

Himpunan Hijau rally at Lynas' doorstep
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Protesters against the Lynas rare earth refinery staged a noisy New Year Eve's protest some 50m away from the gates of the facility this evening.

The protest was the highlight of a 300 car convoy from Kuala Lumpur to Gebeng, Pahang in a bid to pressure the federal government to bar the refinery from operating.

Initially, the group, estimated at 1,000 people, were suppose to converge in nearby Balok for a ceramah. However, an ad hoc decision was made to rally at Lynas' doorstep instead.

When the convoy reached the refinery at about 8.30pm, they were met by 40 police personnel who formed a wall some 100m from the gates of the facility.

A heated exchange took place between Kuantan district deputy police chief Aziz Ahmad and protest leader Wong Tack under the rain.

"Your voice is already heard, there is no point going any nearer," Aziz was heard telling Wong.

"We are not challenging anyone, we are not challenging our own Malaysian people or the police, we want to challenge Lynas," replied Wong.

About 15 minutes of arguments later, the police relented and set up a new line some 50m from the refinery's gates, allowing the protesters to gain some ground.

Following this, Wong thanked the police and ordered protesters to remain calm, not to damage public property and treat the police with respect.

Carnival-like atmosphere

Some 50 Light Strike Force officers later arrived as backup as more protesters flowed in to the factory's entrance as vehicles lined both sides of the road.

The crowd then began to sing songs as they awaited for the clock to strike midnight, led by their emcee operating from a four-wheel-drive vehicle.

Among the songs they sang was an anti-Lynas song to the tune of famous Korean pop music Oppa Gangnam style.

They were also armed with a myriad of banners on bamboo sticks, among of which read: "The choice is in your hand, stop Lynas" and "No Lynas on Malaysian soil".

Local resident Mohamad Razali Selamat, 60 (right), accompanied by his wife, two children and daughter in-law, said he joined the rally in the hope that his family can have a new beginning next year without the Lynas plant.

"I want my family to know about the dangers of Lynas.

"We want a better year ahead where I do not need to worry about the safety and health of my family and grandchildren," he said.

Another participant, L Ramasamy, 56, said he hoped by turning up tonight he could contribute to one more voice against Lynas.

"I followed the convoy from Mentakab today so that I can help say 'No' to the Lynas plant so our future generation can have a better environment," he said.

Pak Samad: Tell your grandchildren of this day

Addressing the crowd, Wong Tack urged people to continue the struggle against Lynas into next year.

"We must continue to work hard, we are talking about a revolution," he said.

However, the star of the night was national laureate A Samad Said who took to the stage ten minutes before midnight.

The crowd, armed with umbrella in one hand and a lit candle in another, fell silent as the 80-year-old poet spoke.

"After this night, if our grandchildren were to ask us about this, we can tell them, on the night of Dec 31, 2012, we were at this place that threatened the future.

"That your grandfather and fellow comrades was prepared to oppose this danger," he said," before reciting a poem for the protest entitled "Tanah yang terdera" (Tormented land) into midnight.

After a shout of "Happy New Year", the crowd dispersed peacefully.

The convoy had arrived in Kuantan at around 6.00pm and converged at Medan Warisan for reorganisation before hitting the streets of Kuantan town.

Police which had been waiting for the convoy there had sought to convince them to take an alternative route to Gebeng, saying that they would cause a traffic jam if they entered town.

However, the convoy, led by some 20 Unit Amal volunteers on motorcycles made a noisy entrance into town, honking their vehicles as curious motorists looked on in the drizzle.

They later made a brief stopover at Himpunan Hijau's blockade command centre in Balok for dinner before making their way to the refinery.

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