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Safe, peaceful nuclear use

Atom Malaysia has been leading the charge for 40 years



Getting ready for nukes: Noraishah says Atom Malaysia is tasked with raising public awareness on safe nuclear use, among other duties. (Right) A Geiger Counter, used to measure radiation, which is still in use by Atom Malaysia. — Bernama

SEPANG: As it marks its 40th anniversary, the Atomic Energy Department (Atom Malaysia) is ready to step up as the national regulator of nuclear energy and ionising radiation, driving the safe and peaceful use of nuclear technology in the country.

Its director-general Noraishah Pungut said Atom Malaysia initially focused on regulating radioactive materials.

Today, its role has expanded to include nuclear safety, radiation protection and the peaceful application of nuclear technology.

"Currently, we oversee over 2,000 active licences covering major industries such as oil and gas exploration, manufacturing, and research and medical institutions. These are regulated in col-

laboration with the Health Ministry under Act 304.

"These activities involve high-risk materials or equipment that must be legally and effectively regulated, in accordance with international best practices to ensure safety, security and proper usage.

"For example, hospitals seeking to use radiotherapy or companies wanting to import materials like iridium must obtain approval and comply with Atom Malaysia's strict standards," she said.

One of Atom Malaysia's key missions now is to raise public awareness about how the government regulates this technology, to help shift negative perceptions.

"We need to rebrand nuclear technology. It's not about bombs

or disasters – it's clean and efficient technology, as long as it's properly managed. Atom Malaysia plays a key role in enforcing legal controls to ensure safety, security and responsible use," she added.

With Malaysia targeting net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, Noraishah said nuclear energy could realistically complement the country's energy mix.

"As part of long-term preparations, we are reviewing amendments to Act 304 and working to ratify several key international agreements, including the Convention on Nuclear Safety.

"If Malaysia is serious about developing a nuclear power plant, these foundations must be in place first," she said.

However, she admitted that one of the biggest challenges is ensuring a skilled workforce in the nuclear field.

"We need to train more people as nuclear scientists and safety engineers and these roles require specialised training," she said.

Atom Malaysia is proposing more awareness campaigns, education initiatives, industrial training programmes and clear career pathways to attract young talent.

"In other countries, nuclear technology is used to purify contaminated water and create new materials. We can do the same, if there's awareness and investment," she said.

She also reiterated that nuclear progress must be built on strong legal and safety frameworks.