

Natgeo's Razak film omits Dr Ismail's role
Malaysiakini.com
August 23, 2010

The National Geographic documentary on second Malaysian prime minister Abdul Razak Hussein, while an impressive display of locally-produced movie magic easily up to scratch with foreign productions, however has selective omissions in its plot line.

One notable omission being the friendship and falling out, both professional and personal, he reportedly had with then-home minister Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman.

NONE In fact, no mention was made in the documentary of Ismail.

The documentary's director, Justin Ong (right), told reporters in a press conference held after the premiere screening of the documentary in Kuala Lumpur that this was done in the interest of the story they were trying to tell.

"We wanted to focus on certain aspects of his life."

"In fact, there are more personalities and issues we wanted to incorporate but could not," explained the director.

This, according to Ong, was in order to portray "the bigger story" and they only included what was important and relevant to fit the one-hour documentary.

NONE Quizzed why Ismail was not included since he, along with Abdul Razak (middle), played an important part in both May 13 and the New Economic Policy which were featured prominently in the documentary, Ong offered no ready explanation.

Stranger still, Ismail was one of the few who were reportedly told of Abdul Razak's big secret, his very private battle with leukemia.

Considering that "sacrifice" of Abdul Razak "for the sake of the nation" was made much of in the documentary, it is strange that one who shared his secret was never once mentioned in the biographical work.

'Longer first cut'

"The first cut was indeed longer, we had to cut out a lot," chimed in National Geographic Channel Asia territory head Basil Chua.

Chua later added that they had to make the documentary accessible to all ages, from five-year-olds to those who had lived in Abdul Razak's time, explaining away the brevity and selective subject matter.

Other than focusing on the spectre of the racial riots of May 13 and highlighting Abdul Razak's role in controlling and mitigating that troubling time in our history, the documentary also portrayed him as the sole architect and executor of the NEP.

NONE The documentary, however, avoided exploring contentious viewpoints - including mainly information and interviews with personalities which supported their 'bigger story' premise.

It also mounted a clear defence of Abdul Razak from allegations that he was responsible for orchestrating the fall of Malaysia's father of independence and first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman.

While it is no denying that Abdul Razak was a great leader and deserves the tribute that this documentary is to him, it is important to remember that while we can celebrate the memory of our leaders, we should not do so at the expense of omitting facts or selectively portraying them.

It may be true, as they say, that the chronicles of history is scripted and told by those in power, but truth and history belongs to everyone. It would have been more interesting had this wonderful piece be made into something more than just another puff piece.

Slated for the Merdeka celebrations this year, the documentary - jointly produced and funded by the National Film Development Corporation and the National Geographic Channel - was rushed through production in three months, which is considered a record for the company.

NONEAmong others, personalities interviewed include Razak's son Najib, who is the current prime minister, fourth premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad and former Finance Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

It will premiere on the National Geographic Channel on Astro tomorrow at 9pm with repeats on Merdeka Day (Aug 31), Sept 5 and Malaysia Day (Sep 16) at the same time.

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