

Dr M: Aye to Lynas, nay to nuke plant
Malaysiakini.com
September 21,2011

Former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad is in favour of the contentious Lynas rare-earth processing plant but opposes plans for a nuclear power plant.

In an article on his blog today, Mahathir does not explain why he is against the nuclear power plant, but gives a lengthy explanation as to why the Lynas Advance Material Plant is unlikely to cause harm.

Chief among his reasons is that the Lynas plant has been given the green light by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which he describes as the "world authority on nuclear material".

Despite this, laments Mahathir, protests are ongoing and the only conclusion he can make is that the protests are political in nature.

"No matter how many investigations and studies are made, the protests will go on. It is not about danger to health. It is about defeating the government in the coming election.

"We should be careful with radioactive material. But we should not allow political activists and non-genuine environmentalists deprive us of the economic benefits rare earth offers through unsubstantiated scare stories," he says.

Mahathir also urges the government to not be afraid to pursue to the project and giving it the go-ahead.

'Even X-Ray has radiation'

Among other examples used to support the safety of the Lynas plant, he says radioactive X-ray, despite its dangers, continues to be used at low exposure levels.

"I was X-rayed many times during treatment for my heart and lungs," says the octogenarian.

He adds that despite nuclear power plant leaks in Fukushima in Japan and Chernobyl in Ukraine, their respective capital cities of Tokyo and Kiev nearby remain habitable because radiation levels are low.

"Clearly the danger from radiation is dependant on the intensity of the rays and the duration of exposure. We are all exposed to some radiation from the sun, but it is not harmful," says Mahathir, who once practised medicine for many years.

He says similar rare earth refineries in other countries have shown no danger affecting the health of workers or those within the vicinity of the plants.

However, Mahathir does not mention the closure of the Bukit Merah rare earth refinery in Perak during his tenure as prime minister.

The Lynas plant was supposed to begin operation this month but the operation period has been shelved until the plant complies with several IAEA recommendations.

Despite the IAEA green light, Kuantan-based activists are vehemently opposed to the plant, fearing a repeat of the Bukit Merah incident, which saw plant workers dying of leukaemia and birth defects.