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RARE EARTH

LYNAS OFFERS JOBS, TECH TRANSFER



IN general, the rare earth production process starts with mining in the Central Lanthanide Deposit (CLD) area of Mount Weld in Australia. The materials are then transported to Lynas Advanced Materials Plant (LAMP) in Gebeng, Kuantan, for reprocessing purposes.

No mining has ever been conducted in Malaysia under the present Lynas management.

Rare earth materials are highly reactive and they exist in complex geological stone components that need to be dissolved and extracted through chemical processes.

Due to this difficulty, LAMP was set up in 2012 for that purpose.

The plant has received its operational licence from the Atomic Energy Licensing Board since 2012, signifying the company's strict adherence towards the safety culture and professional management policies.

LAMP employed over 600 local staff, benefiting the local community.

However, several years ago, protests spearheaded by social activists under the banner of "Save Malaysia Stop Lynas" has called for the complete operational halt of the LAMP processing plant.

The movement gained momentum over the years and some politicians brought up the issue in Parliament.

The licence extension is a way to break China's monopoly over rare earth market exports.

The decision did not cause any public uproar but it weakened the trust given to Pakatan Harapan by the public.

Rare earth material is a multi-billion-dollar industry that benefits the international community. It helps create technology that is more efficient, reliable and consumes less energy.

Minerals from the CLD are reprocessed to produce rare earth oxides through the LAMP chemical plant.

Two major elements found from these processes are neodymium oxide and praseodymium oxide.

Both are highly reactive but not radioactive and they are being used in many common objects that we encounter every day such as magnets, light bulbs, computer screens, and airplane engine components.

Some scientists have even suggested that neodymium can be used to treat skin cancer.

Currently, there is still no indication that Lynas LAMP will be closed down for good.

Rather, it is gaining more support from the new government than ever through the expected investment influx of US\$33 billion (RM136 billion) over for the next 10 years.

The government has also encouraged young entrepreneurial start-ups to involve themselves in this industry as it can create more jobs in the long term.

Lynas' capacity to provide the country with jobs and profits should not be the goal.

Rather, the government should think ahead by allowing local players to create their own rare earth materials chemical process industry and improve their technology and labour skills.

Technology transfer should also be carried out as it will bring a lot of benefits for the future generation and reduce dependency on foreign countries.

Everything is possible if we have determination to change and to steer our fate for the greater good of the country and the people.

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The rare earth industry will create jobs for locals as well as see the establishment of start-ups. FILE PIC

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