

'Dr Mahathir has directed study on estate workers'

Reports by
**A. Kathirasen
and M.K. Megan**

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said today that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had directed that a study be undertaken on the plight of estate workers.

He said the directive was issued to officers in the Prime Minister's Department after a discussion between Dr Mahathir and himself.

Samy Vellu said Malaysian Trades Union Congress president Senator Zainal Rampak also supported his arguments.

He said Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek yesterday told him that the issue of monthly wages for estate workers would be resolved soon.

Samy Vellu said this when winding up the 53rd annual delegates' conference. Many delegates had complained that although the country was entering a new millennium, the lot of estate workers was bad.

On the dissolution of the South Indian Labour Fund which was debated in depth, Samy Vellu said he had initially brought up

the poor condition of the home run by the board with suggestions for improvement to Lim. However, he said, the board did not approve the plans.

"The board threw the proposal into the rubbish bin but now the board has been thrown into the bin," he told the 1,350 delegates.

"This is what can happen to those who oppose my moves to improve the lot of the Indian community," he added.

Samy Vellu said he would meet Lim next week to discuss the construction of an institute. "They have a proposal ready but I will prepare my own proposals to be put forward," he said.

He added "I would rather die than give up the interest of my community" to loud applause.

The proposed institute is expected to cost RM15 million. The MIC will request a 50 per cent grant from the Government.

He said the party would instruct the Yayasan Strategic Social to look into the problem of babies without birth certificates in rural areas and suggest ways to improve the situation.

Samy Vellu said they would look into allocating more seats for Indian students at the soon-to-be-started medical college in Kedah but reiterated that it would be open to all students irrespective of race.

At present, he said, there were more than 406 medical seats in the local universities but only 35 were for Indians.

On calls by delegates for better living conditions for housing estates, Samy Vellu said it was unfortunate that even though many estates were today owned by Permodalan Nasional Berhad, the interests

of workers were still neglected.

On demolition of temples by district officers, he said he had brought it up with Dr Mahathir who was sympathetic, adding that the demolition of many temples had been stopped through the intervention of the MIC.

Samy Vellu also replied to concerns about housing that were raised by the delegates, outlining some of the things the MIC was doing and how Dr Mahathir was helping to ensure the poor had adequate housing.

Talking to reporters just before winding up, Samy Vellu said he would look into all grievances and suggestions of the delegates, among which he said were the reluctance of banks and financial institutions to grant loans to Indian entrepreneurs.

On concerns of the delegates as to whether the Government would keep its word on the construction of a vocational institute on the South Indian Labour Fund land in Nibong Tebal, he said he would "fight till the end for it."

He said others could talk about the fund but "only I can solve this problem because I am part of the Government."