

Lynas: Gebeng plant ready in 3 weeks, TOL only obstacle
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KUANTAN, April 3 — Lynas Corporation is ready to fire up its refinery here in three weeks' time but is currently being held back by its temporary occupational licence (TOL) application, the firm's Malaysian chapter managing director Datuk Mashal Ahmad said today.

The Star Online reported Mashal (picture) as saying during a press conference here that the first phase of the controversial rare earths plant is now 97 per cent complete.

But its application for the TOL from the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB), although approved, has yet to be issued, he said.

"The licence has been approved but we have yet to receive it. Lynas has already fulfilled all the conditions stipulated for the licence to be issued and we are just waiting.

"We hope it can be issued very soon because we need to start operations," the English daily quoted Mashal as telling reporters at the plant in Gebeng today.

He added that without the license, the rare earth minerals could not be brought into Malaysia for processing.

As it is, Mashal was reported to have said, it takes about one month to import the materials from Australia.

As such, he expressed hope that the recently formed parliamentary select committee (PSC) on Lynas would complete its investigations quickly.

"We are looking forward to be called up to give our explanations. The faster, the better," he was quoted as saying.

The Najib administration had agreed to form the three-month PSC following widespread criticism of the Australian miner's plant in the Gebeng Industrial Estate, which concerned residents claim would turn into a hotbed for radioactive waste in the future.

But although the PSC was mooted and approved quickly in the August House earlier last month, detractors of Lynas from the opposition bench in Parliament decided to boycott the panel, claiming its formation was merely a public relations exercise.

This, they argued, was because Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had said in the media that the PSC would not decide the fate of the Lynas plant but would merely engage the views of all relevant stakeholders.

In an apparent attempt to appease Kuantan voters, Najib recently pledged that the government would not hesitate to pull the plug on the RM2.5 billion project if it was found in violation of local safety standards on radioactive waste disposal.

Lynas' TOL approval has five conditions attached to it, including a pledge by the miner to identify a suitable permanent disposal facility for waste generated.

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