

AELB: Australia option open as Lynas waste won't be radioactive
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By Yow Hong Chieh

DENGKIL, March 1 — Australia's refusal to accept radioactive waste should not affect Lynas Corp's efforts to return residue from its rare earth plant to the source, the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) said today.

AELB director-general Raja Abdul Aziz Raja Adnan said this was because the waste from the Gebeng refinery would not be radioactive once it was treated by Lynas.

The Australian miner has assured Malaysia that it will be able to reduce the concentration of radioactivity in the waste products so that the residue could be transformed into commercially viable aggregates, he noted.

"Western Australia said it will not accept radioactive waste from third countries. They never said (they will not accept) Lynas residue...", he told reporters at AELB headquarters here.

"And therefore, if there are commercial items that can be returned to Australia, it is for the Australian government to decide whether it will accept them."

Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said yesterday Lynas must find a way to ship its waste back to Australia, failing which no temporary operating licence (TOL) will be issued for its controversial rare earth plant in Gebeng, Kuantan.

AELB approved Lynas's TOL in January, the issuance of which will be subject to several conditions.

The Australian firm is planning to ship rare earth ores from its mine in Mount Weld, Western Australia to its Kuantan plant, where they will be processed into highly sought after rare earth metals.

"We have listened to the views of the people who propose (that the waste be sent back to Australia). Now, it is up to Lynas to deal with it..."

"Whether Australia chooses to accept the waste or not, Lynas must deal with this issue itself," Sin Chew Daily quoted Liow as saying after the weekly Cabinet meeting.

Raja Abdul Aziz (picture) today also downplayed cracks in a network of pipes at the plant, which was disclosed by PKR last month.

He said the high-density, underground plastic pipes were part of the fire safety system and had nothing to do with the pipes which will be used in the refining process.

AELB has already taken steps to address the problem and would continue to liaise with the Fire Department on the matter to ensure the plant's fire safety system was functional, he added.

Last Sunday, thousands of anti-Lynas demonstrators attended an opposition-backed rally in Kuantan in what was the single largest protest yet against the rare earth refinery, which is expected to fire up operations later this year.

The protest came on the heels of AELB's decision on January 20 to grant Lynas a TOL, which will let it embark on a two-year trial run.

Critics have alleged 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.

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