

Najib: Gov't will shut down Lynas if found harmful
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The government will not allow the Lynas rare earths plant in Gebeng, Kuantan, to operate if scientific evidence proves that it will be harmful to the people's health and the environment, said Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

"We will never compromise on that... the safety of Malaysian citizens will not be compromised," he said in a live interview with Mandarin radio station 988 this morning.

NONENajib (right) stressed that the government needs to hold a dialogue with those who oppose the plant, but this must be done based on scientific facts instead of emotional and political arguments.

"A purely environmental issue has become a political issue, this is unfortunate," he said.

The parliamentary select committee (PSC) on the Lyans plant formed on Tuesday but boycotted by the opposition, is one of the mechanisms to gather scientific evidence related to the project, he explained.

Asked whether the government would be bound by the findings of PSC, Najib said the PSC was a "strong basis for us to make a decision".

During the one-hour interview with the MCA-owned radio station, the premier also fielded questions on the lack of teachers in Chinese primary schools, objections to the MRT alignment in Jalan Sultan, My First Home scheme, and other issues.

NONENajib said he had given assurances to the owners of the shophouses on Jalan Sultan that "the government will do everything possible to preserve the shophouses", but cultural preservation should not impede development.

The government is even prepared to declare the historical shophouses as national heritage, he added.

Answering the question of a listener from Alor Star on the problem of teacher shortage in Chinese primary schools, which has been haunting the community for more than 30 years, Najib pledged that his administration "is serious in wanting to solve the problem".

The cabinet had discussed the issue and accepted in principle the proposals by Deputy Education Minister Wee Ka Siong, including transferring out the non-Mandarin speaking teachers and training more Chinese teachers, Najib said, adding that the government would ensure that these are implemented effectively.

Minister, deputy should oversee implementation

"We have to make sure this problem is solved once and for all," he stressed.

Asked about complaints that ministry officers had failed to execute the policies, Najib merely replied that both the education minister and his deputy should oversee the officers to make sure that promises were implemented.

"But some proposals will take few years before we can see the results."

The United Chinese School Committees Association and the United Chinese School Teachers Association, which form the Chinese education rights coalition Dong Jiao Zong, have called for a rally on

Sunday to demand the transfer of all non-Mandarin speaking teachers out of Chinese primary schools.

NONEThe rally also aims to highlight enduring discrimination against Chinese schools, including the shortage of teachers and development funds.

On another question why many loan applications under the My First Home Scheme were rejected by the banks, Najib said the successful application rate was 36.6 percent, which he described as "reasonably good".

According to him, hundreds of applications were still under consideration and the government would also assess outcome of the scheme.

The crux of the government scheme is to provide 100 percent housing loans to young house buyers earning a monthly income of less than RM3,000 to purchase houses worth up to RM400,000.

On a lighter note, Najib was also asked whether he has the contact number of US president Barack Obama in his phonebook, to which he said Obama was not a personal friend, but that he followed Obama's Twitter updates.

As for the 1Malaysia concept introduced by him having become a trendy phrase, used even by hawkers to label their food, the prime minister said the Hakka cuisine yong tau foo was one of his favourite foods.

Commenting on the insulting remarks made by Internet users on his social media, including his Chinese-language Facebook webpage dubbed 'Ah Jib Kor' (big brother Najib), Najib said he is not upset but rather "disappointed that these people are so shallow".

This was Najib's second live interview with a Mandarin radio station after his debut in Media Prima-owned One FM last year, which was seen as part of his aggressive attempt to win back the ebbing support of the Chinese community in light of the 13th general election being held in the coming months.

