

Banned 'Wolf' raises Perkasa's hackles

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Even though 'The Wolf of Wall Street' is banned in Malaysia, the film has created such a stir among Malaysians that even Perkasa has joined the fray.

This is in no small part due to the fact the film is produced by Red Granite Pictures, a company co-owned by Riza Aziz (extreme left in photo), the son of Rosmah Mansor and step-son of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

Though Malaysians will not be allowed to watch the movie in cinemas, local comments on the US\$100 million film starring Leonardo DiCaprio have taken a political turn.

Perkasa expressed "sadness" that a Malay Muslim is behind the production of the acclaimed but controversial film.

"When we mention Malay, it means Muslim. Perkasa is curious (as to) how a Muslim can make a film with such explicit scenes (involving sex)," Perkasa secretary-general Syed Hassan Syed Ali told Malaysiakini in a text-message.

He added that success should not come at the expense of one's race and religion.

Among opposition politicians, it has set off alarm bells about Riza's sources of finance, given his meteoric rise in Hollywood and funding of the film.

The fact the closing credits express 'special thanks' to Jho Low, a name that often crops up as a behind-the-scenes financier in Malaysian politics has fuelled further speculation.

But 'The Wolf of Wall Street, directed by Martin Scorsese, is not just about Riza. It delivers a sense of pride to some in creative arts circles.

Malaysian film director Ho YuHang, a finalist for a mentorship programme under Scorsese, is among them.

"I met Marty - he said to call him that - a few years back and he encouraged me to make my film and offered some incisive advice.

"And later he was generous to send me DVDs of films by some great directors that he thought I should check out. I am indebted to him. It's about time a Malaysian returns him a favour, I suppose."

Ho, who had directed the Chinese version of DAP's 'Ubah' video, said in an email interview that making it big at Hollywood does not mean just buying a script like Riza did. It involves making a good film from a good script and marketing it well.

"Isn't it ironic that it takes the prime minister's step-son to produce, outside of Malaysia, a movie about money, greed and sex that reflects the life and times that we live in, whereas a movie about decadence is yet to be made back here in Malaysia?"

"We have too many silly ghosts and rempits and low-level wannabe criminals but no realistic high-powered movers and shakers fuelled by money and sex," he said.

But with Riza being part of the film, the raunchy content is being contrasted with the conservative values being espoused by Najib's administration.

For Ho though, Najib has bigger problems than the film.

"I'm sure the prime minister is dealing with graver perception issues closer to home," he said.

'Rules have been applied'

Political analyst Wan Saiful Wan Jan said the fact the film has raked in millions of dollars "says a lot" about its quality.

"Maybe we measure quality differently as there are cultural issues in Malaysia but there is global acceptance," said Wan Saiful (right), who is also Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs chief executive officer.

He said it is inappropriate for parents to be blamed for the actions for their adult children, and that it is unfair to criticise Najib for the content of the film.

In terms of censorship, Wan Saiful said the government has at least been consistent about banning the 'The Wolf of Wall Street' even though it was co-produced by the Rosmah's son.

"I am not suggesting that Malaysia applies the rules equally, because it does not, but for this particular case, the set of rules applied," he said.

Asked what he thinks of Rosmah and Najib not being able to watch the film in Malaysia, Wan Saiful quipped: "Well, they have private jets, they can always fly to the US."

The movie, which has grossed over US\$130 million, has been nominated for five Oscar awards including for best picture.

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