



Brave New World by AZMI SHAROM

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ON Sunday night I was with a group of chaps and we were jumping, dancing and shouting with joy.

Looking back now, it occurred to me that if someone had photographed us, we would have made wonderful poster boys for unity (albeit highly unattractive poster boys). We were your

classic Melayu, Cina, India group (with apologies to my indi-genous fellow citizens).

No, I was not taking part in some plastic 1Malaysia campaign. This moment was a genuine one with real feeling. The reason for our unbridled *muhibbah* celebrations was Tottenham Hotspur's 9–1 victory over Wigan.

It was an amazing night which started (as it always does with long-suffering Spurs fans) with cautious optimism, building to happiness at what was looking like a solid victory, and culminating in ecstatic disbelief that we were watching a historical game unfold.

I suppose the authentic nature of our oneness that night was due to the fact that we shared a common goal and a common endeavour.

And that is the key to any true sense of unity – an overarching ideal that transcends petty differences like the colour of your skin, the god/s that you worship and the food that you eat.

I have written before about gross displays of racism in this country. And I have been critical of those in power who pander to such feelings, indeed, who perpetuate it with their bigoted gesturing.

I have called many times for governance that does away completely with ethnic-based policies and laws.

These elements remain in our country and they continue to scupper any efforts of achieving a sense of Malaysian-ness.

All efforts must be made to exorcise them from our national psyche and system of governance. However, it would be folly to wait for these “big” issues to be settled before we did anything.

We must not fall back on our old “Hang Tuah” complex wishing for some hero to come swooping down and with a Herculean effort solve all our problems overnight.

Instead, we must reclaim our country by making changes ourselves, within our own personal orbits.

And we must make it clear to those who lead and who wish to lead, that we will tolerate no such garbage from them.

In this light, I was happy and honoured to take part in the launch of the Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia movement in Penang on Nov 15.

The SABM is a non-aligned movement made up of volunteers who are basically spreading the message of creating a Malaysia where our different cultures are celebrated but with the belief that we are all Malaysians first.

They advocate a non-ethnic brand of politics and governance with the protection of our human rights via the Federal Constitution (for more information go to <http://sayaanakbangsamalaysia.net>)

Although they are not aligned to any political party, it does not mean they are not political.

By this I mean they advocate that citizens use their power to voice dissent (at the very least through the ballot box) and to push for change from the grassroots up.

In this way, the SABM does not provide yet another organisation seeking a leadership role; instead it aims to empower citizens to instigate changes themselves.

An interesting aspect of the launch in Penang was that the organisers had requested Malay participants to bring a friend who was not of their ethnic group and vice-versa.

It came as no surprise to me to find that the majority of the participants (despite their obvious earnestness) were unable to do so.

To me, this shows that where ethnic relations are concerned, this country has reached a crisis point.

True, we have not (yet) got the experience of skinhead fascists prowling the streets, but in a way our situation is more perilous as it is quiet and swept under the carpet by superficial shows of supposed unity.

We have accepted racism as a way of life and when it happens, it is seen as a norm.

Using a trite example: How often have you seen advertisements for housemates with an ethnic prerequisite?

And no one blinks an eyelid, because we have allowed this to be part of our flesh and blood.

The number of participants at the SABM launch was small, and as I said, it did not go on as the organisers had hoped it would.

However, instead of finding this discouraging, I find it means that such movements like the SABM are needed more than ever.

They are taking their message across the country starting early next year, and it is a message that has to go out.

Yes, they are idealistic and yes, they are utopian. And I count myself as one of those idealistic people longing for a Utopia.

Unrealistic? Perhaps. But without such higher hopes and goals, we will forever be squabbling and scratching around in the divisive, exclusionary, bigoted, unkind, nation state of our own making.

In the meantime, every time there is a Spurs match on, I will be watching it with my pals.

And I am secure in the knowledge that they see me not as Azmi Sharom, Melayu, but Azmi Sharom the loyal Spurs supporter who can't analyse a game to save his life.

Postscript: I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Arsenal fans for having the second highest margin of victory so far in this season.

> Dr Azmi Sharom is a law teacher. The views expressed here are entirely his own.

[But we like it all the same :) - SABM web admin]

Note: SABM Penang Roadshow pictorial [here](#) .