



Hear, hear: A movie still showing US actress Meryl Streep, who plays Margaret Thatcher, in *The Iron Lady*. Parliamentary debates are supposed to take place as part of a routine process by which MPs question the government. — EPA

Hats off to the past

The greatest piece of parliamentary theatre takes place every Wednesday when the British Prime Minister takes questions from the Leader of Her Majesty's Most Loyal Opposition and other MPs.

LAST week my elder brother and I trekked up Bukit Tunggal near Seri Menanti. The motive was not exercise (we get plenty), nor to inspect the flora (apparently successively rubbing four types of leaves can cure anything) and fauna (tapirs are still visible here), nor to conduct a geographical survey (the border with Rembau weaves through the sources of the rivers).

The reason was history: Dr Muhammad Pauzi Abdul Latif, a resident of Seri Menanti and Universiti Putra Malaysia academic, told us of a discovery of a site used by Raja Melewar, the first Yamtuan of Negri Sembilan.

Artefacts were still intact, and the existence of more was revealed by speaking to elderly residents who remembered seeing others. This was crosschecked with other oral sources, carbon dating and more search would further augment these claims.

With dozens of students and officials we were amid real, evolving history – not distortions and inventions seen of late.

Shivers went up my spine as Datuk Dr Mohd Rosli Saludin, our unofficial poet laureate, relayed his interpretation of events in his characteristic singsong fashion. I will say no more on this for now as further research is being carried out: but watch this space!

It was cool under hillslope jungle canopies, and my panama hat was unnecessary as we retired for lunch at Seri Siantan, a collection of houses brought together and restored by Dr Pauzi.

The same could not be said of the BMW Malaysian Open tennis final, which saw Hsieh Su-Wei and Petra Martic battling in sweltering heat.

The latter won her semifinal match earlier that morning due to previous rain delays; her retirement created the first Asian winner of the tournament and time to roam around; other players and familiar faces weren't far.

Rather, Malaysians of any stripe enjoy tennis, and at my Thursday sessions at Taman Duta I see more ethnicities on a single court than I do on a football pitch when Negri Sembilan is in the final (which is often).

"Come on Taiwan!" someone shouted before the termination of the match, and I wondered if he would get disciplined for not cheering "Chinese Taipei" (or "Formosa"?) instead.

The non-inclusion of Taiwan in formal diplomatic approaches to security in the South China Sea was brought up on Wednesday at a roundtable conference hosted by the Foreign Policy Study Group at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations in the historic Treaty Room at the old Wisma Putra.



Roaming Beyond the Fence

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Participants spoke of the challenges to realising the Asean Economic Community, and I had conversations with veterans as to the hazy direction of our current foreign policy and how our ability to punch above our weight in international affairs has dwindled.

On the topic of debates and discourses, since we are a parliamentary democracy, we have a chamber in which debates are supposed to take place as part of a routine process by which MPs question the government.

The greatest piece of parliamentary theatre takes place every Wednesday when the British House of Commons is in session.

For half an hour the Prime Minister takes questions from the Leader of Her Majesty's Most Loyal Opposition and other MPs, and he has to defend himself on any topic.

If you watch the brilliantly acted (but less well plotted) film *The Iron Lady* you'll see Margaret Thatcher trouncing the hapless Labour leader on the other side.

This is what should happen in our Dewan Rakyat, and there should be no question of either participant being incompetent or immoral.

These are the individuals our parliamentary system has determined as Head of Government and Leader of the Opposition, and that is reason enough for them to debate.

Alas, gone are the days when, as the late Dr Chandran Jeshurun wrote in his diplomatic profile of Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Dewan Rakyat would hear such witticisms by the former prime minister urging opposition members to "take advantage of this visit to Formosa: I am sure they will enjoy themselves", or by making clear our stand during the Cold War: "Malaya's stand is on the side of democracy and it is sheer hypocrisy to suggest that when democracy is attacked we should remain silent and consider ourselves at peace with the aggressors. Small as we are, we are no cowards. We are no hypocrites."

That's real leadership, that's morally sound foreign policy, and that's why "Putra" should always remain in the metonym of our Foreign Ministry, even if it's now in Putrajaya.

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