

Mr Prime Minister, what are you hiding?

MalaysiaKini.com

March 20, 2012

By Charles Santiago

MP SPEAKS Malaysia calls itself a democracy but the government remains complacent and nonchalant about the aspirations of the people. Never mind their safety or health... It does not even factor in the Umno-led government's to-do list.

For precisely these reasons, I believe that the parliamentary select committee (PSC) on Lynas Corp is a waste of time. Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak himself gave a clear indication of this when he said the PSC would not decide on the fate of Lynas.

azlanInstead the committee would only serve to repeat Najib's propoganda by trying to convince the people that the RM700 million plant is safe.

Clearly Najib and his administration do not care about the fate of the uneducated Chinese community in Bukit Merah, Perak, which saw eight cases of leukaemia over five years, severe birth defects, lead poisoning, congenital diseases and infant deaths.

Sometimes Najib's government has selective amnesia. It has also forgotten about the US\$100 million clean-up cost of the Asian Rare Earth factory operations, said to be the highest in the industry.

And yet Najib and his cabinet are finding devious ways to get the Lynas factory, which is almost complete, to start operations by the end of June this year.

Now let's look at a timeline of events:

1. January 2012, the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) gives Lynas Corp a two-year Temporary Operating Licence (TOL).
2. Feb 21, 2012 - The Australian government reiterated it would not accept responsibility for any waste material produced by Lynas Malaysia Sdn Bhd. An excerpt from a statement by the Western Australian Mines and Petroleum Minister, Norman Moore, states that "National legislation stipulates that Australia will not accept responsibility for any waste product from offshore processing of resources purchased in Australia such as iron ore, mineral sands and the rare earth produced by Lynas Corporation".
3. Feb 27, 2012 - Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak said - "Lynas Corp's rare earth plant in Gebeng has been reviewed by the government and found to be safe."
4. March 1, 2012 - Health Minister Liow Tiong Lai told the Sin Chew Daily that Lynas would have to send the waste back to Australia even though the Western Australian government has said it would not take back the residue from the ore mined from Mount Weld.

Liow said the government has listened to the people who want the waste to be shipped back. He further said now it's up to Lynas to deal with it.

5. March 1, 2012 - The Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) said Australia's refusal to accept radioactive waste should not affect Lynas Corp's efforts to return residue from its rare earth plant.

AELB director-general Raja Abdul Aziz Raja Adnan said, "Western Australia said it will not accept radioactive waste from third countries. They never said Lynas residue..."

Raja Abdul Aziz has also downplayed the cracks in a network of pipes in the plant, saying they were part

of a fire safety system and are not pipes which would be used in the refining process.

6. March 2, 2012 - Najib said the waste material from the plant would be placed in an uninhabited place although it would be scientifically safe as it may haunt the community psychologically.

Najib further added the plant would not have received an operating licence if the government was not convinced it was safe.

Questions to the PM

And now here is my list of questions to the prime minister:

1. What is the real story behind Lynas Corp? And why are yourself, Liow and Raja Abdul Aziz scrambling about to cover each other's clumsily thought-out statements?

2. The TOL is subject to Lynas sending the waste back to Western Australia. If it fails to do so, would the TOL be revoked? Can the government and Health Ministry give this assurance to the people of Malaysia in writing?

3. And even if that's the case, how safe is the process of extracting rare earth from ore as the crushing of ore releases thorium and also radon, which could travel thousands of kilometres depending of the direction of the wind?

4. Why didn't Lynas set up the rare earth plant near its source of extraction in Western Australia as it would have saved huge shipping costs?

5. Why didn't Lynas obtain an approval from the Western Australia authorities to start the plant there?

6. Could the Western Australia authorities be concerned about possible health hazards?

7. Should this not raise the red flag with the Malaysian authorities?

8. Is the RM700 million in foreign investment more important to you and your government than the lives of your citizens?

Clearly there are more questions than answers to the hasty manner in which the government has bulldozed through the setting-up of Lynas in Kuantan. And therefore my final question to Najib is this - Mr prime minister, what are you hiding?

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
Source: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/192578>

