

## **Activists flay Penang over Tanda Putera 'ban'**

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**By Susan Loone**

The Penang government's move to request local cinemas not to screen controversial Malay movie 'Tanda Putera', which opens nationwide today, has been criticised by a number of activists.

They expressed disappointment that the Pakatan Rakyat-led government, which officially backs freedom of expression, has sought to ban the movie in the opposition state.

NONECultural activist Haris Zuan (right) said it does not bode well for a government which professes to promote freedom of speech.

"No film, book or work of art should be banned. This includes the movies 'Tanda Putera' and 'New Village'.

"This has nothing to do with the quality of the film. We do not know what the movie is about when we have not even viewed it.

"If Penang promotes freedom of speech, why do we fear the movie?" he asked.

Haris, who is a DAP supporter, felt the state's decision to call for the movie not to be screened would overshadow all the good work the party has done for Penang since it took over the helm from BN in 2008.

He pointed out that the state was lauded when in 2010, it designated a spot at the Esplanade dubbed as Speakers Square, while last year, the state assembly gazetted the Freedom of Information Act.

"The state's role is not to decide what movies we watch, music we hear or books we read. It is to provide space for diverse roles and views so that we can strive to become a better society," he added.

"At the rate the state government is going, what if Pakatan Rakyat takes over the federal government? Can it guarantee freedom of speech?"

Which work of art will be next?

Meanwhile, human rights activist Clement Ong said the state government's decision

smacks of "abuse of power".

tanda putera premiere 200813 reception 02He added that if the movie had defamatory scenes against an individual or group, those maligned can seek legal action to stop the movie from being screened.

"The state should not be getting involved in this. If they manage to get the movie banned this time, how many more times would they call for a ban on other works of art or entertainment?" queried the lawyer who practices in Penang.

An arts, culture and entertainment observer, who wants to be known as Abu Hasif, said that the industry should not be politicised.

"The state and all other quarters should allow arts, culture and entertainment to be free.

"If the industry is being controlled, it would have no voice on its own and that would be a very sad and disappointing development for the state," said Abu Hasif, who hails from Penang and is active in the local Malay cultural scene.

NONThe activists are reacting to the call by the Penang government yesterday for all local cinemas not to screen the controversial movie which is loosely based on the events surrounding the May 13, 1969 racial riots.

Chow Kon Yeow, state executive councillor in charge of local government, which controls licences for cinema operators, said he would be issuing letters to request their "cooperation" in not screening the movie.

He however stressed that this was not a directive to ban the movie, but a request from the DAP-led government as it considers the movie a threat to harmony between the different communities in the country.

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