



KEMENTERIAN TENAGA, SAINS, TEKNOLOGI,
ALAM SEKITAR & PERUBAHAN IKLIM
MINISTRY OF ENERGY, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY,
ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE



TARIKH	RABU, 27 NOVEMBER 2019
AKHBAR	NEW STRAITS TIMES
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MARA CORP, LYNAS TIE-UP A BOON FOR BOTH



RECENTLY, the International Trade and Industry Ministry (Miti) proudly announced that government reforms led to Malaysia's improvement in the World Bank's "Doing Business 2020" ranking to 12th from 15th place, out of almost 150 nations being considered in the said report.

But what Miti had failed to mention then was that the week before, in the latest survey by the World Economic Forum, Malaysia dropped to 27th. More alarmingly, the Department of Statistics said Malaysia suffered its worst export drop in three years, with little prospect of improvement.

Traditional export giants fell off the cliff: Electronics was the worst performer and was joined by crude and refined petroleum. The so-called Malaysia Baru needs to act fast to create high-impact export economies and jobs in new high technology sectors on a big scale. Thankfully, there is some progress here and there but not enough.

On Nov 11, Mara Corporation, the corporate arm of Mara, revealed a noble strategy to achieve this. It is a refreshing contrast to infrastructure-oriented programmes and rankings.

Mara Corp's programmes intend to create tens of thousands of high technology jobs and establish the global centre of excellence in sustainable rare earth innovation.

In its attempt, Mara Corp inked an understanding to form a strategic business collaboration with Lynas.

Though I have been concerned about lingering safety issues mentioned in the past, as influenced by some politicians who used Lynas to gain political mileage, I have since realised the concern was unwarranted.

Despite all the political exploitations, the public has been made to understand better about this project. The fact is that, the Lynas facility survived a decade of scrutiny by two different government administrations, numerous international and local atomic energy agencies, and scientists.

More importantly, it survived the scrutiny of our prime minister. The PM's office itself developed its own frequently asked questions factsheet which is the strongest sign of support.

Mara Corp chairman Akhramsyah Sanusi is a chemical engineer from Imperial College, United Kingdom with almost two decades of senior level industrial experience, working for a multinational across three continents.

As the corporate and investment arm of Mara, it is about time that Mara Corp makes a move to play a big role in spearheading the way forward for Malaysia Baru.

Mara Corp is the catalyst for economic development to achieve Malaysia's Shared Prosperity Vision. Since Akhramsyah became chairman, Mara Corp has started on the right footing.

I welcome his announcement on Nov 7 that by the end of this year, Mara Corp group of companies are expected to generate a profit of up to RM20 million before tax, compared with a loss-making position the year before.

A strong turnaround story by any standards.

The latest initiative, to lock the business interest of Mara Corp with Lynas — the producer of "vitamins" of the digital and green economy providing minerals crucial to new clean energy technologies from mobile phones to electric cars to giant wind turbines — must be recognised, supported and promoted.

Whilst the announcement of such an initiative looks good and has given positive vibes for our economy, I have also heard of some "noise" against it coming from within. My wild guess is, especially when it involves statutory agencies such as Mara, these sort of "noises" are pretty normal.

Still I cannot understand why anyone would not stand firmly behind Mara Corp's MoU with Lynas. A global centre of excellence for rare earth is very much in line with Mara's mandate for education and economic development. It is in the same vein as Asia AeroTechnic, the international award-winning aerospace centre overseen by Mara Corp.

To be fair to all parties, I would like to see for myself more details of Mara Corp's plan with Lynas, especially in ensuring this initiative will yield swift, meaningful and multiplied returns for the country and create more local talents in the new economies not only for industries in Malaysia but also globally, whilst protecting the various interests of our beautiful country.

In the meantime, I will do my part and pay Lynas's plant in Gebeng, Kuantan a visit. No point getting my knickers in a knot listening to naysayers without finding out for myself about the real situation.

I am going on a tour of the Lynas plant to see what the fuss is really all about and to appreciate the great opportunities that Mara Corp is saying we must no longer be allowed to miss.

DATUK DR HASAN MAD
Secretary-General, Majlis Perundangan Melayu, MPM

Mara Corporation is making a move to play a bigger role under Malaysia Baru including diversifying into the rare earth industry. FILE PIC

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