

Thousands throng anti-Lynas rally
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By Yow Hong Chieh

KUANTAN, Feb 26 — A mass of over 8,000 anti-Lynas protesters gathered at MPK 4 here today in the biggest rally to date to protest against the Australian miner's rare earth plant.

Braving the hot sun, demonstrators of all ages and races — some from as far as Sarawak — converged on the rugby field along Jalan Besar to show opposition to the controversial plant in Gebeng, 25km from the city, which will go online later this year.

Mostly decked in light green, with some sporting dark green headbands, the protesters began trickling onto the field in small groups from early morning.

By 10am, the crowd which had gathered patiently at MPK4 swelled by the thousands.

A good number brought their children and a few could be seen having their breakfast on picnic mats, lending the rally an almost festive air.

Balloons, large placards and "Radiation not allowed" umbrellas could also be seen scattered among the sea of green-shirted protesters.

Emcee Hishammudin Rais managed to keep the crowd entertained despite a dismal sound system, leading them through chants after chants in between speeches by prominent civil society leaders and politicians.

Not one to mince words, Bersih chairman Datuk S. Ambiga urged protesters here to reject candidates who support Lynas in the next election.

"Today, Bersih stands together with Himpunan Hijau, Today yellow stands together with green..."

"Will you vote in the next election? We want 100 per cent turnout. And when you vote, you can reject candidates who support Lynas. You can reject candidates without integrity," she said to a chorus of approval.

Also present were national laureate A. Samad Said, Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim, DAP parliamentary leader Lim Kit Siang, PAS vice president Salahuddin Ayub and Johor PKR chief Datuk Chua Jui Meng, among others.

Nurul Izzah is seen here amongst the protesters. — Picture by Jack Ooi

At around 10.40am, chants of "Hidup Rakyat" and "Reformasi" erupted when opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim arrived on the scene with his wife, PKR president Datuk Seri Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, and daughter Nurul Izzah.

The PKR de facto chief proceeded to the makeshift podium — the back of a parked lorry — before launching into a short but fiery speech flaying Barisan Nasional (BN) for allegedly putting their greed above the interests of the people.

"These corrupt leaders don't understand the environment. They only respect money, money, money!" he said loud cheers.

He also urged Canberra and Australians to act more responsibly and not sacrifice the safety of Malaysians for the sake of business.

"The Australian government, the Australian people, must take heed of the concerns expressed by Malaysians. We don't want to sacrifice our future, the safety of our children just because of a few corrupt leaders," he said to more cheers and claps.

Thousand take part in the protest march against the construction of the Lynas plant in Kuantan today. – Picture by Jack Ooi

Anwar added that Pakatan Rakyat (PR) will table an emergency motion at the next Parliament sitting urging the Najib administration to cancel the plant.

The rally ended without incident just before 11.30am following his speech, after which most protesters dispersed although some continued to linger to chat and talk pictures of each other.

Today's rally — the first major demonstration since the Public Assembly Bill was made into law — aims to pressure the government into aborting Lynas's controversial plant in Gebeng, which critics claim would expose Kuantan folk to harmful levels of radiation.

Critics have also alleged that Lynas has not given enough assurances on how it would handle the low-level radioactive waste that will be produced at the refinery.

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