

Malaysia: PSM fears move to mine rare earth in the Ulu Jelai forest will take off

Friday 7 May 2021, by [KOW Gah Chie](#) (Date first published: 2 April 2021).

PSM has urged Putrajaya to intervene in a proposed rare earth mining project at a patch of forest the size of 924 football fields in Ulu Jelai, Pahang.

PSM secretary-general A Sivarajan said the proposed rare earth mining project should be slashed as it might cause environmental pollution, besides jeopardising the livelihood of the nearby Pos Lanai Orang Asli village in Kuala Lipis.

Previously, *Malaysiakini* reported that plans were afoot to set up a 660ha rare earth mine in the Jelai forest.

The Department of Environment on March 15 [rejected the terms proposed](#) by Aras Kuasa for an environmental impact assessment (EIA) on the project.

However, Sivarajan expressed concern that Aras Kuasa Sdn Bhd, the company spearheading the project - will resubmit new terms for an EIA soon.

The proposed lanthanide mining activity, he said, will be using the in situ leaching method, a technology used in China, involving the pumping of ammonia into the underground to soften the land.

While it will be the first time the method is used in Malaysia, the controversial method has already caught media attention for causing devastation to the environment, particularly in southern China, Sivarajan said.

The method requires specially designed injection holes and collection tunnels, equipped with piping reticulation system networks to be implemented during the mine development stage.

Widely used for industrial and scientific purposes, lanthanides are a group of 15 different rare earth elements. Lanthanide is also processed by Australian rare earth company Lynas Corporation in Malaysia.

Sivarajan fears that Sungai Telom, which runs downstream of the mine and upon which the Pos Lanai Orang Asli depend for their daily water needs, may be polluted if the rare earth mining ever takes place.

He said that it may even affect water supplied to the people of Pahang.

“Sungai Telom will join Sungai Pahang, where 13 water treatment plants located. This is the key water source for the people in Pahang.

“(We are worried) that the water is going to be contaminated very badly and (it reminds me of) what

happened in Selangor, where water treatment plants are shut down and water disruption occurs whenever pollution is detected," he told *Malaysiakini*.

'State decisions should be in line with federal policies'

Sivarajan said the Pahang state government did have the authority to issue licenses for mining and logging, as well degazette forest reserves.

"However, these decisions should be in line with the federal government's policies on the relevant matter.

"We find that the state government has not looked into these matters when it issued the licence," he said.

"For one, the federal government set a quota on the total size of the forest reserve in the country. Ulu Jelai is located at the Central Forest Spine (CFS), which is the corridor for animals like tigers and elephants. These issues fall under the purview of the federal government.

"Ulu Jelai was classified as forest reserve under the Kuala Lipis District Local Plan 2010-2020. Any plan to degazette its status as a forest reserve should be done via the new local plan, which is expected to be formulated in three years.

"The federal government must look into the matter and determine if the proposed project is in line with the national policies," Sivarajan added.

Earlier Sivarajan, together with Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) president Meenakshi Raman and Pos Lanai Orang Asli representatives, held a press conference this morning to reveal their plan to appeal to Putrajaya.

He said the Pos Lanai Orang Asli would travel to Putrajaya, in the hope of voicing their concerns to the federal government, as soon as interstate travel is allowed.

Malaysiakini has contacted Aras Kuasa for comment and is awaiting a response.

In September last year, the Orang Asli [submitted a protest letter](#) against the proposed rare earth project in Jelai to the Orang Asli Development Department (Jakoa).

Apart from this, another Orang Asli village - Kampung Jintir - is located two kilometres southeast of the proposed project site.

According to minutes from a DOE panel discussion on the project, 397ha out of the 660ha in the proposed site was never logged before. The remaining 263ha was also not fully logged and the last logging done in the area was in 2008.

This is the second major development being proposed for the area that has raised environmental concerns.

Previously, there were plans to erect a dam near Pos Lanai, but the project was scrapped by the Pakatan Harapan government in 2019.

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