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Press Release

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Move To Embark On Rare-Earth Mining In Perak Is Highly Irresponsible

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) is most alarmed to learn that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed between the Perak state government and a Chinese company, Chinalco GXNF Rare Earth Development to undertake the exploration of rare-earth minerals in Perak.

This fact was revealed via a recent statement of Nov 16 from the Ministry of Water, Land and Natural Resources (KATS), with the Ministry viewing this initiative as a “positive move”.

Clearly, the exploratory works are a first step in embarking on rare-earth mining in the state, and SAM views this with utmost concern.

The Perak state is already home to a radioactive permanent waste facility in the Kledang Range that contains dangerous and harmful wastes of thorium and uranium, inherited from the notorious Asian Rare-Earth (ARE) plant that operated in Bukit Merah, Ipoh during the mid-1980s to 1990s.

These wastes will remain radioactive for billions of years and pose high risks already to the people of Perak.

It is most shocking that the Perak state government as well as KATS have not learnt the tragic lessons of the ARE plant that resulted in serious radioactive poisoning in the Bukit Merah community, with high incidences of deaths among children who suffered from leukaemia and cancer, children with elevated levels of lead in their blood, and above normal rates of miscarriages among pregnant women.

Just adding the word ‘sustainable’ to rare-earth mining and processing does not make an inherently dangerous and risky activity safe, especially if we are talking about radioactive thorium and uranium wastes that remain hazardous in the environment for generations to come.

It is most irresponsible of the Perak state government and KATS to promote environmentally unsound investments in rare-earths, despite the ARE lesson and the controversial Lynas rare-earth operations in Gebeng, Pahang.

The Perak state government and KATS must act responsibly in halting investments that bring huge profits for companies in the short-term and leave behind toxic, radioactive and hazardous legacies of waste dumps for generations to be burdened with.

Instead, we should be promoting environmentally sound investments that benefit the public and the environment both in the short and long term.

We therefore call on the Perak state government not to embark on any rare-earth mining activities in the state and on KATS not to promote such rare-earth mining with the dubious label of ‘sustainable mining’.

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