

Rare Earth Plants Have Lower Radioactivity Level, Says Deputy Minister
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KUALA LUMPUR -- Deputy Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Fadillah Yusof on Wednesday allayed fears over the safety of activities at rare earth processing plants, saying the radioactivity level was much lower than at nuclear power plants.

He said a nuclear plant produced electricity from nuclear material whereas a rare earth processing plant produced rare metals from mineral resources which contained natural radioactive minerals.

"As such, the radioactivity level of the byproduct from the rare earth processing plant is much lower and the quantity of radioactive material and its radioactivity are much smaller than at a nuclear power plant," he said when replying to a question by Mohammed Najeeb Abdullah in the Dewan Negara.

Mohammed Najeeb had wanted to know whether the ministry intended to withdraw the approval given to Lynas Corporation for building a rare earth plant in Gebeng and, if it was to be continued, what safety measures were to be taken to prevent radiation leak.

Fadillah said the ministry, through the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB), had issued the siting and constructing licence for the period Sept 19, 2009 to Sept 18, 2011, to Lynas only to set up the plant.

"The licence was issued because the activities to be undertaken by Lynas are safe and do not pose a danger to the public, workers and the environment.

"Furthermore, more rigorous assessment will be carried out for the issuance of the operational licence to ensure safe management of the effluents and strict adherence to the proposed criteria.

"The full operational licence will not be issued unless Lynas fulfilled the criteria," he said.

Fadillah said the rare metals produced from the processing of rare earth were most necessary in the field of high technology which contributed to national economic growth.

(Bernama)