

Malaysia to breach international laws if waste disposed overseas, say anti-Lynas groups
The Malaysian Insider
March 03, 2012
By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, March 3 – Malaysia risks breaching international laws if it ships Lynas Corp’s rare earth waste out of the country, anti-Lynas groups said today.

The Stop Lynas Coalition (SLC) and Save Malaysia Stop Lynas (SMSL) also said that Putrajaya risks causing serious environmental damage no matter where it was stored in Malaysia, and that the only option left is to stop the Australian miner from firing up its refinery here.

“Malaysia’s suggestion has essentially contravened our commitment under the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal. Malaysia is a signatory to the Convention which is legally binding.

“It is illegal under international law to transport hazardous waste like that from the Lynas plant across national boundaries,” the two groups said in a joint statement.

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 this week 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.

The government’s actions, said the two groups today indicated that it was clueless on what to do with Lynas’ “radioactive waste” despite huge public pressure for the cancellation of the Lynas refinery’s construction here.

The statement added that Putrajaya would risk enormous environmental damage should a waste disposal site even be set up anywhere in Malaysia.

“Even if the government can satisfactorily find a permanent disposal site, what about the 500 tonnes of contaminated run-off from the plant that will be drained into the Balok River and into the South China Sea everyday? What about the 100,000 cubic metre of waste gas every hour that will be polluting our air?” said the Lynas opponents.

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.

Three days ago, the prime minister 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.

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."

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

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/malaysia-to-breach-international-laws-if-waste-disposed-overseas-say-anti-lynas-groups/>