

Groups demand Lynas provide better public consultation
The Malaysian Insider
January 06, 2012
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 6 — Anti-Lynas groups today demanded that Lynas Corp improve on its public consultation of its rare earth plant plans, claiming there were too many restrictions and difficulties in gaining access to the company's pre-operating licence.

In a joint statement, Save Malaysia Stop Lynas (SMSL) and Stop Lynas Coalition (SLC) said that although the documents were made available for public viewing, they were written in "highly technical English" and that public consultations were not held in rural areas like Gebang and Balok.

The AELB temporary office at the Lynas (M) Sdn Bhd project site in Gebeng is one of the places where documents related to the company's pre-operating licence can be viewed. — file pic

"If Lynas is sincere in consulting the public on the matter concerning the management of the disposal of its radioactive waste, the documents should have been presented in Bahasa Malaysia and Chinese. They should also be made readily available to the public be it in hard and soft copies," said the statement.

The Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry (MOSTI) recently announced that Lynas had applied for a temporary operational licence for its controversial refinery in Pahang, with director-general Datuk Madinah Mohamad saying the government will display the Australian mining giant's local company application documents for public feedback before reaching its decision.

Save Malaysia Stop Lynas (SMSL) chairman Tan Bun Teet, however, recently said it was impossible for the public to view the pre-operating licence in Kuantan as it turned out to be a limited closed-door session.

He told The Malaysian Insider earlier this week that only one person was allowed to view the 300-400-page-long document for a maximum of one hour, and that there were other hard or soft copies available for people to "scrutinise."

"MOSTI should extend the review duration to another two weeks at least since we are dealing with the world's largest rare earth plant here. It is crucial for more people to review such an important application which will have an impact on their life and future," added the statement today.

The groups said they would file a judicial review to compel Lynas to provide full and easy public access to the pre-operating licence documents if nothing was done by the rare earth company soon.

The documents will be on display daily from January 3-17 at the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) headquarters in Dengkil, Selangor.

They can also be viewed at the Pahang State Secretariat in Kuantan and at the AELB temporary office at the Lynas (M) Sdn Bhd project site in Gebeng as well as at the AELB

east coast branch office in Kemaman, Terengganu.

Lynas Corp has already resorted to placing full-page advertisements in mainstream newspapers to defend itself from criticisms over its almost completed rare earth refinery.

Through the advertisements, the Australian mining firm addressed several frequent allegations against its operations, including restating its promise that it complies with all Australian, international and Malaysian standards.

The controversial RM1.5 billion plant being built in the prime minister's home state of Pahang is now said to be more than 85 per cent complete and is expected to power up by early next year.

The rare earth refinery, touted to be the biggest in the world, aims to break China's near-complete stranglehold of the minerals required to manufacture high-technology products like hybrid cars, smartphones to bombs.

But public protests by local residents and environmental groups over the possible radioactive hazards posed by the plant this year put the brakes on Lynas' plans.

The outcry prompted a review by a nine-man panel of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), who instructed the Sydney-based company to provide a better long-term waste management plan.

Putrajaya, which imposed tighter environmental safety standards on the proposed plant in June following the high-profile protests, has yet to issue a pre-operating licence for the plant.

The Australian government's Department of Mines and Petroleum issued a statement on December 16 stating that Lynas Corp's operations were safe and that it abided by international safety conventions.

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