

Fuziah: Pahang DOE telling 'half-truths' about Lynas plant safety
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By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 31 — Kuantan MP Fuziah Salleh today accused the Pahang Department of Environment (DOE) of covering up facts concerning the radioactive dangers of Lynas Corp's factory in Gebeng, saying the state DOE director had spoken "half-truths" on the matter during a December 29 closed-door briefing with the public.

She took offence when Dr Ahmad Kamarul Najuib Che Ibrahim said that the Lynas factory "is a chemical factory and not a radioactive factory", and charged that his remarks on the safety of Lynas and its future plans were misleading.

File photo of the site of the Lynas plant in Gebeng. — Picture by Choo Choy May
She pointed out that he had not mentioned that the Lynas factory would be producing waste materials which have already been classified as radioactive, and that the factory would become one of the world's biggest rare earth plants after those in China.

"Is it not the responsibility of the director of the JAS (DOE) to tell the truth to the people and not be used as a political tool by the ruling government who wants to twist the real facts?" Fuziah said in a statement.

"The Lynas plant uses material brought from Australia to be processed in Gebeng where its radioactive waste will be disposed of here," she added.

Lynas Corp has already resorted to placing full-page advertisements in mainstream newspapers to defend itself from criticisms over its nearly-completed rare earth refinery.

Through the advertisements, the Australian mining firm explained several frequent allegations against its operations, including offering its promise that it complies with all Australian, international and Malaysian standards.

The controversial RM1.5 billion plant being built in the prime minister's home state of Pahang is now said to be more than 85 per cent complete and is expected to power up by early next year.

The rare earth refinery, touted to be the biggest in the world, aims to break China's near-complete stranglehold of the minerals required to manufacture high-technology products like hybrid cars, smartphones to bombs.

But public protests by local residents and environmental groups over the possible radioactive hazard posed by the plant this year put the brakes on Lynas' plans.

The outcry prompted a review by a nine-man panel of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), who instructed the Sydney-based company to provide a better long-term waste management plan.

Putrajaya, which imposed tighter environmental safety standards on the proposed plant in June following the high-profile protests, has yet to issue a pre-operating licence for the plant.

The Australian government's Department of Mines and Petroleum issued a statement on December 16 stating that Lynas Corp's operations were safe and that it abided by international safety conventions.

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