

NCBM OUTREACH



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EDITORIAL BOARD

- Moses Choo
- Wong Kwee Heong
- Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

SUPPORT OUR CAUSE

The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) provides a vital link between the organisations serving the blind in this country by acting as the national coordinating body. Through NCBM, the organisations for and of the blind have a channel to discuss and formulate national policies and plans and to pioneer new programmes for the benefit of the blind.

Your financial support will, therefore, go a long way in helping to bring about new developments and progress for the blind. All contributions are deeply appreciated.

Donations should be made in the name of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia. Address:

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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Readers are reminded that their contribution of articles, suggestions and jokes are most welcomed for inclusion in "The NCBM Outreach". However, please note that it would be very helpful to the Editor if such contributions could be submitted either on diskette or on single-sided Braille pages to facilitate editing.

For details of payments, please see the last page

Always bear in
mind that your own
resolution to succeed
is more important
than any one thing.

Abraham Lincoln

16th president of US

(1809 - 1865)

IF YOU KNOW OF
ANY BLIND PERSON
NEEDING REGISTRATION
FOR EDUCATION OR
REHABILITATION,
PLEASE CONTACT US
IMMEDIATELY

NCBM

Te: 03-2272 4959

03-2272 1442

MAB

Te; 03-2272 2673

03-2272 2677

**MESSAGE FROM THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
YB DATO' SERI NAJIB BIN TUN ABDUL RAZAK
AT THE 12TH ICEVI CONFERENCE
JULY 16 – 21, 2006**

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for the 12th World Conference on Education for the Visually Impaired, i.e. ICEVI 2006. It is indeed an honour and privilege for Malaysia to have been chosen to be the host of this auspicious event.

On behalf of the Government of Malaysia, I sincerely hope that you will have the opportunity to enjoy your stay in our country. Take a little break from your busy schedule whenever you can in order to experience the multi-faceted variety of our pluralistic culture and to sample the richness of our local sights, flavours and colours. You deserve a little treat from Malaysia after all your hard work! I am sure that by the end of your stay, you will have discovered and understood the meaning of our popular message, “to know Malaysia is to love Malaysia”.

First and foremost, however, I must not forget to acknowledge the sincere effort and hard work to which ICEVI has dedicated itself in striving to bring about the upliftment of the blind by aspiring to create a level playing field for them through education – a very worthy and noble cause indeed. Truly, I feel greatly encouraged and deeply inspired to know that

so many people from all around the world have gathered together for your ICEVI conference in order to work collectively and to deliberate and reflect painstakingly upon the issues and challenges related to the task of ensuring that the blind and visually impaired do not miss out on the opportunities in and afforded by education.

The theme, “Achieving Equality in Education: New Challenges and Strategies for Change” is most timely and very appropriate. The theme is certainly in keeping with the new education policy of Malaysia which was introduced in 2001 and the implementation of new programmes over the next ten years until 2010. Just like ICEVI, Malaysia too aspires to the fulfilment of the vision as envisaged and declared by the United Nations, i.e. the vision of a society in which “Education for All” can be accomplished.

Indeed, I am greatly impressed by the achievements that ICEVI has already made during the last quadrennium or past four years of its existence since 2002. In such a short period of time, you have been able to reach thousands of blind children who are in need of education; this is no mean feat at all in view of the limited resources

available to the organisation. Nevertheless, there are many thousands more to be reached (four million according to your estimates), and I do appreciate the fact that you are just at the beginning of the race.

Of course, I have full confidence that you will win this race because of the courage and determination you have amply demonstrated by launching out with such a clear vision and mission of what you want to do and achieve at the end of the race. I have no doubt that the strategies you have adopted and mapped out for yourselves will help you tremendously in fulfilling the daunting task ahead of you.

As we are all aware, the Year of the Child was celebrated by the world in 1990 and emphasis was placed on the theme, “Education for All”. In accordance with the 1990 Declaration on the Rights of the Child, it was stressed that important consideration should be given to “education for all children”, including the children who are disabled. Truly, I do share and fervently support the view that every child should be guaranteed the right to education because this is the ultimate key to future economic and social independence later on in life, particularly for the

disabled person.

Certainly, there are many challenges that need to be overcome on the way to your final goal. These include the challenge of creating public awareness, bringing about access to opportunities, and the need for resource mobilisation. In fact, the Malaysian government has been very supportive of the efforts to disseminate information on blindness and disability through the mass media. Provision has also been made for voluntary registration of the disabled with the national and state welfare departments.

We are also actively supporting the idea of legislation for the disabled, an instrument which will go a long way in helping to create public awareness regarding the needs and rights of the disabled. Currently, the initiative has been taken by the NGO's and the government agencies to draw up a piece of legislation, the Disability Act of Malaysia, in order to put into practice the policies and programmes that will be of benefit to the disabled in this country.

In meeting the challenge of enabling the blind to gain access and opportunities to education, the government of Malaysia has responded positively to such needs. Concerning Braille textbooks, for example, the Special Department of Education is now collaborating with the organisations serving the blind in producing such books. Effort is also being made to develop more expertise with regards to tactile production so that more maps, diagrams, models and other relevant materials can be made available to the blind in

education from primary to tertiary level.

Concerning resource mobilisation, I am happy to announce that the government has allocated a sum of RM2 million towards the development of an ICT centre at the Malaysian Association for the Blind and the provision of ICT equipment to the blind.

We are aware that besides ICT, the blind also need to have opportunities in rehabilitation and vocational training. In view of this, the government has made available free white canes and Perkins Brailers to the needy blind. We are also working closely with organisations such as MAB to improve their rehabilitation and vocational courses so that high standards can be maintained through the MLVK certification system. In fact, I am very proud and happy to know that MAB has plans for its training centre to be upgraded to college level; in future, the Gurney Training Centre may be known as the Gurney Training College. The government will certainly give its full support to MAB in its endeavours to fulfil this goal.

At the school and university level, the government has responded positively to the appeal for financial assistance for blind students. Every school child who is blind now receives a monthly allowance of RM25 while every blind student in tertiary education is now able to receive RM300 per month.

As mentioned earlier, the New Education Policy (2001-2010) was initiated in order to help

overcome the lack of resources for education. The main thrust of this policy includes four important aspects – accessibility, equity, quality as well as efficiency and effectiveness. These four general principles of the policy apply not only to the sighted and able-bodied but also to the blind and disabled persons as well.

For instance, in order to meet the needs of the disabled in education, provision has been made to increase special education opportunities for the disabled by making available trained specialist teachers right from the primary school level. The participation of the general public, especially parents, in the education programmes is being encouraged. Provision has also been made to introduce new technical and vocational schools for the disabled.

Thus, as you can see, the government of Malaysia is ready and willing to support and collaborate with you in your efforts and through your activities and programmes to enable the blind to gain opportunities to education at all levels. I take this golden opportunity to wish you God's blessings and every success as you strike out boldly and strive to achieve the goal or target of 2015 – "Education for All"! You are indeed making an important contribution to bring about a significant change that will enable all blind persons to live a life that is productive, meaningful and dignified.

Thank you.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. CLIENTS' DAY BY THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCES

The Ministry of Human Resources (together with relevant departments and agencies) will hold Clients' Day on the second Friday of every month from 9.00 a.m. to 12 noon. This event is open to all employees, employers and workers' unions.

For future information, please contact tel. no. 88865000.

2. OKU BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANT

The business development grant for disabled persons was recently launched by the Ministry of Human Resources in 2007. The allocation for the grant will be RM1,000,000 (one million ringgit) each year and will be made available for the next five years.

Applicants are required to submit their business proposals with supporting documents. The amount of grant provided for each business will be RM30,000 (thirty thousand ringgit) or more.

Application forms are available from MAB Job Placement Unit, K.L. or from the Jabatan Tenaga Kerja, Putrajaya. Please contact En. Zainuddin Jasmi, MAB Placement Officer at tel. 03-22722677 ext. 22 or Puan Wan Aminawati of the Labour Department at tel. 03-88865214.

ICT FOR THE BLIND IN MALAYSIA AND THE ASEAN REGION Part I

*By Silatul Rahim Dahman
Assistant Manager
ICT Centre
Malaysian Association for the Blind*

Editor's Note: This paper was presented by Silatul Rahim Dahman at the International Conference on Education for the Visually Impaired (ICEVI) held at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from July 16 – 21, 2006.

Here is what he says:

In our country, it was the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) that first began to think of introducing the ICT programme to the blind during the early 1980s. Under the chairmanship of Godfrey Ooi, the NCBM Library Services Committee worked in close cooperation with St. Nicholas Home, Penang and the Malaysia Association for the Blind in Kuala Lumpur to formulate a national programme. The Ministry of Education was invited to be a partner but the ministry eventually withdrew from the process.

Fortunately, St. Nicholas kindly agreed to take up the challenge. With the help of a highly dedicated volunteer from England, Mr. Nicholas Drayton, St. Nicholas introduced the first Malay Braille Translation software in 1986. Thus, the first

school for the blind to start an ICT training programme in Malaysia was St. Nicholas School. Some Apple PC's were installed with speech screen readers and the programme was opened up to blind students both in primary and secondary education. The lessons were conducted after school hours as part of their co-curricular activities and they were taught keyboarding, word processing and computer games.

In fact, the DOS-based Malay Braille Translator is still being widely used today by many blind individuals, organisations, schools, libraries and government agencies.

MAB AND SBM

In the late 1980s, the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) decided to introduce computer training as one of the courses at the Gurney Training Centre. A full-time instructor was recruited for the purpose. Since then, the programme has been expanded and has made great progress over the years.

The Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) began providing computer literacy courses for its members in the 1990s. Three part-

time instructors were engaged to teach during the week-ends.

In 1995, SBM set up its Computer Resource Unit and it was equipped with PC's with high-speed internet connections, scanners and Braille embossers. Various kinds of affordable adaptive computer equipment were obtained to meet the needs of blind users.

As a result of the efforts of NCBM, MAB and SBM, computer literacy for the blind has now been given much greater emphasis at the school level. Assistive technology and ICT infrastructure have been made available to enable blind students to cope with present demands and future trends.

ICT IN THE PHILIPPINES

In 1998, a national survey was conducted by Resources for the Blind, Inc., Manila in order to determine the extent of basic knowledge in computers among the blind in the Philippines. According to this survey, only 27 blind persons had such basic knowledge. Thus, RBI came up with a programme.

The first computer training initiative was started in February 1999 in collaboration with the Department of Education, the Philippine Blind Union (PBU), and various other organisations serving the blind. Meanwhile, RBI introduced its own computer course on Windows with JAWS for five teachers from five schools in Baguio. Then RBI went on to help establish computer centres in the schools and agencies which had taken part in their computer

course.

Now there are at least 20 ICT training courses in the Philippines which meet the needs of about 135 blind persons at any given time. They are equipped with Romeo & Juliet Braille embossers, Braille displays, scanners and printers.

Besides training programmes, RBI also conducted the first Computer-Eyes Camp, a national training programme for blind students, in 2001. 20 students from high schools and colleges all over the country came to take part. The following year there were 30 participants, and the third year there were 20 who took part. This year (2006) there will be ten blind children from elementary school plus another 20 students from high school.

Thus, it can be seen that training and promotion in the use of ICT among the blind in the Philippines are developing rapidly. In recognition of this reality, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports recently announced the purchase of 500 million pesos worth of computers and adaptive equipment for the use of the blind in high schools over the next two years.

This is indeed an exciting opportunity for the blind in the Philippines. With the rapid spread of computer technology for the blind in the country, many more doors will be opened to them in the not too distant future.

(to be continued)

The person who
makes a success of
living is the one who
see his goal steadily
and aims for it
unswervingly. That is
dedication.

Cecil B. DeMille

(1881 - 1959)

DEVELOPMENTS IN WBU AND WBUAP

*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy
Secretary-General
World Blind Union Asia-Pacific Region*

Editor's Note: *The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) is a member of the World Blind Union (WBU). The World Blind Union Asia-Pacific Region is one of the seven regions of the WBU and Malaysia is part of this regional grouping.*

Here is the report by Ivan Ho Tuck Choy regarding developments, particularly in the WBUAP region, for the year 2006:

I would like to begin by conveying the thanks of Dr. William Rowland, President of the World Blind Union, for the five-year pledge of US\$2,500 made by NCBM in support of the permanent office of WBU and the employment of a Chief Executive Officer to help administer the office.

CEO FOR WBU

Dr. Penny Hartin, LL.D (Hons.), of Canada, a partially sighted person, has been appointed as the first Chief Executive Officer of WBU with effect from 30th October 2006. She is based in the WBU Permanent Office currently operating at the premises of the Canadian Institute for the Blind (CNIB) in Toronto.

Dr. Penny Hartin had spent the past 27 years as an employee

of CNIB where she started as a Field Services Trainee in 1979 and worked her way up to the post of Executive Director of CNIB's Blindness International Division. At the time of her appointment, Dr. Hartin was President of the North American/Caribbean Region of WBU. She had, over a period of 14 years, made a significant contribution to the work of WBU, most notably in the activities concerning blind women. In addition, she had been actively involved in the work of ICEVI, IAPB, other blindness-related institutions and various community service organisations.

WBUAP ASSEMBLY

Following the withdrawal of Fiji to host the WBUAP Mid-Term Regional General Assembly, the China Association of the Blind had offered to be the host. It is hoped the Assembly could be held towards the end of April 2007.

THE THIRD TERUKO IKEDA ICT TRAINING WORKSHOP

The Selection Committee, comprising three members from Japan and the Secretary General of WBUAP, met on 8th May 2006 and selected eight participants from Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri

Lanka and Thailand. There were no applications from Malaysia.

The first part of the workshop was held at the premises of NCBM from 26 July to 16 August while the second part was held in Japan from 17 to 31 August. The training was carried out by instructors from Japan and Thailand.

This project, under the auspices of WBUAP, was fully sponsored by the Teruko Ikeda Foundation.

THE FOURTH WBUAP ONKYO BRAILLE ESSAY CONTEST

The WBUAP Onkyo Selection Committee met on 2 September and selected seven winners from among 17 entrants. Four of the prizes went to Vietnam, two to Myanmar and one to Australia. The overall prize, The Ootsuki Prize, carries a value of US\$1,000. Again, there were no entries from Malaysia.

THE 8TH WBUAP MASSAGE SEMINAR

This seminar was held from 22 to 24 September in Japan. Practising masseurs from over 12 countries were present.

It was agreed to start an electronic newsletter and to draw up a Code of Practice for

professional masseurs.

It was also agreed to set up the Asian Medical Massage Instructors' Network and some of the objectives are to draw up a curriculum for the training of massage instructors, to translate massage materials into various languages, and to establish a database of certified massage instructors who could be called upon to conduct overseas courses and to issue certificates.

THE TAKEO IWAHASHI AWARD 2006

This Award went to Mr. Tran Van Nam (sighted) of Vietnam. He had been working for the Vietnam Association of the Blind for more than 20 years.

FACT-FINDING MISSION TO MYANMAR

The President of NCBM, in his capacity as Chairman of the WBUAP - SouthEast Asia Regional Committee, together with the Secretary, made the trip to Myanmar from 28 to 30 September 2006. Some of the matters touched upon were:

1. The need to unite the Myanmar National Association of the Blind and the Education Centre for Blind Affairs as partners in a single national entity so that they could be recognised by WBU as a Full Member.
2. Establishing ICT training units, a Braille production unit, and the development of an agricultural training centre on their ten-acre plot of land.

FUND-RAISING AND COMMUNICATION WORKSHOP

The Christoffel Blindenmission (CBM) provided 10,500 euros for this workshop to be held from 18 to 20 December 2006 at the Capitol Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. The facilitators were provided by the Resource Alliance stationed in Philippines and Malaysia. There were 28 participants, 14 of whom were from the SEARC region and another 14 from NCBM and its Member Organisations.

A decision is
measured by the
fact that you've
taken new action.
If there's no action,
you haven't truly
decided.
Anthony Robbins

Live neither in the
past nor in the future,
but let each day's
work absorb your
entire energies, and
satisfy your widest
ambition.

Sir William Osler,
to his students -
British physician
(1849 - 1919)

CBR AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN BUSINESS CORPORATIONS

*By Godfrey Ooi Goat See
Deputy Executive Director
Malaysian Association for the Blind*

Editor's Note: The two topics, Community-based Rehabilitation and Employment in Business Corporations, were discussed at the Expert Group Meeting organised by ESCAP in Bangkok, Thailand from July 5 – 6, 2005. En. Ooi from MAB and En. Moses Choo from NCBM were present at the meeting.

Here is the report on the salient points of the meeting as follows:

COMMUNITY-BASED REHABILITATION

1. Disability and Poverty

According to the representative from ILO, disability and poverty reinforce each other, thereby perpetuating the exclusion of the disabled. To prevent this from happening, it is therefore essential for disabled persons to be included in policy and development initiatives.

In fact, CBR processes include early intervention, outreach work and awareness raising. One definite way to alleviate poverty would be through the process whereby efforts are made to help the disabled develop micro-enterprises or their own small businesses.

2. Empowerment of the Disabled

According to another speaker, K. Nagata, CBR initiatives and other community approaches should be aimed at the alleviation of poverty and bringing about the empowerment of the disabled. The main strategies would include:

- 2.1 Empowerment through the acquisition of skills;
- 2.2 Mainstreaming of the disabled through CBR programmes;
- 2.3 Integration of the disabled into the community;
- 2.4 Providing the disabled with gainful employment.

3. CBR is for All

Yet, another speaker, M. J. Thomas, said that:

- 3.1 CBR is for all and not just for the developing countries.
- 3.2 CBR is community action resulting in equal opportunities for the disabled in terms of health care, education, employment, social mobility, and even political empowerment.
- 3.3 CBR is, in fact, aimed at bringing about the inclusion

of the disabled in civil, social, economic and political structures based on the idea of equal rights, equal entitlements and equal opportunities in contributing towards the development of society.

- 3.4 Thus, CBR should be regarded as the channel for the practice of human rights and the ultimate eradication of poverty. The key methods include full participation, capacity-building, collaborative networks at all levels, decentralisation of power to the local groups and communities, and helping to develop the self-help organisations as the tools of empowerment.

4. CBR and Poverty Alleviation

Another speaker, Ms. Maya, emphasised that CBR is the tool for poverty alleviation. She explained that disabled persons are disproportionately represented among the poor not just by the income levels but also by exclusion due to the lack of power and opportunities.

- 4.1 The important principles are the restructuring of functionality, the promotion of human rights, and the promotion of ownership.

4.2 The factors of exclusion include:

Treating Disability Issues as secondary rather than priority issues;

The misperception of regarding disability as a specialised and expensive affair;

Prevailing prejudices regarding the abilities and capabilities of the disabled;

The low level of education and lack of skills among the disabled;

The misconceived notion that the disabled are “special” human beings with “special” or unusual needs;

The disabled are poorly motivated and most of them expect “charity” or “a handout” from society.

4.3 Thus, to bring about the mainstreaming of disabled persons,

CBR should address the issues related to poverty and the eradication of poverty among the disabled;

CBR needs to move beyond traditional vocational skills and to bring about the development of income-generating activities;

Education should encompass early intervention, non-formal education, basic education and transitory education.

4.4 The reality of motivations by governments

(a) Dialogue based only on rights will not persuade governments to include the disabled. This is because governments are more interested in economic issues. Therefore, they could only be persuaded by such issues as the justification of helping 400 million disabled persons because most of them are unemployed. If the disabled are to be able to make a significant contribution to the economy, they must be in employment. In other words, governments must be persuaded that the disabled have the economic potential to be exploited.

(b) However, before the disabled can be exploited, they must have access to productive resources and social services. Thus, developing the self-help groups of the disabled means providing assistance in the development of enterprises, cooperatives and private businesses. Entrepreneurial development must be related to the questions of inclusion.

(c) Ultimately, the disabled must move away from the idea of simply being beneficiaries to becoming contributors to the family, community and nation.

basic rehabilitation and training to the all-encompassing idea of providing a whole range of services through CBR. Surely, this is what is already being done or expected to be done through the wide range of services being provided through the Centre-based approach which is the traditional approach adopted by most organisations serving the disabled, i.e. the service-providers such as the Malaysian Association for the Blind.

Nevertheless, perhaps there are some strategies that need to be emphasised in order for service-providers to compete on equal grounds as the CBR programmes in bringing about the empowerment of the disabled and their inclusion in society.

1. The structures of organisations such as MAB should be made more accessible to the disabled so that they would have a meaningful say in the policy and decision-making processes of such organisations.
2. Existing structures should be strengthened and new ideas and strategies may need to be introduced in order to develop and promote more capacity-building activities amongst disabled or blind persons enjoying the services of the organisation.

(to be continued)

CONCLUSIONS **REGARDING CBR**

Based on the discussions on CBR, it would appear that the CBR programme is now expected to move from mere

NEWS FROM THE MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

READING STATIONS AT MAB LIBRARY

The low-vision reading station was introduced at the MAB Library and Resource Centre towards the end of last year (2006) with the installation of a CCTV. This was the result of collaboration between the MAB low-vision service which identified the need and the MAB library which responded by setting up the station.

The low-vision reading station is the latest addition to a number of reading stations which had been introduced some years ago. These include eight small tables for Braille reading and six audio seats for the users to listen to talking-books.

A round table (with at least three Perkins Brailleurs) is also available for users to do reference work. Some of the users also work with volunteers at the reading stations.

THE ASSISTANCE TO BLIND CHILDREN PROGRAMME

The ABC programme of MAB was started in the early 1990s when its headquarters was located in Petaling Jaya. In 1998, the programme was shifted to Kompleks MAB in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur where the first ABC Centre was established. In 2005, two more centres were set up – one in Klang and one in Kota

Bharu.

The ABC programme has three main objectives – early intervention, rehabilitation, and preparatory skills for schooling. Thus, the categories of blind children accepted at the ABC centres include babies from 0 – 4 years old, pre-school children from 4 – 6 years old, older children who need readjustment skills before going back to school, and blind children with additional disabilities right up to their teenage years.

In January 2007, a total number of 20 blind children were enrolled at the ABC Centre in Brickfields. This included three new children – Nurul Kharina from Selayang at the age of 11½ months, Farid from Batang Berjuntai at the age of ten, and Nishantan a/l Raman from Port Dickson at the age of nine. Nishantan lacks the ability to communicate with other people.

For the Klang ABC Centre, four children were enrolled in January 2007. They included one girl aged five years, and three boys ranging from two years to five years old.

At the Kota Bharu ABC Centre, an awareness programme was carried out in 2006 in order to encourage parents to send their blind children there. New strategies are being planned this year so that more blind children will be enrolled with the Centre.

The ABC programme is headed by Pn. Rosnah Alimuda. Parents and volunteers come to the centres to provide assistance.

NEW HOSTEL FOR GTC TRAINEES

The hostel project commenced on April 1, 2006. On completion of the project, the five-storey hostel block will be able to house between 80 to 90 trainees of the Gurney Training Centre. There are 15 rooms and each room can accommodate four to eight trainees. The administrative office and family clinic will be on the ground floor and three staff quarters will be on the top floor.

BEST BLIND STUDENTS 2005

On January 13, 2007, MAB cash awards were presented to the best blind achievers in the public examinations for 2005. The awards were presented by the Minister of the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur during the official launching of the MAB open house for the blind.

The best blind students were:

1. Low Fang Jun for the UPSR with five As and 1+ (six subjects); Sekolah Kebangsaan Klang, Jalan Dato' Hamzah; she received

RM200.

2. Siti Sakinah bt. Syed Hamzah for the PMR with seven As and one B (eight subjects); SMK (P) St. George, Jalan Macalister, Penang; she received RM300.
3. Abdul Malik bin Mohd. Sayuti for the SPM with seven A1s and three Bs (ten subjects); SMK Kubang Bemban, Pasir Mas, Kelantan; he received RM400.
4. Sek Kit Xuan for the SPM with seven As, three Bs and two Cs (twelve subjects); Chung Hua Independent High School, Jalan Kota Raja, Klang; she received RM400.
5. Syafawati bt. Abdul Jamal for the STPM with two As, one A- and one B-; SMK Tengku Panglima Perang Tengku Muhamad, Bandar Indera Mahkota, Kuantan, Pahang; she received RM500.

(No blind students qualified for the diploma and degree level.)

PARENT SUPPORT NETWORK

Efforts had been made by MAB since 2004 to get the parents of blind children in the Klang valley together to form a support group. After several gatherings of parents followed by meetings of the pro-tem committee, the parents had at last decided to set up their own support network on December 9, 2006. The first parent to be elected as the president of the network was En. Baskaran a/l Nagapan.

The family support network is working in close cooperation with MAB in organising activities for the blind children. MAB also supports the network with regards to the use of facilities and the need for administrative and technical expertise.

SMPK UNDER THE MAB SCHOOL ADOPTION SCHEME

In 2006, MAB provided support to the blind students of SMPK Setapak in various ways. They included briefing the students on the GTC transition training programme for form five and form six school-leavers and the educational assistance schemes for tertiary education, sponsoring of the English language camp, providing a pingpong table and sponsoring of the first pingpong coaching clinic for the school, and the donation of three othello sets to the school library.

MEVIC MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME

MAB collaborated closely with the company known as Play By Ear Sdn. Bhd. in establishing the MEVIC society, i.e. society for the music education of visually impaired children, in 2005. Two blind children had been selected for the grade one level course and they were Tan Mike Foong and Solan a/l Balakrishnan.

Meanwhile, another blind student from SMPK Setapak, Joel Leong, was provided with a grant of RM1,000 to take up piano lessons with a private tutor.

HARMONICA CLASSES

With the help of Mr. Tay Keng Seng, a harmonica champion at one of the German championships, separate classes were organised for blind children under the School Adoption Scheme and for blind adults under the Outreach Care Programme. Six persons took part in the children's programme while about ten persons participated in the adult programme. It is hoped that this will open up new opportunities for the blind in developing their musical talents.

MAB ELDERLY BLIND CLUB

The Elderly Blind Club held its AGM and gathering on Saturday, February 10, 2007. Elections to the committee was held and Kathan Pillai (aged 87) was elected to the chairmanship for the fourth term. Our hearty congratulations to Kathan Pillai!

READING STATION FOR LOW-VISIONED PERSONS

With effect from January 2007, the MAB library has set up a reading station for low-visioned persons in the library. A black-and-white desktop video magnifier and CCTV are provided. Clients may bring along their own reading material or borrow books from the print section of the library.

Bookings can be made with the library staff who will show clients how to use the CCTV.

+

JOB PLACEMENTS

For the year 2006, job placements for blind persons are as follows:

Teachers - 6

Religious Teachers - 8

Masseurs - 26

Shop Assistant - 2

Office Assistant - 2

Telemarketers - 36

Assistant Placement Officer - 2

Lawyer - 2

Total - 84

**FAREWELL TO MAB
LIBRARIAN**

The library staff and volunteers bid Christine Ng Lai farewell with a lunch and a recollection of fond memories on Wednesday, February 28, 2007. This was followed by another farewell lunch hosted by the MAB management at the RRC restaurant on Monday, March 5, 2007.

In his brief speech, the Executive Director, En. George Thomas, mentioned some of Christine's contributions to the work for the blind which included assistance in setting up the Elderly Blind Club, starting the First ASEAN Braille Carnival, the Braille Proficiency Course, the Low-vision Reading Station at the MAB library, building a pool of dedicated volunteers for the library, and, of course, the Teley MAB or Infoline of the Malaysian

Association for the Blind.

MAB expresses deep appreciation for her contributions to MAB during her brief tenure as librarian at the Library and Resource Centre for about four and a half years from August 2002 to February 2007.

We need men who
can dream of things
that never were.
John F. Kennedy
35th president of
US 1961-1963
(1917 - 1963)

+

If one speaks or acts
with a cruel mind,
misery follows, as
the cart follows the
horse... If one speaks
or acts with a pure
mind, happiness
follows, as a shadow
follows its source.
The Dhammapada

HABIL FAIZULLABHOY: THE BLIND BUSINESSMAN FROM INDIA Part II

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Editor's Note: The first part of this article appeared in the January – March 2007 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". Here is the second part of the article.

In 1972, Habil got married which was arranged by his mother. His wife was a double arts graduate, specialising in English and history. She has been teaching for the last 32 years and their relationship remains cordial and excellent. Although she feels lonely and misses him while he is abroad, she is extremely proud of him and appreciates the fact that he keeps in touch with her by phone about three or four times a day.

They have two children – a boy and a girl. Their son is now heading T. Mobil, the biggest cellular operator based in America while their daughter, also in America, is a nutritionist and dietician at the New York State Pediatric Hospital.

In 1988, while in the midst of commercial exploits, he felt a strong urge to do something for the blind. So he disguised himself as a beggar by dressing in torn clothes and carrying an old-looking suitcase. He made his way to the hostel for the blind where he was accepted for training. At first his intention was to make a study of

the psychological problems and physical difficulties being faced by the blind. Ultimately, however, he came to the conclusion that the blind were actually in need of help at the highest policy and administrative level. He felt very sad and angry that the blind inmates were being treated like dirt rather than as human beings.

Eventually, when the authorities discovered his real identity, they decided to offer him a place on their board as honorary advisor. Unfortunately, the board could not tolerate his outspokenness and his enthusiastic support for the blind at the institute. Thus, he had to quit the board in 1991.

This was when he decided to set up his own charity organisation which he called the SOS Distress Station. At first his main objective was to focus attention on the needs of the blind. He provided financial and educational assistance to blind individuals and helped them set up business stalls to sell cigarettes and newspapers at the railway stations. Eventually, however, he found that the blind were never satisfied with whatever assistance he could give them; so he decided to turn his attention to the needy and sick in general.

One day, he felt the desire to pay a visit to Malaysia. When

he landed at the KLIA airport, he met a kind Indian gentleman who helped him onto the KLIA Express and introduced him to the Florida Hotel in Brickfields. He learnt from the Indian gentleman that there were rubber tiles on the road which served as a guide for blind commuters. He was fascinated by the idea and decided to take a morning walk. That was when he got lost and then bumped into Fairuz who was on the way to the bank. This was his first contact with the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) and he was very keen to follow Fairuz back to Kompleks MAB. He was introduced to Silatul Rahim and he immediately enrolled as a student for the basic computer course. This was his first time operating a computer and he was so amazed! He decided to get himself a laptop so that he could practise during his free time.

He was also introduced to Roslan who was running the Gemilang Massage Centre in Brickfields. Roslan provided him accommodation and taught him reflexology. He immediately knew that reflexology had great potential as a lucrative trade in India. Many people were in need of relief from stress, strain and pain!

Later on, Fairuz introduced him to the MAB library where

he met Christine Ng Lai and he bought some of the aids used by the blind. He was then introduced to me and I suggested that he give a talk on his experience as a blind businessman. He immediately jumped at the idea without any hesitation. Thus, arrangements were made for the talk on Saturday, September 9, 2006 at the MAB meeting-room. I found his talk to be so interesting that I felt I should share his ideas with readers, especially as so few blind persons turned up for the function – less than ten persons were present.

Before his talk, however, he had the opportunity to take part in the First Malaysian Conference on Rehabilitation organised by the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR) held at the Bangi Industrial and Rehabilitation Centre from September 5 – 7. Being a keen observer, he had heard me talking to Fairuz about the conference and he immediately asked whether he could participate.

Before returning to India on Saturday, September 14, he visited a business expo and did some shopping to compare prices with the help of Vivian, a library volunteer. He found that the expo offered great opportunities for India and he intends to return to this country to establish business links for a lucrative trade.

Habil says he is very happy with the work that is being carried out by MAB and he appreciates very much the support and assistance he received while in Kuala Lumpur. He was very impressed by the enterprising spirit among the blind in Brickfields

and he will never forget the amazement he felt at discovering that so many blind persons in K.L. were using handphones, many of which were even equipped with speech technology.

In conclusion, Habil would like to share his life's message with everyone. He says that the real secret of success has to do with one's willingness to struggle and to face any difficulties or challenges with a positive attitude and outlook. Blindness should mark a new beginning rather than an end to life.

(Habil would be happy to establish contact with anyone in order to share experiences and expertise. His address is:

303 Cavasji Apartments
A11/1 Sallisbury Park
Pune 4110037
Maharashtra
India.

Email: akhmare786@yahoo.com

Tel: 912024262409

Handphone: 919422545070 or
9371215152

In the attitude of
silence the soul finds
the path in a clearer
light, and what is
elusive and deceptive
resolves itself into
crystal clearness.
Our life is a long and
arduous quest after
Truth.

Mahatma Gandhi

Indian leader

(1869 - 1948)

INTERVIEW WITH LAI KOK KEONG: LIFE AT THE KINTA VALLEY WORKSHOP

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Editor's Note: The Kinta Valley Workshop was a sheltered workshop for the blind in Ipoh, Perak and it had been run by MAB for some time as a successful and profitable venture. Unfortunately, this project was terminated after a very brief period. How this came about is revealed by Lai Kok Keong in the following interview.

Lai was actually among the first batch of blind workers to be employed at the Kinta Valley Workshop when it was first started in 1959. When the workshop showed signs of becoming a failed project, Lai found employment as a telephone operator in Kuala Lumpur where he worked until his retirement.

For a time, he was an active member of the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) and even served in some of its committees. He is now an active member in the Elderly Blind Club of MAB and is serving on the EBC committee. He also spends some of his time providing free Mandarin Braille classes to interested blind persons.

In this interview, Mr. Lai shares with us his experiences at the Kinta Valley Workshop.

QUESTION :

When did you join the Kinta Valley Workshop and who were involved?

ANSWER :

I was among the first batch of blind persons who joined the Kinta Valley Workshop when it was established in Ipoh, Perak in the year of 1959. There were about 30 of us blind workers at the time plus a team of five sighted staff and three sighted workers. Mr. Cheah Yu Ho, formerly working as an engineer, was the manager of the workshop. The other staff included a clerk, a driver, a cleaner and the teaman. When the teaman had time to spare, he would also double up as one of the sighted workers.

QUESTION :

What work was done at the workshop and how were the operations carried out?

ANSWER :

For the first two years of its existence, the Kinta Valley Workshop functioned very well indeed. The blind workers were divided into four groups and each group was headed by a sighted person. Four types of work were carried out at the workshop – basketry, chain-link fencing, carpentry and making chairs.

For basketry, everything was done by the blind workers themselves. For chain-link fencing, the sighted worker would do the cutting while the

blind workers would do the fixing. Similar arrangements were made for carpentry. As for the making of chairs, sighted worker would prepare the iron frames while the blind workers would be busy weaving the plastic cords.

QUESTION :

Were the workers able to make a living and how much were they paid?

ANSWER :

The basket-makers were paid by piece-rate while those in the other three trades were paid a daily rate of RM1.50. Generally, we were able to earn an average income of about RM150 per month and this was supplemented by an allowance of RM25 from the Government Welfare Department. We also received RM20 per month from the MAB.

Thus, an average monthly income of RM200 was quite a good income in those days. At the time, the blind telephone operators had a starting salary of only RM80 each month.

With our income of RM200, we paid RM5 for our monthly rental for accommodation plus another RM30 per month for food. Some of our income was also deducted for the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF). We still had quite a

bit of money left from our monthly income to spend as pocket money or for our savings.

QUESTION :

BesidetheWelfareallowance, was the government involved in any other way?

ANSWER :

Actually, the workshop was subsidised by the State Government of Perak. The government was providing about RM15,000 per year to maintain the workshop.

QUESTION :

What role did Mr. Cheah play in the workshop?

ANSWER :

Mr. Cheah was able to find a lot of contracts for the workshop. So this kept us very busy and fully occupied. In fact, we were all very proud of what we were doing and we were very happy whenever we had the opportunity to show visitors around the place.

QUESTION :

So you were very happy with Mr. Cheah?

ANSWER :

Well, there was only one thing that made us feel a little uncomfortable almost right from the beginning of the project operations. This had to do with the attitude of Mr. Cheah towards us blind workers. He didn't seem to treat us as equal partners – instead, we often heard him talking to visitors about us in a rather condescending manner. We had the feeling that he

did not respect us because he seemed to think that we were not very intelligent people. To tell the truth, he never consulted us on anything. I'm sure things might have been different today if he had talked to us.

(to be continued)

Believe in yourself!

**Have faith in
your abilities!**

**Without a humble
but reasonable**

**confidence in your
own powers you
cannot be successful**

or happy

Norman Vincent

Peale (1898 - 1993)

TECHNICAL UPDATE

*By Moses Choo Siew Cheong
Assistant Executive Director
National Council for the Blind, Malaysia*

On 30 January 2007, Microsoft launched their long-awaited Vista Windows Operating System. It will not be very long now before the blind will be able to have several choices of solutions for accessing Vista.

The first sales of Vista-based PC's by Dell and Gateway on January 30 this year was reported in the PC World Magazine. Meanwhile, Windows XP will continue to be sold by other companies as long as stocks last, but, it will not be too long before all computer vendors will be switching to Vista.

According to the Microsoft web site, there are at least five versions of Vista:

- Vista Ultimate: The most complete edition; it provides the power, security and mobility features needed for work plus all the entertainment features for you to have fun.
- Home Premium: This is an edition for home desktop and mobile PC's.
- Home Basic: This is designed for homes with basic computing needs such as email, internet browsing and photo viewing.
- Business: This is designed specifically to meet the needs of small businesses.

- Enterprise: This is designed to meet the needs of large, global organizations with complex information technology infrastructures.

Window-Eyes

GW Micro released a public beta of Window-Eyes 6.1 on 30 January. The beta works with Vista and can be used as demonstration software by any Vista user, regardless of whether they currently own Window-Eyes. The release date for a final version depends on how well the beta-test goes.

Doug Geoffray of GW Micro says, "The biggest problem we have so far is the lack of Vista users to test Window-Eyes."

Window-Eyes 6.0 users can get the 6.1 upgrade for free. GW Micro has provided a downloadable upgrade file on their web site. This can be used for Windows 2000 and XP.

However, if you want to use Vista, you will need a full installation, which will require the company to send a Window-Eyes 6.1 CD. The only charge for the upgrade will be a small fee of about RM20.

Microsoft is continuing to add more MSAA [Microsoft

Active Accessibility] support to applications that ship with Vista. Perhaps the largest benefit of Vista is its new level of security.

JAWS for Windows

Freedom Scientific released a beta version of JAWS with Vista on 28 February, 2007. This update will work with JAWS 8.0, windows XP or Windows 2000. It will be a free update for all JAWS 8.0 customers who intend to use it on Windows XP and 2000.

For JAWS 8.0 users who intend to buy Vista, Freedom Scientific will want them to participate in the JAWS software maintenance agreement (SMA) program to ensure that their JAWS 8.0 license will be authorised in Vista. Those users will still receive the next SMA upgrades as expected; therefore, this does not mean that installing in Vista will result in losing an SMA.

Beta users should note that the following may not work in this version:

1. This release of the Public Beta does not support the new User Account Control (UAC) feature in Vista. You can read information about UAC, including how to turn it off at the web site http://www.freedomscientific.com/fs_products/software_

jaws80VistaUAC.asp

2. JAWS speech and Braille are not yet available at the log-in screen or the CTRL+ALT+DEL security screens. You can use the Microsoft Narrator for speech if necessary.
3. The “Start JAWS Automatically” Option is not currently available in the Basics Dialogue. You may have to consider putting JAWS in the Startup folder of the Start Menu.

FreedomBox

On 11 January, Serotek Corporation announced that FreedomBox and Key to Freedom with System Access software had been integrated with Microsoft Windows Vista and is available for downloading. Users of FreedomBox and Vista can download the software from the company’s web site:
<http://www.freedombox.info>.

Hal and Supernova

Dolphin Computer Access plans to release a version of Hal and Supernova that is compatible with Vista some time in the second quarter of 2007. This version 8.0 will be a free upgrade for anyone who buys 7.03 after 31 January 2007. Hal users can expect access to Vista that is similar to access provided to Windows XP.

It is very encouraging to note that companies engaged in assistive development for

the blind have invested a lot of resources in order to keep pace with mainstream development. This will enhance the capabilities of the blind in employment and it will be easier to convince the employers to give the blind a chance.

By working together to develop and promote assistive technology, we will be able to ensure that blindness or disability is only just a situation; many more opportunities will be made available for the blind to prove their abilities and capabilities. This will enable the blind to reach a new level of development in the near future.

True silence is the
rest of the mind; it
is to the spirit what
sleep is to the body,
nourishment and
refreshment.

William Penn

English religious

leader and colonist

(1644 - 1718)

BLIND TEACHERS IN MALAYSIA AND RELATED ISSUES

By Wong Huey Siew

Editor's Note: Wong Huey Siew is a regular contributor of articles to "The NCBM Outreach". He obtained his doctorate degree in special education from the University of Malaya in August 2006. The topic for the thesis of research was "Blind Students' Learning Environment in Secondary Schools: Residential and Integrated Programmes". His work was published by the Social Work Institute of Malaysia.

In the following article, Wong looks at the issues facing the blind in the teaching profession of Malaysia. Here is what he says:

The first blind person to enter the teaching profession in Malaysia was in the 1960's. Then, in the mid-1970's, the Ministry of Education adopted the policy of accepting blind graduates as teachers. Thus, by the end of the 1970's, there were at least ten blind graduates in the teaching profession. However, for some unexplained reason, the doors were suddenly closed to blind graduate teachers during the 1980's.

Meanwhile, the doors to blind teachers at the college level had not been opened at all despite many appeals since the 1960's. In the 1990's, due to concerted efforts made by the National

Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM), the government finally agreed to reconsider the policy of accepting blind teachers not only at the university but also at the college level as well. Thus, in 1998, the Ministry of Education issued the announcement that qualified blind persons would be accepted for teacher training both at the university and college level. The blind were very excited and it seemed as if the flood-gates had been opened as at least 30 blind persons in the batch applied for admission into the various teacher training institutions all over the country.

According to the 2004 statistics provided by the Blind Professionals' Assistance Service (BPAS) of NCBM, there were more than 80 blind teachers that year in primary and secondary schools throughout the country. They were teaching not only in the special programmes for the blind but also in the ordinary schools for sighted children as well. About 40 of them were teaching in primary education while the other 40 or so blind teachers were in secondary schools. They taught all kinds of subjects, including languages, history, literature, economics, mathematics, commerce and moral instruction.

BLIND TEACHERS AND RELATED ISSUES

1. SUPPORT SERVICES AND ASSISTIVE DEVICES

A blind teacher needs to do a lot of preparation in order to give a successful classroom lesson. In the past, blind teachers depended very much on their spouses or they hired part-time assistants to help them in their paperwork, particularly in the marking of exercise-books.

2. CLASSROOM TEACHING

Blind teachers in the mainstream schools were unable to use the blackboard or white board. Thus, they were in need of certain aids such as overhead projectors to enable them to function more effectively.

3. CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Some of the blind teachers had difficulty in organising co-curricular or outdoor activities effectively. It was apparent that they lacked the training and the confidence to carry out such programmes.

4. CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE

The school authorities tended to have the negative perception that it was not possible for a blind teacher to handle classroom discipline. Thus, many ordinary schools were reluctant to accept blind teachers.

5. ADAPTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Many of the blind teachers did not have access to adaptive technology which could be of great help in enabling them to function as effective teachers.

SOLUTIONS

1. PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FOR BLIND TEACHERS

The above issues were raised with NCBM and MAB and it was decided to set up a Blind Professionals' Affairs Centre (BPAC) with the following objectives in mind.

- 1.1 To operate a resource centre that would make available Braille materials and documents.
- 1.2 To provide advisory and career counselling services.
- 1.3 To provide a forum for the exchanging of views and experiences.

Thus, the BPAC was set up at MAB with sponsorship from NCBM in 2001. Computer equipment, scanners and embossers were provided, seminars were

conducted and computer classes were made available. This had been a great help in meeting the needs not only of blind teachers but also other blind professionals.

Subsequently, the Centre was discontinued and the name was changed from BPAC to the Blind Professionals' Assistance Services (BPAS) and it is now based at the NCBM main office.

2. DIALOGUE WITH BLIND TEACHERS

The Malaysian Association for the Blind held a dialogue with blind teachers on December 15, 2004 during which there was a very positive sharing and exchange of ideas. Following this dialogue, the MAB decided to organise an intensive computer course for all the blind teachers. The first course was held in early 2005 and about 40 blind teachers took part. Another course will be organised to cater for the remaining 40 or so blind teachers.

3. SURVEY ON BLIND TEACHERS

Meanwhile, the BPAS conducted a questionnaire survey among the blind teachers in order to ascertain for itself the actual problems and challenges being faced by them. The results of the survey have been published in "The NCBM Outreach" and BPAS will be planning appropriate measures to be taken aimed at infusing the blind teachers with greater self-confidence so that they will become more effective teachers.

4. EXPERIENCE-SHARING FORUM

BPAS invited the senior teachers to share their experiences with the junior blind teachers. As a result, very useful suggestions were made as follows:

4.1 Marking Exercise-books

The junior teachers agreed that it would be a good idea to pay assistants to help them rather than obtaining free services from volunteers.

4.2 Using Blackboard and White Board

If they could not use the blackboard or white board, blind teachers could always prepare their teaching materials beforehand such as display cards or transparencies or even PowerPoint illustrations.

4.3 Active Participation

It was important for blind teachers to assert themselves by trying to play a more active role at their schools. They could offer themselves as members of the school management committee or to take charge of certain events.

4.4 Co-curricular Activities

Blind teachers could certainly offer to take charge of various co-curricular activities such as choir singing, music, chess, languages, and so on.

4.5 Exchange Forums and Dialogues

The blind teachers should take the initiative to organise their own forums and dialogues in order to exchange not only ideas and experiences but also teaching aids and materials. They could always work hand in hand with organisations like NCBM and MAB for such purposes.

CONCLUSION

I am happy to say that in spite of the many setbacks, the blind have made good progress in the teaching profession. Organisations like NCBM and MAB have certainly played a very positive role towards achieving this end.

TRAVELLING IN SAMOSIR ISLAND

By Dr. Tan Tok Shiong

Editor's Note: Dr. Tan Tok Shiong is totally blind and is lecturing in economics at the University of Malaya. Some years ago, he had the sudden urge to travel and he simply packed up a few clothes and travelled alone to Samosir Island.

Here is his story:

My dream of travelling in the volcanic island of Samosir began twenty years ago when my house-mate, Chris, who had just come back from a holiday in Indonesia, told me about Lake Toba. According to her, Lake Toba was an immense lake which was formed inside the crater of a volcano. More surprisingly, there is an island in the lake called Samosir and it is larger than the republic of Singapore. I was a young man then and I had dreams of visiting this amazing wonder which had been created by nature. But I was visually impaired and I had no access to printed reference materials.

One day, when I was able to take long leave from my work, I decided to make my dream come true. Early in the morning, I packed some clothes and basic items into a haversack and, with just about RM800, I took a commuter train from Subang Jaya to Port Klang. It was very convenient as the train station in Port Klang was right in front of the ferry terminal

to Indonesia. I bought the ticket costing RM70 and boarded the ferry about an hour later.

Most of the passengers in the ferry were Indonesians returning home after finishing their contract as labourers or as maids in Malaysia. The ferry was full of things which they were bringing back to Indonesia from Malaysia.

The captain of the ferry was an Indonesian and he was very friendly. He went round the deck asking if anyone needed to change their ringgit to rupiah. He offered a good rate – better than what I had obtained from the money-changer in Kuala Lumpur.

After a while, the captain began to distribute lunch which consisted of a sealed plastic cup of drinking water and some food packed in a polystyrene container. Everyone was excited! But when I opened the container, I was shocked to discover that it contained only some white rice and a hard boiled egg. However, everyone in the deck was happily eating and I marvelled at the simplicity of the Indonesians.

The passenger sitting next to me was a Malaysian who was going back to Sumatra to visit some relatives. He told me to be careful while in Indonesia. He said that once he had hired a taxi to take him from the ferry terminal to his relative's home. The agreed fare was about Malaysian one

hundred ringgit. Half way into the journey, however, the Indonesian taxi driver stopped in a remote corner and demanded from him five hundred Malaysian ringgit. He was shocked but he paid up in order to avoid any injury.

After a two and a half hour ride, the ferry finally reached its destination. When the ferry had stopped, two Indonesian immigration officers came on board to stamp the passports. The Malaysian friend told me that I had to put a Malaysian five-hundred ringgit note in the passport in order to have it chopped; I had no choice but to do so. When it was my turn, the officer asked me a few questions. Seeing that I was blind, he then returned me the five-hundred ringgit note and ordered his subordinate to extend my visa from the usual one month to a period of six months. I was overjoyed at the kind reception given to me.

Someone helped me to get down from the ferry. In the terminal, there was another officer at his desk double checking the passports. After clearing immigration, I decided to take a walk from the ferry terminal to the nearest town of Tanjung Balai which was only seven kilometres away. However, the moment I stepped out of the immigration area, I was surrounded by a group of taxi drivers. I broke loose from the ring and started walking. But, as soon as I walked, the taxi drivers, many of whom were using motor-cycles, came after me and blocked my path. I was again encircled by a ring of about twenty taxi drivers. Sensing that I was in real danger and that I could be robbed on the spot, I dashed out

of the main road and found myself in a residential house. The owner was sitting outside the house and I told him what had happened. In a smiling voice, he welcomed me to stay with him and I agreed as I was too afraid to venture back onto the main road.

A short while later, a man came to the house and told me that he was a soldier. He said that he had come to protect me from the gang and asked me to follow him. I enquired how a blind man like me could know that he was truly a soldier. He replied that he was wearing the uniform and this was confirmed by the house-owner who was still sitting next to me.

And so I followed him into a jeep. Mid-way through the ride, the soldier assured me that I would be all right if I followed the jeep driver and he left us. The jeep driver then sent me to my destination which was the Nora Hotel. Inside the hotel lounge, he demanded payment of 50 ringgit for the fare. I then realised that the soldier and the driver were both in one gang.

I told the jeep driver that in Malaysia, a seven-kilometre ride would cost only five ringgit. After half an hour of heated argument, I finally relented and paid him forty ringgit.

The Nora Hotel was a cozy place. The main mosque of Tanjung Balai was located just next to the hotel. In the evening, a group of young Muslim girls on their way to the mosque to learn the al-Quran, came near to the hotel fence and had a little chat with me. They were very friendly and I enjoyed conversing with

them.

The next morning, I took a stroll in the town. The traffic was chaotic with bicycles, trishaws, motor-bikes and many other kinds of vehicles all moving together along the narrow paved roads.

In terms of food, Indonesia seemed to be in no short supply and there was a rich abundance. The market of Tanjung Balai was well stocked with plenty of meat, fish, fruits and vegetables.

Most of the people in Tanjung Balai lived in simple terrace houses. After spending two days there, I went to the taxi station in the morning and hailed a van to Medan. The van waited until it was full before moving off. Another passenger and myself were asked to sit next to the driver.

He was a skillful driver and could drive at a high speed on the narrow village roads. However, being in the front seat and without any seat-belt, I knew that I could be dead if the van were to meet with an accident.

(to be continued)

A POINT TO PONDER: MAKE THINGS HAPPEN

By Wong Kow

We should not wait for things to happen; rather, we should make things happen.

As we reflect upon this statement, I would like to remind readers about the article by Dr. Zakaria Osman which appeared in "The NCBM Outreach" of July to September 2006. His strength and persistence to make his dreams come true really filled me with nothing but admiration for the way in which he overcame his struggle. Despite his poverty and the many obstacles that confronted him, Dr. Zakaria did not seem to ask the question, "why". When faced with the challenge of a friend who did not hand him an offer letter on purpose in order to deprive him of the opportunity to be interviewed for a lucrative position, Dr. Zakaria was able to keep his cool. Moreover, when he could not earn enough from his full-time job in order to support his family, he took on an extra job selling drinks and in that way managed to pull through difficult times. He even found time to complete his thesis for his doctorate degree and also to write a novel.

Now let us leave Dr. Zakaria's story aside for a moment. Instead, let us focus our attention on an experiment that I would like to share with you. I would like you to think about three objects – a beautiful flower, an egg and a spoonful of fresh coffee powder.

What will happen if I put these three objects into three separate pots, fill each pot with a cup of water, and boil them for five minutes? The beautiful flower in the first pot would be totally destroyed, the egg in the second pot would become harder and less vulnerable, while the spoonful of fresh coffee powder in the third pot would have changed the entire environment of the water in the pot. Its significant aroma and fragrance would surely draw our attention.

Well, if I may analyse the behaviour of the three objects and liken them to the qualities and characteristics of human beings, we could say that Dr. Zakaria had demonstrated the characteristics of the fresh coffee powder; he was able to change the unfavourable environment of his situation into one that ultimately enhanced his position in life.

In observing my own life, I think I have the qualities of an egg. Having experienced some hardships in life, I have become less "breakable" or vulnerable.

If one has the characteristic or quality of the beautiful flower, he or she needs to be aware of this. This would then enable him or her to understand what role to take on in society. It is crucial for him or her to remember not to be dipped in "hot water" in order not to be destroyed.

Well done, Dr. Zakaria! The affection, unity and cooperation between you and your loved ones have proved to be powerful resources in helping and enabling you to stand the test of time. They will surely lead you in your striving and endeavours to achieve higher goals and further success in life.

You have shown that disability, discrimination and injustice need not be a hindrance to anyone. Just like you, we can all make things happen instead of waiting for things to happen.

IF YOU KNOW OF
ANY BLIND PERSON
NEEDING REGISTRATION
FOR EDUCATION OR
REHABILITATION, PLEASE
CONTACT US IMMEDIATELY

NCBM

Tel: 03-2272 4959

03-2272 1442

MAB

Tel: 03-2272 2673

03-2272 2677

SOME ANECDOTES

By Daud bin M. Amin

ON A FLIGHT WITH MAS

In my heyday, I used to fly a lot both on the domestic airline as well as abroad. During one of my trips from Kuala Lumpur to Penang, I happened to be sitting next to a British couple.

As usual, light refreshments were being offered to the passengers by the air hostess. Normally, I would prepare my own cup of tea without any trouble at all. On that occasion, however, as I was about to empty the sugar into the cup, the wrapper together with its contents slipped from my fingers.

I had difficulty fishing out the wrapper that was swimming in my tea. So I asked my immediate neighbour, the English lady, if she could kindly help. She obliged but humorously inquired, "Do you always do that?"

FUNNY BUT TRUE

Several years ago, I had the privilege of representing Malaysia at a sports seminar in Amsterdam. In order to confirm my participation, the seminar organisers took the trouble to telephone me at my office all the way from Holland.

At the time, my office was undergoing extensive renovation works and the noise from the drilling machines was overwhelming. The caller wanted

to know my full name and other personal data to be submitted for the brochure. We had a good shouting match on each end of the line.

I could hear her faintly asking for the spelling of my name. And so I spelt out slowly: "D. M. A-m-i-n."

She interrupted, "Is it T?"

I replied, "No! D for Daisy!"

On my arrival at the hotel, I got myself registered at the seminar check-in counter and was quickly assigned to a twin-sharing room. Feeling tired out after a long flight, the cozy bed was most welcome and I soon fell fast asleep.

Hours later I was awakened by someone knocking at my door. Grudgingly, I got up to open the door.

"Hi! What were you doing in my room?" Demanded the voice of a lady.

Confused at first, then realising what had happened, I replied coolly and in a jovial mood, "This is my room too!"

We both went down to the registration counter to rectify the situation. After studying my file, the lady at the counter said apologetically, "We're awfully sorry we made a mistake. They must have thought your name was

Daisy Amin."

Everyone had a good laugh and, from then on, I was nicknamed as Daisy.

HOW TO GUESS ONE'S AGE

Try figuring out one's age with this trick – you will be able to guess his or her age and the month of birth.

First, ask the person to multiply his or her birth month by 2. Add 5 to that and multiply the result by 50.

Then, add to the total his or her present age and subtract 365 from the result. Now ask for the number obtained.

To this total, you add 115, and this will be the result: On the left side, you get the person's month of birth; on the right side, you get the person's age.

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Readers are invited to write for our publication, "THE NCBM OUTREACH". For articles published, payments are as follows:-

1. Original articles on the achievements of blind people or of an inspirational nature (about 500 words) - RM75.00
2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words) - RM75.00
3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250 - 500 words) - RM35.00 - RM75.00
4. Interesting articles taken from magazines or documents of limited circulation - RM10.00.

(Note: Articles submitted by officials of NCBM or its member-organisations will not qualify for payment unless these submissions have nothing to do with their daily office duties.)