

NCBM OUTREACH



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President

Dato' S. Kulasegaran

Editor

Godfrey Ooi Goat See
B.A. (Hons.), Dip Ed.

Produced by

THE NATIONAL
COUNCIL FOR THE
BLIND, MALAYSIA

94B Jalan Tun
Sambanthan, Brickfields
50470 KUALA LUMPUR

Tel : 03-22735508

03-22724959

Fax : 03-22724960

E-Mail

ncftb@po.jaring.my

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EDITORIAL BOARD

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

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR OF KUALA LUMPUR, YB DATUK HAJI ROSLIN HJ. HASAN, FOR THE 12TH ICEVI WORLD CONFERENCE, JULY 16 – 21, 2006

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

I am very pleased and greatly honoured that the city of Kuala Lumpur has been chosen to host the 12th World Conference of ICEVI. May I take this opportunity to extend my heartiest congratulations to the International Council for the Education of the Visually Impaired for organising this worthy conference – ICEVI 2006.

Now can you imagine a city where friends, lovers and families, where even the elderly and pregnant mothers with their baby prams, could have a lovely stroll or leisure walk or perhaps hold a picnic along the riverside? Would you like to be in a city where citizens, residents and tourists could walk, jog or cycle along pedestrian-friendly routes or by the river-bank? Wouldn't it be so beautiful and ideal to be in a city where all disabled persons would be able to participate in the life and activities of society because of the barrier-free or hazard-free streets and pathways as well as accessible buildings?

Well, all this and even much more is being envisaged for the city of Kuala Lumpur in the new

millennium.

In fact, the city authorities have been very busy drawing up new policies for the formulation of a master structural plan that would be in keeping with modern trends and that would meet the needs of all groups and categories of the population in the city of Kuala Lumpur. We shall very soon be embarking upon the project to develop Kuala Lumpur into a dynamic and world-class city. For this purpose, we want to ensure that this beautiful city will be able to cater for the needs of all its citizens and residents, including the neglected minorities such as the blind and visually impaired. Initial surveys have been conducted followed by seminars and consultations with the general public in order to come out with suitable pedestrian-friendly approaches and strategies.

For a city covering an area of about 24,000 hectares, further extensive surveys will still be necessary in order to develop a proper structural plan. Based on certain guidelines, the city will be divided into at least twelve precincts before the plan can be

implemented effectively. One of the sites will feature the golden triangle which comprises the Chow Kit area, Bukit Bintang, the famous Petaling Street shopping area and the KLCC. Another site which may initially be selected for the pilot project would probably be the central business district which is about two acres in area between Lebuhr Pasar Besar and Lebuhr Pudu. The identity of this square will need to be accentuated in order to improve the existing frontages. The bus shelters will be upgraded, the pavements widened, tactile guides and gently sloping ramps made of non-slip material introduced, and hazard-free signages provided. These user-friendly features will especially benefit the blind and other disabled persons.

You may have already seen some of these accessible and user-friendly features that have been provided in the Brickfields area where many of the blind live and work and where some of them undergo rehabilitation and vocational training at the well-known Gurney Training Centre. If you have not done so, I would like to cordially invite you to spend some of your spare time visiting Brickfields to see for yourselves the facilities that have been provided. At the same time, you will be able to enjoy the rich variety of food available at the many stalls and restaurants in the area.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to be with you and to be part of your auspicious event.

THE 12TH INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY CONFERENCE



This series of conferences was started in 1979. The 12th Mobility Conference, held in Hong Kong from 27 - 30th November 2006, was organised for the first time in Asia. The hosting of the event was also timed to coincide with the golden jubilee celebrations of the Hong Kong Society for the Blind founded in 1956. One of the outcomes is that the HKSB has decided to set up a regional centre for the training of trainers on quality Orientation and Mobility.

There were 338 participants from 34 countries who attended, i.e. 132 from overseas, 121 from mainland China and 85 from Hong Kong itself. The representatives from Malaysia were the President, the Hon. Treasurer and the Executive Director of NCBM.

At the plenary sessions, 22 papers were presented while another 69 papers were delivered at the concurrent workshops dealing with such topics as "O. & M. Across the Life-span of the Blind and Visually Impaired", "Accessibility and Aids to O. & M.", "Guide-dogs to Enhance Mobility" and "O. & M. in the New Millennium with Electronics and GPS".

Apart from the exhibition on mobility and assistive devices

which drew the curiosity of the participants, there was Kendra, the guide-dog of Kua Cheng Hock from Singapore, which attracted much attention and media coverage.

Orientation and mobility skills are generally considered unimportant when compared to education and ICT issues. In most instances, a blind person is given a walking stick as an instrument to detect obstacles in his/her path, and if he/she is fortunate, a few lessons on the proper techniques may be given. Of course, there are those who are fortunate enough to undergo a proper course in an institution.

Generally, however, the lack of attention given to this aspect of rehabilitation work for the blind is quite apparent when it is observed that organisations serving the blind do not have properly trained O. & M. instructors. Where they do have such instructors, most of them have only undergone very brief training courses or they have simply picked up the skills based on their own observations. One could compare these instructors to people who learn massage by having a few techniques taught to them by their friends who then consider themselves to be qualified masseurs.

Undoubtedly, O. & M. is more than this; it is one of the essential daily living skills which must be properly taught to a blind person hand in hand with his/her

education. Without mastering the art of mobility, a blind person would find it most restrictive to his/her freedom of movement, and in most instances, he/she would be prevented from performing a job or living a life of independence. Moving in public places, especially on busy city streets, is dangerous. It need not be so, however, if proper training is given.

Needless to say, therefore, O. & M. and other daily living skills are most essential for a blind person. They are even more crucial to a person who is both blind and deaf. Thus, these skills should be taught to the blind and the deaf-blind as early as possible.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. TWO BLIND PERSONS HAVE BEEN AWARDED DOCTORATE DEGREES

Wong Huey Siew completed his doctoral thesis on special education in 2005 while Kamal Arifin completed his thesis on history in 2006. Both of them were awarded their doctorate degrees at the University of Malaya convocation last year in 2006.

Dr. Wong was recently accepted as a lecturer at the Open University of Malaysia (OUM) while Dr. Kamal has been lecturing at the University of Malaya for quite a number of years.

We wish them both success in their future undertakings!

2. TOTALLY BLIND WOMAN WORKS AS RESEARCH ENGINEER IN SINGAPORE

Dr. Yeo Sze Ling works at the Institute for Infocomm Research, Singapore where she deals with mathematical theory underlying cryptographic algorithms. In her research work, she looks at the steps and procedures involved in the schemes to encipher or decipher codes. For example, internet passwords are encrypted before they are sent to the bank. Lots of such electronic information needs to be enciphered or deciphered in order to find solutions such as in criminal cases or the protection and security of information.

Mathematics had been a strong subject for Yeo Sze Ling from her childhood days at the Singapore Primary School for the Blind. She obtained her first degree, Master's degree and Doctorate degree in Mathematics at the National University of Singapore.

She did not wish to be interviewed. However, if you wish to know more about her inspiring story, you can contact her at her email address, 01@singnet.nox.sg.

3. 75% SPONSORSHIP FEES AT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF MALAYSIA

OUM is offering 75% sponsorship fees for the September 2007 intake of students in conjunction with the celebration of Malaysia's 50th year of independence. The enrolment of OUM currently stands at 61,000.

For more details regarding the sponsorship, please contact the registrar at tel. 03-20732002 or email www.oum.edu.my.

4. FINANCIAL PLANNING

According to The Star newspaper, it is important to start financial planning from a young age – in fact, you should begin the moment you are employed. Nevertheless, for those who have not done so, it is better to start late than never even if it is just for the last few years.

For advice, you could consult a licensed qualified financial planner by visiting the website www.flam.org.my.

The directory of companies can be accessed on this website.

5. GOVERNMENT WELFARE ALLOWANCE

It has been confirmed by the Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, YB Dato' Sri Sharizat, that the Employment Incentive Allowance (EPC) has been increased from RM200 to RM300.

A new allowance of RM300 per month for carers of the disabled has also been introduced. This is particularly aimed at helping parents and guardians who are taking care of multi-handicapped or severely mentally retarded children.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Readers are reminded that their contribution of articles, suggestions and jokes are most welcome 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)

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:

94-B Jalan Tun Sambanthan
Brickfields

50470 KUALA LUMPUR

Tel: 03-22735508 / 22724959

Fax: 03-22724960

STUDY VISIT TO INDIA



This was the first time NCBM had attempted to organise an overseas study visit on this scale. India was chosen in view of its proven record in tackling the massive blindness-related problems and its position as a fast developing country which has many things in common with Malaysia. The National Association for the Blind (NAB) and the Poona Blind Men's Association of the Blind (PBMA) had been selected based on the recommendation of successful blind Indians who were guests at the 12th ICEVI conference in Kuala Lumpur.

Altogether there were 18 persons on the trip which took place between 4 – 8th December 2006. The delegation was led by the President, Mr S. Kulasegaran, and all the five member-organisations plus NCBM were represented on the team.

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

NAB is said to be the largest voluntary organisation dedicated to the cause of the blind in India. It has pioneered various services aimed at the socio-economic upliftment of the blind. They include:

1. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Through this department, thousands of blind children have been introduced to integrated education. These programmes are promoted in different parts of the country (mostly in the rural areas) in partnership with its branches and local agencies. Scholarships and sponsorships are made available to meet tuition fees, educational aids, Braille and large print materials, and other personal needs. Services are also provided by specially trained teachers.

Two particular programmes that we saw were the two-year teacher training course (for 20 teacher trainees per intake) and the multi-handicapped programme (which provides training in daily living skills, orientation and mobility, and social communication. NAB also conducts human resource development programmes for parents and teachers of blind children, and organises integrated camps for blind students and their sighted peers.

2. DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION

Through this department, the blind undergo four-month rehabilitation programmes and, if possible, they are placed back to the occupations in which they were engaged before becoming blind. The activities include orientation and mobility, communication skills, home management, and running small businesses. Certificate courses (recognised by the government) are also provided and they include physiotherapy, acupressure and massage.

3. DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT

Assistance is provided to help place the blind in open employment or in self-help enterprises. Short-term courses are available to equip the blind with personality development and marketing skills and to prepare them for the various competitive examinations.

In particular, NAB runs the IDBI Polytechnic and its training programme includes light engineering, apprenticeship, industrial training, and management of self-help and cooperative enterprises.

4. THE NAB CENTRE FOR BLINDNESS PREVENTION AND LOW-VISION SERVICES

This is an outreach programme

offering free services such as detection of refractive errors and other eye conditions, referral for advanced treatment of the eye, provision of spectacles and medicine, and even surgical intervention in cases of cataract, corneal opacity, and squint eyes. The services are funded by business corporations and managed through mobile ophthalmic units equipped with state-of-the-art appliances.

5. THE NAB COMMITTEE FOR ADVANCEMENT OF THE STATUS OF BLIND WOMEN

This committee has started a hostel for blind women who are in employment or who are pursuing higher education in Mumbai. In connection with this hostel is the Utkars Job Development Centre which provides vocational training on an “earn while you learn” basis.

6. THE NAB COMMUNITY-BASED REHABILITATION PROJECT

This has helped over 32,000 rural blind persons in 15 states by enabling them to achieve social and economic independence.

7. THE NAB SIR J. DUFFAN BRAILLE PRESS

It publishes textbooks, general and recreational literature, and magazines on a variety of subjects (including science, technology and current events). Tactile graphs and maps are also produced.

It also runs the M.P. Shah All India Talking-book Centre which

records general books in English and in several Indian dialects besides academic textbooks for primary, secondary and tertiary education.

8. THE NAB LOUIS BRAILLE MEMORIAL RESEARCH CENTRE AND LIBRARY

There is a rich collection of books and periodicals on blindness. The books are used by researchers and professionals in the field.

9. THE NAB LIONS HOME FOR THE AGEING BLIND AT LONAVLA

This home caters for the needs of ageing blind men and women by taking care of their medical, recreational and other requirements.

In general, the services and programmes of NAB are provided free of charge to the blind and to the poor community. Only in certain cases are the blind required to pay a small sum. The emphasis is on helping the blind to be independent and self-supporting and not on making profit. For instance, Braille production was started way back in the mid 1960s and, until today, it has not been making a profit while fulfilling its mission to provide Braille materials for blind students and adults. The Braille section is about breaking even today by having secured printing contracts from the government for Braille textbooks. All the funds of NAB come from the public, corporate sponsorships and government grants.

THE POONA BLIND MEN'S ASSOCIATION (PBMA)

It runs three institutionalised projects – the H.V. Desai eye hospital, the technical training institute, and the home for aged blind women. It also operates non-institutionalised projects such as the talking-book library, the Braille press, computer training, “Sponsor a Granny/Granddad” project, rehabilitation counselling, employment and placement services, distribution of food grains, and publication of the Braille magazine on a bimonthly basis.

1. THE KAMLA AMUL MASSAND TECHNICAL TRAINING INSTITUTE

It has 178 trainees who are provided with hostel facilities and they undergo a two-year training course (including telephony, handloom weaving, chalk making, repair of rattan chairs, tailoring and computer training). It also houses a Braille production unit and talking-book library which produces textbooks and educational materials.

2. THE SHIRDI SAI BABA HOME FOR AGED BLIND WOMEN

It presently houses 65 inmates who are provided with comfortable accommodation and peaceful surroundings. They pass their time singing religious songs, making candles and plastic articles, and preparing foodstuffs. All their needs are catered for free of charge.

3. THE H.V. DESAI EYE HOSPITAL

This was set up in 2000 and provides eye care services, treatment and surgery, board and lodgings, free medicines, and even free transport for poor patients to and from their homes through the outreach programme. Low-vision aids are also provided at low cost to the students in the Maharashtra state.

4. THE MAMA SHAH EYE HOSPITAL

This 100-bed hospital has been built next to the H.V. Desai complex in order to meet the overwhelming demand for eye care. This hospital is well equipped with facilities for eye care (including the paediatric ophthalmology department since 2004 in collaboration with Orbit International and an eye bank).

5. THE SHRI SHANKARSETH SABLE INSTITUTE OF OPHTHALMOLOGY FOR POST-GRADUATION STUDY IN OPHTHALMOLOGY

The national board in Delhi has allotted two seats for studying the post-graduation course in ophthalmology while the college of physicians and surgeons in Mumbai has allotted another three seats for the said purpose. The institute also runs a diploma course in ophthalmology for technician assistants.

6. THE PBMA KANTALAXMI SHAH EYE HOSPITAL AT NANDURBAR

This is a satellite project with a 50-bed facility. It serves the three tribal districts where the people are poor and malnutrition is one of the main causes of death among the children here.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is without doubt that each member organisation on the delegation has learnt something useful from the exercise. For example, one representative said that the visit had challenged him to think of new approaches in solving similar problems. It would be interesting to follow developments in member organisations over the next few years, especially the weaker organisations.

The recommendations for possible consideration are as follows:

1. More of such visits should be organised but the focus should be on specific aspects of work, with a longer duration, and a smaller group.
2. Participation should be based on the intent of organisations to start new projects and it should not be tied to the eligibility factor.
3. Having seen how the sheltered workshops are helping those who cannot cope in open employment, serious thought should be given to this aspect of work in Malaysia. While the number of blind persons may not be large enough to warrant every organisation setting up a sheltered workshop, such workshops could be established in strategic locations.

4. Programmes for the elderly blind and the multi-handicapped should be carefully considered to make them genuinely meaningful to the clients. There should be proper premises, planned activities and trained personnel. The goal should be "do what you do, do well".

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to place on record our heartfelt thanks to:

1. Dr Rajendra T. Vyas and his staff for the warm hospitality and local arrangements made;
2. Mr N.P. Pandya and the staff of PBMA for the warm reception and arrangements in Pune;
3. To everyone on the delegation for their cooperation, patience and cheerfulness at all times despite the shortcomings.



WE'RE THE BRAILLE DOTS

Editor's Note: Louis Braille, the inventor of the Braille system, was born on January 4, 1809. To celebrate his birthday, the First ASEAN Braille Day Carnival was jointly organised by the Malaysian Association for the Blind and the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia on January 4, 2006.

"We're the Braille Dots" was written in honour of Louis Braille and it was submitted for the lyrics-writing competition for the Braille carnival. The main part of the poem is sung to the tune of "Devoted to You" by the Everly Brothers. The end bit, while being humorous, also shows that technology is not perfectly reliable when compared to mechanical devices such as the simple Braille slate or the Perkins Brailier.

The poem was awarded one of the consolation prizes. Here it is:

*We're the Braille dots good and true,
You can always count on us,
If you need someone to turn to,
There are six of us.*

*We're combined in various ways,
It makes reading easy for you,
We'll be here now and always,
Just waiting for you.*

*We'll never prick or hurt your fingers,
We're so sweet and lovely to touch,
Computers may be very smart*

But they'll always need us to keep you in touch.

*When you feel us dots, remember
The one who conceived us in labour and pain,
He's none other than the great
Unforgettable Louis Braille.*

*Ooh, the unforgettable,
Ooh yeah, unforgettable,
Mm, unforgettable
Louis Braille.
Dot dot dot dots,
Wow! Yeah! Burp! – paper jam!*

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)

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)

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: THE VICTOR READER STREAM



The Victor Reader Stream is a device that is smaller than a pack of cards or just a little bigger

than a standard handphone. This product has been specially designed for the use of people who have no sight or who have very little vision.

The functions of this device include the ability to play DAISY files, audio MP3 files, and to read out text files with the help of a built-in Text to Speech reader. Priced at US\$335 approximately, it is quite affordable to the blind and visually impaired. So far all the locally available MP3 players do not have the Text to Speech function.

The possible uses of the Victor Reader Stream are as follows:

1. Reading audio books produced by libraries which offer talking-book services. Although this is not a CD player, files from audio CD's can be copied to the Victor Reader Stream via a computer.
2. Listening to music and audio books on the move – with such power built into this small device, it is certainly an advantage. With the built-in text to speech engine, this device is fully accessible to

the blind.

3. If you enjoy reading information in the form of text files, you will find this device most useful. You can simply grab information on text file and copy it onto the Victor Stream and you will be able to read them straight off anywhere and at any time.

Some features of the Victor Stream include:

1. State-of-the-art DAISY, MP3 and UNISO player.
2. Removable SD card for storing books, E-text files, music, voice recordings and audio bookmarks.
3. Ability to play NLS downloaded books and NLS book cartridges (for eligible members).
4. It is portable – 4.6 by 2.6 by 0.9 inches and lightweight – 6 ounces.
5. It has built-in human sounding text to speech (nuance vocalised).
6. It has voice recording capability via built-in microphone or external microphone.
7. It has playback through stereo headphones or secondary small speaker.
8. It has USB port to transfer books and music from the PC.

9. User replaceable rechargeable battery providing 15 hours of playtime.
10. Built-in battery charger (four hours for full recharge).
11. Switchable external power adapter for use in multiple countries.
12. Stylish look with high contrast keys and buttons.
13. Attractive carrying case with belt clip.

Audio readers will be happy to know that this device also has the following DAISY book features:

- (a) Four-arrow keys for navigation by chapter, section, page, and bookmarks.
- (b) GO-TO features to jump to a specific page, heading, book or bookmark.
- (c) Browse bookmark list.
- (d) Allows for navigation of multiple books, MP3 folders, and voice notes.
- (e) Text-to-speech allows for access to electronic text.
- (f) Three types of bookmarking can be saved separately for multiple books.
- (g) A simple bookmark to mark a reading position.

- (h) Audio bookmark with recorded voice-note.
- (i) Highlight bookmark to mark the start and end of a passage.
- (j) Ability to play or not to play skippable elements.

Extensive usability features are as follows:

- i) Variable speed playback.
- ii) Accelerated fast forward/rewind with audible feedback.
- iii) Time jump feature.
- iv) Auto sleep shut-off with multiple time settings.
- v) Key lock feature.
- vi) Book information key.
- vii) Where Am I key for information on reading position.
- viii) Built-in user guide and key describer.
- ix) Configuration menu for setting time jump interval, DAISY skippable elements, and MP3 shuffle or loop play modes.
- x) Audio messages for battery capacity.
- xi) Announcement of MP3 folder and filenames.
- xii) Audio tone control.
- xiii) Being recognised as a standard Windows USB drive, it allows for transfers from the pc to Stream without the need of a file filtering software.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR DAISY PRODUCTION



Editor's Note: Nicholas has been working as Audio Technician at the MAB library since January 2006. In the following article, he gives a brief explanation with regards to the operating procedures for DAISY production.

Here they are:

1. INTRODUCTION

DAISY is the acronym for the Digital Accessible Information System.

2. DAISY PRODUCTION

There are actually two types of DAISY production – the fully structured DAISY book and the Navigation Control Centre production.

2.1 THE FULLY STRUCTURED DAISY BOOK

This book consists of the audio text and the printed text (including graphics). The audio text is

done by live recording and then synchronised with the printed text.

In order to benefit fully from this type of book, it should be played on a computer. This can be a very useful tool to students, particularly in tertiary education.

2.2 NAVIGATION CONTROL CENTRE PRODUCTION (NCC PRODUCTION)

In this method of book production, only the audio text is made available. This kind of book is amenable for leisure reading. It can be played on various kinds of gadgets, including the computer, a DVD player, certain types of MP3 players, and a special playback machine.

Producing this type of book is quite easy; it can be done either by live recording or by transferring from another medium such as the cassette-tape to CD format. A special software programme known as MyStudio-PC is used for this purpose.

3. LIVE RECORDING

First a volunteer is identified by going through a voice test.

The criteria for selecting a good reader is then explained to the volunteer as follows:

- (a) Voice intonation;

- (b) Expression;
- (c) Punctuation and correct pauses;
- (d) Dramatisation of dialogue and conversation;
- (e) Speed of reading.

4. INTRODUCING THE SOFTWARE

The procedures include:

- (a) Trial reading until the reader gets used to reading aloud and hearing his/her own voice.
- (b) Getting to know the basic operating commands:
 - To start recording;
 - To create a new section;
 - To delete a phrase;
 - To delete a section;
 - To insert section properties;
 - To open and search for a reader's file for the next sitting.

5. COMPLETION OF READING A BOOK

On completion of reading a book, the technician checks through to see that everything is in position before going into the process of producing the book. They include converting the wave files into audio format, burning onto the CD, and labelling the book, which is then ready for circulation.

6. TRANSFERRING A BOOK

It would be a waste if existing titles on compact cassettes cannot be turned into digital format. In MyStudio-PC, there is a tool that can be used to transfer book materials (provided the recording on cassette is of reasonable quality) onto the computer for conversion into digital format.

There are three speeds of transfer:

(a) NORMAL SPEED

The original recording is done at 7/8 r.p.i. at real-time production.

(b) DOUBLE SPEED

The original recording is done at 15/16 r.p.i. and the four-track cassette player is used.

(c) FAST SPEED

The transfer is done in a matter of minutes and a special fast-speed converting machine is used for the purpose. The only prohibiting factor is the very high cost of the machine.

7. REQUIREMENTS OF AN AUDIO TECHNICIAN

- (a) He/she must know the programme well, i.e. ability to use all the tools available.
- (b) He/she must have a fair knowledge of Hifi, i.e. ability to hear good sound quality.
- (c) He/she must have a fair

knowledge of wire connectors, i.e. ability to connect playback machines and accessories to each other.

- (d) He/she should be friendly and be able to interact with volunteers.
- (e) He/she must be multi-lingual, i.e. ability to deal in the three main languages of Bahasa Malaysia, English and Mandarin or other common Chinese dialect.

He/she should have a love of or interest in all kinds of books, i.e. he/she should be well read.

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

CONTINUOUS OPTOMETRY EDUCATION



Editor's Note: *The seminar on optometry education was organised by the ophthalmology department of the Tunku Ja'afar hospital, Jalan Rasah, Seremban, Negeri Sembilan on Saturday, March 24, 2007. Dr. Bethel L. Livingstone, head of the ophthalmology department, extended an invitation to the Malaysian Association for the Blind.*

Barnabas Lee Ah Guan, the Low-vision Assistant of MAB, was appointed to deliver a paper regarding the services provided by MAB.

The following is a report of the proceedings by Barnabas Lee:

The half-day seminar began at around 9.10 a.m. with Dr. Norimah Sulaiman, ophthalmologist, welcoming all participants and, in particular, the optometrists from all over the country.

The programme for the day included topics on Ocular Emergency, Causes of Low Vision, Paediatrics, MAB Services, and Government Welfare Services.

The first speaker dealt with external eye injuries due to

accidents. Pain of varying kinds were discussed with advice on what should be done when an accident occurs before the eye can be treated by an ophthalmologist. The speaker also touched on the role that could be played by the paramedics in intervention and reduction of pain experienced by the patient.

On the subject of paediatrics and low vision, the process of ophthalmology was used to examine the fundus and macula to determine colour sensitivity and brightness. Blue light was used to explain the process in some detail.

This led to the discussion on myopia in children between five and eight years old. The ophthalmoscope was used to try and determine the severity of myopia through the process of refractometry.

Finally, the topic shifted focus to the amount of dioptres to be glazed in a lens ranging from two to eight dioptres for those with high myopia.

Then it was the turn of MAB to take centre stage – armed with a thirty-seven PowerPoint presentation, the participants were taken on a tour of the services provided to the blind and visually impaired.

After the presentation, one of the optometrists wanted to know what was the difference in being registered with the National Welfare Department (JKM) and

the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB). To explain the matter, handouts were given to the participants and they were shown the three forms used in the process of registering a blind person. The first two forms were to be filled in and signed by the medical doctor to prove that the blind individual has been classified as blind. Although both forms are quite similar, one is for those between 0 to 18 years old and the other is for those aged 18 and above.

The third form is for the MAB Welfare Unit to deal with the identification and referral of clients.

In the last presentation by JKM, En. Ahmad Tajuddin from the Seremban Welfare Department described the various categories of disability and the issuing of the disability card. In the subsequent discussion, two notable questions emerged and they were:

1. What would be the likely outcome if an individual was prescribed an optical device with a recommendation to obtain the device from JKM?

According to En. Ahmad, the rule clearly states that an amount not exceeding RM50 is applicable for each individual on a one-time basis by putting up an application form. However, officers had the discretionary power to support special cases by applying the means test.

Concerning procurement, three quotations are required and the lowest bidder automatically becomes the supplier.

2. What kind of support services are provided to the disabled by JKM in the local community?

Through the community-based centres, the needs of disabled children and single parents are met through the intervention programmes, day-care services and outreach activities.

During lunch, I had an interesting discussion with two optometrists, Pn. Asmah of the Tuanku Ja'afar Hospital and Pn. Noraini of the K.L. General Hospital. I learnt from them that the MAB optometrist, Mr. Yap Wing Foo, had been involved in the 2006 training programme for a group of optometrists from all over the country. It was held at the Selayang Hospital and the focus was on assessment procedures, the process of treatment and the prescription of optical devices. Thus, to avoid repetition, he was not invited for the current training session but he will probably have a role to play in future training sessions.

Indeed, as indicated in the subject reading of the seminar, "learning is a lifelong process". The seminar was for me a very wonderful opportunity to learn, exchange knowledge and share experiences.

To conclude, I would like to place on record my sincere appreciation and gratitude to the following:

George Thomas, MAB Executive Director, for giving me the opportunity to take part in the seminar

Dr. Bethel L. Livingstone, Head of Ophthalmology of the Tuanku Ja'afar Hospital for having extended an invitation to MAB to talk about its services

Pn. Asmah and Pn. Faizah (optometrists) for being terrific hosts of the seminar and for helping out with the PowerPoint presentations

Moses Choo, NCBM Assistant Executive Director, for his advice and guidance on presentation techniques and skills for PowerPoint presentations

Idrus for chauffeuring me to and from the seminar.

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)

NEWS FROM THE MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

MAB YOUTH CLUB INAUGURAL

Blind youths between the ages of 16 and 35 were invited to attend the launching of the MAB Youth Club on Saturday, April 7, 2007 at the MAB hall. At the elections of the inaugural meeting, Syed Izaham was elected as the first chairman of the Youth Club Committee.

BATTLE OF THE BANDS 2007

This event was held on March 17, 2007 at Kompleks MAB, Kuala Lumpur. Blind groups throughout the country were invited to take part.

To decide on the winners, the audience was asked to vote by a show of hands. The winning band was Sarhad while the runners-up were Last Call and the Jerzy Boys. The cash prizes were RM350, RM250 and RM150 respectively.

KRM TALENTIME

The talentime of the MAB Recreation Club (KRM) was held on Saturday, April 28, 2007 at Kompleks MAB. The contestants had to sing two songs – one of their own choice and one selected by the organisers.

The first prize of RM500 went to Anuar bin Ngatnan (who has been the champion for several

years running). The second prize of RM300 was won by Abdul Rahman bin Saidi while the third prize of RM200 went to Che Yasim bin Che Yahya. They were also given trophies and certificates of participation.

SHOW-CASE OF BLIND ENTREPRENEURS

The seminar and show-case of blind entrepreneurs was organised by the MAB Job Placement Unit on Saturday, July 7, 2007 at the MAB hall. Successful blind entrepreneurs were given the opportunity to put up their own exhibition booths and to share their experiences at the seminar. The programme was conducted by MARA, Inskan and the Ministry of Human Resources.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS COURSE FOR THE BLIND

This course was held from July 23 – 24, 2007 as a collaborative project between the National Welfare Department (JKM) and the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) with sponsorship from the Ministry of the Federal Territories. The course was held at the Pusat Jaya Diri at Jalan Hose, Kuala Lumpur.

The focus group targeted upon were the blind involved in the sale of tissue-paper or in begging

for a living. It is hoped that after the course, negotiations would go ahead with the Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) to provide business kiosks to the blind and to make it easy for them to obtain business licences.

MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCES ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMME

This is a scheme for the disabled in the Ninth Malaysia Plan for 2006 – 2010. The objective is to encourage the disabled entrepreneurs to expand their business enterprises and to provide more employment opportunities for other disabled persons.

The scheme was launched by the Ministry of Human Resources on May 29, 2007 at the Legend Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. The first batch of about 15 disabled persons received their business expansion grants from the Ministry of Human Resources ranging from RM20,000 to RM80,000.

A sum of RM22 million has been set aside for the programme and more disabled persons are encouraged to send in their application forms with working proposals.

DATO' L. KRISHNAN
PINGPONG CHAMPIONSHIP
AND LADIES' OPEN 2007

This annual event was held from July 13 – 15, 2007 at the Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad premises of MAB. This year the tournament has been extended to blind ladies.

The winning teams were the Ex-Nicolites' Association, the K.L/Selangor branch of SBM, and the MAB Recreation Club respectively. The cash prizes were RM700, RM500 and RM300.

The winners for the Ladies' Singles were Rosmaria with RM150, Che Su with RM100, and Kamsiah with RM70.

For the Ladies' Doubles, the champions were Rosmaria and Che Su with RM200, Kamsiah and Zainab with RM150, and Asnah and Suhaila with RM100.

NEW GTC HOSTEL

The trainees of the Gurney Training Centre moved into their new hostel on July 2, 2007 with an increased enrolment of more than 70 persons. The hostel has 15 rooms and it can accommodate 80 to 90 trainees at any one time (compared to 50 trainees previously).

The hostel project commenced on April 1, 2005 and was completed on June 26, 2007. The administrative block and family clinic are on the ground floor while there are three staff quarters on the top floor (or fifth floor) for the Executive Director, the principal of the GTC, and the matron.

UC MAS MENTAL
ARITHMETIC
PROGRAMME FOR THE
BLIND

MAB collaborated with UC Mas in running the first pilot project to promote the abacus and mental arithmetic among the blind from June 7 – 8, 2007. In initiating this project, UC Mas ran a course for about 20 teachers at the Jalan Batu Primary School for Blind Children in Kuala Lumpur. The objective is for the teachers to pass on their skills to their blind students at the school over a period of six months. The programme will be evaluated towards the end of the year and, if found to be successful, steps will be taken to convince the Ministry of Education and the Special Education Department (JPK) concerning the viability of the programme. It is hoped that eventually this programme will be of benefit to blind children all over the country.

Certificates were presented to the participants by En. George Thomas, the MAB Executive Director. Among the teachers receiving the certificates was the principal himself, En. Baki. He is very convinced that this is a good programme for the blind. The abacus for the blind has been specially adapted in China and it is available at a very cheap price of less than RM10.

According to UC Mas, the programme has already proved to be successful after launching their first project for blind children in Mumbai, India last year in 2006. UC Mas has agreed to work with the Specialist Teachers' Training Institute (MPIK) by providing a basic course for the teacher trainees there.

Further collaborative effort will be undertaken between MAB and UC Mas when a promotional course is organised for the interest of blind adults some time soon.

THE GUNUNG TAHAN
EXPEDITION

On August 22, 2007, a team of eight blind persons with eight escorts and some specialists set off for one of the toughest tracks in the South-East Asian region. The theme for the Gunung Tahan Expedition was "The Challenge of the Blind for the 50th Merdeka Anniversary". The flagging-off ceremony took place in Kuala Tahan, Jerantut, Pahang and it was conducted by YB Tengku Azlan, Deputy Minister of Transport. They arrived at the summit on August 31 at exactly 2.57 p.m. They celebrated their triumph by placing the Malaysian flag on the summit and singing the Negaraku.

The main objective of the expedition team was to achieve three targets for the Malaysia Book of Records, i.e. the biggest expedition ever of blind persons to climb to the summit of Gunung Tahan, the first blind man to reach the peak, and the first blind woman to reach the peak. All the three targets had been accomplished.

MAB YOUTH CLUB
MERDEKA CELEBRATION

At their merdeka celebration on August 30 at the MAB hall, the blind youths took part in two competitions – creative writing to produce a short story and the sajak recital. The winners of the short story writing were Shamuni a/p

Manokaran with RM150, Nabila bt Azahar with RM100, and Ayub bin Ahmad with RM50.

For the sajak recital, the winners were Zamzuri bin Ghani with RM150, Zaris Hasnah bt Ishak with RM100, and Zulkarnain bin Abu Bakar with RM50.

MAB CYBER CLUB

This club was formed in April 2007 and was officially launched on September 11 at the MAB hall. This was followed by a discussion on the future activities of the club chaired by Silatul Rahim, Manager of the ICT Centre and Cyber Cafe. Then came the elections to the new committee and Dr. Tan Tok Shiong won the vote to serve as the first coordinator of the cyber club. The event culminated in a very interesting talk on Mobile Money with employment prospects and opportunities for the blind.

We need men who
can dream of things
that never were.

John F. Kennedy

35th president of

US 1961-1963

(1917 - 1963)

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, MALAYSIA

MUSHROOM CULTIVATION

NCBM provided financial assistance for the Wallace Sheltered Workshop and the Job Placement Unit of the Sabah Society for the Blind (SHSB) to start a pilot project in the cultivation of mushrooms by interested blind persons. Within a period of 18 months, they had been able to harvest the crop three times. The last harvest fetched a cash return of more than RM1,000.

Thus, this project can be said to have met with considerable success and it has been proved to be viable. Therefore, it is a programme that can be recommended to blind and visually impaired persons who want to start their own mushroom enterprises.

THE WBUAP MID-TERM REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

This was held from 21 – 23 March, 2006 and it was hosted by the China Association of the Blind and the China Disabled People’s Federation. One of the matters raised was the need for a permanent office so that WBUAP could make real progress. A proposal of offer was made by the President of NCBM and it is hoped that it will be supported by all affiliates.

However, the highlight of the assembly was the adoption

of the Xenzhen statement for consideration by the governments in the Asia-Pacific region. The main points touched on in the statement are as follows – ratification and implementation of the international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities by governments in the region, implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action (BMFA), ensuring that specific requirements of the blind are recognised (including employment, education and accessibility), access to information, development of capacity-building programmes among the self-help groups and service-providers, improving the status of blind women, and finally the collaboration and partnership within blindness, disability and the mainstream community while maintaining independence self-determination through the voice of blind people.

It was also decided to provide special assistance to four of the poorest countries in the South-East Asian region; they are Cambodia, East Timor, Laos and Myanmar.

DEVELOPMENTS IN MAKPEM

NCBM is an affiliate of the Majlis Kebajikan Pembangunan Masyarakat Kebangsaan Malaysia (MAKPEM) and its representative is Rev. Canon Samuel D. John.

MAKPEM is in the process of reviewing its constitution with the objective of enhancing the quality of its services for the benefit of the less privileged.

Various courses are conducted throughout the year for caregivers, needy groups and interested parties. The courses are provided at the premises of MAKPEM in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur. Accommodation, food and the fee are free for the staff of affiliates. Grants are provided by the Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM) for the courses.

The courses are run professionally and have benefited many over the past few years. However, in order for the courses to be recognised, a Memorandum of Understanding is being drawn up to be signed by MAKPEM and the Open University of Malaysia (OUM).

Affiliates were also invited to take part in an educational tour of the health awareness expo organised by the Health Council of Negeri Sembilan on 21st April 2007. It was an eye-opener to the 24 representatives who visited the various areas connected to health care and the community lifestyle and the FELDA Raja Alias 2 of Bandar Baru Jempol in kawasan Santing.

TRAVELLING IN SAMOSIR ISLAND Part III

Editor's Note: The second part of this article appeared in the July – September 2007 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". Here is the third and final part.

After all the handshakes, the boys asked me if I had any money for them. Regretfully, I had to tell them I had none. Then one of the boys put his hand in my pocket and before I could stop him, I was aware that another hand had entered the other pocket. Then I realised that the zip of my haversack was being pulled open by yet another hand. I began to sense that, in fact, several more hands were coming towards my body. I felt shocked but I could not beat up these boys as they were probably only five to six years old.

Suddenly, I hit upon an idea and started running along the ring road. But the boys ran after me! However, being at least twice taller than them, I eventually managed to outrun them. Then the truth dawned on me – being a Christian travelling in a Christian island was no guarantee for my safety!

As I continued walking, I met several farmers winnowing their rice grains by the road-side. They were very friendly and so I stayed back for a while to witness them carrying out their work with such

enthusiasm. Then, in the late afternoon, I started looking for a place to stay for the night. One of the locals showed me to a house but the door was locked. After a while, an old lady came to the door and opened it. She showed me to a room where I could stay and quoted me the price. The room was dark and, when I touched the bed, I felt a thick layer of dust. So I told the old lady I would not take her offer.

I walked on for another five kilometres until I came to a small restaurant which had an extra room to let. I chatted with the owner and a group of restaurant guests for about two hours while I had dinner. Among them was a master's student returning home for a short vacation from a university in Surabaya. During the conversation, he kept stressing that Samosir was a heaven on this earth. I readily agreed with him but the others at the table were very skeptical.

At breakfast, I met a teacher who was neatly attired. He was teaching modern maths and would cycle to school every day. After breakfast, I went on my way and found it extremely pleasant to walk along the ring road as it was well tiled and there were hardly any cars.

Suddenly, I came to a bridge – I was shocked to discover that there were large holes everywhere on

the bridge. I checked carefully with my white cane as I crossed the bridge – one fatal step and I would fall down one of the holes and be killed in a deep ravine!

Thank God I made it safely to the other side and, after several more hours of walking, I took a rest in one of the stalls by the road-side. A few workers from the onion farm were sipping their coffee. I asked them how much they were paid per day working as labourers on the farm. Their reply was that they earned eight thousand rupiahs per day (or RM4 per day) plus a free lunch. I said they should come to Malaysia to work because the pay was much higher. They said this was not possible because they were addicted to ganja, and it was difficult to get a ganja supply in Malaysia. In Samosir, ganja was planted in the forest and the authorities could not do anything to arrest them.

I walked on again and, after several more hours, I came across a group of people resting under a tree. I said “hello” but they did not seem to be very friendly. One of them had just come back from outstation to visit his father-in-law; he enquired whether I had brought anything interesting from Malaysia. I showed him my white cane and told him that it was a very useful gadget for the blind. Then I showed him a Dunhill cigarette lighter which I used to light my mosquito coils. He took the lighter and looked at it with great interest. Then he called to his wife to get on to the motor-bike and they sped off with my Dunhill lighter. Immediately, I realised I had been robbed and that I was in the midst of a group of drug addicts. Fear came over

me and I quickly left the place.

I was very upset when a man approached me. He said he was a journalist and, being aware that I was visually impaired, he offered to walk with me to the nearest guest-house which was about eight kilometres away. He said that the inner parts of Samosir were very dangerous as many people were involved in planting ganja and many of them were drug addicts.

The owner of the guest-house was a retired sailor and he had travelled to many countries. He related his personal stories while I had dinner in his shop. Then he enquired whether I wanted to go back to Parapat the next morning as a ferry would be leaving from a nearby terminal. I knew that it would take me just one more day to complete my round-the-island trip but this would mean walking in the most dangerous part of the island. After contemplating a while, I chose not to complete my trip and decided to return to Parapat.

At my destination, I realised I had run out of the Indonesian currency. So I went to the only bank in Parapat to exchange my Malaysian currency for Indonesian money. A young officer came to the reception desk and told me that the exchange rate was one thousand three hundred rupiah for one ringgit. I was shocked as this was only two-thirds of what I used to get. Nevertheless, as this was the only bank, I had little choice but to accept the rate offered.

Then I went back to the Parapat hotel where I had previously stayed. After spending one night there, I took my haver-sack and

went to search for transport to go back to Tanjung Balai. I met a group of men at the bus-stop. One of them told me that the express bus to Tanjung Balai would pass by and he offered to wait with me at the bus-stop. He said the bus fare would be fifty thousand rupiah (or RM25). I was overjoyed and very grateful to have met such a kind stranger.

When the bus finally arrived, he helped me up and took the money from me. He paid twenty thousand rupiah to the bus driver and kept the remaining thirty thousand rupiah in his pocket. It was only later that I realised the real value of the bus fare and that he had kept back a commission of thirty thousand rupiah for himself.

After my visit to Samosir, I was still uncertain with regards to the origins of Lake Toba. The questions and puzzles in my mind were, however, cleared two weeks later when I watched a National Geographic programme called “Earth Shocks Mega Volcano”. This one-hour programme gave a detailed explanation about the origins of Lake Toba and how scientists had made the discovery.

According to the scientists, a volcanic eruption, which they named “The Toba Eruption”, had occurred about twenty thousand years ago. Volcanologists believe that “the Toba Eruption” was the largest eruption on earth ever known by man. After the explosion, an enormous amount of sulphur was released into the atmosphere and the subsequent change in temperature and climate killed about forty million people or about 70% of the population on earth at the time. A deep hole

was created on the earth's surface, measuring about 100 kilometres in length, 30 kilometres in width, and 2 kilometres in depth.

During the last 75 thousand years, rain water had been accumulating in the hole and, as a result, Lake Toba was born. During the process, part of the wall forming the crater collapsed and this gave rise to the Samosir Island.

Currently, volcanologists are studying the life-cycle of the Toba Super volcano in order to determine its next eruption, which we hope will be many thousands of years later.

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)

THE JKM NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE DISABLED

Part I



Editor's Note: The National Department of Social Welfare (JKM) held a workshop in Langkawi from September 18 to 21, 2006. The venue of the workshop was the Bayview Hotel and the objective was to help formulate a National Plan of Action for the Disabled.

Here is the report as follows:

1. INTRODUCTION

This can be said to be a landmark workshop for two reasons:

- 1.1 For the very first time, JKM had convened such an event for the purpose of producing a five-year Plan of Action for the disabled. The call for such action had originally been made by the U.N. ESCAP during the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) in 1981.
- 1.2 Further significance was given to this workshop in view of the fact that there was a wide cross-section of representatives from the government, the NGO's and

the disabled self-help groups and even the private sector.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the workshop were:

- 2.1 To obtain inputs from the participants.
- 2.2 To review existing programmes and make recommendations for the effective integration and participation of the disabled in society.
- 2.3 To coordinate and implement the Plan of Action based on the national policies for the disabled.

3. U.N. ESCAP GUIDELINES

In her speech, Aiko Akiyama from ESCAP provided some important guidelines in formulating the National Plan of Action. They are as follows:

- 3.1 Planning at the central level is as necessary and important as planning at the local level if programmes are to be effective in reaching out to disabled persons all over the country.
- 3.2 The focus should be on measurable achievements in

terms of services, facilities and other concrete data.

- 3.3 Collaboration and partnership should be inclusive by involving as many sectors as possible so that public awareness concerning disability issues is effectively multiplied and maximised.
- 3.4 Research and evaluation constitute an essential component of planning. Thus, planners should be equipped with relevant skills. (Planners include policymakers, administrators, disabled persons and even the volunteers.)
- 3.5 International documents such as the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action (BMFA) and the International Disability Convention should be used as the basis for formulating the National Plan of Action.

4. THE BMFA AND THE INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY CONVENTION

Aiko further explained the following:

- 4.1 The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action (BMFA) is actually a non-binding framework document to which various countries have signed up for implementation.
- 4.2 The International Disability Convention, on the other hand, when it is eventually adopted by the United Nations, will constitute the

legal framework for action. Implementation of measures as spelt out in the document will be obligatory upon those nations which ratify it when it is ready for signing.

- 4.3 Actually, both the BMFA and the convention are quite similar in their aims and content. For the moment, therefore, it would be quite sufficient for any country to at least try and implement the provisions of the BMFA.

Later on when they feel ready, they could then choose to ratify the International Disability Convention by signing it.

5. DISCUSSION WORKSHOPS

There were six discussion groups in view of the ministries that were present, i.e. education, health, accessibility to infrastructure, vocational training and employment, social development and culture and sports.

The five-year Plan of Action had to be based on guidelines given by JKM as follows:

- 5.1 The obstacles or challenges faced.
- 5.2 The actions to be taken.
- 5.3 The objectives to be met.
- 5.4 The target groups that will benefit.
- 5.5 Mechanism or method used.
- 5.6 The indicators.
- 5.7 Period of time expected.

5.8 Implementing agency.

6. ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED

In the process of carrying out the discussions, some interesting questions and issues were raised. They included the following:

6.1 DEFINITIONS ON DISABILITY

It was felt that the definitions of disability used in sports for the Disabled may be able to help in clarifying our understanding when we try to define and categorise the disability groups. As we shared ideas, we became aware that it may not be necessary to restrict ourselves to the medical definitions of disability.

In the medical model, for example, the emphasis is on the degree of impairment affecting the disabled person. In sports, however, the focus is on the capacity of the disabled person to carry out certain skills. For the purpose of sports, therefore, the blind are divided into three main categories – B1, B2 and B3. In the case of the cerebral palsied, they have to be divided into eight categories in order to adequately cater for their varying physical condition and consequently capacity to deal with the challenges in handling certain specific skills.

In the process of the discussions, it became clear that within certain groupings, there are actually much more distinct categories which have very different needs from what has generally been assumed for the particular grouping as a whole. For instance, the cerebral palsied come under the same

grouping as other orthopaedically disabled persons but, in actual fact, their needs are quite different from those who are wheelchair-users. In another example, those with down's syndrome are actually quite different and have very different needs from those with autism; and yet both groupings come under the same general type known as the persons with learning difficulties.

It was thus agreed that consideration should be given to these varying perspectives when reviewing the classifications and definitions on disability.

(to be continued)

MOBILITY AND ACCESS FOR THE BLIND IN A BARRIER-FREE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Editor's Note: The seminar and workshop on access audit was jointly organised by the Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) and the Universiti Islam Antarabangsa (UIA) at the Sri Pacific, KL from May 8 – 10, 2007. Seven areas had been selected for the access audit survey among which was the K.L. Sentral area.

Before the survey, Prof. Datuk Dr. Ismail Salleh was invited to address the group. This is what he said:

We are fast approaching the year 2020, the year when we aspire for “developed nation” status. The challenges of a caring society in Malaysia need to be overcome with increasing urgency. The disabled (including the blind) would, indeed, like to be able to contribute towards ensuring sustainable growth of our nation and the enrichment of knowledge and wealth among the country's citizens.

The vision of a “world-class” city encapsulates the ambition of our government to make Kuala Lumpur into a city that will assume a major global or sub-global role for the benefit of all its inhabitants, visitors and investors.

This means that Kuala Lumpur, as a world-class city, must ensure that

the infrastructure, environment, the cultural, social and community facilities and, most important of all, the city management, meet the highest expectations of the majority of its residents (including the visitors and investors).

With the introduction of the Codes of Practice on Access for the Disabled since 1990, efforts have been made by the various government authorities to implement the provisions as drawn up in the codes. Consequently, certain areas in Kuala Lumpur have become more accessible to the blind and other disabled persons. The accessible public facilities and amenities include hotel and public buildings, barrier-free roads and pavements, and trains with announcements regarding destinations.

THE BARRIER-FREE BRICKFIELDS PROJECT

This project was implemented in 2003 as a positive response from DBKL to the call made by MAB. As a result, many accessible features were introduced to Brickfields, thereby making it the first extensive barrier-free area in Malaysia not only for the blind but also for other disabled persons as well.

When initiating barrier-free projects like the one in Brickfields, serious consideration should be

We believe

in

working together

for

common good

given to the kind of features to be introduced. The list below could serve as a guide as follows:

Covered drains along pavements and roads;

Tactile guiding blocks with patterns in a consistent manner;

Wide pavements free of obstacles;

Systematic placement of street furniture such as lamp-posts, post-boxes, rubbish bins and telephone booths;

Modified traffic lights with light and sound, especially on all main roads – the light and sound should be combined in a fail-safe system so that if either light or sound fails, both will stop working - this is particularly important for blind and deaf pedestrians who may be tricked into crossing the road if only the light or the sound is not working;

Repositioned sign-boards that are also high enough so that they do not hinder the tactile path used by blind commuters;

Gentle slopes at street corners and junctions or near traffic lights;

These slopes are also useful as ramps for the wheelchair-users, baby prams, etc and these ramps should be made of non-slip tiles;

Bus shelters with railings to help blind commuters from going astray, with clear or distinct areas for landing or pick-up, and with proper colour codes;

Public transportation system (vehicles and station terminals)

that are user-friendly to all pedestrians and disabled persons alike.

Infrastructural adjustments in the transportation system include:

Ticketing counters at station terminals with Braille signage for the totally blind and large print signage for the low-visioned with appropriate colour contrasts;

Get-on and off areas with clearly embossed tactile and colour-contrasted guiding blocks;

Hazard-indicating tactile blocks of at least two feet in width to show the blind that they are approaching the edge of the train platform;

Guide-blocks leading to and from the train platform;

Audio announcements on trains and buses and at the station terminals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While we appreciate very much the helpful features and facilities that have been made available, we would like to draw the attention of the authorities to some of the weaknesses that need to be addressed. Our suggestions are as follows:

1. MONITORING AND ENFORCEMENT

All the laws and codes may be in place regarding access but, without monitoring and enforcement, all the facilities and amenities provided will not be able to perform their proper function in serving the disabled in particular

and the community in general. In fact, the facilities will be rendered useless and non-functional.

It is, therefore, necessary for periodic inspections and enforcement to be carried out. In Brickfields, for example, the banning of double parking near the bus-stops should be enforced by DBKL.

2. COVERING OF DRAINS, MANHOLES AND RUTS

Regular maintenance checks and enforcement should be conducted by the relevant authorities to ensure that drains, manholes and ruts on the roads and pavements are always covered or closed up, repaired and well maintained. Indeed, when implementing any barrier-free project for the blind, first priority should be given to the covering of open drains and manholes.

In fact, there are still some areas in Brickfields where the blind are exposed to the danger of falling into open drains. It is hoped that DBKL could give due attention to these areas which are hazardous to the blind.

3. TACTILE PATHS

If the guiding blocks on the tactile paths could be two feet in width (rather than one foot at present), the path would be easier to follow by the blind commuters.

The tactile path should be as straight as possible and free of obstacles such as motor-cycles, sign-boards and other street paraphernalia. Additional curves

and bends in the line of tactile blocks should be avoided as they could be quite confusing to the blind commuter. The facilities indicated by the tactile path should serve a useful purpose to the blind such as traffic lights; the guiding blocks should not lead to non-functional objects in terms of access such as lightning rods.

4. SLOPES AND RAMPS

These should be made of non-slip material so that the blind and other pedestrians will not easily slip on them.

5. AUDIO ANNOUNCEMENTS

Announcements should be made on all buses and trains and at station terminals so that the blind passengers and other commuters will be kept informed of the destinations and routes. The announcements should be loud enough to be audible and there should be at least one repetition of the announcement; this would be helpful to those passengers who may be caught off guard when the announcement suddenly comes on the air.

6. AREAS UNDER PRIVATE OWNERSHIP

In the areas which are under private ownership, the local authorities should have the right to implement or establish barrier-free facilities so that these areas could also be made accessible to the blind and other members of the general public.

CONCLUSION

Our final recommendation is that Brickfields should be used as a model barrier-free and accessible area for the blind and other disabled persons. In this way, the good example that had been set by DBKL could be clearly illustrated and held up as a model to be emulated by other relevant authorities in all the housing estates not only in the towns and cities but also in the sub-urban and even rural areas.

However, before Brickfields could really be considered as a model barrier-free and accessible area for the disabled, further improvements need to be made. Indeed, urgent attention should be given to this matter by the DBKL and other relevant authorities.

The self is not
something
ready-made,
but something
in
continuous
formation through
choice of
action.

John Dewey

(1859 - 1952)

THE 2008 BUDGET FOR THE DISABLED

By Ooi Hock Tiam

Editor's Note: Mr Ooi Hock Tiam is totally blind and is a lecturer on international relations at the Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang. He is a regular contributor to "The NCBM Outreach".

For the past few years, he has been focussing his interest on the presentation of the national budget. He is particularly interested in the provisions for the disabled in the budget.

Here again is his outline of the benefits being provided for the disabled in the 2008 budget.

The 2008 budget was tabled in parliament by the Prime Minister on 8th September 2007. This time round the allocation for the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development has been increased from RM739 million to RM782 million. In spite of the increase, however, this allocation actually constitutes only about 0.4% of the total national budget of RM176.9 billion. Compare this with the total number of disabled persons in the country which is very conservatively estimated at just 1% of the population. Nevertheless, even at this conservative estimate, the allocation for the disabled is way below target; this means that, in fact, the disabled could still ask for a bigger allocation!

I was able to identify nine

measures adopted in the National Budget which might be of interest or benefit to the disabled either directly or indirectly. They are as follows:

1. LOW-COST HOUSING

Syarikat Perumahan Negara Bhd. (SPNB) has plans to build another 36,000 low-cost houses. An allocation of RM381 million has been made available by the Government for this purpose.

Based on the policy of 20% discount for the disabled (as provided for in the 2005 National Budget), this would imply that the disabled should be able to take advantage of the move that will be taken by SPNB to develop more low-cost houses.

2. HOUSING LOAN FOR LOW-COST HOUSE

The Government has decided to set aside RM50 million in order to provide housing loans for the purchase of low-cost houses. In view of the policy of 20% discount for the disabled through SPNB, my feeling is that the disabled should have a good chance of obtaining this loan either from Bank Simpanan Nasional or from Bank Islam to make the purchase.

3. ALLOWANCE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

All special education teachers will have their special allowance increased from RM100 to RM250 per month. This will definitely be of benefit to the resource teachers who are blind. They can use this extra money to pay for their readers.

4. ABOLITION OF SCHOOL FEES

With the implementation of this measure, the disabled will be able to save around RM50 to RM100 per year. Concerning the scheme to provide textbooks free of charge, however, the blind will not be able to benefit at all as Braille books are being provided for by the Ministry of Education under a separate scheme.

5. ALLOWANCE FOR THE ELDERLY

For those who are aged 60 years and above, this allowance has been increased from RM200 to RM300 per month. This will certainly be of benefit to the elderly blind.

6. EMPLOYMENT INCENTIVE ALLOWANCE FOR THE DISABLED

This allowance has been increased from RM200 to RM300 per month. This measure is long overdue as the disabled had been

looking forward to this increase for the past few years.

7. ALLOWANCE FOR CARERS OF THE DISABLED

A new monthly allowance of RM300 has been made available to carers of the disabled, i.e. those who are taking care of any person who is terminally ill or bedridden. We can assume that the blind with multiple disabilities should also be able to benefit from this new provision. As with other welfare allowances, this allowance is being channelled through the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (or the National and State Welfare Departments, to be exact).

8. RM25 MILLION FOR THE NGO'S

This allocation of RM25 million has been set aside for 148 charitable organisations. Presumably, this money will be going to organisations such as MAB and St. Nicholas in the form of annual grants. This money usually constitutes between 10% and 20% of the annual budget of such organisations. Of course, the money is used by these organisations to run programmes and services for the blind or other disabled persons.

9. RM50 MILLION FOR PUBLIC-LISTED AND GOVERNMENT-LINKED COMPANIES

This money will be going to companies which practise corporate social responsibility, i.e. those corporations which run

programmes or services that are of benefit to the disabled. These include support for or sponsorships to charity organisations, providing employment opportunities for the disabled, and modifications to the office environment so that the workplace is accessible to the disabled.

This seems to be quite a considerable sum when compared with the allocation of only RM25 million to the NGO's.

Well, are the disabled getting their fair share of the goodies for the coming year? Anyway, let's hope for more positive provisions in the next budget.

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

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)**

A POINT TO PONDER: DEADLINES

By Wong Kow



You are probably like me if you do not like to hear or read the word, “deadlines”.

However, there are innumerable deadlines that every one of us has to face whether we like it or not.

When life begins in one’s mother’s womb, the first deadline to be met is the time when the baby has to leave the warm, comfortable and safe shelter of the womb in around 40 weeks’ time. This is followed by the long series of deadlines in the form of checkups and vaccinations – deadlines which cannot be ignored!

Then more deadlines await the child as he or she grows up. They include the following – time to register for nursery, kindergarten class, primary and secondary school, and further studies in college or university.

Then come the closing dates for all the examinations.

And very soon it is time to apply for the identity card at the age of twelve and subsequent renewal between the ages of 18 and 25 or with the implementation of smarter and smarter cards!

Suddenly, you are caught up in the exciting and thrilling times when you have the opportunity to say “I love you” to someone special and other loved ones before it is too

late!

Of course, you cannot ignore the stressful deadlines for paying bills, instalments, insurance premiums, and so on as they come knocking upon one’s door almost every month.

And, when one gets married and launches into parenthood, the pressure of ever-increasing and incessant deadlines will become part of one’s life with the beginning of another new life.

All those examples I have just mentioned simply go to show that it is indeed impossible for anyone to escape from deadlines. Some people may prefer to use the words, “closing date” or “time’s up” but they are as equally disturbing as “deadlines”.

Well, since we are destined to meet with so many deadlines and there is no way nor any means for us to escape from most of them, it would be much wiser if we prepare ourselves and readily accept them.

For example, when you are given a few years to renew your identity card, you should get the necessary documents ready and apply early; this would give you the opportunity to avoid the rushing crowd towards the last few months at the final stage.

You need to study hard, get the necessary guidance, give careful consideration and be

wise as you think of your options before entering the college or university and faculty and choose the appropriate subjects. Then you must painstakingly plough through your books and carry out your assignments so that you will be prepared for whatever is thrown at you during the examinations.

Quite a number of bills may be due on a certain fixed date. It would be very helpful if you take note of those dates and have the cheques prepared beforehand. Be warned – never wait until the last moment! The unexpected can always turn up such as bad weather, transport problems, traffic jams, computer breakdowns, and so on. All these mishaps are likely to delay your business at the last minute.

When a loving couple decides to get married and to raise children, the life cycle begins anew. Knowledgeable parents will work together to help prepare their children so that they too will be ready and able to meet any eventualities and deadlines from childhood, through schooling, to adulthood.

Most important of all, be ever ready to show that you love and that you do care for your loved ones; it is never too early to do so before the final deadline catches up with you!

Thus, with careful management, we would be able to sail through life quite happily and meet all or most of our deadlines by

HUMOROUS TITBITS

ON MARRIAGE

Marriage is not a word; it is a sentence.

Marriage is love and love is blind; therefore, marriage is an institution for the blind.

Marriage is an institution where a man loses his bachelor's degree and the woman gets a master's degree. In the end they both get a ph.d. or permanent head damage.

Marriage is a three-ring circus – an engagement ring, a wedding ring, and suffering.

Married life is full of excitement and frustration; in the first year of marriage, the man speaks and the woman listens. In the second year, the woman speaks and the man listens. In the third, they both speak and nobody listens.

OVERHEARD

After a quarrel, a wife said to her husband, "You know, I was a fool when I married you?"

The husband replied, "Yes dear, but I was in love and didn't notice."

WHO SHOULD MAKE THE COFFEE?

A man and his wife were having an argument about who should brew the coffee each morning.

The wife said, "You should do it, because you get up first, and then we don't have to wait long to get our coffee."

The husband said, "You are in charge of cooking around here and you should do it, because that is your job, and I can just wait for my coffee."

The wife replied, "No, you should do it, and besides, it is in the Bible that the man should make the coffee."

The husband replied, "I can't believe that; show me!"

So she fetched the Bible and opened the New Testament and showed him at the top of several pages, where it indeed says, "Hebrews".

INTERNET DEFINITIONS ON GIRLS

Hard-Disk girls: She remembers everything, for ever.

RAM girls: They forget about you, the moment you turn them off.

WINDOWS girls: Everyone knows she can't do a thing right, but no one can live without her.

Screen-saver girls: She is good for nothing but at least she is fun!

Internet girls: She is difficult to access.

Server girls: She is always busy

when you need her.

Multimedia girls: They make horrible things look beautiful.

CD-ROM girls: She is always going faster and faster.

Email girls: For every ten things she says, eight are nonsense.

Virus girls: When you are not expecting her, she comes, installs herself and uses all your resources. If you try to uninstall her, you will lose something; if you don't try to uninstall her, you will lose everything.

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MAB

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03-2272 2677

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Malaysian Association for the Blind

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