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ENVIRO  
ALERT



WARNING

## RARE EARTH VS. RARE SURF

MALAYSIAN RARE EARTH REFINERY DRAWS ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS FOR SURFERS

Story by S. A. Martin



# SURFERS UNITE AGAINST RADIOACTIVE CONTAMINATION

**Environmentally-minded surfers identify potential negative and harmful effects from the controversial Lynas Advanced Material Plant (LAMP) in nearby Gebeng, Pahang that could adversely affect coastal surfing resources at northern Malaysian peninsula coastal areas**

At a recent International Surfing Association (ISA) judge training course in Phuket, local surfers learned how to score waves in surfing competitions by the professionals; they also met the Malaysian surfers (who came to Phuket for the judging course) and learned about surfing areas under threat in Malaysia. In particular, we learned about serious pollution issues which could affect the local tourism industry and the highest quality surfing areas on the eastern side of the Malaysian peninsula. The issues surround the construction of a 230 million dollar Rare Earth processing plant and port area being built by Lynas Corporation at Gebeng, Kuantan, Malaysia. Environmentalists identify the plant as another case of a multinational corporation taking advantage of the lax regulations and enforcement in the developing world.

### WHAT IS RARE EARTH

Rare Earth refers to rare earth elements or rare earth metals which are a set of chemical elements in the periodic table (ATOMIC #'s 57-71 and others). Despite their name, rare earth elements (with the exception of the radioactive promethium) are relatively plentiful in the Earth's crust. However, because of their geochemical properties, rare earth elements are typically dispersed and not often found in concentrated and economically exploitable forms. It was the aspect of difficulty in obtaining and processing these minerals (previously called 'earths') that led to the term 'rare earth.'

Mainly, the key issues surrounding the potential pollution produced at the rare earth processing plant are those which threaten environmental quality, including radioactive by-products and the proposed large-scale industrial port area. However, this case is not new in Malaysia. In the 1980's, despite objections from the public and various NGO's, the Bukit Merah Rare Earth project in Perak was built. It was only after a Japanese journalist

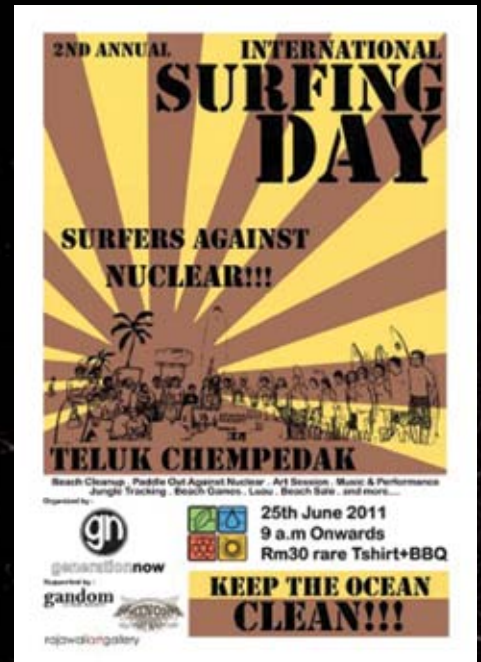
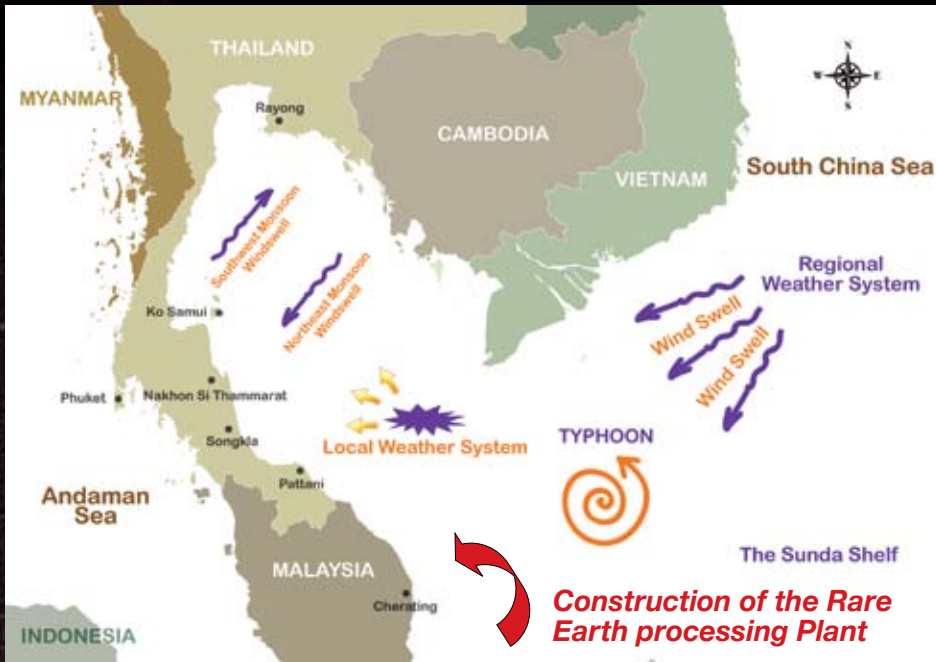
took soil and waste samples back to Japan for testing that the plant was closed in 1992. Today, the area is plagued with reports of leukemia, disabled children from birth defects, and the plant owners are still cleaning it up with many issues yet unresolved. A key issue in the argument is why the foreign companies don't just process the rare earth minerals where they are mined (namely Australia). Opponents to the Malaysia project say that it's because the environmental costs and regulations in other, more developed countries are simply too high.  
Photo-Tim Hain

### WHAT IS RARE SURF

Rare surf is, well, good surf that is hard to find. In Malaysia, the east coast surf season is just a few good months, mainly from November to March and the best surfing areas on the Malaysian peninsula are in proximity to the proposed development. This comes as a heavy blow to local surfers who grew up living and loving these special coastal surfing resources; a variety of long-walled point breaks and sandy beaches. If you love to surf, then ask yourself if you want a radioactive waste facility and other serious health risk industrial activities at your home break. Furthermore, many surfers now work in the domestic and international tourism trade in the area, including the rapidly expanding surf tourism market, which they perceive to be in grave danger in the face of heavy industry.

### ANOTHER SIDE TO THE STORY

The Lynas Advanced Materials Plant in Malaysia's central Pahang state is expected to add stability to the world supply of key components used in electronics, green technology, and advanced weapons systems. It is the first rare earth processing plant being built outside China in the last thirty years. Currently, China has a global chokehold on the market, producing over 90 percent of the global supply of rare earth materials. For Malaysia, the plant will create over 350 engineering jobs and could encourage high tech companies to start up new operations near the supply of these essential materials. Ironically, rare earth minerals are needed to make any number of green technology products, such as batteries for electric cars.



# SURF BREAKS UNDER THREAT ARE THOSE NEAR TELUK CHEMPEDAK BEACH KUANTAN AND CHERATING

## ORGANIZATIONS IN ACTION

There is a show of solidarity among environmentalists, human rights groups, civil societies, and non government organizations (NGOs) from all over Malaysia who are monitoring the events in Kuantan to discuss and strategize the next move to prevent the Lynas Advanced Material Plant from going ahead. Among these are Friends of the Earth Malaysia, Save Malaysia Association, Green Surf (a coalition of environmental groups), and the Malaysian East Coast surfers.

## CLARIFICATION OF INFORMATION

Plant owner: Lynas Corp (Australia)  
 Local company: Lynas Malaysia Sdn Bhd  
 Plant location: Gebeng, Kuantan, Malaysia  
 Project name: LampsOn

For more information or to help our Malaysian surfers, explore the links below:

- [savemalaysia-stoplynas.blogspot.com/](http://savemalaysia-stoplynas.blogspot.com/)
- <http://www.newsabahtimes.com.my/nstweb/fullstory/51019>
- <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?sec=nation&file=/2011/8/3/nation/9217326>
- <http://simonthongwh.wordpress.com/2011/06/24/save-malaysia-stop-lynas-campaign/>
- <http://story.malaysiasun.com/index.php/ct/9/cid/48cba686fe041718/id/788305/cs/1/>
- <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/01/lynas-idUSL3E71102920110701>
- Also search for related terms and articles published in the New York Times
- <http://www.lynascorp.com/>



Photo-Tim Hain



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