

Cambodian outrage mounts over Thai film's disrespect of genocide

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Phnom Penh - Cambodian outrage was growing Wednesday over the new Thai horror flick Ghost Game which is set in an abandoned Cambodian jail strongly resembling the infamous Khmer Rouge Toul Sleng torture centre.

Accusing the Thai film makers of disrespect for the victims of Cambodia's genocide, head of the Culture Ministry's cinema department, Kong Kendara, said his office would cooperate with the Interior Ministry to confiscate and destroy any copies of the movie in shops in the capital.

Kendara said he had personally denied representatives of the Thai company Tifa Co permission to film the movie at Toul Sleng on June 27, 2005, because in the ministry's opinion, the script outline obviously failed to respect the memories of the victims of the Pol Pot-led Khmer Rouge regime.

'These film makers disappeared for a while but now it seems they are back. They want people to be scared, but the deaths (of hundreds of thousands of people) is not a game,' Kendara said by telephone.

'The police and the Culture Ministry will cooperate, and when we find this movie, we will destroy it. I would rank it beside the videos from Iraq,' he added.

Last year Cambodian cultural authorities banned the sale of harrowing images showing beheading executions by kidnappers in Iraq on the grounds that they were disrespectful to the victims and were a bad influence on young Cambodians.

The set of Ghost Game, directed by Thailand's Sarawut Wichiansarn, reportedly depicts lines of photographs on the walls in a seemingly direct reference to Toul Sleng, as well as piles of skulls and skeletons.

A group of 11 young Thais play characters in a TV reality show who must stay in the haunted Cambodian prison and brave angry ghosts to win prize money.

'The movie makes the dead out to be bad, but they are innocents. Our national tragedy is not a game. This movie looks like the Thais are not respecting the Khmer,' Kendara said.

The movie, due for release Thursday in Thailand, has united all factions of Khmer politics in indignation, with some saying they fear renewed friction between the two nations due to the Thai production's allegedly crass treatment of a highly sensitive and still painful period of Cambodian history.

In January 2003, Cambodian mobs burned the Thai embassy and destroyed Thai-owned businesses during a riot sparked by unfounded rumours that a Thai soap actress had claimed Cambodia's most sacred temple, Angkor Wat, rightfully belonged to Thailand. Thailand made emergency evacuations of its nationals.

Deputy Governor of the former Khmer Rouge stronghold of Pailin in Cambodia's far northwest, My Meak, said he was horrified that anyone would see the killing fields as a business opportunity.

'This is not a tool to make business. The killing has stopped. We do not forget our past, but it should never be repeated in any form, and especially not in this way,' My Meak said by telephone.

Local English-language newspaper, the Cambodia Daily, quoted a former soldier as saying Thailand should parody its own tragedies if it wanted to make light entertainment out of death.

'If they were neutral, they would make a film about Thai authorities killing thousands of their own people in their 'war on drugs',' soldier Loung Nhoung was quoted as saying.

Up to two million Cambodians died from torture, disease, overwork, starvation and execution under the Khmer Rouge's bloody Democratic Kampuchea regime, which lasted from 1975 to 1979.

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