

GOVT TO BAN EXPORT OF RARE EARTHS ORE

Focus to be on processing as industry expected to contribute RM9.5b to GDP, says PM

MOHAMED BASYIR AND
QISTINA SALLEHUDDIN
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

THE government will ban the export of rare earth elements ore, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

During the presentation of the midterm review of the 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP) in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday, he said this would avoid exploitation of resources, and guarantee maximum returns for the country.

"This will promote processing (the ore) in the country to generate additional revenue."

Anwar said the government would focus on accelerating the development of new growth sources based on non-radioactive rare earths.

He said the rare earths industry was expected to contribute RM9.5 billion to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2025 and create 7,000 jobs.

He also said the government would draft a National Minerals Policy to guide development of the minerals industry that was sustainable and responsible.

Anwar said the policy would set out the rules for mining in permanent forest reserves, as well as environmentally sensitive and protected areas.

"Detailed mapping of rare earths resources and a comprehensive business model that integrates upstream, midstream and downstream industries will be developed to sustain the rare earths value chain in the country.

"Therefore, the government will develop a policy of banning the export of raw rare earths materials to avoid exploitation and loss of resources, thereby guaranteeing maximum returns for the country," he added.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) said it would call in Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri



An alleged illegal rare earth elements mining site in Bukit Enggang, Kedah. The MACC will summon Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor within two weeks over alleged theft of rare earths in the state. FILE PIC

Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor within two weeks over the alleged theft of rare earths in the state.

MACC chief commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki said the investigation into the alleged theft of rare earths was almost completed.

"Everyone is asking when we will charge (Sanusi) but my investigating officer has to cover everything, including interviewing the witnesses and others.

"Among the things that we have to look into is the people in power who approved the mining.

"If I'm not mistaken, it's not the state's power, it is a federal power.

"In terms of state and federal we need to look into how the state government proposed it to the federal government for approval and the policies of the federal government. We need to look into all these matters," he said.

Azam said MACC was also looking into the role of China national So Loi Fatt, who was allegedly a co-conspirator in the theft of rare earths.

"We have to take that into account in our investigation as to why they (China nationals) came to Malaysia and where they came from. Are they really here in Malaysia for exploring or did they come here for illegal mining?"

"We also have to check on what

the authorities were doing. Were they sleeping?" he said.

Azam added that MACC also had to be fair to Sanusi and check all allegations, including video footage of him purportedly coming out from the scene of the crime.

"We need to check that. If it's true, then that's fine (and he is truly implicated). What if it's not true (because that would mean he was not involved)?"

"That is the duty of the investigators, to look into all these matters," he said.

Azam said MACC had used its discretion not to question Sanusi during the state election campaign period as the commission did not want to disrupt the democratic process. Pas politician Sanusi is also Perikatan Nasional election director.

In July, MACC started investigating Sanusi for allegedly misusing his power to illegally approve rare earths mining that resulted in losses to the state government.

Investigations are being conducted under Sections 17(A) and 23 of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009, and under Section 7 of the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988.

As of press time, Sanusi and his aides could not be reached for comment.