

**Lynas project must be appraised dispassionately**  
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**S Param**

As member of the scientific community I have been following closely the debate and issues raised by members of the public and NGO's with regards to the safety of the yet to be operational Australian rare earth processing plant, Lynas in Gebeng, Pahang.

Although some of the concerns, views and comments highlighted by individuals and NGOs with reference to the safety of the operation are genuine and understandable, however it is sad to note that certain quarters have taken the opportunity to manipulate the issue and created unnecessary fear in the public with their mind blowing imagination.

Under these prevailing circumstances the recent assurance of the Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak that the Lynas rare earth plant operation in Gebeng will be safe to humans and the environment, is timely and appropriate.

The government's decision to relocate the waste generated from the plant (although said to be scientifically safe) to an uninhabited location is a caring and a considerate move (The Star 27-2-2012).

This announcement I believe will alleviate whatever fears in the minds of the people living in close proximity to the plant and others concerned.

I understand the government has set strict safety conditions and standards for Lynas to fulfill before it can start its operations.

The Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB), Department of Environment (DOE) and Department of Occupational Safety (Dosh), Ministry of Health and the local authorities have been tasked to enforce the relevant laws and guidelines including the close monitoring of the operations.

The recent newspaper advertorial by Lynas and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Industry (Mosti) in the major newspapers with regards to the Lynas rare earth plant operating conditions and safety undertakings has somewhat given a clearer picture of the issue.

The authorities and Lynas should continue to engage the public in this manner so that the layman is aware of the true situation.

The sensitivities and the fear surrounding anything do with radioactive materials among the public is understandable and should be given due consideration.

It is not going to be easy to explain highly technical issues to the public but efforts should be taken to engage those who are familiar with the subject and able to communicate in simple language to the community to alleviate their fears and doubts.

It must be pointed out to the layman of the many mega dams and MW electrical power stations and other infrastructure built and well maintained in many parts of the country that are relatively safe despite the fact that they have the potential to cause harm and damage to the public.

Since the government has given the public an assurance that the Lynas plant operation is safe and it will do its utmost to ensure that the rare earth plant adheres to the safety standards and conditions spelled out and that its license will be revoked upon any serious breach, I am of the opinion that we should reconsider our stance and allow the plant to operate on a TOL permit for the time being.

The NGOs who are concerned should set up a surveillance committee to monitor the Lynas activities and

for any breach of the safety conditions during the temporary operating period.

It is advisable for NGOs who are genuinely involved in championing public health and safety to avoid affiliating openly with political organisations as it would be misconstrued or seen in a different light.

In parting I wish to share what the famous Polish pioneering physicist and chemistry researcher on radioactivity and the first female to be honored with two Nobel Prizes, Marie Skłodowska Curie(1867-1934), had to say with regards to the fear of the effects of radiation: "Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood".

Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.

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