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Low quality padi, rice smuggling led to surplus

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ALOR STAR, Fri. - The low quality of locally produced padi and smuggling of rice were the main reasons rice mills nationwide faced the problem of unsold surplus, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said smuggling happened because locally produced padi was often of a lower quality (than that produced in a neighbouring country) which resulted in millers' reluctance to buy.

"So some people resort to smuggling rice and this is a problem.

"We try to control (smuggling) but our border stretches a long way and it is difficult to take care of every spot as much of it runs through the jungle.

"We have erected a fence along certain stretches, but even then it (smuggling) still happens," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked on reports that there were some 300,000 tonnes of unsold rice in 40 mills nationwide.

Millers complained wholesalers refused to buy their products because smuggled rice was sold at lower prices.

A miller yesterday claimed Kelantan was the main entry point for smuggled rice into the country.

It was reported that smuggled rice was being sold to wholesalers for as low as RM700 per tonne.

Asked if the Government planned to ask Padi Beras Nasional Berhad to step in and buy the surplus rice from millers as was done last year, Dr Mahathir said the Government would have to look into the matter.

Dr Mahathir was speaking after visiting the house where he was born and raised in at Lorong Kilang Ais, off Jalan Pegawai in Seberang Perak.

Also present were his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain and other VIPs.

The Prime Minister spent about an hour in the house, reminiscing about things he used to do in certain rooms of the wooden Kampung-style house built in 1900.

Dr Mahathir was born in the house on Dec 20, 1925, and stayed there until he was married and moved to his own house at Titi Gajah.

"I feel very nostalgic coming back here, especially after looking at pictures of myself when I was young.

"The area around here wasn't like this when I was young. At that time most of the houses here were in bad condition, like squatter homes, but my house was the best in the kampung."

Most of the residents there, he said, used to sell satay and popia.

Dr Mahathir said he used to be good friends with a local satay seller, nicknamed Ismail Satay.

"We used to play marbles and tops together."

On his favourite spot in the house, he said it was the verandah where he often sat and chatted with friends.

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