

Cabinet agrees to PSC on Lynas
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By Koh Jun Lin

The cabinet has decided to form a parliamentary select committee (PSC) to study issues related to the Lynas rare earths refining project in Gebeng, Pahang, MCA president Dr Chua Soi Lek said today.

Chua Soi Lek debate Lim Guan Eng "MCA supports the decision, and hopes that opposition politicians who will be in the committee won't use it as a platform for politicking," Chua (right) told a press conference.

He said he was informed of the decision by MCA ministers in the cabinet.

Chua praised the decision and said it shows that the prime minister puts the people first, and that the government is listening to the people, especially the residents of Pahang.

He said there may be issues with Lynas, but it should not be politicised, and that a PSC is the best way to gather feedback from all stakeholders.

"And we hope that NGOs and individuals invited to give their input would do so professionally," he told a press conference at MCA's headquarters today.

He also said that MCA views the people's health and welfare seriously, but efforts to attract foreign investments were also important.

However, Chua added that he has no knowledge on when the PSC will be formed.

The controversial Lynas Advanced Materials Plant (Lamp) has attracted brickbats and several major demonstrations against it due to concerns over its safety, especially on the management of low-level radioactive waste, and allegations of shoddy construction.

Chua also dismissed media reports that the party would focus only on 20 "winnable" parliamentary constituencies.

"It's not true. We have 130 (parliamentary and state) seats. All the seats are winnable seats if we work hard enough," he said, adding that MCA should not be dismissed after the 308 political tsunami.

Citing figures, he pointed out that MCA had more MPs than DAP after the 1999 and 2004 general elections.

"So we believe that political fortunes could go up or down, because voters do change," he said.

Chua was asked by reporters to comment on a report by Chinese daily Nanyang Siang Pau today, which quoted unnamed sources that MCA would focus on the 20 seats over the next two months, in hopes of retaining at least 15 in the next general election.

Earlier during the press conference, he also announced that the party's central committee had unanimously decided that any party members who sabotage BN election candidates would be sacked or suspended by the disciplinary committee, and barred from participating in party elections.

"This is important so that our members would always support BN candidates," he said.

'Did the prime minister tell you?'

When asked to respond to speculation that he may contest in Batu Pahat, Johor, Chua merely replied, "That one, did the prime minister tell you or what? If not, I don't hold much to it.

"If it came from the prime minister, I should thank you because you are the first to tell me that, my dear friend," he said, triggering giggles amongst the reporters present.

Chua was also asked to comment on a report by English daily The Malay Mail where his predecessor Ong Tee Keat was quoted as saying that he would defend his Pandan seat under a BN ticket.

He replied that this is "illogical" because Ong had also previously said he had lost faith and interest in the party, and only spoke about his "personal agenda".

"So we got used to it, that this leader is not one who puts the party first," he said.

When asked whether Ong had violated the party's disciplinary rules, he replied that any "winnable" person could be an election candidate.

"We at the leadership (central committee) level have no factions. If the chances of winning are high, we will give it (the candidacy) to him," he told reporters.

He also took a swipe at Pakatan Rakyat, especially on the silence of Pakatan leaders about the Kedah government being monitored by an unelected committee from PAS' central leadership.

"That's why in Kedah it's very unfair. Whether you like it or not, the menteri besar and the exco members are elected by the people.

"But today, this elected state government's decision can be overruled by a committee set up by PAS, which is unelected. So much for democracy advocated by (DAP secretary-general) Lim Guan Eng, by PAS, and by PKR."

Chua said he is confident that the "eye-opener" would show voters that Pakatan is power-hungry.

However, PAS had previously said that the steering committee is only an advisory body and had no executive powers.

During the press conference, Chua also declared support for a minimum wage policy, but said it should take into account the differences of the cost of living between rural and urban areas, and it should not be too burdensome to small and medium enterprises.

'Don't use issue for political mileage'

On an unrelated matter, Chua condemned a protest to be held on March 25 at New Era College in Kajang, Selangor on the shortage of Chinese teachers.

"MCA does not believe that street politics and street demonstrations can solve any problems in this country.

"Political parties should not use this issue for political mileage. It's not fair," he said.

The "Save Chinese Education Rally" is organised by Chinese education rights coalition Dong Jiao Zong (DJZ), against the Education Ministry's policy to deploy hundreds of teachers without Chinese language qualification to teach in Chinese primary schools.

Chua said that a special committee had already been formed under Deputy Education Minister Wee Ka Siong to handle the issue, and had already met with all stakeholders on three occasions.

He also repeated MCA's position on the issue, which include empowering headmasters to employ temporary teachers to fill the vacancies, which number at 1,874 positions.

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