

Liew's new book reveals Dr M wanted to sack Yeo Bee Yin

Commission

Malaysiakini

21 April 2021

In early January last year, Maszlee Malik resigned as the education minister. It was essentially a sacking as then prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad asked him to leave.

It has now come to light that Maszlee was not the first minister Mahathir had wanted to sack, according to a new book by former deputy defence minister Liew Chin Tong.

The book is a biography about DAP's Lim Kit Siang but also give a glimpse into the inner workings of the short-lived Pakatan Harapan government.

On Aug 15, 2019, the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB), an agency under then energy, science, technology, environment and climate change minister Yeo Bee Yin (above), announced new and significant conditions for Lynas' operating licence.

Among others, the conditions required Lynas to shift its cracking and leaching facility back to Australia within four years.

It was the same process that had led to a build-up of radioactive waste at Lynas' rare earth processing plant in Gebeng, Kuantan.

The AELB also instructed Lynas to terminate its ambitions to commercialise the waste, which the firm argued is low in radiation, into fertiliser dubbed "Condisoil".

Lynas also had to build a permanent deposit facility (PDF) to store the waste that had already been produced since 2012 and will continue to produce until 2023, when the cracking and leaching process is finally moved to Australia.

All this happened on a Thursday. By the following Wednesday when the cabinet meeting convened, Mahathir wanted to sack Yeo.

"At the Wednesday cabinet meeting on Aug 21, 2019, Mahathir said that he wanted to make a minor change to the cabinet portfolios.

"The news leaked and we were anxious," Liew said in the book titled *Lim Kit Siang: Patriot. Leader. Fighter.*

Liew said he later found out from then finance minister Lim Guan Eng, who was also the DAP secretary-general, about what had transpired.

"I left the building (prime minister's office) as the leaders went into the prime minister's room, only to find out from Guan Eng when we met with Kit Siang later that Mahathir wanted to remove Yeo over her defiance on Lynas and other environmental issues.

"The leaders later managed to dissuade Mahathir from executing his plan. Bee Yin stayed on," Liew wrote.

Yeo's office has yet to respond to a request for comment.

High expectations

Liew did not elaborate on the specifics of what had upset Mahathir.

More than two months after the episode, Mahathir met with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison at the 35th Asean Summit in Bangkok.

Following the meeting, Mahathir said Morrison spent a good amount of time asking that the conditions imposed on Lynas be dropped.

The conditions were ultimately retained but they still fell short of a full closure of Lynas' facility in Kuantan.

Liew acknowledged that as the DAP had campaigned against the project since 2012, there was a hardcore base that had expected a swift closure of the plant.

Regardless of whether Lynas was closed or not, its radioactive waste accumulated since 2012 at Gebeng, Kuantan, would still have to be dealt with.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/571506>