

Stop work on rare earth plant: MCA
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The MCA has called on the government to freeze work on the proposed Lynas Advanced Materials Plant (Lamp) in Kuantan, Pahang, until it is proven to be environmentally safe.

Party president Dr Chua Soi Lek said a comprehensive study on potential risk factors and an environmental impact assessment study must be carried out and the findings made public.

He said it is incumbent on the government to weigh the pros and cons of the controversial project, and "not be too hasty" in accepting investments that pose great risks to the people and environment.

"The people must always come first and their health should not be compromised at the expense of wooing investors," Chua said in a statement, after chairing a MCA presidential council meeting today.

"Although the plant is located in the (Gebeng) industrial zone, the onus will be on the authorities to convince the people that it is entirely safe and that the plant does not pose any health risk."

'Shelve if risky'

Chua said regardless of the potential benefits of a project, the government cannot press on with their plans "without consideration for the protection of the environment."

Should the project prove a risk to the people and the environment, he said, the government must be firm to shelve the project.

The MCA chief called on transparency on the part of the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry in answering the people's concerns over the project.

The Ministry, he said, must give full disclosure of the safety aspects of the plant.

"The Ministry will need to be transparent in coming up with answers to erase any doubt by the people. They need to convince them if the plant does not pose any health risk."

"The MCA would not compromise on anything less than a total rejection of the project if there is an iota of proof that the plant may generate toxic waste that can endanger or harm the community within the vicinity," said Chua.

Gebeng's rare earth refinery is touted to be one of the largest in the world, and is scheduled to be operational by the third quarter of this year.

Residents and environmental groups have however stepped up protests against the plant for fears of radiation contamination.

NGOs have criticised the government from embarking on the project despite the environmental hazard caused by a rare earth plant in Bukit Merah, Perak, in the 1980s.

Protests from locals and environmentalists over unusually high number of birth defects among those in the vicinity of the plant eventually caused its closure.

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