

Turn Tanda Putera into miniseries, says ex-DPM's son

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By Koh Jun Lin

The controversial film 'Tanda Putera' should be made into a miniseries to better portray the politics of the time, said the son of Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman - one of the main protagonists in the movie.

"There are many facts in the book (about my father) 'The Reluctant Politician' that did not end up in the film. This may have triggered the feeling that the film is propaganda," said Tawfik Ismail at a forum on the film's historical accuracy last night.

NONETawfik (right) is the Ismail's eldest son and had served as an adviser in the making of the film, particularly the portraying of his father.

The film was set during and after the May 13, 1969 racial riots and revolves around the friendship between home minister and later deputy prime minister Ismail, and then prime minister Abdul Razak Hussein.

Tawfik told the audience of around 50 youths that the two-hour movie should have been a three-part miniseries of about six hours, pointing out that a historical film on one of the USA's founders, John Adams, devoted eight hours on just one person.

He said that failing to do so "trivialises the politics of the time", where the Alliance (precursor to today's BN) was fighting for the support of moderate Malays and fending off the influence of ultra-Malays, while opposition parties - DAP, PAS and Gerakan - plied on politics of polarisation.

Dramatic difference between May 13 and now

As an example of some of the historical facts left out of the film, he pointed out that his father had said the riots were triggered by then MCA president Tan Siew Sin's decision to pull out of the government, following the party's dismal electoral performance.

"Now history repeats itself since MCA has pulled out of the government (after the 13th general election) but there is no riot like May 13.

"There are many parallels in today's politics (and the politics of that time) and has repeated, but since we are experienced and as a society we are conscious of the

repercussions, we don't do anything extreme," he added.

However, he said the cause for the riots and its perpetuation are separate issues, and there is no need to find out who is responsible. It would suffice for them to realise what they did was wrong.

Even if a royal commission of inquiry (RCI) is formed on the matter, he said no one would be happy with the outcome anyway.

"Who would do the investigation and what (evidence) has been left behind? If (author of the book 'May 13: Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969') Kua Kia Soong claims he has evidence from foreign intelligence, there was a curfew at the time with everyone indoors.

"How are they going to get the information?" he said.

However, Tawfik said he does not blame the film's producers for the historical inaccuracies because of the time constraints they had to work under.

When asked after the forum, themed 'Tanda Putera: History or slander', he told Malaysiakini that he was largely satisfied with the film because the key facts - namely Razak and Ismail's terminal illness and their attempts to conceal this while trying to help the nation recover from the May 13 trauma - are in place.

Meanwhile, another panellist, Universiti Teknologi Petronas lecturer and historian Muhaimin Sulam, said 'Tanda Putera' should not be considered historically accurate although it has "historical elements".

He said although the majority-held version of the May 13 riots was that it was caused by the DAP, Gerakan and the People's Progressive Party's (PPP) dissatisfaction with the 1969 general election results, the film portrays as if DAP was solely responsible because the latter two parties are now BN members.

However, he said people should not be worried about this because the viewers can think for themselves and may not accept the film as a whole and have their own interpretation.

"We should support such films (that have historical value) over comedies or ghost movies that have all sorts of action. The fact that we dislike 'Tanda Putera's' version (of events) is another issue and I don't agree with it myself.

"But we have to support this and films that raise our intelligence instead of turning

us into fools," said the PAS arts and culture bureau chief.

Also present as panellist was film critic Fadli al-Akiti, who hit out at the film's lack of aesthetic value, while the forum's organisers said that 'Tanda Putera's' producers could not attend the forum because of prior engagements in Sabah.

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