

Penang Gerakan sticks to stand against Lynas
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By Susan Loone

The party urges the federal government to listen to the people's voice against Lynas, following its finding that the plant is potentially hazardous to human life.

Penang Gerakan has made a strong stand against the Lynas Advance Materials Plant (LAMP), saying it should not be granted the license to operate for social, economic, environment and medical hazards reasons.

NONThe party's state secretary Goh Kheng Sneah (right) said a committee had been set up to study the issue thoroughly and based on its findings, the party has come to the decision to reject Lynas for its potential radioactive hazards.

State Gerakan vice-chief Dr Lim Boo Han, who heads the committee, said the party reached this conclusion after much discussion and visits to the affected areas.

Lim said based on its findings, the closest housing estate is 2km away from the plant and within the 30km inland radius there are 700,000 residents.

He urged the federal government to seriously consider the concerns and voices of the people from the local community as it is their fundamental right to be consulted.

"The government must promote the spirit of local participation. The precautionary approach principles advised by World Health Organisation must be strictly adhered to," Lim said at a press conference in Penang.

He was accompanied by Penang Gerakan communication bureau chief Dr Thor Teong Gee , the party's legal and human rights bureau chief Baljit Singh, Dato' Keramat BN coordinator Tan Yeow Joo , environment bureau chief Tan Chai Liang and political training bureau chief Rowena Yam.

Massive anti-Lynas protest

TNONEhe plant situation in Gebeng, Kuantan, has been the object of massive opposition from local residents, NGOs and Pakatan Rakyat leaders, with PKR Kuantan MP Fauziah Salleh leading the pack.

Anti-Lynas supporters held a nation-wide protest last month, with the Penang leg disrupted by supporters of the Australian-based plant, resulting in two journalists being hurt.

Recently, Prime Minister Najib Razak said the factory would be shut down if scientific evidence proves that the plant is harmful to people's health and the environment.

Lim, who is BN coordinator for Bukit Tengah, said the party welcomed the setting up of a Parliamentary Select Committee to address the project.

He added that the party would like to invite the PSC to visit Penang to listen to the local folks here.

"We strongly believe that rare earth issue is not a local issue but a national issue," Lim said.

He was referring to a nine-member panel - four from BN, three from Pakatan and one independent - headed by Higher Education Minister Khaled Nordin, recently approved by the Dewan Rakyat.

However, opposition MPs had boycotted the PSC, declaring it to be powerless in stopping the rare earths refinery from operating, even if it is found to be unsafe.

Harmful even in small doses

Meanwhile, in terms of medical problems, Lim pointed out that a human health fact sheet from the Argonne National University Laboratory, Chicago, US, in August 2005 stated that Thorium is harmful to the human body ingested even in small quantities.

He added that the US National Academy of Science Biological Effects NONEof Ionizing Radiation VII report has concluded that "no dose of radiation is safe, however small".

"We support the Malaysian Medical Association for urging the government to stop Lynas due to the potential harmful effects from Thorium-232," he told reporters.

From the economic perspective, Gerakan views that no gain generated from the Lynas business can outweigh the risks of possible radioactive exposure from this extremely toxic waste product.

Lim said the waste produced will harm citizens directly and also contaminate the daily food supply chain.

This problem is heightened by the fact that the country still does not have a proper plan to deal with the disposal of the waste products, he added.

"As for industrial investment policy, it is time for the authorities to take proactive action to formulate investment and industrial policies that will protect the environment and health of Malaysians," he stressed.

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