

BN MPs say expect little national impact in Lynas issue
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 28 — The Lynas issue may have impact on two parliamentary seats in Pahang but is unlikely to gain traction among voters out of state and affect the ruling coalition's chances in the next election, Barisan Nasional (BN) MPs and analysts said.

Pulai MP Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed said while no one wanted Lynas Corp's rare earth plant "in their backyard", it would not be a major issue leading up to the 13th general election.

He accused the opposition of trying to turn a local issue into a national issue but said they would not succeed as no rural voter outside of Balok, located near the Gebeng plant, cared about it.

"So it might impact Kuantan and Indera Mahkota (parliamentary seats) but the opposition are already incumbents there, so BN has more to gain than lose," he told The Malaysian Insider.

The BN had won the mandate to govern in 2008 but lost its customary two-thirds hold in Parliament.

Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who took over as prime minister from Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi mid-stream, has been working hard to win back support for the BN amid global economic gloom.

Despite widespread speculation, he has held off calling early elections. The BN's mandate expires in March next year.

Pasir Salak MP Datuk Tajuddin Abdul Rahman disparaged the 8,000-strong crowd which turned up at the anti-Lynas rally in Kuantan on Sunday, claiming up to 60,000 showed up when the prime minister visited his constituency.

The government would not take the risk of hurting the people and environment, he pointed out, as the BN administration was "not so stupid as to be killing themselves".

"If I'm the PM, would I allow it if I would lose power? Never mind the kampung people, even educated people don't really care about this," the Felcra chairman said, adding that the election will be about jobs and opportunities.

Pahang MCA chief Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said the opposition had "hijacked" civil society for their own political gain in the Lynas issue but stressed that the government had the people's interests at heart.

"PM clearly said the government will look into the issue. The government is acting on behalf of the public and defending the rakyat.

"As health minister, I can say the people's health is of utmost importance," the Bentong MP

said, adding that it was important to ensure the project was transparent to allow the public to scrutinise it.

Political analyst Ong Kian Ming said the Lynas issue would probably ensure the marginal parliamentary seats of Indera Mahkota and Kuantan remained with the opposition but said it was purely a local issue.

"I don't think it has national implications," he said.

The UCSI lecturer added that voters who saw the controversial plant as an issue would only be placated if it were axed but said the possibility of that happening was remote.

Najib said yesterday that the RM2.5 billion Lynas Advanced Materials Plant (LAMP) would not have been given a temporary operating licence if federal regulators were not sure of its safety.

"But if there are people who object for political reasons, there is nothing we can do about it. Opposition parties will look for issues like this as capital to garner the support of the local community. But they are not finding a solution," he said.

He had also said the government was looking for an uninhabited location to place waste material from the plant's operations even though it was safe scientifically so as to not "haunt the community psychologically".

Najib's assurance that the plant was safe prompted anti-Lynas coalition Himpunan Hijau to reiterate its threat to call for another mass rally to demand the plant be scrapped.

Thousands of demonstrators attended an opposition-backed rally in Kuantan on Sunday in what was the largest protest to date against the rare earth refinery, which is expected to fire up operations later this year.

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