

ON Sunday, I officiated and participated in the Kenaboi International River Challenge. This was the third time I kayaked alongside a hundred participants for 32km down this tributary of the Temiang which itself flows into the Pahang, emptying at the royal town of Pekan.

In my speech I mentioned how unfair it was that the most famous nature spots in the country are in other states, even though Negri Sembilan has such marvellous rivers, mountains, caves and forests (still), despite being the fourth smallest state.

Rivers were always hugely politically significant in our history (even if Negri Sembilan wasn't named after one, like the other peninsular states).

They were the conduit for transportation, trade and, therefore, taxation, and today many state borders are defined by rivers – the northern boundary of Negri Sembilan encompasses the drainage basin of the Kenaboi, while the southern boundary with Malacca follows the Rembau and Linggi (on which Isabella Bird famously travelled), notwithstanding the exclave of Tanjung Tuan.

To the east, the Seri Menanti flows into the Muar which then meanders southwest, ending at its namesake town, providing the country's only riverine link between two royal capitals.

I completed the journey in just over three hours: a new personal record that Hashim Osman, Director of Jabatan Pengairan dan Saliran Negeri and his staff will expect me to beat next year.

My speech on Monday was to congratulate my colleagues at the

Of clean rivers and fight against graft

The end of year rush results in more meetings than usual taking place, but regular commitments have to be fulfilled, too. Three of the best for me occurred in as many days.



Roaming Beyond the Fence
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Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) on producing a well-researched interim report on anti-corruption initiatives in Malaysia, including a useful historical summary of policy since before Merdeka.

Our Senior Fellow Anis Yusaf Yusoff mentioned that compared to other countries in which citizens perceived such bad levels of corruption, Malaysia nonetheless enjoyed better economic indicators.

This was reported as "Ideas says corruption not as bad as perceived", and although the project was funded by several local and foreign funders – including the British High Commission and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, this was omitted in favour of "MACC-funded", insinuat-

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ing that the report must therefore be biased.

Perhaps such journalists are unaccustomed to the integrity that inspires us and think tanks in other democracies which routinely criticise governments and institutions though they may fund them – sometimes, internal party think tanks even criticise their own leaders.

It will inevitably take time for Malaysian spinners and politicians to

understand this.

Other media focused on the fact that the panel discussants – Datuk Akhbar Satar from Transparency International Malaysia, Prof Dr Syed Faris Alatas from the National University of Singapore and the always animated Professor Dr Terence Gomez (why would we invite him if we were being government sycophants?) – warned of a looming descent into kleptocracy unless something substantial is done to counter the scourge imminently.

Finally, still others focused on Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's comments that the judiciary is the key to combating corruption, and highlighted the fact that we celebrated his birthday that fell on the same day.

As has been noted even by ardent critics of Barisan Nasional, it's undeniable that democratic space expanded during his administration, resulting in the birth and growth of many civil society organisations.

So, although no one reported my reference to Bond girls, the diverse

aspects of our event emphasised across the Malaysian media should provide any student of media studies with useful examples of spin and manipulation.

Do download our report and send criticisms to feedback@ideas.org.my.

There was no speech on Tuesday, but plenty of noise in Gemas as I joined the three battalions of Rejimen 508 Askar Wataniah for the shooting component of their annual training exercise – this time focusing on conventional rather than jungle warfare (regular readers may recall my experience last year).

I encourage Malaysians whose knowledge of the military is based on exposés of questionable arms spending – including scandals which should rightfully be exposed as the resulting deficiencies can endanger our troops – to consider joining the voluntary forces: it provides an entirely different perspective of ordinary men and women of all ethnicities and diverse professions (amongst the officers are teachers at Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools) who give up their time for the sake of the defence of our country.

The discipline and camaraderie that is fostered at these sessions has benefits well beyond the military, too.

My thanks to Brig-Jen Datuk Shahrom Mohamad, Lt-Kol Nazaruddin Yahya and Lt-Kol Mahadi Abu for hosting such a competitive, mentally and physically demanding morning that thankfully ended with a meal with the best *ikan sembilang* from Negri Sembilan's rivers.

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