

03/05/1999

Filming in Penang hits a sour note

THE shooting of 20th Century Fox's Anna And The King in Penang and Langkawi was not all razzmatazz and roses.

One of the main grouses heard was apparently of unfair treatment of locals by the production company.

A Penang resident, 28-year-old Saiful Abd Rahman, who registered with his friends in Langkawi, recalled being confirmed as an extra for at least three to four days (he even went for costume fittings on April 1) but was only hired and paid for a day's work.

"Others who had not registered got the jobs. This is unfair considering the expenses we had to bear, from travelling to food and lodging," said Saiful.

Langkawi resident Abdul Rahman Ismail, 55, said he was asked to look for 12 local village women to act as extras but "when I got them, I was told our services were not required," said Abdul Rahman.

He alleged that some girls who had not registered earlier were recruited instead.

Another local, Yeo Swee Seng, 52, from Kelibang, Langkawi had this to add: "I was hired as an extra to play the part of a monk. I was made to believe that I will be paid RM300 to shave my head bald for the role but we only got RM100.

"When we enquired about the payment, one of the company officials shouted at us to take the RM100 and get out," alleged Yeo, adding that 19 of his friends got the same treatment.

The filming seemed also to have caused some measure of inconvenience, something which had not gone unnoticed by Penang State Assemblyman for Kampong Kolam Lim Gim Soon.

Lim said that the closure of roads especially in the Lebuh Armenian and Lebuh Acheh area for a longer duration than anticipated had inconvenienced some residents. But they were compensated for this nevertheless.

Residents T.C. Hong, 51 and K.C. Lee, 39, said the street lamps along Lebuh Armenian were removed much earlier than the actual shooting period and were not re-installed until several days after the completion of filming.

They said several English and Thai posters pasted on the walls of some houses were not removed.

DAP State Assemblywoman Chong Eng who also visited the area questioned the public relations maintained by those responsible for the shooting.

"If there had been better dissemination of information to the mass media and the people, things might have gone smoother," he said.

20th Century Fox's local arm, Farang Films Sdn Bhd, could not be reached for comment. Local assistant director Mahathir Tahir could not be reached either.

(END)