



29 OCT, 2021

Decision to allow radioactive waste storage questioned

The Sun, Malaysia



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AN opposition lawmaker questioned the government's rationale yesterday for allowing Lynas Malaysia to build a permanent disposal facility (PDF) for its radioactive waste in Gebeng, Kuantan.

Fuziah Salleh (PH-Kuantan) cited an environmental impact assessment report (EIA) by the rare earth processing company to prove her point that it was a hazard.

However, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba refuted her claims, saying that the PDF would be safe.

Fuziah said according to the Lynas EIA, which was completed in 2018, the PDF would be constructed in a locality where the groundwater level is only a metre deep.

"How can you have a PDF in the area? The radioactive waste has a half-life of 1.4 billion years," she added to highlight the risk of a leak in the long term.

She also noted that another site, Bukit Ketam, was picked earlier but it was rejected by the Department of Environment (DoE) because it was in a water catchment area.

In response, Adham said the PDF would be five metres above the groundwater and sea level, making Gebeng a safe place for the facility.

Nonetheless, he said an evaluation is being carried out and its report will be sent to the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) and the DoE, and a final decision will be made next month.

Earlier, Adham said the government is aware of low-level radioactive emissions in the area, making it necessary to speed up the construction of the PDF.

According to the AELB, the PDF must pass the Radiological Impact Assessment and the EIA.

Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai (BN-Bentong) pointed out that there remains more than a million metric tonnes of radioactive waste behind the Lynas plant in Gebeng.

"Anything can happen, given the risk of floods or a tsunami as a result of climate change," he said. "This is not child's play. We cannot take it for granted."

Liow said the government should have required Lynas to identify a location for its PDF before extending its operating licence to 2023.

"It's been more than 10 years now, and Lynas has yet to fulfil the conditions for it being allowed to process rare earth in Malaysia."

Lynas, an Australian company, mines the rare earth ore in Mount Weld, Western Australia and ships it to Kuantan for processing.



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## SUMMARIES

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