

Liow: Up to Lynas to dispose of toxic waste
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 24 — Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said today it is up to Lynas Corp to dispose of hazardous residues from its controversial rare earth plant in Gebeng, which is expected to fire up operations by the second quarter of this year.

“Lynas has to solve the problem. The government has put in the conditions and come up with solutions for Lynas and it is up to Lynas to ensure the safety of the people in this country,” he told a press conference here.

Liow (picture) was responding to reports yesterday which had Kuantan MP Fuziah Salleh accusing the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) of inserting flawed conditions for the Lynas plant’s disposal of radioactive waste in order to appease the public.

Fuziah had quoted the example of the UN’s Basel Convention concerning the movement of hazardous material and waste across national boundaries.

However, Liow pointed out that the convention does not cover radioactive waste.

“If it’s normal waste residue then you cannot transfer it out of country, but if it’s radioactive waste, it is not controlled under the Basel Convention,” he explained.

“But as long as Lynas can’t fulfil conditions (put forward by the government), they can’t get licence (to operate).”

The AELB had listed five conditions, some of which concern the disposal of radioactive waste, which Lynas must adhere to.

This includes returning the waste to its country of origin — Australia — if the need arises.

However, the Australian government had said that it will not allow the “importation and storage of other countries’ radioactive waste”, to which Liow reiterated that it was “up to Lynas to solve the problem”.

“We must understand that whatever residue... Lynas needs to undertake to send back to the original source,” he said.

“The safety of rakyat comes first. The temporary operating licence (TOL) comes with conditions so as long as you don’t fulfil these conditions, there is no licence.”

Lingering concerns over how the waste will be managed have become a pressing matter as the controversial project in Gebeng has been granted a “conditional” TOL by the AELB and the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry earlier this month.

Yesterday, the AELB made an apparent insistence that it has done its best to ensure the project would not expose residents to harmful levels of radiation.

The regulator had reasoned that since the RM2.5 billion project was mooted in 2008, the agency had complied with all necessary safety standards as required by law and would continue to do so.

Kuantan residents, along with numerous anti-Lynas groups under an umbrella coalition called Himpunan Hijau 2.0, will stage nationwide rallies this Sunday to protest against the Lynas plant.

Despite repeated assurances from AELB and the Australian mining firm, the group, backed by opposition party leaders, has continued to insist that the plant would be a health, safety and environmental hazard and wants the project axed immediately.

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