

Anti-Lynas rally a test of Najib's resolve
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The Najib administration was today challenged on two fronts - its insistence over the safety of the Lynas Advanced Material Plant (Lamp) and execution of the Peaceful Assembly Act 2011.

Some 15,000 people descended on Kuantan today backed by hundred others in solidarity rallies across the country including Kuala Lumpur, Sarawak, Perak, Sabah and Penang.

The events were triggered by the Atomic Energy Licensing Board's (AELB) decision to approve a Temporary Operations Licence (TOL) for the Lamp, that has prompted the largest protest in the country since last year's July Bersih 2.0 rally.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak appeared to have felt the heat, with Nanyang Siang Pau quoting him saying that the TOL will not be issued to Lynas if the public was not comfortable with Lamp.

Najib reportedly said this just hours after the rally concluded in Kuantan, the capital of his home state Pahang, and a short drive away from his constituency of Pekan.

The prime rally in Kuantan today saw locals and outsiders turning up in force to voice their dissatisfaction against what they see to be an environmental disaster in waiting.

It brought together several other groups afflicted by environmental concerns throughout the country and even cultural activists who are dissatisfied with the MRT project at Jalan Sultan.

While these people had their various concerns, they were unified by their dissatisfaction towards the federal government.

'Opposition capitalises on discontent'

Perhaps sensing the potent combination of dissatisfied groups, the opposition wasted no time in capitalising on the rally.

While condemning Lynas, opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim in his speech which capped off the rally declared: "If we capture Putrajaya, we will cancel Lynas' (plant)."

Meanwhile, DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang had also warned BN that today's rally was a warning that it may lose more seats in Pahang come general election.

As political party members unfurled their party banners, a couple was heard whispering: "They shouldn't do this, tomorrow the newspapers will say that we've been hijacked by political parties."

Politicians had undoubtedly attempted to benefit from today's major rally, but there were equally large numbers of common folk, local and non-locals who were passionate and sincerely concerned about the project.

Common folks, real concerns

A 60-year-old grandfather who only wanted to be known as Haji Mohamad had said: "I'll probably die in five or six years but my future generation will suffer because of Lynas".

While the young were passionate in their cause, most of the elderly people interviewed admitted that they were unclear of the details of Lynas, but simply opposed it because they felt the risk posed towards their

children and grandchildren wasn't worth it.

On the virtual front, Lynas' website was hacked and replaced with a fluttering Malaysian flag with the words: "Stop Lynas, Save Malaysia".

However, regardless if the rally was a combination of genuine concern for Lamp or a political opportunity, it has increased the pressure on the government.

Although the TOL had been approved, it has not been issued pending compliance of several conditions set for Lynas.

New law's first test

On the government's side, this was its first opportunity to redeem itself after the highly-criticised Peaceful Assembly Act 2011 came into force with today's rally being the first major to take place under the new law.

Despite rally organisers violating the new law by briefly marching and bringing children to the rally, Kuantan OCPD Mohd Jasmani Yusof appeared lenient, stating that he would advise rally organisers and that it would serve as a future example.

Suhakam commissioner Mohd Sha'ani Abdullah who was present as an observer had praised the police's performance today but stressed that the Peaceful Assembly Act remains flawed and must be improved.

Police today largely facilitated the rally from the sidelines and had merely advised participants who had gathered elsewhere to proceed to the designated site.

The law imposes rigid restrictions on peaceful demonstrations, however no major complaints were received from participants or organisers.

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