

Dr M: Govt will go with expert view

We cannot always give in to popular view, says prime minister

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KUALA LUMPUR: Despite protests against the government's decision to allow Lynas Corp's rare earth operations to continue in the country, the Prime Minister defended it by saying that the government will go with the expert view.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the government had sent scientists to examine the operations in Gebeng, Pahang, and found there was no danger but some people insisted that it was dangerous.

"That is very difficult for the government to decide because popular view is one thing, experts' view is another.

"Do you go by popular view or experts' view? If you go by popular view, there is nothing we can do because every time we propose to do something, there will be people who will be against it," he said, adding that this was akin to the protest against the government when it initially wanted to build the Penang bridge.

Dr Mahathir said that if the experts had said the material is dangerous, the government

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would stop Lynas.

However, the report said it was not dangerous and the government was prepared to disperse the material.

"We cannot export it because no one wants to accept it," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there were 700 people working in the company and they were not afraid nor did they complain.

"Either we get rid of the industry and lose credibility in terms of foreign direct investment, or we can take care of the problem. There is no problem. Actually, the Cabinet has discussed this. The decision is that no one wants to take it if we want to

export it. At the same time we can disperse it so that the concentration is not that big," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government could not always pander to popular view.

In Kuantan, anti-Lynas groups say they are considering initiating a judicial review of the decision to extend Lynas' operating licence.

The legal basis for such a move would be Lynas' letter of undertaking to remove its residues if necessary, said Save Malaysia, Stop Lynas (SMSL) chairman Tan Bun Teet.

He said there was also the issue of groundwater contamination which was brought up in the executive review committee's report that could be used to challenge the government's decision.

"We are still deliberating on it. The lawyers will look into it and advise us on how to proceed," Tan said after attending a rally at Taman Gelora yesterday.

Lynas, however, had previously explained the commitment was only if the options to research the safe use of the water leach purification (WLP) residue or construct a permanent disposal facility to store the WLP failed.

The rare earth materials produc-

er had also clarified that the letter signed in 2012 was only related to the residue being generated during its two-year temporary operating licence period.

The rally organised by SMSL saw hundreds of protesters showing up from 7am to express their displeasure with the government's decision to grant a six-month licence extension to Lynas.

It featured a show where a cardboard cut-out of a bus with the words "Pakatan Mungkir Janji" and "Bas U-tum Pakatan" on it being carried around in repeated U-turns.

Cardboard faces of Pakatan Harapan leaders Dr Mahathir, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Lim Kit Siang and Mohamad Sabu were put on board the "bus".

Participants also took aim at the silent MPs and assemblymen by chanting the Hakka term *Jon loi lo* which means "come back".

Tan said when the government made a U-turn, many of the elected representatives who previously opposed Lynas had kept quiet, which was why they hollered at them to come back.

The rally ended with several participants tearing up Promise 39 of the Pakatan manifesto, which stated

Pakatan's commitment to protect the welfare of the people and environmental sustainability, as well as not to be dictated by large corporations and their crony capitalists.

Kuantan district police chief Asst Comm Mohamad Noor Yusof Ali said he was informed that the rally had not received consent from the owner of Taman Gelora.

The matter was confirmed by Kuantan Municipal Council (MPK) president Datuk Hamdan Hussin on Saturday.

"This rally did not meet provisions under the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012. I wonder why they still continued with the rally when all the necessary requirements had been clearly stated.

"We will file a police report for appropriate action to be taken," he told reporters yesterday.

ACP Mohamad Noor said the need for approval of the venue owner was explained at an hour-long meeting with five SMSL representatives, including Tan, on Aug 7 at the Kuantan district police headquarters.