

**NGO: Dr M's son has stake in Lynas project?**

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The Save Malaysia Stop Lynas (SMSL) group has raised a poser of sorts for former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad over his recent support for the controversial rare earth refinery plant in Gebeng, Pahang.

What exactly are his motives when he challenged the government of Najib Abdul Razak to push ahead with approving the Lynas Advance Material Plant constructed by Lynas Malaysia Sdn Bhd?

In a statement issued late yesterday, the group said given the entrenchment of vested self-interests in Malaysian politics generally, is Mahathir's complacency with the dangers associated with "hazardous" projects due to his "limited understanding of nuclear science and physics"?

"Or is it a convenient position for him as a father of two sons in one way or another linked to the Lynas project?"

In addition to noting that Mahathir's son Mukhriz is deputy minister at the international trade and industry ministry which approved the construction of the Lynas plant, SMSL also pointed to reports that Kencana Petroleum, of which Mahathir's eldest son Mokhzani (right) is group CEO, "has a nice stake in the Lynas rare earth refinery project"

This is by way of its subsidiary, Kencana Torsco Sdn Bhd, which won a RM9.1 million contract to design, fabricate, line, supply, install, and commission carbon steel and stainless steel tanks to Lynas in 2011.

SMSL also wondered whether it was not a coincidence that Mahathir's blog posting, in which he gave the thumbs up to Lynas, occurred the same day that its share value took its steepest tumble in two years.

"Perhaps daddy decided it was time (to) lend his weight to the deal to make sure Lynas is healthy enough in shareholders' confidence to pay their bills?" suggested the group.

In the blog posting, Mahathir cited several reasons why the Lamp plant is unlikely to cause harm, chief among which was the green light given to the plant by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as the "world authority on nuclear material".

The protests against the plant, he lamented, are thus merely political in nature.

"No matter how many investigations and studies are made, the protests will go on. It is not about danger to health. It is about defeating the government in the coming election." said Mahathir.

Taking aim at these comments, SMSL said the opposition to the plant derives not from political motives but the desire of ordinary "mums and dads as well as youths" to leave for the next generations a future that is "clean and safe".

It is only right that ordinary citizens band together with other like-minded people "to claim their democratic right to reject a polluting hazardous project such as the Lynas rare earth refinery plant," the group added.

"The people of Kuatan have spoken loud and clear through the various peaceful public actions, the Stop Lynas campaign is a campaign run and supported by mums and dads and ordinary people who are simply worried about having a mammoth hazardous plant nearby."

SMSL also countered Mahathir's contention that while he is against nuclear power and the dangers of radiation from nuclear waste, he is not against rare earth refineries as the risks associated with exposure to their low levels of radiation are no cause for alarm.

Similar rare earth refineries in other countries have shown no danger affecting the health of workers or those within the vicinity of the plants, Mahathir had added.

Does Mahathir not realise that Mt Weld ore which will provide the raw materials for Lamp contains both thorium and uranium, which are radioactive, asked SMSL.

“Thorium, especially, is a hazardous substance with a half-life of 14 billion years - far, far longer than uranium, said SMSL.

The sheer volumes of the Lynas waste streams of solid waste, which SMSL said would be enough to fill 126 Olympic-size swimming pools, contain other toxic hazardous substances such as sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrates and heavy metals such as lead.

SMSL also noted Mahathir's failure to address the closure of the Bukit Merah rare earth refinery in Perak during his tenure as prime minister.

“SMSL is appalled by Mahathir's complacent stance on the Lynas plant despite his own government's poor track record in managing the Bukit Merah rare earth case.

“How many lives need to be lost and how much of land and water need to be contaminated before we will ever learn to stop accepting highly polluting hazardous projects which Malaysia do not have a track record of managing safely?”

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