministry and also noted that there are ongoing efforts to continue these activities even at present.

**3.10 Charging money from children for school activities - Hon.
Nihal Galappaththi**

The Hon. Member informed that although Principals of all schools in Sri Lanka have been informed not to charge money from the parents of school children for school activities, even now, an amount of Rs. 15000/- to Rs. 17000/- is collected when admitting students to national schools and provincial schools for the preparation of classrooms.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that if specific information can be provided in this regard, the schools will be inspected and that the Ministry had already received information about such activities.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that such activities are in violation of the circulars issued by the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education.

Hon. Member informed that the information along with the names of the persons carrying out such activities has been submitted to the Provincial Education Directors who participate in the District Coordination Committees and Regional Development Committees and in response to this, the Provincial Education Directors informed that such activities be stopped.

Hon. Aravinda Senarath also expressed his views in this regard.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that there is no adequate investigation unit to investigate the complaints received in this regard and that it takes a considerable amount of time to restore a system that has collapsed over a period of time and that there are difficulties in taking prompt action.

3.11 Schools in difficult areas - Hon. E. M. Basnayaka

The Hon. Member informed that there are currently about 6000 teacher vacancies in Kandy District and that there are about 97 schools in the Ududumbara -Theldeniya Educational Zone and that there are schools teaching up to G.C.E. Ordinary Level in the villages in this area with a very limited number of students.

The Hon. Member requested that the Zonal Education Offices cannot establish these schools in the villages elsewhere because this is the only school in those villages and in a context where people with more economic capacity are leaving the villages, this school is the only one left for the children of those people who do not have such capacity to receive education and inquired about the measures that can be taken in this regard.

The Hon. Member requested that this matter be considered since, due to the economic level and difficulties of those people, their children are unable to progress beyond the level of education available in the village school.

The Hon. Member inquired whether it was possible to formulate a system for awarding marks on the basis of school rather than on district basis, as the cut-off marks for the Grade 05 Scholarship Examination are determined based on the levels prevailing in the main schools in the district, while the marks for the G.C.E. Ordinary Level and G.C.E. Advanced Level examinations are given on a district basis.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that the Ministry is making an effort to eliminate this disparity and that special attention should

be paid to such areas and schools, with plans to address this through educational reforms.

The Deputy Minister of Education and Higher Education, informed that schools should be re-established based on geographical differences and other relevant factors, rather than on a numerical basis.

3.12 Hon. Lal Premanath

3.12.1 Raising Awareness on Educational Reforms among the General Public

The Hon. Member informed that teachers, parents, and children do not understand the transformation to be carried out in the education sector, and that the division between national schools, popular schools, and provincial schools still exists among the public; therefore, steps should be taken to remove this misconception.

3.12.2 Acts carried out by principals in admitting children to schools

The Hon. Member informed that the Principal of Morawaka National School had informed parents to construct a school safety wall costing approximately Rs. 3.5 lakhs, despite what was stated in the circulars, when admitting students who had passed the Grade 05 Scholarship Examination to Grade 06.

3.12.3 Transfer of Educational Administrative Officers

The Hon. Member informed that officers of the Sri Lanka Educational Administrative Service in the Provincial Public Service had been serving in the same place for about 10–15 years, and therefore, they should be transferred.

3.12.4 Problems prevailing at National Colleges of Education

The Hon. Member informed that special attention should be paid to the National Colleges of Education and that there are a large number of problems, particularly in the Nilwala National College of Education.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that plans have been made to monitor the National Colleges of Education and that a special program is expected to be implemented in this regard.

3.13 Hon. Kitnan Selvaraj

3.13.1 Selling narcotics around schools

The Hon. Member requested that the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education, along with the security forces, intervene to prevent the illegal activity of drug selling racket that operates around schools.

3.13.2 Attention to children who fail school examinations

The Hon. Member requested that attention be paid to students who fail the Grade 05 Scholarship Examination, G.C.E. Ordinary Level, and Advanced Level examinations, just as students who pass them are praised.

3.13.3 Collections of money happening at schools

The Hon. Member informed that a farewell ceremony would be held for the students of the Ordinary Level classes of Vipulananda Tamil Maha Vidyalaya in the Haldummulla Divisional Secretariat on 10.03.2025 at 10.00 a.m. and for this purpose, a teacher named Nesamalar had informed that Rs. 2,500 will be collected from each student, and after the event expenses, the remaining amount of Rs. 100,000 will be allocated for a certain project, as stated by another teacher named Suresh.

Therefore, the Hon. Member requested that this matter be investigated and action be taken in this regard.

3.14 Hon. Manjula Sugath Rathnayaka

3.14.1 Non-Academic Staff vacancies

The Hon. Member inquired as to whether recruitments are being made for non-academic staff vacancies in schools.

3.14.2 Grade 05 Scholarship Examination

The Hon. Member inquired whether the Grade 05 Scholarship Examination would be held in 2026.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that the Grade 05 Scholarship Examination will be held as usual in 2026 and that a committee of experts would be appointed to address the changes to be made to the Grade 05 Scholarship Examination in the future.

3.15 Land belonging to Bandaranaike College, Gampaha - Hon. Ruwan Mapalagama

The Hon. Member informed that the Zonal Education Office and the Divisional Education Office are being maintained on the land

adjacent to the Bandaranayake College, Gampaha and despite a request made regarding this land on several occasions during the sessions of District Coordinating Committee, a response has not been received so far.

The Hon. Member further informed that preparations had been made to establish the Zonal Education Office and the Divisional Education Office in the old building of the Divisional Secretariat and that an additional amount of Rs. 76 million has been allocated for the purpose.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that the line ministry is aware of this matter and that the work will be carried out in the future.

3.16 Hon. (Dr.) Pathmanathan Sathyalingam

3.16.1 The absence of a Synthetic Track for the Northern Province

The Hon. Member requested that a synthetic track be constructed at least this year since there is no synthetic track for the Northern Province.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that attention would be paid to this matter in the future.

3.16.2 Shortage of officers in Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service in the Northern Province

The Hon. Member requested that since about 50% of the approved number of officers in Sri Lanka Educational Administrative Service in Northern Province are vacant, necessary steps be taken to fill the vacancies.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed that more attention would be paid to education zones and provincial councils when appointing officers in the future.

3.16.3 Problems arising from translating Examination Papers into Tamil

The Hon. Member informed that many mistakes have been made in the translation of G.C.E Advanced Level examination papers (especially Biology question paper) into Tamil and that the examination candidates do not understand what the expected answer is in the examination question translated into Tamil.

3.16.4 Predatory Journals

The Hon. Member requested that an appropriate action be taken in this regard stating that there is an increase in the publication of Predatory Journals and about 30% of the existing journals are Predatory Journals.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that this is a global issue that has been continuing for several years, that University Grants Commission should take some steps to resolve this issue to some extent and that university lecturers, under pressure to publish their research for promotion, are falling prey to Predatory Journals.

The Hon. Chairperson further informed that predatory journals are pursuing professors and researchers, claiming to provide them with various benefits, and that more attention should be paid to this matter in order to protect the higher education sector in the country.

3.16.5 Appointment of Medical Officers for University Medical Centres

The Hon. Member informed that the universities are faced with great difficulty due to the non-availability of doctors to work as Medical officers at the university medical centres due to issues such as salary scales.

The Hon. Member requested that appointments be made for Medical officers of the university medical centres through the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that attention would be paid to this matter.

3.17 Closing down schools with less than 50 students – Hon. (Dr.) Nandana Millagala

The Hon. Member inquired whether schools with less than 50 students would be closed.

The Hon. Member informed that since only 49 and 47 students are studying in schools such as Edurapola Tamil Vidyalaya and Mahabage Athulanda Vidyalaya in the Dehiowita Education Zone of Kegalle District respectively, the Principals of these schools are acting arbitrarily by not admitting students for Grade 01 in these schools.

The Hon. Member further informed that the issue of the lack of students in schools in remote areas is due to the lack of transportation and infrastructure facilities.

3.18 Hon. Gnanamuththu Srineshan

3.18.1 Challenges encountered by visually impaired students in facing examinations

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that more than 50 visually impaired students are studying at the Dharisanam School for visually Handicapped in the Nochchimunai area of the Batticaloa District, and a large number of those educated students have gained university admissions.

The Hon. Member requested that the said students be provided with an alternative for the examination questions that include diagrams, maps, and graphs in the G.C.E. Ordinary Level and Advanced Level Examination papers, as they have expressed significant challenge in answering those questions.

3.18.2 Non-issuance of the cut-off marks for the Grade 05 Scholarship Examination

The Hon. Member requested the prompt release of the cut-off marks as problems have arisen in the admission process of students to Grade 6 because the cut-off marks for the Grade 5 Scholarship Examination have not been released up to now.

3.18.3 Teacher shortages in difficult schools

The Hon. Member requested that teachers and other facilities be provided to the difficult and highly difficult schools, in the same way as they are provided to leading schools, in view that there is currently a situation where subjects such as Science, Mathematics, English, and Information Technology are not being taught due to a significant shortage of teachers in the said schools.

3.19 Hon. Ravi Karunanayake

3.19.1 Encouraging students who do not gain admissions to universities

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that approximately 55,000 students out of around 170,000 candidates sitting the G.C.E. Advanced Level exam gain admission to the state university system, underscoring the need for programmes to

inspire the remaining students and to raise their awareness about the opportunities available to them.

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that a programme to provide interest-free loans to graduate students was launched in 2015 and since it is not being carried out currently, he requested that the said programme be reintroduced with the intervention of State Banks.

The Additional Secretary (Non-State Higher Education Division) informed the Committee that a gazette notification has been issued for the 8th batch of interest-free loan granting and applications have been received, and due to the involvement of the People's Bank in addition to the Bank of Ceylon in implementing this programme, the publication of the announcement for loan granting was delayed, and as a result of the delay in releasing examination results, students were compelled to participate in other educational programmes, which resulted in a reduction in the number of applications received for the 7th batch, thereby reducing the amount of loans granted in the year 2024.

The Additional Secretary (Non-State Higher Education Division) informed the Committee that approximately 10,000 applications have been received so far in 2025, and while the maximum number of loans that can be granted is about 7,000, this process is carried out solely based on the capacity of the respective educational institutions and educational courses offered.

3.19.2 Private university system

The Hon. Member requested that the tourism education system be integrated into the private university system and that the Hon. Chairperson make a statement in this regard.

The Hon. Chairperson informed the Committee that the Government views education as a right that should be protected and that the primary responsibility for providing education lies with the Government.

The Hon. Chairperson further informed the Committee that the state university system is collapsing due to its inability to adjust to the evolving needs of the higher education context, leading to the emergence of an unregulated private higher education sector.

The Hon. Chairperson also informed the Committee that the Standing Committee on Accreditation and Quality Assurance

(SCAQA), which oversees the non-state higher education sector, has been assigned to analyse the non-state higher education sector in the country and create a policy for essential measures regarding this system, highlighting that regulation is necessary but cannot be implemented immediately.

The Hon. Chairperson informed the Committee that although the entire system should be regulated according to the existing strata within the non-state higher education sector, there should be a proper policy in place. And since education is not a commodity, but a service its quality should be assured.

The Hon. Chairperson further informed that this does not mean that the non-state higher education sector does not have any role or function, and that the non-state higher education sector plays a significant role, especially in vocational and technical education, and that this sector should be expanded.

The Hon. Member also informed that though Rs.135 billion is spent on state universities, since 50,000 - 60,000 students go abroad to study in foreign universities, expending about Rs.300 billion which should be retained in the country.

The Hon. Chairperson informed the committee that a proper study and evaluation should be carried out on these statistics and that experts related to this sector should provide proper opinions on the steps to be taken in the future.

3.19.3 Decline in enrolment of students to Grade 01 in schools

The Hon. Member enquired whether there was any truth in the fact that about 150,000 students used to be enrolled in Grade 01 in schools about five years ago, but that number had now decreased to about 110,000.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that although there was a shortage of students entering Grade 01 as the birth rate in the country is decreasing, it was not a major decrease.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed the Committee that this matter would be examined.

3.19.4 Appointment of Vice-Chancellors to state universities

The Hon. Member requested that a proper methodology be prepared for this and that a program be formulated to appoint capable officers to the position of Vice Chancellor.

The Hon. Chairperson also informed the Committee that the appointment of Vice-Chancellors to state universities should not be politicized and that the University Councils and the University Grants Commission should be given the opportunity to carry out the task.

The Hon. Chairperson informed that although this process is free from politicization, there are some incentives for this within the university itself and that the higher education system should be reviewed and examined as to how it can be improved and transparency could be established.

The Hon. Chairperson further informed the Committee that the election process for the selection of Vice-Chancellors should also be examined.

3.20 Hon. Sunil Rajapaksha

3.20.1 Recruitment of Principals

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that since a significant number of principal posts in Type 2 and Type 3 schools are vacant, many acting principals are serving there, and quality leaders should be appointed to such schools when implementing educational reforms.

The Hon. Member enquired as to whether recruitment and training process for the posts of Principals are taking place.

3.20.2 Salary anomalies of Teacher Advisors

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that due to the salary anomalies in the Teacher Advisors' Service who are engaged in the activities of supervising teacher development and the learning & teaching process, many officers are not assuming the duties of that position and it is difficult to implement educational reforms without recruiting a sufficient number of Teacher Advisors and strengthening that service.

3.20.3 Number of Students Studying in each Classroom

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that although there is no adequate number of students for even one classroom in some schools, there are about 60 students for one classroom in some other schools, and a policy decision should be taken to admit about 35 students for one classroom.

3.21 Hon. Kaveenthiran Kodeeswaran

3.21.1 Obtaining teachers to teach Sinhala and Tamil as a second language

The Hon. Member requested that Sinhala teachers be provided to teach Sinhala as a second language in Tamil schools in the Northern and Eastern provinces and Tamil teachers be provided to teach Tamil as a second language in Sinhala schools.

The Hon. Member also informed that Sinhala teachers do not attend to carry out teaching activities in Tamil schools.

3.21.2 Volunteer teachers in Tamil medium schools.

The Hon. Member requested the Committee that justice be ensured for these volunteer teachers.

3.21.3 School building in a state of near collapse

The Hon. Member requested the committee to take immediate action regarding the three-storey building of the Vipulananda Central College, Karaithivu in the Ampara District, which is in a state of near collapse and as a result, classes are being conducted in open areas due to the risk of collapse. The Hon. Member requested that a quick step be taken in this regard.

3.22 Hon. Nishantha Perera

3.22.1 Collection of money at schools

The Hon. Member requested the Committee that since schools collect money in several ways, such as for the school development society, for painting the school, and for painting classrooms, these issues be addressed under the supervision of the divisional education officers.

3.22.2 Shortage of Non-Academic Staff at provincial schools

The Hon. Member requested the committee that attention be paid to this matter as District Coordinating Committees were informed that valuable pieces of equipment in the schools are being stolen due to the shortage of non-academic staff such as school guards.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed the committee that due to the suspension of recruitments as per the circular issued by the Central Bank in 2022, the number of vacancies has been submitted to the Committee established under the Chairmanship

of the Secretary to the Prime Minister in order to obtain the necessary approvals.

3.22.3 Teacher shortage at schools

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that when a teacher from a Provincial Council school is transferred to a National School, the same teacher sometimes requests a transfer back to a Provincial school through the zonal office and, it is essential that mutual understanding prevails between provincial education officials and national school officials.

3.22.4 Non-release of cut-off marks for Grade 5 Scholarship Examination

The Hon. Member informed the Committee that due to the non-release of the cut-off marks for the Grade 5 Scholarship Examination, some parents are refraining from enrolling their children to Grade 6 and are keeping them at home.

3.22.5 Ownership of school lands

The Hon. Member requested the committee that necessary inquiries and action be taken regarding a large number of school lands that have not yet been officially vested in schools, as complaints in this regard have been submitted to the District Coordinating Committee.

3.23 Shortage of Non-Academic Staff at provincial schools – Hon. Aboobucker Athambawa

The Hon. Member requested the committee that prompt action be taken to fill vacancies of non-academic staff such as laboratory assistants and security personnel at Provincial council schools in the Eastern province.

The Secretary to the Ministry informed the committee that due to the suspension of recruitments as per the circular issued by the Central Bank in 2022, the number of vacancies has been submitted to the Committee established under the Chairmanship of the Secretary to the Prime Minister in order to obtain the necessary approvals.

3.24 Interest-Free Loan Schemes - Hon. Sudath Balagalla

The Hon. Member informed the committee that although interest-free loan schemes are in place for students to pursue education at private universities, these students face significant hardships as they are required to commence loan repayments

upon graduation, despite the fact that securing employment may take a considerable length of time.

The Hon. Member further informed the committee that due attention be paid to this matter.

The Hon. Chairperson informed the Committee that attention will be paid to this matter.

4. The Committee was adjourned at 01.05 p.m. *sine die*
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