

Snip, snip! Government overreacting?
Malaysiakini.com
Feb 28, 2007
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Local film-maker Amir Muhammad is upset. And he has every reason to sport a frown since his second offering has also been canned by the Censorship Board.

So when asked what he thought about the level of censorship in Malaysia, he put it blatantly, albeit with a laugh, that 'it sucks'.

On a more serious note, the 35-year-old film-maker believes that the problem extends beyond the censorship board.

"I think the whole social political system is bad. This is all symptomatic stemming from the ruling government made up of coalition parties with different interests.

"Their interests get dissolved together and it is critical because this is dangerous for everybody," he said when contacted today.

Amir's latest movie *Apa Khabar Orang Kampung* (known abroad as *Village People Radio Show*) was banned on Feb 12 for allegedly glorifying the struggle of the 'communist united front' in this nation.

In a letter to the film-maker, the censorship board listed seven reasons for the ban that ranged from 'inaccurate facts to depicting the government in poor light'.

Amir, whose previous movie *Lelaki Komunis Terakhir* (*The Last Communist*) was also banned, sent his appeal letter on Monday citing 14 reasons as to why his latest movie should not be axed.

The censorship board falls under the purview of the Home Ministry and bans are based on guidelines concerning ideological, political, religious, socio-cultural, moral and decency matters.

Gov't insecure

Meanwhile, author K Arumugam - who could relate to Amir's disappointment since his book *March 8* was among the 56 titles banned recently - said the government was insecure and overreacting.

Contacted today, he said it was pertinent for the government to strike a balance between the need for stability and the level of liberty.

"We have politics run by different races, sensitive issues can create a level of intolerance but still I think they are being highly judgmental of the maturity of citizens," he added

Gerakan leader and Penang state executive councillor Dr Toh Kin Woon agreed with this.

"By banning films, the censorship board seems to imply that the viewing public are incapable of making their own judgement and evaluation of films in a critical way.

"If this is the case, then it is clearly untrue. A lot of people do engage in critical thinking [...] they often generate healthy debates among viewers of their contents," he said in a statement today.

Who is immature?

This view was also supported by Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) communications lecturer Zaharom Nain who said that it is the government, and not the public, which was immature.

"What kind of democratic society are we if we can't even show movies?"

"Is it just because that he (Amir) did not follow the official history line prescribed by the government? There is no democracy in the country if the leaders trip all over it," he said when contacted.

Yesterday, Culture, Arts and Heritage Minister Dr Rais Yatim called for a review of Amir's movie.

The minister said he wanted to see *Apa Khabar Orang Kampung* "in the context of determining if it actually is against security, or it transgresses on lines of morality or other matters".

"We should have a fair reaction first towards our own films before we simply cut it off before it is put on the slate," he said.

Censorship Board chairperson Mohd Hussain Shafie could not be reached for comments.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/63887>