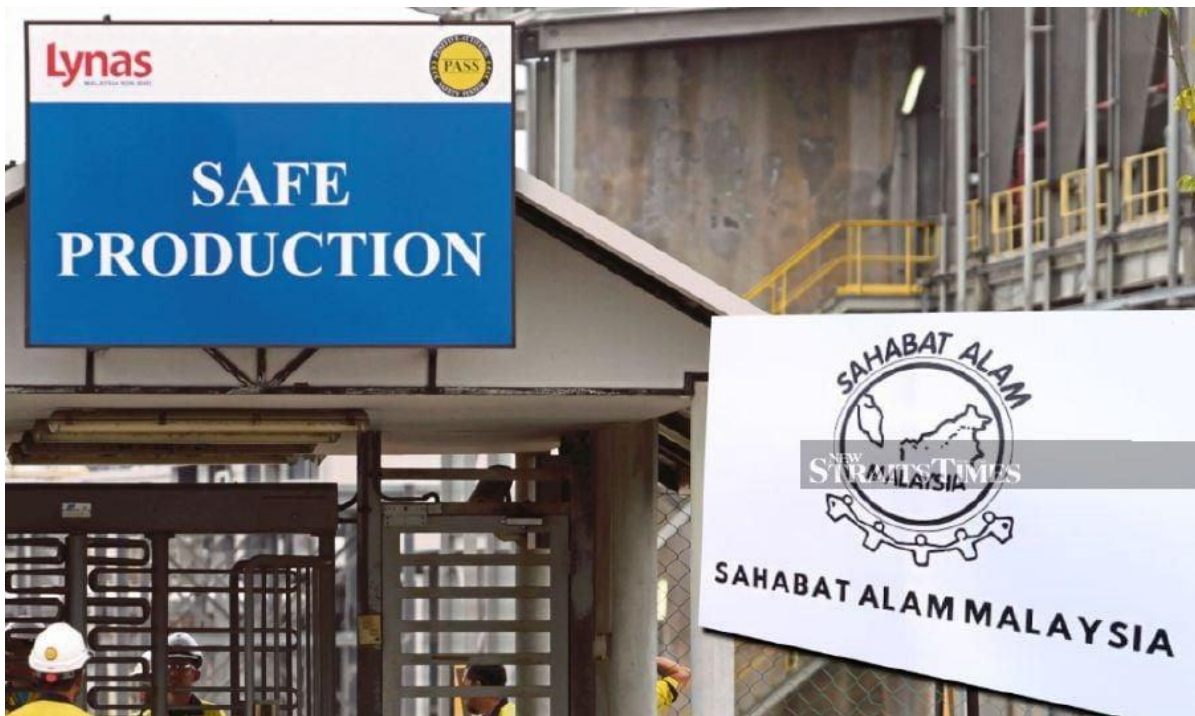


Sahabat Alam Malaysia dismayed over govt U-turn on Lynas licence

By [Audrey Dermawan](#) - October 24, 2023 @ 6:56pm



Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) says the government must explain why the change of heart. - NSTP file pic

GEORGE TOWN: Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) today voiced its disappointment over the government's decision to extend rare earth producer Lynas's operations until March 2026.

SAM honorary secretary Mageswari Sangaralingam said they were baffled by the U-turn made by the government from its earlier decision.

"The government must explain why the change of heart when earlier, it was concerned about the radioactive component of the company's activities," she said today.

She said the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry (MOSTI) had stated that the reversal of the decision, allowing the company's Cracking & Leaching (C&L) activities to continue, was subject to the condition that Lynas ensures that the radioactive content in the Water Leach Purification (WLP) residue is below 1 Bq/g through an R&D programme led by local experts.

The current level of the radioactive component is at 6-7 Bq/g.

Mageswari asked how local experts would get this down to below 1 Bq/g, noting that it was "baffling and questionable."

"It seems the decision of the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) was based on the findings of a laboratory level preliminary study, which showed that the radioactive material from thorium can be extracted from the WLP residue until this residue no longer needs to be regulated under the Atomic Energy Licensing Act 1984.

"No explanation has been given on how the radioactive level is going to be brought down.

"Does the local experiment include the CondiSoil research which was rejected before or is there another yet-to-be-proven laboratory experiment?"

"SAM is most baffled by this explanation and calls for more transparency and public disclosure on what this study is about and its details," she added.

Mageswari said a reversal of the government decision based on this preliminary study was not convincing or assuring from a public health and environmental standpoint.

She said the government needed to be more accountable and transparent in this regard and the ministry needed to explain the details of the research.

"It is clear from the government's orientation of making money from the rare earth industry but this cannot be at the expense of people's health and the environment.

"We reiterate our call for a public disclosure of the preliminary study urgently," she said.

It was reported on Oct 20 that Lynas, an Australian producer of rare earths, would cease all operations in Malaysia beginning next month, with the exception of its mixed rare earth carbonate processing facility.

During the shutdown, key Malaysian C&L (cracking and leaching) personnel will be deployed to assist with the start-up process in Kalgoorlie, Australia, it said in its quarterly report.

In April, Lynas said it had planned for either a temporary shutdown of its Malaysian operation or a period of very low production if licence conditions prohibiting the import and processing of lanthanide concentrate remain on July 1.