

After Lynas flap, PKR questions Liow's 1 Care promise
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 10 — PKR today urged Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai to reveal 1 Care's current status, expressing doubt over the "value" of the health minister's recent promise that the healthcare scheme would not be introduced if found unsuitable.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail questioned whether the MCA deputy president's pledge had any meaning after his assurances over radioactive waste from the controversial Lynas rare earths plant appeared to be at odds with those of his Cabinet colleagues.

"What worries Keadilan is the value of Liow's guarantees in view of the recent Lynas flip-flop.

"Liow must understand the rakyat's concern due to the importance of healthcare and the less-than-sterling record of Barisan Nasional in pushing transparent and credible reforms," Dr Wan Azizah (picture) said in a statement.

Government regulators had approved storage of the waste at the RM2.3 billion facility in Gebeng, Pahang for the first 20 years before, said the Bentong MP, the company must send the radioactive waste back to Australia.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak then appeared to contradict him by saying the waste will be stored in at a location far away from any settlement.

But Trade Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed then issued a statement this week saying the Sydney-based firm had promised to send its residue abroad if it cannot find a suitable waste disposal site in Malaysia.

"We hope that Liow can clearly explain at what stage the consultation with the stakeholders and public is taking place," Dr Wan Azizah said.

Last week, Liow sought to assure the public that the proposed 1 Care scheme would not be introduced until a suitable model is found.

"If it found not suitable, it will not be implemented. That is why we have formed technical working groups to study and engage various stakeholders to ascertain the suitability and viability of such a model, and this is very much at the preliminary stage," the health minister was quoted as saying by Bernama Online.

Liow had also dismissed claims that the 1 Care scheme includes a mandatory 10 per cent tax on all wage earners' monthly salaries, saying the figure was "not the amount to be deducted from individual's income", but an estimation of the monthly amount needed by an average household to cater to its requirements.

"The government must truly take the rakyat's input in the consultation process, and not

make it merely a public relations exercise obsessed with 'low-hanging fruits' and 'quick gains' that was the case with the PM's New Economic Model (NEM)," Dr Wan Azizah said.

The PKR leader, who had served as a government doctor for 14 years before turning to politics, reminded the government that Malaysia's healthcare expenditure was a mere 2.2 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) although the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends a minimum 5 per cent.

She added that WHO has also estimated that between 20 and 40 per cent of government expenditure in healthcare was usually wasted on inefficiencies, including corruption.

"Thus an increase in government expenditure for health combined with a more transparent and efficient system will greatly improve the health system in Malaysia without the need to resort to 1 Care," she suggested.

Dr Wan Azizah also repeated an earlier proposal to form an independent health service commission that would be tasked to ensure healthcare would remain sustainable and affordable to all.

"As mentioned in our earlier statement as well, our philosophy that healthcare is a right does not mean that we are against the private health sector, which has played a crucial role in contributing to the nation's well-being today.

"But we want the inequalities that exist today to be addressed to ensure that quality healthcare remains accessible for all," she said.

1 Care has come under fire from healthcare practitioners and the public, who claim that individuals and businesses will be forced to hand over 10 per cent of their earnings each month to the government-run insurance fund.

The scheme is expected to replace the current two-tier healthcare system with one that integrates both private and government hospitals in the hope of ensuring more equitable healthcare for Malaysians of all classes.

Under the present system, patients can choose to seek treatment at either private clinics or hospitals and pay out of their own pockets or opt for government clinics or hospitals instead, where they will pay a nominal fee for basic, federally subsidised healthcare.

The ministry has assured critics that the 1 Care scheme will not burden the public with undue costs, saying that talks on the financial arrangements that will be made available and their impact on the government and taxpayers were ongoing.

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