

**Anti-Lynas lobby tells Putrajaya to 'learn lesson' from Perak death**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
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**By Shannon Teoh**

KUALA LUMPUR, March 30 — The federal government must learn from the mistakes of the Asian Rare Earth (ARE) plant in Bukit Merah, Ipoh, those leading protests against Lynas Corp's rare earth refinery in Kuantan said today after an ARE worker's son died last night.

They told The Malaysian Insider the Barisan Nasional (BN) administration must "stop gambling with people's lives" after the death of Cheah Kok Leong, whose mother Lai Kwan blames congenital defects he was born with 30 years ago on radiation exposure from working at the plant while she was pregnant with him.

"How many more lives must we lose before Putrajaya learns its lesson?" said Kuantan MP Fuziah Salleh, who has led protests against Australian miner Lynas's RM2.3 billion project there.

"I will do my best, so that not even one family will have to go through the same kind of suffering as Lai Kwan in Kuantan, STOP LYNAS!!" the PKR vice president added on micro-blogging site Twitter.

Save Malaysia Stop Lynas chairman Tan Bun Teet also said it was "sad that politicians are making decisions that capitalise on the forgetfulness of others."

"Lai Kwan's 30 years of suffering and other deaths in Bukit Merah, although not proven to be a direct result of ARE, should convince the government to show more prudence and care," said the leader of the group of Kuantan residents opposed to the plant that has raised fears of radiation pollution.

The 11,000-strong Bukit Merah community blames the ARE plant for birth defects and eight leukaemia cases in the last five years, seven of which were fatal.

But radiation regulator Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) has said it was unlikely that Lai's child was born with mental defects because of her exposure to radiation, explaining that nerve tissue is the most resistant to radiation.

DAP MP Fong Po Kuan said that in her emergency motion on reports of unsafe radiation in the area that was debated in Parliament last week, she had called on the government "not to make the same mistake in Gebeng as it did in Bukit Merah in 1983."

Fong's Batu Gajah constituency includes Bukit Merah

"The issue is simple: stop Lynas and stop gambling with people's lives," she added.

Lynas Corp has insisted its RM2.3 billion plant is safe, saying it produces only low radiation waste that the Australian miner says it will recycle into commercial products.

The project was on course for approval until the New York Times highlighted it a year ago,

using the ARE plant as a cautionary tale.

An article in the newspaper's March 9, 2011 edition zeroed in on Lai's story of how she decided to take up a better-paying job in the refinery.

Lai, now 70, told the NYT that she was told to take unpaid days off while pregnant when factory bosses said particularly dangerous consignments of ore were arriving.

"She has spent the last 29 years washing, dressing, feeding and otherwise taking care of her son from that pregnancy... she and other local residents blame the refinery for the problems, although birth defects can have many causes," the daily reported.

The report galvanised local opposition to the Lynas plant, leading Putrajaya to call for a review by an international panel of experts in June the same year.

However, the AELB has since approved a temporary operating licence subject to a few conditions yet to be fulfilled that include finding a suitable waste disposal site.

But continued protests, backed by the federal opposition, have forced the government to form a Parliamentary Select Committee to study the project.

However, Pakatan Rakyat has refused to participate in the panel, calling it an attempt to "whitewash" the alleged danger of radiation pollution from the refinery.

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