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Affifuddin-Labourers

GOVT TO ENSURE WELFARE OF SOUTH INDIAN LABOURERS

KUALA LUMPUR, July 12 (Bernama) -- The welfare of South Indian Labourers housed in the South Indian Labourers Old Folks Home in Nibong Tebal will be better taken care of after the dissolution of the South Indian Labour Fund Board, Deputy Human Resource Minister Datuk Dr Affifuddin Omar said today.

He said the 50-odd South Indian labourers in the home would be placed under the charge of the Welfare Services Department which was bound to give them better treatment.

"The view that they will not be treated well after being placed under the Welfare Department should not arise," he told reporters at Parliament House. Earlier he received a memorandum from 16 Indian Non-Governmental Organisations, which urged the government to review the dissolution of the board.

He said the board was approved in 1958 by Parliament to safeguard the welfare of South Indian labourers and their descendants and also send those employed in estates back to India.

"We have sent 27,000 South Indian Labourers back to India and some 50 of them elected not to go back to India. These 50 have been receiving benefits from the South Indian Labour Fund Board and many of them are now very old and are kept in the Old Folks Home built by the Board."

Earlier in the Dewan Rakyat, Affifuddin tabled the South Indian Labour Fund (Dissolution) Bill 1999 for first reading.

The Bill was among things to enable the government to take over the powers, privileges, obligations and liabilities of the South Indian Labour Fund Board.

The Bill would also provide for the transfer of all land and assets of the Board to the government.

He said there was a mistaken belief that the government after taking over the RM2.39 million cash and about 20 hectares of plantations and land belonging to the South Indian Labour Fund Board would not use these for the benefit of the 50 South Indian Labourers.

A copy of the memorandum was also sent to MIC President and Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, following which an argument erupted. In the group handing over the memorandum was the DAP MP for Teluk Intan M.Kulasegaran.

Samy Vellu wanted to know why the group did not consult him before issuing the memorandum.

"I have expressed my views to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on the government's plan to dissolve the Board and had said that I will only agree to it if the welfare of the South Indian Labourers are taken care of," he said.

At this point another argument erupted:

"Datuk Seri, come and speak in Parliament. YB Explain your facts," said Kulasegaran.

Samy Vellu retorted, "I have been in Parliament even before you were born. I am never afraid of speaking in Parliament. Don't come and tell me what to do... I will face anybody."

He also accused Kulasegaran of taking advantage of the matter to serve his own political interests.

The memorandum was jointly presented by the Hindu Youth Council of Malaysia, Malaysia Hindu Sangam, Council of Indian Tamil Bell Club of

Malaysia, Thirukkural Association and the Andhra Association of Malaysia.  
-- BERNAMA  
NZ AAM