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Fulfil responsibility, firms told

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CALLS to plantation companies to provide adequate housing for workers have fallen on deaf ears, Senator Zainal Rampak told the Dewan Negara yesterday.

The Malaysian Trades Union Congress president said these companies could not run away from their responsibilities.

"Ideally, they should provide workers with a roof over their heads. Since this isn't being done, I think the least they can do is build and later sell the units to their workers at a low price," he said when debating the Royal Address.

To a question from Senator Datuk Dr T. Marimuthu on MTUC's role in solving the problem, Zainal said the congress was aware of the matter and was doing its best to help the group.

He also reminded State Governments to exercise greater enforcement over housing developers who indiscriminately felled trees and flattened hills for projects.

"One of the reasons tourists flock to the country is because of its greenery and forests."

On the issue of minimum wage, Zainal said the RM1,200 per month figure proposed by the congress was first raised by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said the Prime Minister mentioned the figure in a meeting with the MTUC in 1998.

Zainal said MTUC wanted to set the minimum wage at RM600.

Senator Hunaizah Mohd Noor felt religious activities and programmes could be turned into tourist attractions, citing as examples the Quran reciting competitions and pondok schools in Kelantan.

She said tourism promotion should not be confined to entertainment and world-class programmes.

On unity, Hunaizah said if the people chose to support the Opposition, it did not mean that the country was heading towards destruction.

"It is worrying how the media can play up a fight between individuals to make it look like one between political parties, just because those involved happen to have different political affiliations."

On globalisation, she said it was the responsibility of the Government to prepare the people for how to face and overcome challenges.

Addressing the issue of teachers expressing anti-government sentiment in schools, Senator Abdillah Abdul Rahim said that this could be due to the state of affairs in some schools.

"I think studies should be carried out in schools to identify internal problems that contribute towards the formation of these sentiments."

On gangsterism in schools, Abdillah said that although teachers had been given "policing authority" to act against students involved in gangsterism, a more long-term solution needs to be designed to fully overcome the problem.

Abdillah cited the lack of motivation from teachers, poorly equipped schools and a dull school environment as possible causes for students losing interest in studies.

He added that disinterested students would normally seek excitement in other ways, including getting involved in gangsterism.

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