

Guan Eng: Vote out BN to shut Lynas plant
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 8 — Lim Guan Eng told voters today that the only way to boot Lynas Corporation back to Australia and shut down its controversial rare earth refinery in Kuantan is by voting out Barisan Nasional (BN) in the coming polls.

The DAP secretary-general warned anti-Lynas lobbyists that the recent granting of a two-year temporary occupational licence (TOL) to the Australian miner was a clear sign that should BN win again in the next general election, the firm would be allowed to operate fully without any restrictions.

“That the BN government has no hesitation to issue the TOL to Lynas even before the general election showed its commitment towards Lynas and profits over the people’s health.

“The two-year TOL leaves Malaysians no choice but to choose health and public safety over profits and two nuclear reactors by replacing the BN with a PR (Pakatan Rakyat) government,” Lim (picture) said in a statement.

He pointed to unsettled fears over where Lynas would ship its waste materials generated from the Lynas Advanced Materials Plant (LAMP) in Gebeng, Kuantan, despite the firm’s verbal commitment that it would be transported outside the country.

He said that despite the commitment, Lynas has since refused to state where or which country the residues, known as water leach purification (WLP) residue, would be sent to.

“Further, such removal of toxic or radioactive residue contravenes international covenants of its removal from one country to another, such as the Basel Convention, unless it is returned to its source.

“Returning to its source is impossible when Australia has declared that it would not accept back the rare earth residue mined from Western Australia.

“Where then would Lynas find a country willing to accept millions of tonnes of its waste unless of course it is the backyard of the homes of BN ministers?” he asked.

Regulator Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) said yesterday that Lynas’ commitment to ship out radioactive wastes from its Gebeng plant was not binding as it was not a condition for the TOL issued earlier this week. The TOL came into force from September 3.

In a briefing to the media, AELB director-general Raja Abdul Aziz Raja Adnan said the agency only relied on Lynas’ unilateral commitment without putting it in “black and white”.

“It was never a condition of the licence. When they (Lynas) made the commitment, we took note of the commitment and the board decided to issue the licence,” he was quoted by Malaysiakini as saying.

He, however, said if Lynas broke its commitment to ship the waste overseas, AELB would consider its options against Lynas.

"I'm sure they will take it out. The board decided it (and) took into account they will take it out.

"Should that not happen, there are various steps and considerations that the board can take," he was quoted as saying.

On Thursday, the Save Malaysia Stop Lynas (SMSL) movement said Lynas and the authorities should reveal details of the waste removal because it had been established that Australia would not allow Lynas to return the waste there.

Environmentalists have also pointed out that trans-boundary transportation of hazardous waste was controlled by the Basel Convention, and it would be nearly impossible for Lynas to find a country willing to accept millions of tonnes of its waste.

The TOL has paved the way for Lynas to fire up its controversial rare earth plant.

Lynas had 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."

Unprecedented public anger against the Lynas plant has been fertilising Malaysia's green movement and could affect voter sentiment ahead of key national polls that must be called soon.

Earlier this year, thousands of people gathered for a peaceful demonstration in Kuantan calling on the government to stop the plant from being fired up.

The company said that the issuance of the TOL would enable Lynas to commence the transport of rare earth concentrate and to complete all necessary steps to prepare for first feed to kiln, which is expected in October.

Last week, five Kuantan residents made headway in their last-ditch bid to stop Lynas Corp from firing up its plant after they got the High Court's nod to challenge the science, technology and innovation minister's decision to award a TOL to the Australian miner.

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