

PAS wants referendum on Lynas plant
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By Lisa J. Ariffin

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 29 — PAS information chief Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man today called for a public referendum on the controversial RM700 million Lynas rare earth refinery in Kuantan.

“Since this issue has a big impact on people of Kuantan and its surrounding areas, the government and Lynas cannot take objections from the people lightly because any decision whether to continue or cancel the project has a direct impact on people,” he said in a press statement.

“A public referendum could be the main platform for the government to continue or cancel the project. Furthermore, in this way decisions may seem fairer to all parties. If the public referendum shows that a majority agrees with the project, Lynas and government companies will not have problems again,” Tuan Ibrahim (picture) added.

He said a public referendum was one of the mechanisms within the framework of a democratic system for people to make decisions that have an impact on their lives.

“Without it, the government would be faced with continuing pressure if something bad occurs when a project is approved. If Lynas and the government adopt a deaf ear to the protests of the people, it is not impossible those who disapprove will take a court injunction,” he said.

“Groups in support (of the plant) have been using the mainstream media, direct dialogue with residents and NGOs as well as various promotions to convince people it is a safe project and need not be feared,” he said.

“Those fighting consist of a number of environmental experts, public health experts, environmentalists, and some NGOs such as Badar and ‘Save Malaysia! Stop Lynas!’ and leaders of the opposition parties PKR, the DAP and PAS,” he added.

The PAS leader said those opposing regard the Lynas project as a “time bomb” for the population around the site of the plant in Gebeng.

A review of the project led by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) put forward 11 recommendations for Lynas to meet before beginning operations which have been adopted by Putrajaya.

But Lynas has denied reports that the new conditions set by the government will delay the plant by up to two years, insisting that it remains on track to begin operations and complete phase one of the plant by the end of 2011.

The Australian mining giant has said that its plant — which will extract rare earth metals crucial for high-technology products like smartphones, hybrid cars and wind turbines — will create a RM4 billion multiplier effect annually and 350 jobs for skilled workers.

Although reports say the plant may earn RM8 billion for Lynas, critics have questioned the real economic benefit of the project, pointing to the 12-year tax break Lynas will enjoy due to its pioneer status.

“Hopefully this solution (a public referendum) will lead to good decisions from both parties. It must be remembered that the people have the biggest right to ensure their voices are heard by their leaders,” Tuan Ibrahim said.

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