Don't send waste overseas

THE ministerial review committee recently concluded that Lynas has operated within government directives. They also found no radiation levels and no evidence of ill health.

The government made the right decision to appoint independent experts on the review committee. Lynas has been at the receiving end of countless criticism mainly because of the lack of understanding of rare earths processing.

All kinds of claims were made including that the minerals emit radioactivity, even equivalent to the nuclear wastes of Japan's Fukushima.

This was despite the positive report given at the start of the project by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Admittedly, all chemical processing facilities carry risks, especially to the environment, safety or health. But chemical industries worldwide have developed internationally accepted procedures to manage such risks.

There is no doubt that Lynas as a responsible international chemicals company, has also put in place very stringent safety procedures in its operations.

We should be proud of the fact that many among the safety professionals in Lynas are Malaysians. In fact, most of the top management are local.

The fact that Lynas has conformed to all the international standards on safety was further corroborated by the committee of experts.

Despite the positive conclusions, there is talk that the Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Ministry would insist that Lynas send the wastes back to Western Australia.

This is rather odd since the wastes do not pose the radiation risks claimed earlier. Even nuclear power plants which import uranium from third countries are not obligated to send back their nuclear wastes to the uranium exporting country.

With the development of advanced processing technology, most developed economies earn their income through the conversion of low value imported crude products into higher value consumer and commercial items for export.

This is a developed country's modus operandi. We should do the same if we want to be a world processing and value adding centre. Developing the right waste treatment technologies would also bring handsome returns in the future.

This is because many agree that wastes will become the resources of the future, as we witness the continued depletion of the world's natural resources.

Take the issue of plastic wastes which have posed serious environmental threats to marine life and even our human food chain. There has also been a case of plastic wastes being dumped here.

If only we had the necessary technologies to reprocess such wastes into useful products, the problem would vanish.

Banning single-use plastics may not be a sustainable solution. Many countries have tried this. The real answer lies in technologies. More than just bringing in technologies from outside, we also need to develop our own.

The wastes from Lynas should be treated the same. Since radiation is not an issue any more, as articulated by the experts committee, we can ask Lynas to put in the necessary technologies before the wastes are safely disposed.

The important consideration here is that they should not harm the environment. If indeed the presence of heavy metals is confirmed, then the necessary technologies should be deployed to neutralise the potential hazards.

I know in Germany, treating heavy metal wastes is now standard practice. It is not rocket science. There is no need to ask Lynas to send back the wastes.

I urge experts from the Institution of Engineers and colleagues from the Academy of Sciences, Malaysia, to share their views on this.

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