

Bar Council wants government to pull Lynas licence
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By Melissa Chi

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 7 — The Bar Council demanded today Putrajaya revoke or at least suspend a temporary operating licence (TOL) to Lynas Corp, saying the move was “hasty” and reckless.

Its president Lim Chee Wee urged the federal government to take steps for a meaningful consultation with those likely to be most affected by the rare earth factory in Pahang, especially since a detailed environmental impact assessment (EIA) has yet to be released on the project’s radioactivity and potential hazard risks.

The lawyer was responding to news reports that radiation regulator, the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB), had approved the TOL on January 30 despite receiving feedback amounting to 1,123 instances over the course of just four days objecting to the Lynas Advanced Materials Plant (LAMP) starting up in coastal Gebeng.

“The only natural conclusion is that the whole public consultation process is a sham and charade, in contravention of one of the recommendations of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)’s report dated June 30, 2011, which the government had pledged to comply with; namely, to inform interested and affected parties of the regulatory requirements, and to involve them,” he said in a statement today.

Lim also questioned why the federal government had not complied with obtaining a detailed EIA first before awarding the TOL, as per procedure.

“Hasty issuance of Temporary Operating Licence to Lynas without proper consideration of public feedback smacks of recklessness,” he said.

The AELB granted a TOL to Lynas for its RM2.5 billion rare earth plant in Gebeng on January 30, nearly a year after sustained public protests.

Lim, in a statement today, called the public consultation process “a sham and charade”. — file pic

AELB’s decision will finally allow Lynas to fire up its controversial refinery, which has raised fears of radiation pollution among residents of the east coast state and environmentalists.

A civil society movement called the Stop Lynas Coalition had strongly criticised the decision, highlighting the health and safety questions left unanswered by the Australian miner’s unresolved permanent disposal facility for radioactive waste.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai had also thrown his support last Sunday for the government to disclose the details of the license.

Lynas Corp, among the world’s biggest producers of rare earth metals, which are crucial to the manufacture of high-technology products ranging from energy-saving light bulbs to smartphones, has been trying to break China’s stranglehold on the global supply chain for the past few years.

Its factory in Gebeng is touted as the world's biggest.

Plans to start operations in September last year were scuppered when Putrajaya bowed to public pressure and put the project on ice pending a review by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), a United Nations watchdog.

Lynas Corp said last week it expects the start of operations to be delayed to the second quarter from the first quarter of this year.

The plant will be monitored for the next two years during which Lynas must meet safety requirements before AELB issues a full licence to ramp up operations.

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