

Malaysia says to rule soon on rare earths plant

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Lynas is building the facility in Malaysia's eastern Pahang state, which is set to become one of the few sites outside China to process [rare earths](#) -- metals used in high-tech equipment ranging from missiles to mobile phones.

Lynas has insisted the plant, which will process rare earths imported

from Australia, will be safe, but critics say [radioactive waste](#) could leak out, threatening the public and environment.

A ruling by Malaysia's Atomic Energy Licensing Board on whether Lynas would be granted a two-year temporary licence for the facility had been expected by Tuesday but no announcement has been made.

"Hopefully in the next few days there will be some news coming from the board," Trade Minister Mustapa Mohamed told reporters in the capital Kuala Lumpur.

Speaking at a press conference with Australian counterpart Craig Emerson after bilateral trade talks, he reiterated Malaysia's stance that, if approved, the plant must meet "the strictest standards" on safety.

Mustapa said the issue was not a major agenda item in their talks.

Malaysian [government officials](#) have declined comment on the outcome of a Monday meeting by the licensing board to review Lynas application.

The license would allow Lynas to start operating the plant, which is already near completion, for an initial two years under strict supervision from Malaysian authorities and with certain limitations on production capacity, Malaysian officials have said.

Lynas says any waste would be handled according to strict standards.

Processing work was originally set to start in the third quarter of 2011.

Thousands of Malaysian opponents of the plant held a protest against it in October in Kuantan, a Malaysian east coast town near the plant site.

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