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JVP wants debate on COPE report on Bond issue

(Island.lk) - In an attempt to coerce the Government to take action on the controversial bond issue, JVP MPs on Monday called on the Government to hold a Parliamentary debate to decide on the course of action to be taken to address the issue.

MP Sunil Handunnetti, who chairs the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) claimed that Parliament has not yet scheduled a debate on the COPE report tabled last October.

"However what we see is that the Parliament is taking steps to take Constitutional reforms to debate, where the sub-committee reports relating to the reforms process are scheduled for debate. To date no date has been scheduled to debate the COPE report on the Bond Issue. This is why I requested the Speaker to take immediate measures to address the situation in the first Parliamentary session itself," he said.

However, Handunnetti claimed that the Government's inaction may be an attempt to protect the wrong doers.

"We have a suspicion that the Government is trying to protect those who have been found at fault in the Bond issue," he said, calling the Government to consider the COPE report on the Bond issue a top priority in the 2017 agenda.

COPE Chairman also found fault with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's move to send the report to the Attorney General (AG), claiming that Parliament should decide on such matters, not the Prime Minister.

"The Prime Minister has referred the report to the AG. What we believe is that it is not the AG who decides on the report but the Parliament who holds the right to take decisions based on the report. The Parliament has to decide on taking advice from the AG," he said.

A letter sent by Handunnetti to the Speaker Karu Jayasuriya last week emphasised the need to hold a debate in Parliament regarding the issue. In the same letter Handunnetti claimed that Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had taken over the Speaker's powers by sending the report to the AG for advice, prompting the Prime Minister's office to issue a statement defending the move. The statement claimed that seeking the advice of the AG is normal procedure, highlighting that Wickremesinghe has agreed to a Parliamentary debate on the matter.

Sunil Watagala, a JVP working committee member, also told media that the move to send the report to the AG was beyond standard procedures, claiming that the report should have been directed

to an investigative body to hold a proper inquiry.

"There is a question on what would happen if the AG decides that they cannot proceed beyond the report. COPE comprises of Members of the Parliament, they prepared the report based on available information. Then the case should have been forwarded to a body which can inquire on the matter, AG is not an investigative arm. What should have happened was that the report should have been directed to a proper investigative arm like the FCID or the CID," Watagala claimed.

Last week the Prime Minister's office defended the decision taken to direct the COPE report on the bond issue to the Attorney General (AG).

The Prime Minister's office said Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had accepted the COPE report and asked the AG to study the report and recommend appropriate action.



MP Sunil Handunnetti
The Prime Minister's office says seeking the advice of the AG is normal procedure. The Prime Minister's office also said that Wickremesinghe had agreed to a debate on the report in Parliament.

Please help - See pages 16 & 17



Little
Hearts

PM's Office accuses COPE head of misleading public

(Island.lk) - The Prime Minister's Office has accused MP Sunil Handunnetti of making misleading statements about the COPE report on the alleged bond scams.

It has said, in a media statement, that the COPE report on the bond scams was tabled in Parliament on Oct. 28, 2016 and after it had been endorsed by the members of the watchdog committee unanimously and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe accepted it in the House.

The PM, on Nov. 02, referred the COPE report to the Attorney General for the latter's opinion. Seven days later, the PM, in his capacity as the subject minister, asked the Secretary General of Parliament, with permission from the Speaker, to send relevant documents for the perusal of the Attorney General.

On Nov. 21, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe expressed his willingness to have a parliamentary debate on the COPE report and MP Handunnetti did not question the PM's action at that juncture. The PM's Office says there is nothing wrong with the PM referring the COPE report to the AG. It says MP Handunnetti has levelled allegations against the PM though the secretary to his committee referred the COPE report to the AG.



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THE CARDIAC AND CRITICAL CARE COMPLEX

The Cardiac and Critical Care Complex is a ten-storey hospital wing which will be built on Lady Ridgeway Hospital grounds in Colombo. The building will feature cardiac operating theatres and it will increase the number of cardiac ICU beds from 18 to 40, include over 100 medical and neonatal intensive care beds, as well as the areas for advanced cardiac investigations and staff training facilities to provide optimum care for all children.

According to Central Engineering Consultancy Bureau, the estimated cost of this project is Rs. 2bn.

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