

REVIEW COMMITTEE

LYNAS' CRITICS PROVEN WRONG

THE verdict on the Lynas rare earth facility in Kuantan, Pahang, has just been released. The management at Lynas, together with its employees, mostly locals, have waited with bated breath for the outcome.

This is understandable since their future is at stake. Many agree that the government made the right decision in appointing independent experts to the review committee.

The committee was tasked with evaluating whether Lynas should be allowed to continue its operations or be terminated.

Appointing professionals to the committee is a positive sign for the nation.

The government deserves a big pat on the back.

We must not leave judgment on the country's investments, be they foreign or local, to unschooled critics.

Lynas, from the start, has been at the receiving end of criticism just because it is the first rare earth processing facility in the country.

People threw baseless accusations at it about its operations, especially on the fact that minerals processed do emit some radiation.

Many professionals in the field say Lynas is the most heavily-inspected chemical processing facility in the country, if not the world.

We must remember that the country has had similar chemical processing plants.

All such plants carry risks. These can be risks to the environment, safety or health.

But through many years of operation, such chemical industries have developed internationally-accepted procedures to manage such risks.

Many environment, health and safety professionals undergo rigorous training. I used to teach one such master's programme at Universiti Malaya.

Lynas, as a responsible international chemicals company, has also put in place stringent safety procedures in its operations.

We should be proud of the fact that many safety professionals in Lynas are Malaysians. I am told many are from Kuantan.



Critics of the Lynas project have suddenly gone silent. FILE PIC

The fact that Lynas has conformed to all international standards on safety was corroborated by the conclusions reported by the review committee.

Critics' claims about the high level of radiation from the plant have been declared unsubstantiated, or even fake, by the report.

Out also went the claim that the plant posed health hazards to the people in the area, because a rigorous health scan of the population showed no evidence of that.

Many feel that the government needs to pay attention to people making unsubstantiated claims.

Unless checked, this practice

can be detrimental to future investments, especially in high-risk industries. We must remember that globally, there is a rise in such investments, which are high risk, but give high returns.

I have been informed that because of the earlier hoo-ha over Lynas, the nation missed out on a big investment to manufacture high-value magnets using the rare earth produced by Lynas.

That company has since set up the facility in Vietnam.

That magnet-production facility would have started other downstream product investments to support the global demand for robotics, automation and artificial intelligence, which

are the technologies fuelling the Industry 4.0 frenzy.

It is time the government monitor fake claims that damage the country's foray into high technology and high value-added manufacturing.

I urge professionals to offer their takes on baseless claims. The nation has many experts in chemical processing and many are in universities.

Otherwise, we will continue to be inundated by unschooled analyses and opinions that will be to the detriment of the nation.

In the Lynas case, I have observed that the critics of Lynas have suddenly become silent on the radiation issue.

This is because the review re-

port contradicted their claims of health-threatening radiation levels. The latest I hear is that they are now picking on heavy metals in groundwater.

Unlike radiation, heavy metal contamination can be remedied, and chemical industries have the technologies to deal with heavy metals.

But as explained by a chemical engineering professional in a recent online article, the heavy metal contamination may be from the bauxite that plague the area.

This needs to be investigated.

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