

'Impossible' for safe waste disposal site in Malaysia, say Lynas opponents
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 3 — Anti-Lynas lobby Himpunan Hijau 2.0 today demanded the prime minister state where Lynas Corp's rare earth waste disposal site will be relocated to, claiming that it was "impossible" for a "safe" location anywhere in the country.

The Australian miner's RM2.3 billion rare earth refinery in Gebeng has caused a controversy over its lack of plans for waste disposal but Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday the waste disposal has to be away from the area and local communities.

File photo of anti-Lynas protestors taking part in the Himpunan Hijau rally in Kuantan on February 26, 2012. — Picture by Jack Ooi

"It is impossible. What we want to know from Datuk Seri Najib Razak is where are you going to locate the waste disposal site which will be far away from people?"

"Malaysia is a small country, unlike Australia. So where is it going to be? It's not like we have a desert here to dump the waste," Himpunan Hijau chairman Wong Tack told The Malaysian Insider.

Three days ago, Najib said the Lynas refinery was scientifically and factually safe.

But he said the directive was made after taking into consideration the psychological and emotional effects on the community.

"We are not just talking about the human population here. Don't just think about lifeforms, think about the ecosystem, and what this site can do to disrupt a natural ecosystem, a normal environmental landscape will be affected.

"Our ecosystem, forests are a treasure... as a leader, we feel he (PM) has little knowledge in the matter, making hasty decisions like that," said Wong.

Thousands of anti-Lynas protestors attended an opposition-backed mass rally organised by Himpunan Hijau last weekend in the single largest protest yet against the rare earth refinery that is expected to fire up operations later this year.

Critics of the Lynas refinery want the government to halt its construction and direct the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) to reverse a decision to grant Lynas a temporary operating licence (TOL), which will let it embark on a two-year trial run.

They allege that the Australian miner has not given enough assurances on how it will handle the low-level radioactive waste that will be produced at the refinery.

They further assert that plans for an off-site storage location for the refinery's waste material "is totally senseless" and reflected "a shallow understanding of the ecological system and blatant disrespect of the natural environment."

"Why move it to another location if the waste is safe? If it's safe, Australia should even take it back," said Wong.

He urged the government to hire independent scientists to study and verify "once and for all" whether it was safe to build the Lynas refinery.

The government has been under pressure from groups to shut down the rare earth project over safety fears. But Putrajaya has stood its ground on the project that was first earmarked for Terengganu.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai told the Sin Chew Daily yesterday that Lynas will have to send the waste back to Australia even though the Western Australian government has said it will not take back the residue from the ore mined from Mount Weld in the state.

Putrajaya has been adamant about the plant that will employ up to 400 workers. Lynas will also get a 12-year tax holiday for the facility.

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