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Press Release

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Government must not relax on conditions for Lynas operations

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) calls on the current government not to relax on the conditions imposed by the previous government for the operations of Lynas Corporation in Gebeng, Pahang.

Public health and environmental safety concerns must remain the focus of government decision-making over political whims and lobbies by vested interests.

We urge the current Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Khairy Jamaluddin, not to revisit and review the decision already taken by the previous government, as such a move would not only be contrary to sound decision-making and good governance but would also be against the interests of public health and environmental safety.

Valuable public resources and time have already been spent for years on dealing with the controversial Lynas operations. It is time to follow the conditions imposed by the previous government and not reopen decisions that have been taken in the public interest.

SAM's call comes in the wake of news that the current government will review the proposal for Lynas to continue research and development (R&D) of water leach purification (WLP) residue as Condisoil (a soil conditioner) for agricultural use.

The government's intention was made known by the MOSTI Minister in Parliament yesterday, stating that the decision was subject to approval from the Cabinet, and the ministry will stick with plans to move the Lynas waste to a permanent disposal facility (PDF) if the R&D fails to be commercialised.

SAM is most alarmed by the MOSTI Minister's statement, which appears to ignore the many years of reviews and controversies over the Lynas operations and its wastes, which eventually led to an independent expert assessment under the previous government.

The assessment by independent experts led to an Executive Committee Report (ECR) submitted to the former Ministry of Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change (MESTECC).

The ECR revealed that the Department of Environment (DOE) had rejected Lynas' application to conduct large-scale studies for kenaf and grain corn as previous studies showed among others, an increase in heavy metals after the use of Condisoil, chromium concentration exceeding limits, and the concentration of heavy metals during growth increased after Condisoil use.

This eventually resulted in the imposition of several conditions by the previous government for the renewal of Lynas' operating licence last year, including the halt in further R&D on the recycling of the WLP radioactive residue as Condisoil for agriculture use.

We reiterate our call to the MOSTI Minister to respect the conditions imposed for the renewal of the Lynas' licence and focus attention on the PDF site in Bukit Ketam, Pahang.

According to the MOSTI Minister, the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) had on 28 July, approved the proposed site, subject to approval of the Radiological Impact Assessment (RIA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies as well as other relevant requirements of the local authorities.

While we appreciate the Minister's statement that the reports of all the studies will be presented to the local authorities for assessment before approval to build the PDF is issued by the AELB, SAM would like to underscore that complete transparency and public participation and engagement in the process must be ensured, as provided for by the law.

These governments agencies must not be under any pressure to approve the PDF in haste and must ensure that all public health and safety, as well as environmental considerations, are properly evaluated and assessed, taking into account the views of the public with no compromises, especially when the WLP wastes will remain radioactive and hazardous for generations to come.

According to previous media reports, Lynas had said it has appointed a local company Gading Senggara Sdn Bhd to manage the PDF for US\$98 million (RM 400 million).

It is unclear if this also includes the cost of acquiring, preparing and building the PDF or if it is for the maintenance of the site for decades to come.

This amount appears to be rather insufficient for the maintenance of a PDF which is supposed to deal with at least 1 million tonnes of radioactive wastes for generations to come.

As a comparison, in the case of the Asian Rare Earth wastes, news reports have revealed that Mitsubishi Chemicals of Japan spent US\$100 million just to clean up the site of the ARE plant.

Another serious issue of concern relates to the expertise of the local company named by Lynas in undertaking the management of the radioactive material. The capabilities and expertise of this company have to be made transparent because what is being managed is no ordinary waste but one which will remain dangerous for generations to come.

SAM once again reiterates our call that Lynas should not be granted further extensions of its licence to operate pending a proper resolution of the handling of its wastes permanently.

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