

PM: Lynas plant safety beyond doubt
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 22 — “Scientific facts” have proven that the Lynas Corp rare earth refinery in Gebeng will be safe, the prime minister said today.

Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the public must make an informed decision regarding the safety of the rare earth refinery and not be swayed by “imaginary fears.”

“Based on scientific facts, there is nothing that can raise doubts as to the safety of the public or the environment,” Najib told reporters after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting here.

PM Najib pointed out that even PAS lawmaker Dr Che Rosli had broken ranks with his Pakatan Rakyat colleagues and agreed that the Lynas plant did not pose a threat to the general public.

But the Hulu Langat MP has denied this, and repeatedly stated he never said the Lynas plant was safe.

The nuclear scientist said earlier this week that although he agreed the radiation levels at the refinery would be low, this did not mean Lynas’s operations would not threaten the health of the Gebeng folk.

Che Rosli had also said the government should not give Lynas a temporary operating licence (TOL) yet.

The Australian miner has cleared probably its final major hurdle to getting its TOL after a parliamentary select committee (PSC) called for the licence to be issued as “scientific facts” show that the controversial Kuantan plant is safe.

The positive feedback tabled in the PSC report came just four days after the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry (Mosti) dismissed an appeal against the facility by residents living nearby and instead imposed two conditions that Lynas said it will have no problems satisfying.

However, residents who filed the appeal to Mosti have said they will challenge the minister’s decision in court, calling the conditions “flimsy” and “not specific enough and will in no way safeguard or appease the fears of residents living in the area.”

The parliamentary committee on Lynas was approved in the Dewan Rakyat in March amid opposition furore over the alleged lack of terms of reference and suspicion that the nine-man panel would be used to “whitewash” the issue.

Pakatan Rakyat lawmakers also questioned the point of the select committee given that Najib had already said the government will not be bound by the panel’s findings.

Lynas had said last month that it was on track to start up what it says will be the world’s largest rare earth plant within weeks after Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin, chairman of the parliamentary committee, called it “the safest rare earth plant in the world.”

It also said in April that delays in obtaining the licence for its facility, which was initially approved in January, may have "very serious consequences" for the RM80 billion worth of rare earth orders already received as it is "sold out for the next 10 years."

Anti-Lynas lobby Himpunan Hijau warned Lynas Corp and the government yesterday of "wave after wave" of protests against the impending issuance of a temporary operating licence (TOL) for the Australian miner's rare earth plant, beginning with a day-long assembly this weekend.

Himpunan Hijau plans to end its 24-hour protest this weekend by marching up to Lynas's Gebeng plant on Sunday morning after a night of speeches called "rising flame of anger, turn Lynas to Ash."

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