

Lynas plant is not Chernobyl, says prime minister

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has dismissed criticism against Lynas' operations in Malaysia, saying that the rare earth processing plant "is not Chernobyl".

Experts, he said, had inspected the Lynas Malaysia Sdn Bhd (Lynas Malaysia) plant in Gebeng, Kuantan, and established that it posed no danger.

"We (the public) are insisting that it is dangerous. So it is difficult for the government to decide.

"But reports say it's not dangerous. It's not Chernobyl. This isn't going to be dangerous," he said after the World Statistics Congress 2019 opening ceremony here yesterday.

Present were Economic Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali and Bank Negara Malaysia Governor Datuk Nor Shamsiah Mohd Yunus.

Dr Mahathir said the "700 highly-qualified people" working at the plant were not afraid, yet some "neighbours" were the ones complaining.

The government, he said, had a choice to make and noted that the matter had been discussed by the cabinet.

"We either get rid of this industry and lose credibility in terms of dealing with foreign direct investments or we go ahead and take care of what is considered to be a problem.

"We can take care of that problem. There is no problem."

He said the people would always have something to disagree about, adding that the government could not always take the popular view.

"If we continue with the popular view, there's nothing we can do, because every time we propose something, there will be some people who are against it.

"Remember the Penang bridge? When we wanted to build it, there was so much opposition to it. Then they want to build a second bridge and now they want to build a tunnel."

Dr Mahathir said the government was prepared to disperse

waste from the plant.

"We cannot export it because no one wants to accept it. We cannot throw it into the sea because fish will die, if it is true.

"We can disperse some of the waste in places so that the concentration is not too high."

On Thursday, Australian rare earth company Lynas Corp's operating permit was renewed for another six months, with three conditions.

Lynas has been embroiled in controversy for several years, with environmentalists and Pakatan Harapan politicians protesting against the plant and calling for its closure.

Critics were concerned about

the potential adverse health effects that the radioactive waste would have on communities and the environment.

Lynas' permit renewal became a hot topic given that it is the world's only major producer of rare earth outside China.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was committed towards achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations General Assembly.

He said the government was mobilising efforts with other countries to end all forms of poverty, to fight inequalities and to tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one was left behind.