

# Wee: Stop the double standards

## Illegal factory ignored despite green issues raised in GE13

**PETALING JAYA:** The controversial activated carbon filter processing factory in Penang, at the centre of an anti-graft investigation, continues to garner intense interest.

Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong lambasted DAP and Pakatan Harapan for practising double standards by picking on the Lynas plant and Bukit Koman gold mining activities in Pahang while turning a blind eye to the illegal factory in Sungai Lembu, Bukit Mertajam.

"The plight of the constituents in Penanti were ignored despite PKR assemblyman Dr Norlela Ariffin's tearful plea in the Penang state assembly," said the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in a statement yesterday.

"It is hypocritical of DAP to stir up emotions in the country before the general election in 2013, highlighting so many green issues in Kuantan and Raub, and then choosing not to act against the illegal factory."

The factory has 31 square pits to burn sawdust to produce activated carbon.

Kampung Sungai Lembu villagers claimed that the dirty air from the factory caused them various health problems, including cancer, breathing difficulty and dizziness.

On Aug 11, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission nabbed Penang state executive councillor Phee Boon Poh, who is state welfare, caring society and environment committee chairman, factory director Edmund Gan Eu Leong, 37, and his father Gan Buck Hee, 70, the factory manager.

They were released last Monday.

Dr Wee pointed out that Phee can claim that activated carbon is not toxic, and if the same logic is



**Bad for the environment:** The still-burning sawdust pit at the illegal factory in Kampung Sungai Lembu in Bukit Mertajam.

applied, gold is not harmful either.

"However, he did not divulge that the process of manufacturing activated carbon without pollution control incurs an adverse impact on the residents near the factory.

"The key point is that there is no air pollution control system for the carbon-manufacturing process. The process must be subjected to stringent rules, controls and monitoring," he said.

Even if the Department of Environment representative found no pollution at the site during a previous visit, Dr Wee stressed on the need for continuous checks.

the issue in response to the residents' complaints.

Reading out excerpts of the declassified minutes of the meeting at the Seberang Prai Municipal Council (MPSP) office, Phee said the operator of the illegal factory had a licence when it operated in Alma, but the licence was cancelled after it was ordered to relocate.

He added that the factory was located more than 500m away from the residential area.

Phee had also requested that the factory be legalised to ensure it carried out environmentally-friendly processes and complied with all necessary requirements, such as the use of safety equipment.

He added that the DoE representative had informed the meeting that the department's visit to the factory found no pollution, as there was a barrier that prevented smoke or dust from escaping.

"The DoE stated that it can support the factory operations if the sawdust burning activities were done in an enclosed manner and safety control equipment was used.

"These requirements were then told to the factory operator," he said at the press conference which was also attended by Lim.

When contacted, Dr Norlela said she had received a letter from the DoE in 2015 stating that the factory did not have any equipment to control smoke or sawdust from escaping.

"You can ask all who attended the May 6, 2015, meeting about the fight I had when objecting to Phee's request for another three-year extension for the factory.

"Just because I was at the meeting doesn't mean I agreed with everything," she added.

"This plant has been operating illegally on agricultural land for 10 years. Why didn't the Penang government legalise it and convert the land to industrial?

"Allowing it to run uninterrupted for 10 years without taking any action while villagers suffered from the contaminated air shows the DAP-led government is not concerned about the health and welfare of the people," Dr Wee said.

At a press conference in Komtar yesterday, the Penang executive council revealed the minutes of a meeting on May 6, 2015, to show that Phee had attempted to tackle