

# 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 : 03-22724959

Fax : 03-22724960

### **E-Mail**

ncftb@po.jaring.my

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**A quarterly  
publication of NCBM**

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# EDITORIAL BOARD

- Moses Choo
- Wong Kwee Heong
- Ivan Ho Tuck Choy
- Chan Yin Fan

IF YOU KNOW  
OF ANY BLIND  
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REGISTRATION FOR  
EDUCATION OR  
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PLEASE CONTACT US  
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NCBM

Te: 03-2272 4959

MAB

Te; 03-2272 2673

03-2272 2677

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## 1. KL SENTRAL WEBSITE FOR THE BRICKFIELDS COMMUNITY

The Brickfields community website was launched by KL Sentral at the YMCA hall on Tuesday, 26 August 2008. Representatives from MAB and NCBM were present at the launching.

The blind are encouraged to access this website in order to obtain information on developments by KL Sentral, particularly in the Brickfields area.

For the website address, please contact Ms Iris Wong or Cik Faridah at their office, tel. 03-2730 2003 or 03-2730 2042 respectively.

## 2. APPROVAL OF THE DISABILITY ACT

In a circular letter dated 29 August 2008 received from Dato' Dr Ng Yen Yen, Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, the Minister confirmed that the Disability Act of Malaysia had been approved by Parliament on 17 July 2008. In this connection, a national body of the disabled had been established to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Act, to draw up the national plan of action for the disabled, and to look into various matters concerning the disabled.

In view of this, the National Advisory and Consultative Council

(NACC) which was established in 1998 has been dissolved.

## 3. TEN THOUSAND JOBS LAUNCHED IN JULY 2008

In the launching ceremony to provide ten thousand jobs for the disabled, the National Welfare Department (JKM) distributed forms to the NGO(s) and government agencies in order to collect information for a database on employment opportunities for the disabled in the public sector. This was in view of the need to meet the goals provided for in the policy on at least 1% employment for the disabled in government departments and agencies. This policy was introduced in 1989.

According to the report issued by the Kuala Lumpur Human Resource Department, 9,806 disabled persons registered with their Department for job placements. Although the Department managed to match up 72% of disabled applicants with certain jobs, they could not be placed for the following reasons:

- (a) The employers either had no confidence in them or they flatly refused to accept them.
- (b) The parents of the disabled were unwilling to release their children to take up the jobs.
- (c) The disabled themselves did not take up the jobs because they could not adapt to the environment due to lack of adaptive equipment or accessible facilities.

#### **4. FIVE HUNDRED JOBS FOR THE DISABLED BY GIANT SUPERMARKET CHAIN**

This offer was made by Giant in early 2008. According to a report by the Secretary-general of the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation, Puan Khatijah Suleiman, only five disabled persons had responded to accept the jobs.

#### **5. MPPJ TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON ACCESS FOR THE DISABLED**

According to an announcement by the mayor of Petaling Jaya, Datuk Roslan Sakiman, a policy on access for the disabled in Petaling Jaya had been introduced on 1 August 2008. According to this policy, all development plans for buildings and infrastructure will not be processed at the one-stop centre unless facilities for the disabled have been included in the plans.

Endorsement of the plans will, therefore, be required from the MPPJ Technical Committee on access for the disabled which is headed by a disabled person, En. Anthony Thanasayan Sivabalan. He was appointed as a councillor, i.e. a member of the Council of Petaling Jaya, in July 2008.

This is a very significant and historic moment for the disabled as this is the first time that a disabled person has ever been appointed as a member of any local council in Malaysia. We would like to extend our warm and heartiest congratulations to En. Anthony Sivabalan.

## **DEVELOPMENTS IN WORK FOR THE BLIND THROUGH NCBM AND ITS MEMBER ORGANISATIONS, 2007**

*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy  
Executive Director*

*National Council for the Blind, Malaysia*

***Editor's Note: This report is based on the NCBM Annual Report 2007. Here it is:***

Let us begin this year's annual report by extending felicitations to those who have been appointed to responsible positions or have been honoured for their contributions to the blind and to the community at large. They are:

S. Kulasegaran, who was bestowed the datoship by TYT the Governor of Penang on the occasion of His Excellency's birthday on 14 July 2007;

YB Sen. Prof. Dr Hj. Ismail Mohd. Salleh, who was appointed Senator for the Disabled to the Malaysian Parliament on 17 December 2007;

Prof. Dr M. Chandra Sekaran, who was promoted to full professorship by the Twintech University in December 2007;

Mrs Clarice Irene Moiji, who received the NCBM Tun Hussein Onn Award for Distinguished Services to the Visually Handicapped on 24 November 2007 (she was the former vice-president of NCBM and a long-time and active member of the Sabah Society for the Blind).

Our heartiest congratulations on your well deserved achievements.

At its 21st AGM on 25 May 2007, The President, Dato' S. Kulasegaran said that in human terms, 21 is the age of maturity and the time when a person is expected to shoulder more responsibilities. It is the time when society uses a stricter standard to measure his/her performance. Similarly with NCBM, an organisation which has reached its 21st year of existence, society would be viewing it from a different perspective. It would be expected to take on more challenging roles and greater commitments.

Turning his attention to future developments, the President said that whatever we want to do, we must ensure there are tangible benefits for the blind, and there must be an impact on the organisations which are associated with NCBM. For this reason, the three-level plan was drawn up – NCBM should work directly with individual member organisations, it should organise national events for the benefit of all bodies having dealings with the blind, and, on the international level, it should support the programmes of the World Blind Union (WBU) and the World Blind Union-Asia

Pacific (WBUAP).

## **1. ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS WITH INDIVIDUAL MEMBER ORGANISATIONS**

### **1.1 ICT DEVELOPMENTS WITH SKSB**

Following the very successful staging of the ICT Day for the Blind in Kuching, Sarawak on 9 September 2006, a basic computer training course for eleven persons was conducted from 2 – 6 May, 2007. Instructors from MAB, SNH and SHSB assisted in the project with funding from NCBM. As a result of the interest created, SKSB has decided to set up a computer centre and to hold more advanced courses for its blind clients.

NCBM will assist in equipping the centre and sponsor part of the salary of an administrator, and provide support services to blind workers in the city of Kuching.

### **1.2 JOB PLACEMENT UNIT IN KUCHING**

As job placement is an essential service of an organisation serving the blind, NCBM has agreed to sponsor the Job Placement Unit of SKSB for three years. For a start, RM30,000 has been released to them to establish the unit and for the employment of an officer and a clerk.

### **1.3 THE CYBER CORNER IN SHSB**

With some financial support from NCBM, the cyber corner of SHSB was launched on 26 October, 2007 by Datuk Seri Panglima Hj. Yahya Husin, the Deputy Chief Minister

of Sabah.

The President of NCBM took the opportunity to appeal for government support both on the state and federal level. Consequently, the Sabah State Government decided to have Mr. Peter Gumba, a blind telephonist at the Department of Youth and Sports, transferred to the Sabah City Library to take charge of the ICT project for the blind. A grant of RM60,000 was subsequently given by the State Government to SHSB to expand the cyber corner.

### **1.4 JOB PLACEMENT UNIT IN SHSB**

Following another appeal from SHSB to continue funding this essential service, NCBM agreed to extend the sponsorship of RM55,000 for the next twelve months. An evaluation will be conducted to assess the impact of the project and to determine further measures SHSB needs to take to ensure the sustainability of the unit.

### **1.5 DIGITISING THE ANALOG RECORDINGS IN SNH**

NCBM will be assisting St. Nicholas with 50% of the actual cost for digitising over 1,000 talking-books on cassette-tape into the Digital Access to Information System (DAISY). When completed, the DAISY talking-books will be made available to all blind users of the library and to member organisations through an inter-library loan arrangement.

## **1.6 PRODUCTION OF BRAILLE TEXTBOOKS**

Since NCBM obtained a contract from Bahagian Buku Teks, Ministry of Education in 2006 for the production of Braille textbooks, the work has been shared among the three bodies with Braille production facilities. SNH took one title in 2006 and increased it to two in 2007.

### **1.7 THE MATA FAIR**

SNH organised a very successful Mata (eye) Fair at the Penang International Sports Arena from 29 – 30 December, 2007 and it was partly funded by NCBM.

In his speech, the NCBM President sent a very strong message to the general public on the need to take preventive measures in reducing the incidence of avoidable, preventable and treatable vision loss.

### **1.8 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP**

Since the drafting of the plan of action in 2006, NCBM and MAB had been working closely in several areas. These included the training of MAB personnel on the DAISY project, sharing of work in the production of Braille textbooks, organising the 12th ICEVI World Conference, and providing support for their Job Placement Unit.

In return, MAB had assisted NCBM with resource personnel for conducting ICT sessions, organising of the national career guidance camps, and holding of the ASEAN Braille Carnival.

With MAB having won the bid

from the International Society on Low-vision Research to host the World Vision Conference 2011, NCBM and its member organisations will work closely with MAB in ensuring its success.

(to be continued)

Genius is born--

not paid.

**Oscar Wilde**

## **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:

94B Jalan Tun Sambanthan  
Brickfields  
50470 KUALA LUMPUR  
Tel: 03-2272 4959  
Fax: 03-2272 4960

## **SPECIAL ANNOUNCE- MENT**

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.

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# BIOGRAPHY OF A BLIND MATERIAL HANDLER

*By Dr Tan Tok Shiong*

***Editor's Note: Dr Tan Tok Shiong happened to pop in at the MAB Elderly Blind Centre one day when he met up with M.K. Baskaran. After talking to him for a while, he was caught up with the interesting story of Baskaran's life as a blind material handler. He had a detailed interview with Baskaran and wrote the following biography. Here it is:***

M.K. Baskaran was born on 10 February, 1944 in Alor Setar, Kedah. At the age of two, his father took him and the whole family back to India in order to escape the Japanese occupation in Malaya (as Malaysia was known at the time).

In 1956, Baskaran and his eldest brother followed their father back to Malaya – he was twelve years of age. It was at this time when he began to experience some problems with his optic nerve. However, he remembers being still able to see large objects quite clearly at the time.

He also remembers having met Mr Badawi, the father of our current Prime Minister of Malaysia, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Both his father and Mr Badawi were working closely together in preparing for the celebrations of merdeka day, the auspicious day when Malaysia gained independence from Britain.

When Baskaran became totally blind at the age of eighteen (18), his

family approached the Specialist Teachers' Training Institute (STTI) to enquire whether they could provide some assistance. Mr Khoo Chang Thean, one of the lecturers in the institute, was appointed to give Baskaran some Braille lessons. Every morning he would go to Mr Khoo's office in STTI to learn Braille. After completing the Braille course with Mr Khoo, he was sent to the Gurney Training Centre where he received training in woodwork, basketry and English. It was about this time when Mr Khoo Chang Thean was appointed as principal of the GTC.

After the two-year programme at the GTC, Baskaran could not find employment. He was staying with his aunt in Petaling Jaya and he felt a great depression because he did not know what to do with his life. Fortunately, the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) had come into existence since its establishment in 1964 under the leadership of Lee Ah Kow and Ivan Ho Tuck Choy. This provided him with the opportunity to meet with friends in Brickfields during the weekends and he was able to take advantage of the free bus service.

After staying with his aunt for more than a year, he returned to the GTC to undergo some training programme which had been introduced by some Americans under the advice of Major D.R. Bridges, who was then the Director of the American Foundation of the

Overseas Blind (AFOB). Major Bridges was himself totally blind due to an accident as a soldier in the British army which was fighting the Japanese in Burma. When Major Bridges became the Welfare Officer in colonial Malaya, he was the one who founded the Malaysian Association for the Blind in 1951.

After going through the light engineering course that had been set up by Major Bridges, the Job Placement Officer, Peter Kok, found him a job in the Ford car assembly plant in Shah Alam as a production worker. He stayed on with this company until his retirement at the age of 55 (fifty-five).

When Baskaran first started on his job, he was faced with great difficulties. He had to wake up very early every morning at 4.30 a.m. in order to arrive at the factory in time. Immediately after washing up, he had to grope his way from his aunt's house to the bus-stop which was about one kilometre away in order to catch the 5.30 a.m. bus. Frequently, he would be the only person waiting at the bus-stop. With the place being so quiet, it felt somewhat eerie and ghostly.

Fortunately, the Selangor State Government had plans to construct some low-cost flats which would be within walking distance from the factory. Shortly after he had started work at the factory, the housing project was completed

and he managed to obtain a one-bedroom flat where he has been staying ever since.

From his flat, he would walk to work every day. Occasionally, friends who passed by would offer him a lift either to the factory or back to his flat. After staying in the flat for nine years, he used the savings in the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) and some other sources of assistance in order to buy up the flat from the Selangor Government at the price of RM14,000.

During his thirty years of service with the Ford company, he had been working as a sandpaper boy for thirteen (13) years. He remembers the metal body of the car being brought into the assembly plant – it was very rough and rusty to the touch. He would work with a team of sandpaper boys to smoothen the body of the car. After they had done their work, the body could be sprayed with the appropriate colour.

Later, Baskaran was transferred to another section where his job was to fix the lights and bumpers of the car (both front and back). Some time later, he was even given the responsibility to fix the fuel tank. To do this, the car had to be raised up with the help of a compressor. First he would fix the appropriate pipes; then he had to carry the fuel tank to the car and many rubber hoses had to be "clipped"; he would then use a compressor gun to screw the tank to the body of the car. He carried out these tasks for a period of seventeen (17) years until he retired from the company.

While working as the sandpaper

boy, he had occasionally been reprimanded by his supervisor because some of the car-parts had been wrongly fixed. However, he had never been reprimanded when he was in the assembly section which meant that he did not make any mistakes during the second stage of his career.

Baskaran had found it easy learning how to fix the lights, bumpers and fuel tank because of his training in the carpentry and light engineering sections of the GTC as well as the skills he had gained from the rural trade school in Tanjong Karang before he became totally blind. At the Ford factory, he was given on-the-job training by an engineer and he was able to pick up the skills within two days. Officially, he was called a Material Handler.

He was very happy during his working life and he always looked forward to receiving his pay at the end of every fortnight. He had many friends in the factory and he had no problem getting his lunch. He could make his way to the cafeteria, hand over his money, and the food would be brought to him. There were some anxious moments though when certain car-parts were absent and this caused delay in the assembly work.

It was a very memorable year in 1995 when Malaysia started on its "look east" policy. Following the government's advice, the company switched from assembling Ford Continental to Ford Japanese cars. The distinct difference between the two versions was that the body of the Continental car was tough and heavy while the Japanese car-body was thin and light.

Like any other workplace, rivalries did occur among the workers which numbered about one thousand (1000). During one of the rare incidents in which Baskaran was involved, he found himself being regarded as the hero. A factory worker had gone down a manhole to do some maintenance work on the septic tank. His rivals immediately closed up the cover and locked him inside the manhole. Baskaran was having his break when a friend came to him and told him what had happened. His friend dared not interfere for fear of being involved in a fight. As for Baskaran, he was blind and did not feel the fear of gangsterism. He, therefore, immediately left his food on the table and followed his friend to the place. He inserted his walking stick through the small padlock and used his force to break it. He opened the steel cover and, with the help of two other friends, they lifted up the person from the manhole. The person was feeling rather ill and would probably have collapsed in the manhole if Baskaran had not gone to the rescue in time!

At the end of his service in the company, Baskaran was given a sum of money for his gratuity. Being unmarried and staying alone, he would have loved to go on working – but it was his company's policy to retire everyone at the age of 55. He will always treasure the times and experiences he has had in the Ford company.

Now after retirement, he would go down to Singapore every year to visit his two uncles. He has been to Thailand several times and once to Indonesia. When one of his uncles died in India,

he followed some of his relatives there to witness the throwing of the ashes into the sea.

Some time after retirement, he was offered a small part-time allowance to help take care of the Elderly Blind Centre at the Malaysian Association for the Blind every Wednesday and Saturday. That was where I met up with Baskaran one Wednesday morning in April 2008.

He who has  
injured thee was  
either stronger or  
weaker than thee. If  
weaker, spare him;  
if stronger, spare  
thyself.

**William**  
**Shakespeare**

# NEWS FROM THE MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

## **TREASURE HUNT ON 26 JULY, 2008**

This is the third year that MAB has been invited to collaborate with Methodist College in making it possible for the blind to take part in their treasure hunt. Some of the main objectives include promoting integration between the blind and sighted, creating public awareness regarding the importance of Braille to the blind, and providing the opportunity for both the blind and sighted to get to know the environment better. Thus, the monorail route had to be taken in order to discover the treasures at designated monorail stations.

Prizes to be won included handphones and I-pods. About 20 blind persons paired off with volunteers for the hunt. The three winners from the blind category were Eddy Chong, Jamiah Mat Nor, and Dorothy Wong.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR FROM JAPAN JOINS MAB**

Ms Kanae Kosuda, a 22-year old university graduate from Japan, has been assigned by JICA to the MAB Sports Department for one year with effect from 14 July 2008. Her main focus will be on developing physical education activities among the blind in MAB, government schools and other programmes serving the

blind. During this period, she will be working closely with En. Muhamad Fairuz bin Abdullah, head of the MAB Sports Department.

## **MAB CHARITY DINNER**

This was held on Sunday, 29 June 2008 at the Legend Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. The Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, had been invited to grace the function as Guest of Honour. The objective of the dinner was to raise funds for the RM6 million project of rebuilding Taman Harapan, MAB's agricultural training centre in Temerloh, Pahang.

The guest artistes for the evening included the MAB harmonica group followed by the great local performer, Zainal Abidin with a string of other popular entertainers.

## **WEB ACCESSIBILITY TRAINING WORKSHOP**

The closing ceremony for the Web Accessibility Training Workshop was held on Friday, 6 June, 2008 at the MAB hall. Certificates were given to the nine participants who were from the various countries of the ASEAN region. The workshop was held from 2 – 8 June which had been preceded by an online course which lasted from January to June 2008.

During the ceremony, the RM2 million grant from the government for the equipment loan scheme was launched by the Deputy Director-general of JKM, Puan Halijah and loans were given out to the first batch of eleven blind persons.

MAB also received RM10,000 from Denso Company in support of its ICT Development Fund.

### **DIALOGUE OF BLIND MASSEURS WITH SEN. DATUK DR. ISMAIL SALLEH**

The dialogue was held on 5 May, 2008 at the MAB hall. More than 60 blind masseurs attended the dialogue.

The issues raised were as follows:

#### **1. RM10,000 DEPOSIT FOR BUSINESS LICENCE**

It was requested that this deposit be waived or significantly reduced. This was because the objective of DBKL imposing this deposit had actually been aimed at curbing sexual abuse among sighted massage operators but the ruling had seriously affected the blind operators.

#### **2. LICENCE APPLICATION AND RENEWAL**

It was requested that certain rulings pertaining to the licence be relaxed as follows:

- (a) Payment of RM50 per square metre of space in the operation premises be waived.
- (b) The requirement to partition rooms by curtains or glass

walls should not apply to the blind masseurs.

### **3. PROTECTING THE MASSAGE INDUSTRY FOR THE BLIND**

It was requested that legislation be considered to regulate such things as the standardisation of massage prices, qualifications of masseurs, and recognition by an appropriate body.

Reasons included:

- (a) Malaysia was being flooded by cheap but unqualified masseurs from China, Indonesia, Thailand, Korea and Philippines.
- (b) Massage is one of the few good employment avenues open to the blind.
- (c) Because a large number of blind persons can take up massage as a career, this would have a significant impact on the number of blind persons choosing to become beggars if they cannot find work.

### **4. DISCRIMINATION BY THE LICENSING AUTHORITY**

Granting of business licences to blind massage operators should be given special consideration and there should be no discrimination against them. For instance, one blind applicant was given a temporary licence but he was misled to believe that it was the genuine licence.

### **5. RECOGNITION BY A GOVERNMENT HEALTH BODY**

A government health body should be established to be in charge of certifying and registering masseurs in the country. With the massage enterprises being legalised and regulated under an official register, abuse of the standards and regulations could be prevented.

### **MAB AWARDS FOR BEST BLIND STUDENTS 2007**

The awards were presented to blind students in primary and secondary education who sat for the public examinations in 2007. The awards were presented by the MAB President, Sen. Prof. Datuk Dr. Ismail Salleh at the MAB hall on 18 June 2008.

The recipients were:

Nur Abdilla bt Zamri for the UPSR with five A's. She received RM200. School – SK Ladang Melangit, Perlis.

Ahmad Zairi bin Zaidi for the PMR with eight A's. He received RM300. School – Maktab Sultan Ismail, Kelantan.

Mohd Idil bin Idris for the SPM with eight 1A's, three 2A's, and two 3B's. He received RM400. School – SMK Sheikh Abdul Malek, Terengganu.

Nor Izati bt Meor Samsudin for the STPM with two A's, one B and two C's. She received RM500. School – St. John's Institution, Kuala

Lumpur.

### **FORMULATING THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR THE DISABLED**

On 20 May 2008, the Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM) held a briefing for the NGO's at the Bangunan Setiausaha Kerajaan (SUK) in Shah Alam, Selangor. The objectives of the briefing were:

- To highlight important points in the International Disability Convention, a document initiated in 2002 at the United Nations and recently adopted by quite a number of countries.
- To explain what bearing the international convention would have on the newly introduced Disability Act of Malaysia.
- To formulate a national action plan for the disabled.

#### **1. THE INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY CONVENTION**

On 8 April 2008, Malaysia was among the twenty countries who signed the International Convention of Disability. The twentieth country to sign was Tunisia.

With this number of countries signing, it provided the justification for the Convention to be regarded as an international legal document.

However, the document still had to be ratified by all countries before its implementation could be considered obligatory. So far,

by 15 May 2008, only 26 countries had ratified the Convention (excluding Malaysia).

The definition of "disability" in the Convention is based on the social model rather than the medical model. The eight principles of the Convention are:

- (a) The dignity, independence and individual choices of disabled persons.
- (b) Non-discrimination of the disabled.
- (c) Participation and inclusiveness.
- (d) Humanity and diversity.
- (e) Equal opportunities.
- (f) Accessibility to opportunities and facilities.
- (g) Gender equality.
- (h) Respect for the capabilities and rights of disabled children.

#### **2. THE DISABILITY ACT OF MALAYSIA**

The main points highlighted in the Disability Act were:

- (a) The characteristics, objectives and philosophy of the act are rights-oriented rather than charity-based.
- (b) The act provides for the mechanism of a national council for the disabled comprising ten persons and headed by a government minister.

(c) Instead of penalties being provided for in the act, recommendations are allowed by referring to penalties provided for in other related pieces of legislation.

(d) The Disability Act will not be in force until such time as the minister responsible for its implementation gives approval for the act to be enforced.

#### **3. NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR THE DISABLED**

This actually harks back to the National Welfare Policy which had been formulated in 1990, the National social Policy declared in 2003, and the U.N. Proclamation on the Equality and Full Participation of the Disabled (which was signed by Malaysia in May 1994).

Based on these policies and on the two new documents of the International Convention on Disability and the Disability Act of Malaysia, the fifteen targets that have been set out for the latest National Action Plan for the Disabled are as follows:

- (a) Advocacy and self-help of the disabled.
- (b) An accessible and barrier-free environment.
- (c) Health maintenance for the disabled.
- (d) Rehabilitation programmes for the disabled.
- (e) Education for all.
- (f) Employment opportunities

- for the disabled.
- (g) Personal safety and social security.
- (h) Support services for the disabled.
- (i) Social amenities and activities.
- (j) Human resource development.
- (k) Involvement of the community and society.
- (l) Research and development.
- (m) Housing for the disabled.
- (n) Needs of disabled children.
- (o) Needs of disabled women.
- Family and Community Development.
- (d) One or more representatives from each of the state advisory councils for the disabled should be elected to the new national council.
- (e) A significant proportion of members in the national council should be disabled persons (perhaps 50%) and a cross-section of disabled persons should be reflected in the council.
- (f) Both disabled and able-bodied persons should be able to work in equal partnership for the benefit of the disabled community and ultimately for the good of the general society.

#### **4. EMPOWERING THE DISABLED**

At the end of the briefing, the disabled representatives from the NGO's suggested the following:

- (a) The disabled will remain powerless if the Disability Act is not enforced immediately.
- (b) Too much power is being vested in the government authorities rather than in disabled persons through the mechanism of the national council for the disabled.
- (c) Besides the ten persons appointed by the government, another ten persons should be elected from among members of the existing National Advisory and Consultative Council (NACC) headed by the Minister of Women,

#### **FAREWELL TO MAB STAFF**

31 August, 2008 was the last day for Theresia Nathan while 5 September, 2008 was the last day for Sariza Abdul Halim at MAB.

Theresia has served MAB for 43 years. She first joined the organisation as a clerk on 3 May, 1965 and was promoted to the position of appeals officer in the 1990s.

Throughout the years, Theresia had been attached to the Fund-raising and Public Relations Unit. Her tasks included assisting in fund-raising projects, liaising with the press, production of public education pamphlets, meeting donors, organising public awareness talks for visitors, and running the Appeal Letters Income-generating Project for the Elderly Blind and Deaf-blind.

Indeed, Theresia has served as a vital link of MAB with donors, volunteers and particularly the blind. In fact, a new volunteer at the MAB library recently commented that Theresia's words of encouragement were a source of inspiration and spiritual upliftment for her.

Sariza has served MAB for over two years since 2 May 2006. She was an industrious, responsible and reliable worker. She has provided crucial assistance in executing the clerical and administrative work and in organising many of the sports activities such as the gym, goalball, and especially in the most memorable tandem-riding expedition to Langkawi in 2006. She is well known to the blind as being very calm and always obliging.

We take this opportunity to wish both Theresia and Sariza God's blessings and all the best in their future undertakings.

#### **FUEL PRICES AND DISABLED PEOPLE'S LIFESTYLE**

On 4 June 2008 (Wednesday) the announcement on the rise of fuel prices by 78 sen to RM2.70 was made by the Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. In view of the difficulties faced by the disabled due to the rising cost of living caused by the price hike not only of petrol prices but of other essential goods as well, Dato' Dr Ng Yen Yen, Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, called for a meeting with the disabled on 9 June 2008 (Monday). The objective was for the disabled to put forward

suggestions to be considered by the Government in order to improve the conditions of living of the disabled.

The main issues and concerns raised were as follows:

1. Sustainable allowance of RM500 per month for all disabled persons, particularly those who are unemployed.
2. Employment incentive allowance to be raised from RM300 to RM400.
3. Trainee's allowance to be increased.
4. Ceiling income of the disabled to benefit from the disability allowance to be raised to RM5,000.
5. Disabled persons who can indicate their identity with the disability card at the petrol stations can qualify for petrol rebates.
6. Those using the dialysis machine should be given financial aid.
7. Families of disabled persons should be given financial assistance, especially at this time of price hikes.
8. Toll charges should be reduced for the disabled plus concessionary rates for public transport.
9. Road tax exemption for the disabled.
10. 50% excise duty on imported cars used by the disabled.

11. Low-interest housing loans to be introduced for the disabled.
12. The housing policy of DBKL and other local housing authorities should be relaxed to include unmarried disabled persons to obtain low-cost houses.
13. The disability card should indicate functionality and degree of impairment and whether the condition is temporary or permanent; those with temporary disability should return the card when they recover.
14. Business launching grants should be given to the disabled to start enterprises rather than six months later after initiating their enterprises.
15. JKM should consider reintroducing their marketing system to help sell the products made by the disabled and to provide places for the disabled to set up enterprises.
16. The amount for business licences to the disabled should be reduced significantly.
17. Illegal and foreign masseurs should be controlled in order to protect the massage industry of the blind in Malaysia.
18. Disabled internet users should be granted discounts or rebates.
19. The government welfare delivery system should be less bureaucratic and there should be no delays in the disbursement of monthly

allowances to the disabled and their families. (These delays often occur for as long as six months or even more; sometimes the allowances get lost or are forfeited in the process through no fault of the disabled themselves.)

JKM should adopt a more effective system of disseminating information on its services so that such information can reach the disabled, the actual beneficiaries who need to be in the know regarding services being provided by the government.

#### **JOB PLACEMENTS FROM MAY TO JULY 2008**

Job placements for the blind during these three months were as follows:

Masseurs	-	2
Telephonists	-	2
Telemarketeers	-	1
Counsellors	-	3

Lim Wah Heng has retired from Sekolah Menengah Khas Setapak after teaching for more than 20 years.

A two-day course on how to be a successful deejay was held in July 2008 and about 30 blind persons took part. The course was sponsored by the Ministry of the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur.

# CREATING ACCESSIBLE WEBSITES

By Sen. Prof. Datuk Dr Ismail bin Mohd Salleh  
President  
Malaysian Association for the Blind



**Editor's Note:** This speech was delivered at the NCBM Web Accessibility Conference held at the Tun Hussein Onn National Eye Hospital (THONEH) on 3 April 2008 (Thursday). Dr Ismail Salleh says:

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is the first ever web accessibility conference and workshop to be organised by NCBM in collaboration with MAB and the Sabah Society for the Blind. While there have been a couple of web accessibility workshops in the past, they had been held on a much smaller scale and only involved individual organisations such as MAB and St. Nicholas Home. Before today's conference, no web developers or policy-makers had participated in such projects or programmes.

Creating accessible websites will certainly bring great benefits not only to the blind and other disabled persons but to all users in the mainstream as well. Of course, web accessibility is being

introduced with the disabled particularly in mind and the main objective is to enable them to browse the website easily and independently. For example, all the images will be labelled with text so that the blind can use screen-readers to read them. With colour contrasts of clear and high resolution, web accessibility would be most helpful to persons with low vision or to those who are colour blind. The audio content together with text descriptions in Braille or print will be of great benefit both to the blind and the deaf.

In this connection, therefore, we strongly urge all web developers to make their websites accessible to everyone by meeting with the requirements of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) standards that have been set by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) working group, a group that has been established by the consortium. Website developers would include the banks, the stock exchange, airlines, hotels and the various communication providers. With accessible websites, the blind in particular will be able to enjoy the online services such as e-banking, e-commerce, e-booking and reservations, and all kinds of other payments by making use of the electronic channel.

Indeed, we deeply appreciate the role that is being played by NCBM in developing and promoting web

accessibility for the blind. MAB, on its part, will also pledge its total commitment in helping to bring about the process of creating web accessibility for the blind by doing the following:

1. RM87,000 will be made available to assist the blind in acquiring assistive equipment (both hardware and software) such as the JAWS screen reader for Windows; the Talks screen reader for mobile phones; laptops and note-takers for the blind; and visual aids for persons with low vision.
2. RM400,000 will be allocated for the purpose of upgrading the ICT training services at Kompleks MAB so that they will be able to meet with current needs and demands effectively.
3. MAB will host website accessibility workshops in order to help build up expertise in this field. At present, MAB is, in fact, running a web accessibility workshop at Kompleks MAB with the help of a web accessibility specialist from Washington DC. There will be a follow-up workshop from 1 – 7 June 2008 in which the ten participants from the ASEAN countries will be taking part.
4. MAB will be launching its

own new accessible website on 7 June this year towards the end of the follow-up workshop.

5. MAB will be willing to act as consultant to local web developers and service-providers in making websites accessible to everyone, especially the blind consumers.

To conclude my speech, allow me to share with you some figures taken from a report with the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC). According to this report, the number of internet users in Malaysia, as of September 2007, is 47.8% or 13,528,200 out of the estimated population of 28 million. Almost half of the internet users in Malaysia are senior citizens and disabled persons. Imagine the amount of profits you will attract if two-thirds of the senior citizens and the disabled internet users could be persuaded to buy your products and services – web accessibility is certainly one of the most potent marketing weapons!

Once again, I thank the organisers for having invited me to deliver my speech. Best wishes to all participants and guests for a fruitful seminar.

## INTERNATIONAL TEACHER TRAINEE AT THE CARROL CENTRE FOR THE BLIND

*By Silatul Rahim bin Dahman  
Head of the ICT Department  
Malaysian Association for the Blind*



***Editor's Note: Silatul Rahim bin Dahman is totally blind and he has been heading the ICT Department of MAB since 2005. During the last three years, he has been doing an excellent job in organising ICT training programmes for school students and for the adult blind.***

***Last year he was given the opportunity to serve as an international teacher trainee for a period of two months from September to November 2007 at the Carrol Centre for the Blind in Boston, USA. In this article, he relates his experience as follows:***

I was at the Carrol Centre in Boston, Massachusetts for two months from September to November 2007. The purpose was for me to be accredited as an international teacher trainee on

access and assistive technology. Towards this end, I had to prove my teaching skills and techniques by running a class for a group of professional blind persons and helping to develop online course materials for the Carrol Centre.

Besides these challenging tasks, my experience was further enriched by the opportunities that were provided for me to visit a number of places and to get involved in various activities. The places I visited included the Perkins School for the Blind, the Perkins Braille factory, the Overbrook School for the Blind and the Colorado State University. In Pennsylvania, which is six hours from Boston by car, I attended a web accessibility conference for professionals which had been organised by the Colorado University.

One day we took another three-hour drive by car to New Hampshire, the neighbouring state of Massachusetts, in order to take part in the presidential political rally in support of John Edward's candidacy. We all stood in line on the roadside with a picture sticker of John Edward pinned to our jackets while his name was held high in the sky on a huge poster.

There was another crowd on

the opposite side of the road and they were the supporters of Hilary Clinton. As we shouted and cheered for John Edward, the opposite camp yelled and cheered ten times louder for Hilary Clinton. Suddenly, there was a heavy downpour and the people in our group started leaving on foot or in their vehicles. As I made my way to our transport, I could hear Hilary's supporters continuing their yells with great enthusiasm and gusto as they stood in the pouring rain. This is an experience I will not quickly forget.

I also had the wonderful opportunity to experience watching a movie which had been made accessible to the blind. I sat in an ordinary cinema frequented by the general public. Although I could not see, I was able to enjoy everything and every scene that occurred in the film through a device known as audio descriptive assistance. A voice would start speaking whenever there is action in the movie and it would stop speaking when the action ceases. This would happen throughout the movie and it really made the show very interesting for me. It is my earnest hope that such movies could be introduced to Malaysia some day.

During my two months at the Centre, I had to survive as a vegetarian. I found the food provided by the Carrol Centre to be rather bland and tasteless. Fortunately, I was able to supplement my diet with instant vegetarian noodles which were available at US\$2 per pack and the additional luxury of a can of tuna obtained from the local store. Indeed, I must advise my Muslim

friends that should they ever venture on such a journey in the future, they had better bring their own noodles from Malaysia and other little condiments to spice up the simple dish. Actually, I was quite lucky to be able to obtain vegetarian food or to go for meals without meat from the Chinese and Indian restaurants such as fried rice which cost me US\$10 (or about RM40) per plate together with a cup of coffee for another US\$1.50 (or about RM6).

I was housed in a single room at the international dormitory of the Centre. I had to pay US\$1,500 (or about RM6,000) per week for my food and lodgings. Life was quite comfortable except for the weather which was very cold and windy, usually below ten degrees Celsius. I had to wear thick clothing all the time and I had a terrible time trying to adjust to the climate.

However, the students were very friendly and they did much to warm my heart. In the daytime, they learned Braille from another teacher while I imparted to them whatever knowledge I had on computer skills and techniques. During the evenings, I spent much of the time walking with them and helping them to adjust to their environment by putting into practice the mobility techniques they had acquired from their rehabilitation programme. As they were blind adults, their mobility was very poor and they were quite inspired by my ability to adjust to my new surroundings rather quickly. I was so glad that I could be a source of hope and encouragement for them. In fact, the group of students was made up of people from several different

cultures and religions but we got along very well together.

I was also able to establish fairly strong links with some of the staff and committee members running the Centre. In particular, I appreciate very much the kindness and understanding shown to me by the President of the Centre – she is a sighted person and I am still carrying on some correspondence with her.

Someone else who had made a great impression on me was the Director of Technology. He is blind and he uses a guide-dog to help him in his travels everywhere. He had a very warm and friendly personality and I shall certainly remember him for a long time to come.

Truly, I have had a great experience and it is one that I shall not soon forget. Nonetheless, I did feel such a wonderful sense of relief when my plane finally landed on Malaysian soil at the KLIA airport. It was so heavenly to be able to feel once again the familiar ground of Kuala Lumpur under my feet. I felt such joy when the warm air of the Malaysian weather touched my face as I stepped out from the entrance of the airport. I experienced an exhilarating sense of appreciation for my beloved Malaysia after the terribly long journey of at least 30 hours by flight.

Before concluding, I must express my heartfelt thanks to MAB for having given me this golden opportunity to undergo the beautiful experience as an international teacher trainee. I have no doubt that the knowledge I have gained would be most useful

to me as I continue to manage the ICT Centre and to organise computer literacy and technical courses in order to meet the needs of the blind at various levels.

The future belongs  
to those who believe  
in the beauty of their  
dreams.  
  
**Eleanor Roosevelt**

# TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: THE DAISY AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS

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

The Digital Accessible Information System (or DAISY) is becoming increasingly acceptable as one of the universal formats for “reading” and for publishing digital talking books. DAISY technology allows for new ways to deliver information quickly and efficiently by using high-quality synthetic speech or even a human voice.

A DAISY book has been designed to allow the reader to move around the text as efficiently and as flexibly as a print user. Some of the functions include the bookmark; pause reading; speed up or slow down while maintaining the pitch; reading or ignoring of footnotes; and jumping easily from chapter to chapter, heading to heading, by paragraphs or by pages.

### **HOW TO LISTEN TO A DAISY BOOK?**

To take full advantage of DAISY, one needs a DAISY player or specially designed software on the computer, both of which can be purchased from several manufacturers. The DAISY player is similar to a CD player and allows the user to access tracks quickly and flexibly. Some smaller players use memory cards rather than CD’s; therefore, they require DAISY books to be transferred to the memory card by

using a computer.

Many digital audio players such as the Apple Ipod or some mobile phones are able to play a DAISY book but not all of the navigation features are available. Many of the household CD players are not able to play a DAISY book unless they are designed to play the MP3 format (which is a common format for audio files).

On 7 May 2008, Microsoft released the following statement that “DAISY makes reading easier for people with print disabilities using the Office Open XML files; users of Microsoft Office Word can now produce content in the world’s most widely used assistive technology format.” Microsoft Corp. joined with industry and advocacy group leaders worldwide in launching the new software that would make it easier for anyone to create documents and text that will be accessible to the blind and print-disabled persons. The new “Save as DAISY XML” add-in (which has been designed for Microsoft Office Word 2007, Word 2003 and Word XP) will allow users to save Open XML-based text-files into DAISY XML, the foundation of the globally accepted DAISY standard for reading and publishing navigable multimedia content (at [www.daisy.org](http://www.daisy.org)).

The “Save as DAISY XML” add-in was created through an open source project with Microsoft Sonata Software Ltd. in collaboration with the DAISY Consortium. It can be downloaded by MS-Word users for free at <http://www.openxmlcommunity.org/daisy>. Also released on the same day was the newest version of the DAISY Pipeline, a free downloadable transformation suite that supports the seamless conversion of DAISY XML into the DAISY Digital Talking Book (DTB) format.

Together these technologies provide a comprehensive solution for converting text documents into accessible formats for people with print disabilities. Users can download the DAISY Pipeline from the DAISY Project page at <http://www.daisy.org/projects/pipeline/information>.

Other technologies that can convert DAISY XML into DAISY DTB format and other products that support the DAISY standard are available on the DAISY website at <http://www.daisy.org/tools/index.shtml>.

According to estimates of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and World Blind Union (WBU), there are 160 million blind people throughout the world. Besides this, there are hundreds of millions of people with physical, developmental or learning disabilities. All these people can benefit from the many applications of DAISY technology.

Indeed, global access to the “Save as DAISY XML” add-in for MS-Word is a very important step

forward for people with print disabilities around the world, especially those in the developing countries. It will support access to information contained within billions of MS-Word documents, thereby enabling these people to lead more independent and productive lives.

Chris Capossela, Senior Vice President of the Information Worker Product Management group at Microsoft, said, “This new Save as DAISY XML functionality for MS-Word has the potential to break down barriers for millions of visually impaired individuals around the world and enhance the experience for virtually anyone who loves to read.” He continued, “We are proud of our collaboration with the DAISY Consortium and Sonata Software to deliver valuable benefits for people with visual impairment. This tool will make it easier for anyone - from a child writing to his or her grandparent to a government agency providing vital information to its citizens - to create accessible content.”

Microsoft’s initiative to put “Save as DAISY XML” in MS-Word is the first step towards bringing fully accessible content to the blind and those with print disabilities. “This new add-in provides an unprecedented leap forward in the worldwide effort to make information available to all,” said George Kerscher, Secretary-general of the DAISY Consortium.

This new tool presents the opportunity for organisations and vendors to consider ways in which the technology may be employed to meet the needs of those not yet

served by the text-only or audio-only formats. This is certainly the breakthrough that corporations such as insurance agencies and health care providers have been waiting for.

“Libraries today are often ill equipped to provide content for people with print disabilities, and the methods they have at their disposal are antiquated,” said Helen Brazier, a member of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). “But things are beginning to change, and state-of-the-art technologies like Save as DAISY XML and the new DAISY Pipeline are making it easy and cost effective for libraries to essentially level the information playing field for people with disabilities and do things they never before could have imagined.”

Here are some players that can be used to read DAISY books:

### **AMIS (Adaptive Multimedia Information System)**

This is free open source DAISY playback software developed by the DAISY for All project.

### **Book Courier**

This is a portable reading device designed specifically for the disabled who have difficulties in reading.

### **Book Port**

This is a portable device designed to read electronic books to blind students and professionals. Its small size and large storage capacity

make it a perfect hand-held device for reading wherever you go.

### Classmate

This is a portable DAISY reading system for K-12 students with reading difficulties.

For more information on these playback tools, please go to <http://daisy.org/tools.shtml?Cat=playback>

Knowledge is  
the best eraser  
in the world for  
disharmony, distrust,  
despair, and the  
endless deficiencies  
of man.

**Orlando Battista**

# STUDY VISIT TO BIZLINK, SINGAPORE

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



Three persons from MAB visited Bizlink Singapore on 20 March, 2008. They were En S. Radhakrishnan the Employment Chairman, En Godfrey Ooi the Deputy Executive Director, and En Zainuddin Jasmi the Job Placement Officer.

The three representatives from Bizlink Singapore were Ms Carol Heng, the business manager, Rebecca Tan, the project manager, and Palanisamy s/o Avaday, the operations executive for business development.

### **PREMISES**

The Bizlink office and workshop for the disabled occupy one floor of a high-rise building. The production area is divided into two main sections - the production workshop and the I.T. Centre.

### **GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE**

Bizlink was originally an effort of the Singapore government but the enterprise was eventually handed

over to the National Council of Social Services (NCSS) which ultimately decided to run the workshop as an autonomous entity. Besides running its own enterprises for the disabled, Bizlink also collaborates with other voluntary welfare organisations (VWO's) such as the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped (SAVH) to help them in organising and managing their industries.

### **JOB PLACEMENT UNIT**

The role of the Job Placement Unit is in job-matching, consultation with employers regarding environmental adaptations and special equipment, sourcing for funds, and organising training programmes in rehabilitation, adjustment and mobility of the disabled workers. Priority is given to placing the disabled in open employment - jobs have been found for at least 4,000 persons. Another 30 to 50 disabled persons are given employment in the sheltered workshop.

The unit is backed up by a team of psychologists, sociologists and occupational therapists.

### **SHELTERED SERVICES**

Hostel facilities are not provided because the main objective is to make the opportunity available for the disabled to enjoy the real

experience of family and home life as dignified and productive workers. In order to make this happen, various subsidies are provided such as the work allowance and transport allowance and quite a number of buses are provided to enable the workers to commute to and from work every day.

The sheltered services are regarded as such because of a number of other factors which include:

- (a) The inability of these disabled workers to cope in open employment.
- (b) Salaries of the disabled are often sponsored or subsidised.

In fact, three kinds of sheltered employment are made available at Bizlink - the production workshop, the I.T. centre, and the cleaning service.

### **PRODUCTION WORKSHOP**

Production includes the packing of goods, assembly-line sorting and packaging, preparing corporate gifts and hampers, and making of handicrafts. The emphasis, however, is on customised products so that there is minimal accumulation of goods at the workshop.

The disabled workers are initiated into the workshop by starting on the basic job skills through on-the-job training exercises. They are also given guidance on social etiquette at meals, proper use of the toilets, and work discipline. Opportunities for social interaction are also provided by organising festive celebrations and other

community activities.

The staff helps in planning the production, preparing the work methods for implementation, gathering information on market demands, and promoting the sales. Outdoor and field work are very important for the survival and development of the programme.

### **I.T. CENTRE**

The jobs at this centre include telemarketing, data entry, and designing of cards for the festive seasons. Higher-skilled workers are required for this section.

### **CLEANING SERVICE**

Contracts are signed with various organisations for the cleaning services of Bizlink. Organisations targeted are mainly the schools, churches and charities where expectations are not so high as in the corporate sector. The disabled cleaners are first given training at Bizlink's premises. When they are ready, the cleaning teams are then sent out. Each team is headed by a site supervisor.

### **FUNDING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS**

Besides government funding, sponsors are solicited to help pay for the salaries and allowances of the workers. Alternatively, donors could choose to sponsor clothing and transport, particularly for the first-timers who are going into employment. To keep the public informed of needs and events, pamphlets are published and the information is made available on the internet.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

According to the Bizlink model, running production workshops for the disabled as a sheltered service rather than as a profitable venture cannot be avoided. Before coming to a definite conclusion on our part, however, I feel that we should gather more information, facts and figures from other sources by looking at similar ventures in other countries such as Britain, Australia, USA, Japan, South Korea, India and even Thailand. Nevertheless, should MAB decide to establish sheltered services based on the Bizlink model, then we need to consider the following:

#### **1. WORKFORCE**

We need to decide whether to cater only for blind workers or to have a mixed workforce which would include other disabled categories and perhaps even able-bodied and sighted workers.

#### **2. SUBSIDIES**

Various forms of subsidies must be provided because some of the workers would be people who cannot cope in open employment and others may be low-skilled workers. Government assistance and private sponsorships would be needed for the purpose.

#### **3. PRODUCTS**

Items that appeal to charity and to the heart would probably have to be the mainstay of the industry, especially in the initial stages. More competitive products may be considered eventually but

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this requires much investment in time, effort and qualified manpower.

Since labour is rather expensive in Singapore compared to China and even her neighbours in the ASEAN region, Bizlink may consider collaborating with an organisation in Malaysia in the form of production contracts.

#### **4. PREMISES**

Proper and ample space would be needed so that the work structures could be well planned for implementation.

#### **5. STAFFING**

Very competent staff would be required to help run the production workshop. It is essential to have a team consisting of professionals and volunteers who have the interest, enthusiasm, knowledge and expertise so that effective management can be brought to bear in helping to ensure a successful outcome.

#### **6. AUTONOMY**

It may be necessary to consider establishing the workshop as a decentralised and autonomous entity (as is the case with the Bizlink model in its relationship to the National Council of Social Welfare (NCSS) in Singapore). This would enable the group to organise and carry out their programmes more proficiently.

# **SPORTS FOR THE BLIND IN THE ASIAN REGION: FIVE-YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

*By S. Radhakrishnan*

*Chairman of IBSA Asia*

*and Chairman of the NCBM Sports and Recreation Committee*



***Editor's Note: S. Radhakrishnan has been the Chairman of IBSA Asia since 2005. He then became the Chairman of the NCBM Sports and Recreation Committee in 2006.***

***In the following article, he puts forward a proposal for a five-year development plan in order to upgrade sports and recreation for the blind in the Asian region.***

Asia is the biggest continent in the world and it has the biggest population. However, most of the countries in this region are poor or under-developed in many aspects of living, including sports and games for the blind.

In order for Asia to catch up and become equal with the other continents and regions, particularly with regards to sports and games

for the blind, IBSA needs to take a serious look at the current situation and take immediate steps to bring about positive developments for the blind in this important aspect of living. The way forward is to adopt a dynamic and action-oriented plan of action for the next five years.

There are many resources that could be tapped within the Asian region; there are many wealthy individuals and affluent corporations to whom we could turn for financial support and assistance.

#### **1. OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of our five-year development plan are as follows:

- 1.1 Providing opportunities for the blind in the Asian region to develop their talents and skills in sports and games.
- 1.2 Helping the blind to develop the values of good sportsmanship, including the competitive spirit, the ability to win or lose with dignity and humility, building up of self-confidence and self-esteem, and the development of positive friendship bonds.

1.3 Establishing proper infrastructure and making available adaptive equipment that are necessary in enabling the blind to develop their talents in sports and games.

## **2. PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**

### **2.1 MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT**

In order to encourage Asian countries to become members of IBSA, we propose that sponsorships be provided for at least ten countries to help pay for their membership subscriptions of US\$100 per year for a period of three years.

This means that a total sum of US\$30,000 will initially be required for the membership recruitment project.

### **2.2 LEADERSHIP AND SKILLS TRAINING**

Workshops and coaching clinics should be organised in different countries in order to equip the leaders and coaches with the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them to organise programmes and provide expertise to others in the field of sports and games for the blind. For this purpose, money will be required to provide sponsorships for the poor countries to send participants to the seminars, workshops and coaching clinics.

A period of at least three years will be needed to train at least 20 persons per year in various sports and games. Priority must be given to the training of qualified classifiers as this resource is very

much lacking in the Asian region.

The amount of money required is as follows:

#### **Airfares for 20 persons, US\$60,000**

(US\$1,000 X 20 persons per year for three years)

#### **Food and accommodation for 20 persons, US\$12,000**

(US\$200 X 20 persons per year for three years)

#### **Local transportation for 20 persons, US\$ 6,000**

(US\$100 X 20 persons per year for three years)

#### **Secretariat to organise seminars and workshops, US\$24,000**

(US\$8,000 per seminar per year for three years)

### **2.3 IBSA ASIA YOUTH AND STUDENT CHAMPIONSHIP**

So far no such championship has been organised in the Asian region. It is important for sports and games to be organised at this level so that the blind youth will be encouraged to take a real interest in developing sports talents.

It is hoped that this championship could be organised in 2008 or 2009. All Asian countries registered with IBSA will be given the opportunity to offer themselves to be the host country for the event which should be organised biennially.

The amount required for the first championship will be approximately US\$500,000.

### **2.4 BUILDING UP**

## **SOLIDARITY**

Success can only be ensured if all member countries in the Asian region of IBSA can or have the opportunity to take part in the games and sports events. Nevertheless, this will not be possible without the backup of a solidarity fund which is necessary to provide sponsorships for the poor countries. In order to initiate this idea of solidarity, at least ten countries which are in need of financial support should be identified.

Each country will be allowed to send a maximum of ten persons, i.e. seven athletes and three officials, to the solidarity event.

The amount of money required for this programme is as follows:

#### **Airfares, US\$100,000**

(US\$1,000 X 10 persons for ten countries)

#### **Food and accommodation for one week, US\$ 70,000**

(US\$100 X 10 persons per day for ten countries)

#### **Local transportation and airport transfers, US\$ 30,000**

(US\$30 X 10 persons per day for ten countries)

#### **Total, US\$200,000**

### **2.5 AWARENESS CAMPAIGN AND PROMOTIONS**

In order to create awareness throughout Asia and for promotional purposes, CDs and DVDs should be distributed to all countries in the Asian region. Awareness should be created not only among the sighted public but more importantly among the blind

and visually impaired. It would be pointless to organise sports and games if the blind themselves do not show an interest and enthusiasm in taking part.

Other important groups that need to be targeted include the schools and universities. The rules and regulations governing each of the sports and games should be clearly demonstrated on the CD and DVD recordings so that they can be easily understood. The CDs and DVDs must be distributed as widely as possible.

The initial sum of money required for the awareness campaign and promotional effort would be approximately US\$100,000.

## **2.6 SPORTS EQUIPMENT**

It is essential that sports equipment be purchased for distribution to the needy countries. The equipment is necessary for demonstration purposes, coaching clinics and regular practices. Each game or sport will need to have its own particular kind of equipment and donors will have to be identified in order to meet this expenditure. The mode of distribution could be in the form of cash or it could be the actual equipment required.

The amount of money needed for the sports equipment fund will be about US\$200,000.

## **2.7 INTERNATIONAL SPORTS DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR IN THE ASIAN REGION**

Such a development seminar is necessary in order to provide a forum or meeting ground to deal with all the various aspects of

sports development, including governance and structure. Financial support would be needed to enable the poor countries to send delegates to the seminar.

The estimated amount required is as follows:

### **Administrative secretariat, US\$30,000**

### **Ten speakers from overseas countries:**

Their airfares (US\$2,000 per person), US\$20,000

Their food and accommodation, US\$ 7,500 (US\$150 X 10 persons per day for five days)

Their transportation - internal, US\$ 1,000 (US\$100 X 10)

### **Overseas participants:**

Their travel expenses, US\$20,000 (US\$1,000 X 20)

Their registration fees, US\$20,000 (US\$500 X 20)

Contingencies, US\$ 5,000

### **TOTAL, US\$93,500**

## **3. GRAND ESTIMATED BUDGET**

The grand total budget required for the five-year development plan is as follows:

Membership recruitment fund, US\$ 30,000

Leadership and skills development fund, US\$ 102,000

IBSA Asia youth and student championship, US\$ 500,000

Solidarity fund, US\$ 200,000

Awareness and promotional campaign, US\$ 100,000

Sports equipment fund, US\$ 200,000

International sports development seminar, US\$ 93,000

GRAND TOTAL US\$1,228,500

# A POINT TO PONDER: A HARD DAY'S WORK

*By Wong Kow*



My niece, Cindy, is an insurance agency manager. She has a full-time maid to help her in taking care of her two school-going children and in managing the domestic affairs of the family. Her husband often has to travel outstation for business and usually comes home only once or twice a month.

Cindy lives in Petaling Jaya and her office is in Kuala Lumpur. So she has to travel daily along heavy traffic routes in the Klang Valley. Thus, she often reaches her office late and has to be in a rush in order to get to her appointments on time. These days are labelled as “bad days” by Cindy.

The situation is frequently made worse by a sudden downpour amidst the traffic jam. She would blame it on the weather the highway planners, the traffic system and even her own family for the tremendous responsibilities laid upon her shoulders.

Rushing for work in this manner

and meeting her clients unprepared make life very chaotic for her. Despite working extremely hard, her results are most uneventful. She just hopes that things would automatically change for the better.

When she feels unhappy about her performance, she places further blame on her working conditions and the results turn out worse and become unbearable. Worse of all, all this affects her relationship with family and friends.

It was around half a year ago, however, when Cindy began to experience a turnaround in her life. It was at this time when she attended some inspirational and motivational seminars and she started reading books on self-improvement. In this way, she learned how to have the right attitude of acceptance and adjustment. Now she was undeterred by the setbacks in her life. She decided to cut down on her hours of watching tv and to focus more on exercising professionalism in her work, on product knowledge, and on presentation and delivery of service.

It was quite recently when I began to notice this 180-degree turn in Cindy’s life both at work and at home. She was putting into practice what she had learnt. More responsibilities were being assigned to the maid and to her own children. Consequently,

domestic chores were becoming less tiresome and she could sleep more soundly at night.

Now when she is caught up in a traffic jam, she is able to keep cool by listening to inspirational recordings or to light music. She would request her secretary to update documents and information needed for the day so that she is well prepared and ever ready to meet with clients. She would ring up a client if delay is unavoidable. Undoubtedly, her performance has improved considerably and she is able to see more fruitful results. There is a warm atmosphere in the family and she has an excellent relationship with other people.

Nowadays Cindy has the feeling that every day is a fresh and happy beginning. Indeed, she often wears an attractive and friendly smile.

# THE 2009 BUDGET FOR THE DISABLED

By Ooi Hock Tiam

*Editor's Note: Ooi Hock Tiam is totally blind and he is lecturing on International Relations at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). In the past few years, he has been providing very useful information and comments on the provisions for the disabled in the annual national budget presented in Parliament every year. Here are his comments on the budget for 2009:*

The 2009 budget was tabled in Parliament on 29 August, 2008.

Amongst the goodies meant for the general public, some might be of interest to the disabled. There are also some provisions specifically intended for the well-being of the disabled population.

They are as follows:

## **1. PERSONAL INCOME TAX REBATE**

The tax rebate of RM350 has been increased to RM400. However, this is given only to those in the first RM35,000 taxable income level. This means that after all the deductions and should your taxable income be at RM35,000 or below, then you would be entitled to this rebate.

This provision will certainly benefit many disabled employees, including the blind graduate teachers who are likely to fall under this category.

## **2. DISABLED WORKER'S ALLOWANCE (EPC)**

The upper eligibility range for this allowance known as the Elaun Pekerja Cacat (EPC) has been increased to the RM1,200 income level per month with effect from 1 June, 2008. Prior to this, the upper income level was RM750 per month.

This will certainly benefit more disabled employees, particularly those in the sub-professional category.

## **3. RM150 MONTHLY ALLOWANCE FOR UNEMPLOYED DISABLED PERSONS**

This is definitely a great move forward to help the disabled. This is in view of the fact that there are many disabled persons who face great difficulty in finding suitable employment. Moreover, there are many of the multi-handicapped who are simply unemployable. Many parents and guardians of the disabled will certainly be very grateful for this assistance from the Government.

## **4. MONTHLY ALLOWANCE FOR DISABLED SCHOOL STUDENTS AND VOCATIONAL TRAINEES**

This allowance for disabled students in special education programmes and for disabled trainees in vocational institutions has been increased from RM50 to

RM150. This is certainly another great move forward - the 200% increase will be of great help especially to disabled students and trainees who come from the lower income group. It is hoped, however, that the relevant school authorities in particular will guide their disabled students in using this money wisely or even saving some of this money for the future.

## **5. HOUSING FOR THE DISABLED**

With regards to housing in general, the Government has provided for an allocation of another RM50 million in order to build 1,000 more low-cost houses by the National Building Agency. It is true that this may not benefit the disabled directly. However, it must be emphasised that due to the 20% reservation of houses for disabled buyers through this agency, such a move to build more low-cost houses could provide greater opportunities for the disabled to own a low-cost house.

## **6. HOUSING LOAN**

RM50 million will be allocated to Bank Simpanan Nasional (BSN) for the housing loan scheme. The disabled should grab the opportunity to gain access to this loan scheme.

## **7. SPECIAL FUND FOR CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

A special fund is to be set up in order to encourage private firms to shoulder greater corporate social responsibility. Under this scheme, the Government will establish a fund up to the maximum of RM100 million on a dollar-for-dollar basis. It is hoped that the private corporations will respond to this challenge enthusiastically and positively by contributing generously to this fund. The money from this fund could be used to bring about great benefits to the disabled directly or indirectly. Nevertheless, proper guidelines need to be put in place to ensure that the fund will be managed effectively in order to fulfil its purpose and goals.

**8. INCOME TAX EXEMPTION FOR COMPANIES**

Exemption from income tax for companies to carry out corporate social responsibility has been increased from 7% to 10% per year. I believe this could be a good incentive for the corporate sector to consider providing more employment opportunities for the disabled.

**9. MONTHLY ALLOWANCE FOR SPECIAL TEACHER ASSISTANTS**

A monthly allowance of RM200 will be given to special teacher assistants. These "special assistants" are actually full-time government servants who will be deployed to provide assistance to resource teachers in the special education programmes. This allowance should not be confused with the RM250 monthly allowance given to all special education teachers (as announced

in the previous year's budget for 2008).

**10. MONTHLY ALLOWANCE FOR HOUSE ASSISTANTS**

This allowance for the house assistants who are taking care of elderly women at the Rumah Tunas Harapan Bakti in Kulim, Kedah has been increased from RM600 to RM1,000. This increased allowance, however, is confined only to this particular home. It is hoped that the allowance will be extended to all house assistants serving in similar schemes throughout the nation.

**11. WELFARE ASSISTANCE TO HOUSEHOLDS**

For households whose income level is RM720 per month and below, they are entitled to receive certain welfare assistance. In Sarawak the income level for entitlement has been raised from RM450 to RM830 per month while in Sabah it has been raised to RM960.

On the whole, I am of the view that the Government has made some good moves to bring about the economic upliftment of the disabled in this country. Nonetheless, there is still much more that needs to be done. I believe the Government will be able to achieve more in the future in consultation with the disabled, especially in view of the national council of the disabled having been established by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.

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

NCBM

Tel: 03-2272 4959

MAB

Tel: 03-2272 2673

03-2272 2677

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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
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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.)