

Big turnout expected at largest anti-Lynas rally yet
The Malaysian Insider
February 26 , 2012
By Yow Hong Chieh

KUANTAN, Feb 26 — Thousands are expected to descend on Padang MPK 4 here later this morning in yet another opposition-backed public rally — this time to protest against the government-approved Lynas Corp rare earth plant.

The huge turnout is expected after police gave the green light to Himpunan Hijau 2.0 to hold its mammoth rally at Padang MPK 4 from 9.30am onwards.

The rally — the first major demonstration since the Public Assembly Bill was made into law — aims to pressure government into aborting Lynas's controversial plant in Gebeng some 25km from here, which is due to fire up later in the year.

Simultaneous rallies will also be held in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Perak and Sabah.

Today's protests come hot on the heels of the Atomic Energy Licensing Board's (AELB) decision on January 20 to grant the Australian mining giant a temporary operating licence (TOL), which will let it embark on a trial run.

The gathering, if successful, would also symbolise the growth of Malaysia's civil society movement in the years following the tumultuous 2008 federal elections, when the Barisan Nasional (BN) administration lost its coveted two-thirds parliamentary majority.

Similar events that occurred recently in other developing nations across the globe have even led to the fall of governments — an outcome that Pakatan Rakyat (PR) hopes would occur in Malaysia in the coming general election.

The three-year-old opposition pact, which has spearheaded the anti-Lynas campaign along with civil groups, is expected to use the Lynas controversy as an example of the government's alleged high-handedness in dismissing public concerns.

Critics have alleged that Lynas has not given enough assurances on how it will handle the low-level radioactive waste that will be produced at the refinery, raising fears that the plant would expose nearby residents to harmful levels of radiation.

Questions concerning the RM2.5 billion plant's design and construction were also raised after the New York Times reported that a key contractor had pulled out over safety concerns.

Controversy over the Lynas Advanced Materials Plant (LAMP) appears likely to become an issue in the coming election and will add to the already considerable pressure faced by BN.

The ruling coalition has in recent months found itself bogged down by a series of imbroglios, chief among them a scandal involving a cattle-raising company run by federal minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Jalil's family which is alleged to have misused public funds.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) has been quick to capitalise on public anger over the Lynas issue, with opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim urging supporters at Teluk Cempedak here last night to "rise up and reject any policy that cannot guarantee the people's safety". Anwar Ibrahim urging supporters at Teluk Cempedak here last night to 'rise up and reject any policy that cannot guarantee the people's safety' - Picture by Jack Ooi

"It's not all about business. People can make money, but don't sacrifice the health of the people..." he said to cheers from the partisan crowd.

"Tomorrow, we must show our strength and solidarity. Not only the people of Kuantan but all Malaysians must reject this arrogance of power and lies."

It is understood that Anwar will be joined by DAP's Lim Kit Siang, Tunku Abdul Aziz Tunku Ibrahim, Tan Seng Giaw, Tony Pua and Liew Chin Tong as well as Salahuddin Ayub from PAS.

Deeply concerned over the potential environmental impact of the plant, anti-Lynas groups have grown in force over the past year since news of the nuclear power plant crisis in Fukushima, Japan hit global headlines.

The Australian miner is looking to break China's chokehold on the supply of rare earth metals needed to manufacture high-tech products such as smartphones, energy-efficient light bulbs and hybrid cars.

Lynas expects to generate some RM8 billion annually from its operations here.

In a bid to allay public fears, Putrajaya announced on Wednesday it will form an independent monitoring unit to audit the construction of the plant to ensure compliance to standards imposed by regulators.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/big-turnout-expected-at-large-st-anti-lynas-rally-yet/>