

# OUTREACH



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## **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.

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## **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.

**IT'S NOT THE  
HOURS YOU PUT  
IN YOUR WORK  
THAT COUNTS,  
IT'S THE WORK  
YOU PUT IN THE  
HOURS.**

**SAM EWING**

**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, BRITISH  
PHYSICIAN  
(1849 - 1919)**

# DEVELOPMENTS IN NCBM AND THE WORK FOR THE BLIND - PART II

*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy  
Executive Director  
National Council for the Blind, Malaysia*



*Editor's Note: The first part of this article appeared in the July – September 2006 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". It is based on the NCBM Annual Report 2005 which was tabled and adopted at the 20th AGM of NCBM on April 29, 2006. Part II of the article continues:*

## **6. EDUCATION AND WELFARE**

### **6.1 The Forum of Concerned Blind Individuals**

This was held on January 9, 2005 in Sabah. The purpose of such forums is to listen to the views of the blind and collect ideas for planning and implementation.

Issues touched on included more effective support for BVI students by the Ministry of Education, housing for the blind that would encourage integration rather

than segregation, the need for local rehabilitation and vocational training programmes in Sabah, and adapted equipment for the blind in employment.

### **6.2 The Sabah Welfare Department**

At the briefing with the Sabah Welfare Officers, it was recommended that the Disabled Workers' Allowance be extended to the blind in Sabah. We are happy that this scheme was implemented towards the end of 2005.

### **6.3 Standardisation of Braille Textbooks**

Another major project was the workshop on the standardisation of Braille textbook production and re-

lated materials held from September 26 – 29, 2005 in Port Dickson. A draft of the Malay Braille Transcriber's Manual was produced and will be launched in 2006.

### **6.4 Braille Textbook Production**

One of the most significant achievements resulting from the Seminar on Educational Issues Concerning the Blind held in 2004 was the meeting between NCBM and the Ministry of Education on June 14, 2005. At the conclusion of the meeting, it was agreed that NCBM would expand the operations of the Malaysian Braille Press, thereby improving its capacity to meet the challenge of dealing with the shortage of



Braille textbooks for the BVI in primary and secondary schools. The MBP is working closely with MAB and St. Nicholas as partners in Braille textbook production.

## **7. COMMITTEE FOR THE PROMOTION OF EMPLOYMENT AND PLACEMENT SERVICES FOR THE BLIND**

### **7.1 Job Placement Service**

As one of the recommendations of the Langkawi Employment Seminar in 2003, NCBM is continuing to fund the operations of the job placement service under the Sabah Society for the Blind. In view of the positive results, we have finally convinced the Sarawak Society for the Blind to consider setting up their own job placement service. We look forward to this development with keen interest in 2006 and will be willing to give the same support as was provided to Sabah.

### **7.2 Workshop for Placement Officers**

This was held from November 28 to December 1, 2005 and the purpose was to provide the opportunity for job placement personnel to upgrade their skills. This workshop coincided with the conference of the Malaysian Employers' Federation and this enabled the placement officers to have positive interaction with the human resource personnel from other leading corporations.

### **7.3 Fish-rearing Project**

A film was produced on the fish-rearing project of a blind individual, En. Mohd. Bahkri, in Maran, Pahang. We shall be exploring the possibility of obtaining suitable expertise to help in producing better-quality films of other successful projects of the blind.

## **8. COMMITTEE ON LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES FOR THE BLIND**

### **8.1 Promotion of Braille Literacy**

In order to promote Braille literacy among the blind, 103 story-books in Malay and English were produced in Braille for distribution to the schools for the blind all over the country. 89 titles were produced by MBP and 14 titles by MAB.

### **8.2 National Braille Carnival**

This was successfully held on June 25, 2005 at Kompleks MAB. Activities included reading of Malay and English texts, Braille dictation using the slate and stylus, and embossing of Braille materials.

### **8.3 Book on Blind Achievers**

Manuscripts have been received from 24 blind achievers. It is hoped that the book can be produced in 2006.

### **8.4 DAISY Project**

In 2004 NCBM had been selected by the DAISY Consortium to be their partner in implementing the DAISY FOR ALL. Training sessions were conducted for the staff of schools, organisations serving the blind, and state libraries. Computers and play-back machines were also loaned out to the participating organisations to start their own programmes pending the purchase of their own equipment.

Further training was provided to relevant persons at the Bangkok workshop on the accessible multi-media information system (DAISY).

## **9. COMMITTEE ON THE PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS**

### **9.1 Cataract Operations**

The latest extension of work was the setting up of the Community Health Clinic in Kota Bharu. Activities included public awareness campaigns, talks on health and preventive blindness, and the formulation of action plans.

### **9.2 World Sight Day**

An exhibition on eye care, rehabilitation services and community activities was held at the Mid-valley Megamall from October 12 – 16, 2005. 25,000 information booklets were distributed to the public and eye-screening was carried out during the exhibition.

10. **COMMITTEE FOR THE PROMOTION OF SPORTS AND RECREATION**

**10.1 Asian Ten-pin Bowling**

The Second Asian Ten-pin Bowling Championship for the Blind was held at the Megalanes Pyramid from November 10 – 13, 2005. The seven countries which took part were Chinese-Taipei, Korea, Japan, Western Australia, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia. We are very thankful for the close cooperation given by the Malaysian Ten-pin Bowling Congress, MAB, THONEH, SMK Setapak and staff of NCBM. In particular, we would like to express our deep appreciation to SBM for taking charge of the training of our national team.

Korea was the champion with five golds, six silvers and two bronzes. Malaysia came fourth with one gold, three silvers and one bronze medal.

**10.2 Futsal**

Exploration has been started on the development of this game for the blind in Malaysia. It is hoped that a coaching clinic will be organised in 2006.

11. **THE WORLD BLIND UNION ASIA-PACIFIC**

WBUAP is one of the six regional branches of WBU. Two notable projects undertaken by WBUAP were

as follows:

**11.1 The Third Onkyo Braille Essay Contest**

This was sponsored by the Onkyo company in Japan and this was the second contest to be organised. We received 32 essays from seven countries. Vietnam was awarded the top prize of US\$1,000 and two other prizes.

**11.2 The Second Teruko Ikeda ICT Scholarship Workshop**

Five persons from five countries were chosen to undergo a five-week training workshop in Kuala Lumpur and Japan. Computers, software and Braille displays were given to the scholarship holders at the end of the course. The project was sponsored by Mrs. Teruko Ikeda, a Japanese philanthropist.

**11.3 SEARC**

Three project papers were proposed concerning price reduction of equipment for the blind, a cooperative of the blind, and information exchange on vocational training programmes. Further consideration will be given to these ideas.

**CONCLUSION**

The foregoing clearly demonstrates the wide range of programmes and activities undertaken by NCBM in cooperation with its partners, including member organisations, government agencies, and the private corporations.

There is much work to be done and all concerned persons and organisations are needed to help ensure the success of projects and programmes carried out.

Thank you to all our partners.

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)

# A SHORT HISTORY OF BRAILLE PRODUCTION IN MALAYSIA

*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy  
Executive Director  
National Council for the Blind, Malaysia*

The production of Braille textbooks, storybooks and other Braille materials in this country was started back in 1948 by the Welfare Department when the late Major D. R. Bridges was its Welfare Officer. Major D. R. Bridges was a British soldier who was blinded in the Japanese-Burmese War. He received his rehabilitation at St. Dunstan's and was posted back to Malaysia to set up services for the disabled, in particular, for the blind. Major Bridges who passed away in 2005 was also the founder of the Malaysian Association for the Blind. His two-pronged strategy in setting up the Braille Publishing Unit (BPU) were to give employment to some of the earlier blind job pioneers - Kathan Pillai, the late Elizabeth Hoe and the late Mary Poon - and to produce Braille materials for St. Nicholas Home which was then in the process of being transformed into the first primary school for the blind in the country. The BPU also produced Braille books for the Princess Elizabeth School for the Blind (PES) when it was established in 1953 on land presented by the Sultan of Johor and funds contributed by the British expatriates to celebrate the wedding of Princess Elizabeth. PES was put under the management of MAB.

As MAB developed and began introducing several services

for the blind, including the Gurney Training Centre in 1952 and the Job Placement Unit thereafter the operations of BPU was transferred to MAB around the turn of the 1960's. However, all the staff who were working in BPU prior to the transfer, including the three Braille transcribers, continued their service as government employees.

As the demand for Braille materials grew and the BPU of MAB could not meet the supply, St. Nicholas School and the Society of the Blind in Malaysia, purchased their own embossing equipment to meet their specific requirements. By the beginning of the 1980's, the Special Education Section in the Ministry of Education felt confident enough that they possessed the necessary Braille expertise, decided to set up their own Braille printing section adjacent to the Setapak School for the Blind. They discontinued giving orders to MAB. MAB, in turn, concentrated on developing other services but gave very low priority to the production of Braille materials. The Braille printing unit of the Special Education Section never really got off to a good start. Initially, it could produce a few volumes, but when the equipment began to break down, the machinery was left abandoned. Blind students were deprived of the much-needed Braille textbooks. These

blind students either had to copy their own books or had the services of their dedicated resource teachers.

In 1993, after learning about the deplorable state of affairs with regards to the shortage of Braille materials in the Asian region, Tet-suji Tanaka, Executive Director and Chairman of the Japan Braille Library, approached the Post Office Service of Japan and obtained from them a ten-year grant to run a series of training workshops. His goal was to train at least 100 persons from at least ten countries and to provide them with the necessary equipment and software so that upon return to their respective organisations and countries, they could produce more materials with the computerised Braille production technology. The goal was accomplished with the holding of ten yearly workshops and the training of over 110 personnel. Some of the beneficiaries were NCBM, Member Organisations and the Department of Special Education.

In 1996, the Think Tank Committee of NCBM, headed by the late Datin Roquaiya Hanim Tun Hussein, decided to tackle the problem of the shortage of Braille textbooks. It convinced the Council to support the proposal. NCBM subsequently sent out appeals to Member Organisations

and the Department of Special Education requesting them to take up the challenge by setting up a fully-equipped Braille Press to overcome the yearly recurrence of the shortage of Braille textbooks. None of the organisations paid attention to the call. Finally, NCBM decided that it could no longer wait for such an urgent project to be implemented. It decided to proceed with the project.

So, in 1997, NCBM sent two teams, one to the United Kingdom to look at the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) setup, and the other to the United States to look at the operations of the National Braille Press (NBP) in Boston. They recommended that a unit be set up within NCBM, similar to what is being done in the UK, to produce the needed Braille books. The NBP structure was not adopted since it would entail the setting up of an independent registered body with the right to raise funds to supplement its operations.

When the Malaysian Braille Press (MBP) was set up in April 1998 with the bulk of the equipment donated by the Japan Braille Library and by the British High Commission, the four Member Organisations strongly supported the move while MAB opposed it on the grounds that NCBM is a co-ordinating body and should not operate services. To confuse matters further, MAB was under the impression that MBP would become a profitable entity and not a service to meet the special needs of Braille users. For the next two years MAB continued to oppose the setting up of MBP. Finally, around 2000, a delegation from NCBM, headed by Dr. Tan Yaw

Kwang, met with Tan Sri Mohd Azmi (the then President of MAB) and they agreed that MBP should continue to meet the urgent needs of Braille users.

When the chairmanship of the MBP Management Committee was assumed by MAB, only then did they fully realised the importance of such a service. MBP was provided with adequate funding for its operations year after year; in fact, the allocations amounted to over 15 percent of the total annual budget of NCBM. To further expand the operations of MBP to embrace the Digital Access to the Information System (DAISY), it was agreed that MBP should occupy two of the four floors of the building at 96 Jalan Tun Sambanthan which NCBM purchased in the middle of 2003. In the face of some people who kept on questioning the importance and the validity of MBP by quoting misleading statements and by ignoring the historic facts, NCBM commissioned an evaluation of MBP in October 2004. An independent consultant from the Force Foundation of Netherlands, Christopher Day, was invited to undertake the assessment.

HE ENJOYS TRUE  
LEISURE WHO HAS  
TIME TO  
IMPROVE HIS  
SOUL'S ESTATE.

HENRY DAVID  
THOREAU  
US AUTHOR  
(1817 - 1862)

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

# TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: TIPS FOR CREATING BETTER ACCESSIBILITY TO ICT FOR THE BLIND

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



## **FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND**

Many people who are legally blind retain some residual vision. Some may be able to see objects with the help of magnification. Others may be able to sense light and dark but little else. Because of the wide range of visual sensitivity found among those who are legally blind, a well-designed interface should assume that the end user has no vision, while allowing that person to make use of whatever residual vision he or she possesses.

To access online material, blind users depend on screen-reading software that digests the contents of the computer screen and sends information to a text-to-speech synthesiser or refreshable Braille display.

Developers can do much to

support screen-reading software and to help blind users perceive and understand screen content.

To support screen reading software, developers can:

- use standard system tools to draw and erase all on-screen text and to display all cursors and pointers.
  - use system standard on-screen controls whenever possible.
  - define tools in toolbars, palettes, and menus as separate items, and avoid creating single graphics containing multiple objects. When tools and other objects are kept separate, the screen reader is better able to identify and name each tool for the user.
  - embed descriptive text in graphic images in such a way as to make the text known to screen-reading software. This addresses the problems that can arise when text is rendered as a graphic image and cannot be read by software.
  - assign logical names to controls, even if the name is not visible on the screen. Screen readers can access this information and use it to describe the type and function of the control on the screen.
- track the system cursor with the mouse, even if the cursor is invisible. This allows the screen-reading software to detect the mouse position when customised highlighting or focusing techniques are in use.
  - use consistent and predictable screen and dialog layouts.
  - avoid the use of “help” balloons that disappear whenever the hot spot, or focus of the mouse, changes. Locking the help balloon in place lets user move the cursor and continue to read the balloon.
  - provide keyboard equivalents for all tools, menus, and dialog boxes.
  - Since screen readers can only read text (or give names to separately identifiable icons or tools), it is a good idea to:
  - avoid assigning unlabeled hot spots to pictures for use as controls.
  - avoid non-text menu items when possible or at least incorporate visible or invisible

text cues to accompany these items. Screen readers can see text even if that text is written to the screen invisibly.

- avoid non-redundant graphic toolbars.

Finally, documentation and training materials are always more accessible when:

- documentation and on-line help can be understood independent of graphics. Text descriptions should stand on their own.
- synchronised audio descriptions are available to play alongside animated graphics or movies.

### **FOR PEOPLE WITH LOW VISION**

“Low vision” refers to a range of vision problems including:

- poor acuity, meaning blurred or fogged vision.
- loss of all central vision; the ability to see only the outer ring of the visual field.
- tunnel vision; the ability to see only the centre of the normal visual field.
- loss of vision in other parts of the visual field.
- other problems, including night blindness, reduced contrast and sensitivity to glare.

Computer users with low vision often depend on the ability to enlarge or otherwise enhance areas of on-screen information.

Screen-enlargement software can be tremendously helpful.

To make on-screen information easier to see, developers can:

- increase the contrast between text and the background.
- place text over a solid-colour background. A patterned background can make text harder to discern.
- create consistent layouts for all screens and dialogs within the program.
- provide access to tools via a menu bar.
- follow line-width guidelines when drawing lines on screen. Use the line-width information provided by operating system settings. This will ensure that the learning application will increase all lines proportionally should a user choose to enlarge the view.
- allow the user to zoom in on or magnify portions of the screen.

To make software more compatible with other applications that offer low-vision access features, developers can:

- use the system pointers whenever possible, as well as the system caret or insertion bar, if available.
- include a highlight or focus indicator when dragging the system cursor, even at those times when the cursor is invisible. This adjustment will help screen enlargement soft-

ware using “pan and zoom” features to track the user’s movements more accurately.

- add support for a “high contrast” setting.
- protect users from the need to monitor simultaneously two or more events occurring far apart from each other on the screen.

### **FOR PEOPLE WITH COLOUR BLINDNESS**

To improve access for colour blind users, developers can:

- make colour coding a redundant or secondary means of conveying information.
- ensure that the program will run in monochrome mode.
- use variations in contrast and brightness in addition to colour variations.

In conclusion, it may be a good idea to get in touch with any of our member organisations who will link you up with their clients to test drive your work. You can join in our efforts to make Malaysia a better place for the blind and visually impaired.

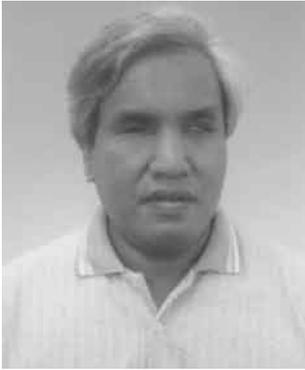
COURAGE IS THE  
LADDER ON  
WHICH ALL THE  
OTHER  
VIRTUES MOUNT

CLARE BOOTH LUCE  
(1903 - 1987)

# MY STRUGGLE

## Part II

By Dr. Zakaria Osman



***Editor's Note: The first part of this article appeared in the July – September 2006 issue of "The NCBM Outreach".***

Dr. Zakaria Osman shares with us the experience of his struggle as a blind person. His story continues:

In 1983, when I was enjoying my tutorship, I decided to bring my whole family down to Kuala Lumpur from Taiping, Perak. We stayed in a rented house in Ampang where I was not far from my blind friends. My father found work as a watchman and we were both able to support the family and send four of my brothers and sisters to school. Of course, my loving mother kept the home going as housewife although my siblings would often grumble at her for bringing them to the wrong place instead of the school. Nevertheless, none of them wanted to go back to their hometown in Taiping. And now that they are all having their own careers, I believe they are all very grateful for what my parents and I had done

for them. I myself felt very happy inside at the time as I knew that my parents were very proud of me.

Then, in January 1986, when my tutorship was not renewed, I earned my living for a while by selling titbits from door to door. Later, the Welfare Ministry set up the Temporary Graduates' Scheme and I applied to join the scheme. I was assigned to help out with the production of the Welfare Bulletin but I was rather unhappy because it was a quarterly magazine and there was not much work. My anxieties were increased as I had just got married at the time.

My wife's name is Toriah bt. Salim and she is a low-visioned person. She left the Gurney Training Centre in 1984 and she was placed in a factory as a machine operator. Someone introduced me to her and within three months I had proposed to her. We had our first child after the first year and two more were to follow within 11 years of our marriage.

Since my temporary employment at the Welfare Ministry was quite relaxing, I was able to spend time at home writing up the last chapter of the thesis for my master's degree which I at last completed in 1987. Two years later I received the good news that I had obtained my master's degree. I must admit that I owe my success to my wife as she was the one who

kept nagging at me not to give up. In fact, life was not easy financially at that time as I was only earning a RM400 salary and I worked at my sales in order to support my family. The Temporary Graduates' Scheme was under review every six months and there would be no pay for two to three months while the Ministry took time to decide whether or not we would continue in the scheme. It was during these intervals when my first two children were born. The first child, for example, was born in February 1988. All three of our children came into this world by caesarean birth.

Fortunately, my wife knew how to save money and this helped us through the hard times. One day, out of desperation, I cried out to my wife that God had not been fair to us. She was about to give birth and I had just paid out RM500 to the typist for my master's thesis. How could we survive?

Calmly, she told me not to worry. Then she put her hand under the mat of our bed at home and drew out an envelope which she handed to me. Then I had to rush her to the General Hospital. During the trip, she reminded me that her hospitalisation would cost nothing as I was working with the government. There would be enough money for the family while she was in hospital. True enough, when I got home and

opened the envelope, I discovered quite a few hundred ringgit in it. In addition, I earned extra money through the sale of titbits.

In 1990 when our second child was born, the same thing happened again. Providentially, she had some savings as before and this helped to tide us over the crisis. Truly, I appreciate with all my heart the courage and support of my wife.

Eventually, I decided that I had to apply to study for my Ph.D. so that I could get another fellowship, the allowance of which I knew would be much more generous, i.e. a sum of RM1200 per month. My application was accepted and my topic of research was “aesthetics in literature”. This saw us through for a period of about four years until my fellowship ended in July 1994.

Then I was without income for another few months. This clearly brings to mind the month of December 1994 when two important things occurred in my life – I submitted the draft of my doctoral thesis in that month; I also got the news from Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka that they would be paying me royalty for my first novel entitled “Penantian” (or “Waiting”). The total sum paid to me was RM2,800, as was given to me in two payments.

This saw us through another few months without any other source of income. Finally, I decided to sit down in front of the Globe Silk Store to sell packet drinks for which I could earn a reasonable income of about RM20 per day. I did this for about one month and then just before Hari Raya, I re-

ceived a letter from St. Nicholas to attend an interview for the post of librarian. They said that I was over-qualified and decided not to recruit me even though I had indicated that I would be willing to accept a lower salary.

So I continued with my sale of drinks until someone from the Special Education Department spotted me and asked if I would be interested in temporary teaching. I replied in the positive and was posted to the Setapak Special Secondary School for the Blind from May 1995 to December 1996.

Then, on the advice of a friend who was a supervisor at Universiti Malaya, I returned to university to complete my Ph.D. studies. Actually, my first draft had been submitted in 1994 but it had been held back for a period of three years. Now I had to complete the second draft by 1997 which was the final year of the seven-year grace period for a doctoral thesis. To help me, I was given the post of a research assistant at RM1,200 per month, which was less than my teacher’s salary of RM1,500 per month. At long last, I managed to complete the thesis by July 15, 1997.

However, my happiness was marred by the memories of an injustice which occurred in 1993. I had applied for the post of lecturer in aesthetics and I was interviewed in 1994. Unfortunately, I was rejected by my Department head in favour of a girl who was not qualified in that field – her field was in classical textual study.

Actually, it was a friend who, by a slip of the tongue, told me that the selection had been made

even before the interview. So I wrote to the vice chancellor to protest and, as a consequence, my friend received a letter informing him that disciplinary action would be taken against him. I realised I should not have written the letter of protest and so I hastily sent another letter to inform them that my friend was not involved in the matter. Thus, he was told to treat the letter threatening disciplinary action as null and void – I felt such relief that he was saved! Regrettably, until today, aesthetics is not on the list of courses for study even though it has been budgeted for.

When my contract as research assistant came to an end in 1997, I did not renew for a further six months in view of a possible job opportunity at the Malaysian Association for the Blind. Again I had applied for the librarian’s post but I was rejected in favour of a sighted person. Nevertheless, I was not disheartened because I was offered the post of Researcher and Welfare Officer and I joined MAB in January 1998.

Two years later I was offered a teaching post at the Malaysian French Institute. I accepted the post in view of the career prospects and a better life for my family. However, I was beginning to enjoy the work at MAB and I did leave with a heavy heart.

# UPGRADING OF THE GURNEY TRAINING CENTRE - Part III

*By George Thomas  
Executive Director, MAB  
And Wong Yoon Loong, Principal, GTC*

**Editor's Note:** *The second part of this article appeared in the July – September 2006 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". The third part continues:*

We intend to introduce at least four new courses to the Gurney Training Centre in the immediate future. They are as follows:

## 1. DESIGNING OF WEB-PAGES

Through this course, the blind trainees will learn the requisite skills in designing an accessible website for the blind. The topics include:

- What is an accessible website – finding a definition;
- Advantages of using the valid HTML;
- An introduction to hypertext mark-up language;
- An approach to using the world wide web consortium (W3C);
- Accessibility guidelines – document content, structure and presentation;
- Accessing the web using screen readers or text-only

- browsers;  
Accessible web text – size issues;
- Web accessibility and PDF documents;
- Using the cascading style sheet;
- An accessible web design and colour;
- People with particular impairments and web accessibility;
- Accessibility and frames;
- Creating accessible tables for layout and data;
- Designing accessible websites – the front page;
- Useful tools and validators.

Some basic academic qualifications are required for this course. The duration of the course will be five months and evaluation will be based on the test approved by the GTC Board of Examiners.

## 2. COMPUTER PROGRAMMING

Through this course, the blind trainees will be equipped with the necessary skills for computer pro-

- gramming. The topics include:
- Introduction to computer programming;
  - Introduction to the computer system;
  - Programming language;
  - Mathematics for information processing;
  - Introduction to electronics;
  - Introduction to the operating systems;
  - Introduction to computer communications;
  - Mathematical programming;
  - Introduction to the copyright laws;
  - Security and safety of the computer system;
  - Hardware for information processing;
  - Information retrieval;
  - Software engineering;
  - Introduction to the programming language process.

Some basic academic qualifications will be required. The

duration of the course will be five months and evaluation will be based on the test approved by the GTC Board of Examiners.

### 3. ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The objective of this course is to provide blind persons with the necessary skills in order to be a successful entrepreneur. They will be introduced to the various forms of business enterprises, business management and the business plan. The topics include:

- An entrepreneur's motivations;
- Self-competency analysis;
- Business opportunities and ethics;
- Business creativity;
- Money and business;
- Forms and types of businesses;
- The business plan.

Some basic academic qualifications will be required. The duration of the course will be five months and evaluation will be based on the test approved by the GTC Board of Examiners.

### 4. THE JOB PREPARATION PROGRAMME

This programme will be compulsory for all GTC trainees and there will be a strong emphasis on inter-personal and job-seeking skills.

The course is designed to enable the trainees to identify their

strengths and weaknesses, recount their experiences and explore career opportunities, thereby breaking through the various barriers to employment. Ultimately, they should be able to draw up an action plan detailing their needs and how these needs can be met.

The topics include:

- Preparing for employment;
- Working in teams;
- Decision-making;
- Writing CV's and resumes;
- Making applications;
- Job search skills;
- Interview techniques;
- Vocational guidance and counselling;
- Self-presentation and interpersonal skills;
- Disability awareness;
- Work experience;
- Use of aids and adaptations.

### 5. PRACTICAL TRAINING

After completing their vocational training, the trainees will be provided opportunities for job attachments with MAB or other companies and agencies such as the Braille Production Unit, handicrafts shop, massage centre or mini-market. This is to enable the trainee to gain practical job experience before being placed in open employment.

## STAFFING AND FUNDING

In the process of upgrading the Gurney Training Centre, the quality and number of staff will need to be reviewed in order to cater for increasing demand. For example, the number of staff will need to be increased from 27 to 32.

Of course, there will also be financial implications and it is hoped that the National Welfare Department will give favourable consideration to our request for additional assistance in terms of staff salaries and the per capita grant for the trainees.

We would also need to explore other funding sources for the purpose of human resource development and the purchase of new equipment.

## CONCLUSION

After more than 50 years of operating as a Centre, it is timely for the GTC to be upgraded to the level of an institute. We want to provide the blind and visually impaired with the best quality training so that they will be able to meet the demands of the rapidly changing and challenging job market.

# WHAT IS DAISY

*By Nicholas Lam Yew Khay*



***Editor's Note:*** *Nicholas Lam was appointed as the Audio Technician of the MAB Library and Resource Centre in January 2006. He was formerly Chief Coordinator of the St. Nicholas library in Penang from 2003 to 2005.*

In the following article, Nicholas explains what is DAISY and what are some of his plans to help MAB move forward in this direction.

The production of talking-books was started by MAB in the year of 1990. Since then, many books have been produced on cassette-tape and that format is being used until today.

From my experience as a user, I have found that the quality of production on cassette-tapes is rather unsatisfactory and not up to the mark. I also find that this system of production is not very efficient – the rate of production is rather low; probably, this is one of the reasons why the number of subscribers for talking-books

is also quite low in the libraries that produce talking-books for the blind in this country.

I believe this is the situation that has been faced not only by MAB and St. Nicholas but also by other libraries producing cassette-books for the blind. In view of this, quite a number of talking-book libraries have realised that in order to meet the present and future needs of the blind more effectively, the best way to go forward is by adopting the DAISY recording system. In fact, countries that have adopted the DAISY system include Japan, the European countries, Britain, Canada, and the United States.

In Malaysia, Japan has been making a serious effort to help in promoting DAISY to the blind through the “DAISY for All” project in cooperation with NCBM and member organisations such as MAB.

At this juncture, I would like to ask the question: “What Is DAISY”? Actually, there are two kinds of DAISY recordings and they are as follows – the DAISY full text plus audio text system, and the navigation control centre (or NCC) system.

In the first system, the recording contains the printed and audio text and this system can indicate chapters, page numbers, main headings, sub-headings and book-marks with the synchronisation of

both audio and print texts.

For this system, more than one person will be required to help in the keying in of texts, writing of descriptions for diagrams and pictures, and to produce live recordings of the book. For these live recordings, the reader must be able to focus on the reading and at the same time take note of when to insert the page numbers, main headings, and so on. The task in hand is quite complicated and rather laborious and a lot of time is required to produce a DAISY book using this method of production.

However, there is a great advantage for blind students, especially those in tertiary education, who use this type of DAISY format – the book-mark feature, in particular, can be very helpful to them.

For the second system, i.e. the Navigation Control Centre (NCC) system, only the audio text is recorded; if necessary, this system could also include the features to indicate chapters, main headings, sub-headings and page numbers. This system is very suitable for the production of books and materials for leisure and recreational reading.

## **SETTING UP THE DAISY UNIT IN MAB**

In view of the ease of production

by using the NCC system, I have recommended that this should be the initial system to be introduced at the MAB Library and Resource Centre. The production of DAISY books must then be tackled on two fronts: The first approach to be taken is to look at the current stocks of existing cassette talking-books and to have those that are of reasonably good quality transferred on to the DAISY format. This is exactly what we have started to do at the MAB library.

The second approach (which can be done at the same time while implementing the first approach) is to establish an inter-loan system with other libraries. The purpose is to borrow cassette books from their existing stocks and to have these transferred on to the DAISY format.

In addition, MAB could provide assistance to other organisations in Malaysia to transfer their existing stocks of cassette books on to DAISY. Such organisations include St. Nicholas Home, the National Library and the Ministry of Education. Perhaps a small fee could be charged for undertaking such work.

When doing the live recordings, the traditional method is to have the volunteers come into the library to record the books. This method can, of course, still be continued as it is a good idea to have face-to-face interaction with our volunteers.

Nevertheless, certain volunteers may prefer to do the live recordings at home by using the Skype communication channel through the computer. In this case, the volunteer (after some

initial training) could just simply sit at home and read for the live recordings while at the same time the monitoring could be done by MAB using the Skype channel. The final recording could then be produced at the studio in MAB.

A great advantage in using the Skype system is that the telephone service is free of charge. Therefore, using the Skype system at home would result in the saving of resources for MAB and for the volunteer in terms of money, transport and time.

Another advantage of the Skype system is that it could facilitate the recording of seminars and conferences or any other major functions of MAB with the help of DAISY.

### **THE DAISY BOOK CLUB**

The current lending service for talking-books is based on the borrow and return system. Instead of this system, I would like to propose that for the DAISY books, it may be a good idea to have a DAISY book club with an annual subscription being charged to members. Each member will be allowed to request for two titles per month and the books could be of their own choice. After reading the books, members will be allowed to keep those books or to pass them on to friends.

Since the DAISY books need not be returned, this would mean some savings for MAB in terms of money, personnel and time. The catalogue will be required only for the purpose of making book selections by the members.

### **EQUIPMENT AND PERSONNEL**

In order to start a DAISY unit, the basic equipment needed would include one or more computers with the DAISY programme installed, a mixer with an equaliser, a scanner, a microphone and a headphone.

The technician-cum-coordinator, of course, would be essential. Besides possessing DAISY skills, the technician must be able to deal with volunteers, plan and manage the DAISY unit, and he must have the ability to initiate and innovate as and when necessary.

### **CONCLUSION**

We are all aware that cassette recordings are gradually being phased out and will soon be a thing of the past. The current and future trend is to go digital. Therefore, I believe it is not too early to start now in building up a stock of DAISY books and materials for the blind.

In fact, it is imperative that we begin now to educate the public (particularly the blind) concerning the advantages of the DAISY book. The best news is that affordable DAISY players will soon be available to the blind consumers. Meanwhile, many MP3 recorders can be used for the DAISY recordings.

# EXPLORING THE WALKWAY NEXT TO MONORAIL AND ITS SURROUNDING AREAS

*By Oh Coatsel*

One Saturday afternoon in September 2005, I told a low-visioned friend the happy news that DBKL had put up a good shelter at the bus-stop next to the Kuan Cheng bridge. He wanted to see where the shelter was and so we took a walk from Kompleks MAB.

We walked across the bridge from Brickfields and he confirmed for himself that there was indeed a good shelter at the bus-stop where passengers alighted from the bus on the way to Kuala Lumpur from Puchong along Jalan Syed Putra. There were also railings all the way from the shelter to guide the blind to the bridge and to prevent them from falling into the river. Then we walked up the bridge again to get to the other side of Jalan Syed Putra. At the bottom of the stairs, we found tactile blocks on the pavement all the way to the Kuan Cheng school-gate and beyond leading to the bus-stop near Wisma Belia. We observed that work was in progress to construct another bus-stop shelter. We were glad that DBKL was doing something to make Brickfields and parts of Jalan Syed Putra accessible to the blind.

However, as we were crossing the bridge back to Brickfields, my friend warned me to be ready for some surprises. True enough, I was surprised that the walkway from the Kuan Cheng bridge to the

monorail station was very uneven and full of holes and obstacles. I almost walked into a sharp sign-board which was standing right in the middle of the walkway.

Then we decided to explore another walkway which was along the river-bank. Previously, before the Monorail station had been built, it was possible to walk safely along this route to the Central Market (now known as “Pasar Seni”). Now, however, the path was very rocky, full of ruts and obstacles, and there were dangerous gaps in the railing along the edge of the river; a blind pedestrian, in particular, could easily miss his or her footing and fall into the river about 25 feet below.

Being unwilling to take any further risks, we crossed the road instead and came to Scott Villa with its name clearly announced by a sign-board on the wall with embossed signage. My friend said that there used to be a similar sign-board on the wall in front of MAB. Unfortunately, it was removed by Monorail when they were constructing the rail track in front of MAB and they did not put it back. It is hoped that MAB will have the sign-board restored or get Monorail to do it – the sign-board used to be on the wall about five feet from the ground in front of the guard-house.

We walked a little way to-

wards Jalan Scott and then made our way back when we discovered two interesting landmarks. The first was a big temple hall run by a Hindu association – it was open and the public were allowed to walk in. The ground floor was very spacious with an adjoining kitchen; the second floor was also spacious but it had several extra rooms there. Someone told us that the first floor was meant for parties and gatherings while the second floor was meant for large conferences. The facilities were available for rental to the public.

The other landmark turned out to be something quite unexpected – we walked in and thought that it must be another temple hall. However, it was carpeted and appeared to be more posh! Then we heard a friendly female voice welcoming us and she told us that this was the Senali Boutique. They were dealing in a wide variety of fashions from the South Asian continent of India and Pakistan. She showed us around and we saw many different kinds of clothing ranging from priests’ wear to wedding dresses. Some of the other fashions looked quite attractive and the prices seemed to be quite reasonable. I never imagined that anyone would think of running a boutique in this isolated corner of Brickfields.

A few days later, my friend happened to bump into someone

who was involved in the construction of the bus-stop shelters along Jalan Syed Putra and informed him about the condition of the two walkways along Jalan Tebing. This met with positive response because, some time later, I observed that the walkway leading to the Monorail station had been significantly improved. As for the walkway leading to “Pasar Seni”, especially the gaps in the railing which could be mortally fatal for a blind pedestrian, the man from DBKL told my friend that blind people were not likely to use that walkway. This probably means that DBKL will not be touching that stretch of walkway at all.

I remember attending a seminar some years ago at which a speaker had urged that Kuala Lumpur be made into a user-friendly city. One of the recommendations was that the walkways along river-banks should be upgraded into usable pedestrian paths and bicycle alleys. The idea was to make these places user-friendly and even attractive for strollers and for family picnics.

If such a plan should ever take off, it is hoped that these places will also be made accessible to and safe for the blind.

## HANYA ENAM TITIK CUMA

*Oleh Romainun Zakaria*

***Editor’s Note: The sajak is a Malay verse form and this poem was submitted by Romainun Zakaria for the sajak-writing contest as part of the First ASEAN Braille Day Carnival. The event was held on Wednesday, January 4, 2006 which was the birthday of Louis Braille, the inventor of the Braille system for the blind. He was born in the year 1809.***

Here is the sajak:

*Hanya enam titik cuma,  
Bisa dibentuk, diolah menjadi abjad,  
Bisa digubah menjadi nada irama lagu,  
Bisa menghitung, mengira, menghisab segala angka,  
Bisa mengubah pandangan dunia.*

*Hanya enam titik cuma,  
Punya kuasa yang sungguh luar biasa,  
Mampu membenarkan maklumat seantero dunia,  
Mampu berkomunikasi berbagai bahasa,  
Mampu mengorak jalan ke menara gading,  
Mampu melahirkan cendekiawan buta mata.*

*Hanya enam titik cuma,  
Punya kisah yang sungguh unik,  
Diiringi sejarah menarik yang pelik,  
Ceritera perjuangan angan-angan seorang anak kecil,  
Yang berjiwa besar bernama Louis Braille.*

*Hanya enam titik cuma,  
Menunaskan ilham membuka minda,  
Membentuk huruf timbul yang unggul,  
Menjadi perantara sesama tunanetra.*

# NEWS FROM THE MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

## PERKINS BRAILLER REPAIR COURSE

The Perkins Braille Repair Course was organised by MAB for a period of two weeks from May 29 to June 9, 2006 (Monday to Friday) at the Kompleks MAB, Kuala Lumpur. In order to qualify for the course, the applicants had to go through a screening test during which they were required to remove the 20 outermost screws on the Braille and screw them back on.

During the course, participants learned how to carry out both major and minor repairs; for the purpose, they were provided with a braille each, spare parts and tools for the training. They also had the option of bringing along their own braille but they had to bear the cost of the spare parts used for their own braille. Lunch and refreshments were provided.

Instructors from Howe Press and from Worth Trust (India) worked hand in hand with local instructors. The full fee charged was RM500 per head but blind Malaysians paid a concessionary fee of RM250 only.

## BATTLE OF THE BANDS

The Third Battle of the Bands was held on Saturday, March 11, 2006 at the Kompleks MAB. Five bands took part in the competition

and they included a band from St. Nicholas Home as well as The Braille Dots from the Princess Elizabeth School in Johor Bahru.

The winners were Sarhad (a band from Kuala Lumpur) as champion, Last Call from Sarawak for the second prize, and The Braille Dots for the third prize. They received RM600, RM400 and RM200 respectively.

The prize-giving ceremony was officiated by the Deputy President of MAB, En. S. Kulasegaran. In his speech, he announced the good news that next year the cash prizes would be much better.

## THE MAB ICT DEPARTMENT

MAB established the ICT department in July 2005 for the purpose of running short-term courses on basic information and technology and on the use of adaptive computer equipment.

MAB will be purchasing RM180,000 worth of adaptive equipment for the purpose of testing, training and promotion. An equipment loan service for the blind is under consideration.

The work of the ICT Department is partly sponsored by the government fund of RM2 million which is jointly managed by the National Welfare Department and MAB. As stipulated by joint com-

mittee, the fund will be utilised in the following ways – equipping the ICT department, setting up new ICT facilities, purchasing of adaptive equipment, and supporting the Equipment Loan Scheme.

## THE MAB SPORTS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

MAB upgraded its sports and recreation programme with the creation of a separate department to develop and promote sports and recreation for the blind. En. Muhamad Fairuz was appointed as the head of the department to coordinate the activities.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports has promoted to provide financial support for the work of this department.

## GURNEY TRAINING CENTRE

Plans are already under way to make the GTC as the Centre of excellence in rehabilitation and vocational training for the blind in this country and perhaps this region. Existing instructors are being retrained or new instructors are being recruited so that they be able to help in upgrading the existing courses or introduce new courses for the Centre. Applications are being made to the Ministry of Human Resources for recognition of the GTC courses so that appropriate certification

can be provided to the trainees on completion of their training.

For example, the telephony course is being upgraded into a course for office administrative assistants and will be designed to enable the blind trainees to deal with the challenges and requirements in the current job market. At present, there are 54 trainees for the year 2006. The next intake will be increased to 80 trainees when the construction of the hostel is completed some time in the middle of this year.

Once the higher end courses are in place, there are plans to upgrade the GTC from the level of a centre to that of a college.

#### **THE MAB BRAILLE PUBLISHING UNIT**

This new unit was established in January 2006. Its main objective is to help produce Braille textbooks for the blind in primary and secondary school.

The first project was completed in March 2006 with the production of three titles for distribution to the schools. They were the Bahasa Malaysia textbook for form four and the Science textbook and Practical Science workbook for standard four. MAB is working in cooperation with NCBM and the Bahagian Buku Teks of the Ministry of Education.

Miss Wong Yuet Leng, retired assistant director from the Special Education Department of the Ministry of Education, was appointed as manager of the BPU in January 2006.

#### **DAISY BOOKS AND SOFTWARE**

The MAB library is building up a collection of DAISY audio books. There are now 50 titles in English, 28 titles in Bahasa Malaysia and 20 titles in Mandarin.

Blind users are able to read these books on the computer by using the TPB version 11 which is an updated DAISY book playback software. Free copies of this software can be requested from the MAB library.

#### **THE 12TH ICEVI WORLD CONFERENCE**

The International Council on Education for the Visually Impaired (ICEVI) held its 12th world conference in Kuala Lumpur from July 16 – 21, 2006. The venue was the Putra World Trade Centre and the conference was attended by about 1,200 participants from 96 countries.

The conference was hosted by MAB and its President, Prof. Datuk Dr. Ismail Salleh, was the organising chairman.

#### **NATIONAL READING CAMPAIGN**

This was organised by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development at the Dewan Pamiran 2, KL Convention Centre from July 14 – 16, 2006 (Friday to Sunday). There were many exhibition booths, including one from MAB. There were also many activities such as story-telling sessions, art competitions and cartoon shows.

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)

# SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT FOR THE BLIND

## Part II

*By Tom J. Parker*

*Editor's Note: The first part of this article appeared in the July – September 2006 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". Having described the history of sheltered workshops for the blind in Great Britain, Tom Parker now gives his prescription on how to go about setting up a sheltered workshop. He continues:*

### DEVELOPMENT OF NEW WORKSHOPS FOR THE BLIND

19. If I were given the task of creating a workshop organisation for employing blind people in countries where they have not existed in any great number in the past, I would take the following steps:
  - 19.1 I would first of all set up a small planning team. At the head of this team I would have a chairman or coordinator. Such an officer would need to be able to coordinate the activities of those serving with him and also be able to inspire them to be enthusiastic in their approach to the problems.
  - 19.2 I would then select a technical officer who would lead a small section. After the chairman or coordinator has made the necessary approach to government and obtained the goodwill of the leaders of the government, it would be the duty of the technical team to study the list of articles regularly purchased by government departments at all levels. This means both centrally, regionally and locally. They should look at articles regularly required by these departments and study whether any of them can be made by blind people if they are suitably trained and workshops are suitably equipped to produce those articles. It may well be found that the blind workers could make a considerable proportion of such articles. There may, however, be certain parts which would be beyond the capacity of the blind worker. In this event, consideration should be given to the needs to introduce sighted workers to carry out that part of the work which would be beyond the reach of the blind workers. It may well be that some seeing disabled people could undertake this part of the operation. It has been shown in some countries that by using the skills of the blind workers and the skills of the seeing disabled workers in a complementary manner, the entire article could be produced in the workshop. Once this has been established, the coordinator should enter into discussions with the appropriate government leaders to try to secure the introduction of a system in which the government will decide that in future as much of this work as is required to keep workshops fully occupied shall be guaranteed to them. Such a guarantee will make it possible for the workshop management to plan its production on a long term basis.
  - 19.3 The technical team should also study the articles regularly imported into the country. They should try to determine whether they can be made in the workshops. If they can, the necessary discussions should be instituted so that the workshops are assured that a fair proportion of this work is also made available for the workshop.
  - 19.4 If these steps are taken, it could lead to a system in which blind people at present not employed could become producers and self-supporting.
  - 19.5 The technical team should study the future plans of their government. For example, will they be enter-

ing into the tourist trade and thus developing tourism? If so, this will mean that new hotels will be built to cater for these visitors. New hotels will need to be furnished. There will be the need for bedroom furniture of all kinds. There will be need for lounge chairs, dining room chairs and tables. There is evidence that such hotels have been furnished by blind workshops in Europe.

19.6 They should also study the plans for any expansion in modern housing. Again it has been shown quite clearly that blind workshops can play their part in furnishing these new housing units. We have experience where a workshop for the blind is actively involved in producing and supplying kitchen furniture including sink units, kitchen cupboards, wall cupboards and built-in wardrobes for major housing authorities. This is giving considerable satisfaction to blind workers who realise they are participating in the efforts to meet a social need.

19.7 The technical team should set up a production prototype unit whose purpose shall be to analyse the work required to be done and to determine the most effective way of producing the article. They should also involve themselves in designing new ranges of articles likely to find a consumer market. The experience gained in such a production

unit would be of help in determining which kind of tools are needed, which kind of machine can be used to improve production, which kind of jigs are most likely to be of assistance to blind workers, and thus increase their productivity.

19.8 Experience gained in such a production unit would be a useful guide in setting up workshops for the employment of blind people. Such a technical team should be involved in providing guidance as to the type of building required, and the lay-out of the building, always bearing in mind that it should be designed to meet the needs of blind people. Usually, they will require more space per worker which is generally required for able-bodied workers.

19.9 When planning a new workshop, every effort should be made to ensure that the production area is on one floor, preferably the ground floor.

19.10 The technical team should become responsible for the training of instructors who will teach the blind trainee. Training must be efficient if the end product is to be an efficient worker. The person selected for such training should have knowledge of the technical requirements of the job in hand. This, however, is not sufficient when dealing with blind people. Such instructors, therefore, should be shown that different methods are required in such establish-

ments. It may be necessary in the early days for some selected personnel to be sent to countries where workshops have existed for a long time so that they can be taught the teaching techniques required when dealing with blind trainees.

19.11 After a few years it will be found possible to promote competent blind workers so that they can become instructors, departmental foremen or managers, and even works managers. The prospect of such promotion possibilities will be of tremendous encouragement to blind workers and will undoubtedly prove to be a spur to achieving greater proficiency.

19.12 A marketing section should be set up as early as possible, when plans are being determined. The purpose of this section should be to study market opportunities. They should try to find out what consumable goods are permanently in short supply. When this information is available, they should refer their findings to the technical section, which will then consider whether it is technically feasible for the work to be undertaken by blind workers. If they find that this is possible, it will provide new lines of work which could lead to the employment of an increasing number of blind workers. Such an investigation may well reveal that articles are required which will not demand much skill from

workers to produce. This would make it possible for the lesser skilled to be employed.

19.13 The marketing section should also be responsible for identifying sources of supply of the raw materials, thus ensuring a steady supply. This can be a very important aspect of the entire plan. It could be extremely frustrating if the technical section discovered suitable work, only to find that there are problems in obtaining the necessary raw materials.

At an early stage in such developments, every effort should be made to involve the blind workers in the administration of the workshops. This would give them the sense of belonging. It would undoubtedly make them feel that they were an essential and integral part of the whole enterprise. They would cease to regard the workshops as merely being a place where they went to work and would regard it with a new interest. They would become increasingly interested in the success of the enterprise. This would produce better workers. The importance of employment to blind people cannot be over-emphasised. It will bring a new dimension into their lives. Job satisfaction and the consequent sense of achievement will create a feeling of pride in the individual worker and his family. They will recognise the fact that they have now become producers as well as consumers. They will be earning a livelihood and at the same time they will be contributing to the national economy. They will

have achieved parity with other citizens. This is important and will do a great deal to raise the morale of the blind worker and will be of encouragement to blind people everywhere.

(To be continued)

THE BRAVEST  
THING YOU  
CAN DO WHEN  
YOU ARE  
NOT BRAVE IS  
TO PROFESS  
COURAGE  
AND ACT  
ACCORDINGLY.

CORRA HARRIS

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)

# THE BIWAKO MILLENNIUM FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DISABLED

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



***Editor's Note:*** This paper was prepared by Prof. Datuk Dr. Ismail bin Mohd. Salleh for the Disability Issues Seminar organised by the Society of Orthopaedically Disabled Persons (PO-CAM). The seminar was held at the Residence Hotel, Kuala Lumpur from June 9 – 10, 2006.

In his paper, Prof. Ismail Salleh explains how, in spite of the many shortcomings with regards to the implementation of “The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action: Towards An Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for the Disabled” in Malaysia, there are still many opportunities to take advantage of the policies that have been recommended in the BMFA for the benefit of the disabled in this country.

Here is what he says:

## INTRODUCTION

“The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action” is indeed a very important international document that sets out some policy guidelines with the view to achieving “An inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for the disabled”. In order to fulfill the goals as indicated in the document, seven priority areas have been outlined for immediate consideration and formulation of action plans. The seven priorities have to do with the development of self-help organisations, disabled women, early intervention and education, training and employment, an accessible environment, user-friendly ICT, and finally, poverty alleviation and capacity-building. Ultimately, all these priorities are aimed at bringing about the empowerment of the disabled through “full participation and equality” in society; this, in fact, harks back to the theme which was adopted and declared in 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons (or IYDP).

The question we need to ask now is this: “Has the BMFA made any impact on the lives of the disabled in Malaysia?” Before I provide an answer, let us first reflect on what has taken place in this country since the IYDP of 1981.

## 1. SELF-HELP ORGANISATIONS OF THE DISABLED

Although there has been no specific government policies in favour of the self-help organisations of the disabled, certain provisions have been introduced by the government that are inclined to foster the development of self-help groups among the disabled. A good example is the provision of financial grants through the Social Welfare Department to encourage the disabled to form their own groups for the purpose of setting up small production workshops or cooperatives; this has enabled the blind in Temerloh, Pahang to manage their own canework enterprises and the blind in Brickfields to run their own massage businesses.

Another example in which government recognition of disabled self-help groups is implicit can be seen in the fact that the government is willing to extend invitations to such groups to have representation on various government committees, forums and workshops. An outstanding example would be the National Advisory Consultative Council (NACC).

Many NGO's have emulated

the example set by the government. I can cite the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) and the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR) as being two living examples of this fact. Both organisations have blind or disabled persons actively involved in the work of their committees and even the executive council or board. The blind and disabled persons are able to work hand in hand with sighted or able-bodied partners in decision-making and policy formulation for the benefit of the clients concerned.

## **2. DISABLED WOMEN**

In line with the government's policy to open up opportunities for women both on the political and economic front, disabled women have also been able to benefit from this new climate of awareness and understanding with regards to the potential and positive contributions that can be made by womanpower!

At the university level, for instance, disabled women now do occupy important positions as lecturers and administrators. Likewise, at the NGO level, more disabled women are now getting involved in directing the affairs and activities of such organisations.

## **3. EARLY INTERVENTION AND EDUCATION**

The government's new education policy (2001-2010) is definitely in favour of early intervention and education. Although it does not provide any direct benefits to the disabled, organisations such as MAB have been able to

take advantage of this policy. Since 1998, MAB has established three pre-school programmes for the blind – in Kuala Lumpur, Klang and Kota Bharu respectively. The government has promised to provide funding for these programmes. At the same time, the government has also encouraged residential schools and integrated programmes to set up their own pre-school programmes for the disabled as in the case of the Jalan Batu Primary School for the Blind in Kuala Lumpur.

## **4. VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT**

Again, some policies and measures have been adopted by the government intended to bring benefits to the disabled. An immediate example that comes to mind is the policy of at least 1% employment for the disabled in the public sector which was introduced in 1989. To my mind, this was a very positive step that had been initiated by the government although many of us do agree that the implementation of the policy has fallen far short of our expectations.

Nonetheless, more positive developments have taken place since then. In 2003, the Ministry of Human Resources agreed to set up a special department on employment for the disabled in response to the request from self-help groups and NGO's serving the disabled. With the help of this department, job-matching efforts have been made by the government to enable the disabled to secure suitable employment in the public and private sectors.

Another important move that has been made by the government is the introduction of the Majlis Latihan Vokasional Kebangsaan (MLVK) which is aimed at equipping the youth with skills for all kinds of jobs and careers.

I am very happy to inform the audience that MAB has been able to take advantage of this scheme for the benefit of the blind. At our Gurney Training Centre, we are working towards the idea of upgrading all our courses by gearing them towards the MLVK standard. So far we have already obtained MLVK certification and recognition for our massage and reflexology courses.

We are also making preparations for the other courses of GTC and Taman Harapan (our agricultural training centre in Temerloh, Pahang) to receive MLVK certification. They include the rehabilitation skills such as Braille, cooking, sewing, cane travel, and other daily living techniques as well as vocational skills such as computer literacy, the office administrative system (in place of telephony), woodwork, basketry, poultry rearing, fish rearing and horticulture.

## **5. ACCESSIBLE ENVIRONMENT**

In 1983, two years after the declaration of IYDP, the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) took the initiative to draw up a memorandum on access for the attention of the government. Subsequently, the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled (MCD) followed up on the matter and got SIRIM and later on the Construction and Industrial Development

Board (CIDB) to be involved in formulating some codes of practice on access for the disabled inside and outside buildings. The first document was completed in 1990 and subsequently the codes were revised in 2002. Eventually, the Code of Practice on Access Inside Buildings was gazetted by all the peninsular states while the Code of Practice on Access Outside Buildings had to be left to the discretion of the local authorities to implement.

In 2003 MAB called upon the Ministry of Works and DBKL to consider making Brickfields as a model barrier-free area for the blind in order to inspire other local authorities to do the same. The Mayor of Kuala Lumpur took up the challenge with great enthusiasm and, as a result, many accessible features can now be found in Brickfields. They include covered drains and manholes, tactile guides, wide pavements, gentle slopes or ramps at strategic places, and modified traffic lights especially at the busy main road. It is true that there are still some shortcomings but, nonetheless, we do appreciate the effort that has been put in by DBKL. We hope that the good example set by DBKL will be emulated by the other local authorities all over the country.

## **6. USER-FRIENDLY ICT**

Much effort has been made by the NGO's to introduce user-friendly ICT to the disabled. In MAB, for instance, the first computer literacy course was introduced at the GTC in December 1989. Since then, the use of computer technology has spread

far and wide among the blind throughout the country. Again in MAB, for example, all the blind staff have started using computers with adapted speech software since 2004.

The Malaysian Confederation of the Deaf (MCD) too has played an important role in introducing adaptive computer technology for the benefit of the deaf throughout the country. The orthopaedically disabled organisations have also been doing likewise for the benefit of the wheelchair-users and crutch-users throughout Malaysia.

On the part of the government, it has introduced income tax provisions as a way of helping the disabled. They are able to claim income tax exemptions for the purchase of adaptive computer equipment. We hope that one day the blind will also be able to join their fellow citizens in taking advantage of the Multimedia Super-corridor (MSC) introduced by the government just a few years ago.

## **7. POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND CAPACITY-BUILDING**

Generally, quite a number of policies and provisions have been introduced by the government and by the NGO's (particularly after IYDP 1981) in order to bring about a better quality of life for the disabled in this country. Consequently, the disabled do have better prospects for education, employment and an improved standard of living nowadays. Undoubtedly, many more disabled people can be seen to be up and about today compared to 20 or 30

years ago. Moreover, there are now many more disabled persons who are involved in all kinds of jobs and careers such as administrators, teachers, lecturers, lawyers, and so on.

In spite of this, nonetheless, we do recognise the fact that there is still much work to be done so that many more (or preferably all) the disabled can break out of the vicious poverty cycle. I believe that we can deal with this challenge effectively if we have the support of the government at the highest policy level. This is the reason why the disabled groups and the NGO's have drawn up the Disability Act of Malaysia. I am indeed glad to note that the document has received endorsement from the Minister of Women, Family and Community Development and that it will be adopted by parliament some time in the near future.

## **CONCLUSION**

And so I come back to the question which I had posed at the beginning of my presentation: "Has the BMFA made any impact on the lives of the disabled in Malaysia?" Well, my answer would have to be a qualified "yes". I have tried to show that the BMFA has certainly affected our lives as disabled people and I have attempted to illustrate this with just a few positive examples. Of course, we are all keenly aware that we are still in very strong negative territory; but we also realise that this is the challenge that we must all seek to overcome through our own efforts and, wherever possible, in partnership with our sighted and able-bodied partners.

To do this, it is important for us to understand that the BMFA actually refers back to past documents on the one hand (which include the conventions, declarations and human rights instruments that go as far back as 1950's until the 1990's and beyond); but the BMFA also looks forward to the future on the other hand (which will or should be backed up strongly by the new or yet to be adopted International Convention on Disability). This new convention would actually be the culmination of all the previous international documents on disability that have gone before. Through these declarations and agreements, the United Nations, and in particular, ESCAP, has sought to create a new climate of awareness concerning the needs and rights of the disabled. Thus, over the recent past years, dating back from IYDP 1981, there has been a growing awareness among the government authorities, NGO's and other civil organisations that the disability are a neglected minority but they are a significant minority that should not be neglected any longer.

Thus, I would like to pose yet another question: "Can this awareness be sustained and can it be translated into positive plans and programmes for action and implementation?" Again, my answer would have to be a qualified "yes". Certainly, the authorities at all levels, be they the government, the NGO's or the private sector, have the power to act on the policies that have been recommended by ESCAP and they do have the capacity and resources to introduce the measures that would bring benefits to the disabled. In the end, nevertheless, it is the disabled themselves who would have

to assume the responsibility ultimately in seeing that the policies and plans are carried out.

The disabled must be the ones who have the determination to keep the message alive at all levels of society but especially with the government authorities. The message, of course, is that "There is nothing about us without us". The disabled want to be empowered through capacity-building programmes so that they can participate and make a positive contribution not only for their own good but also for the good of society as a whole.

However, all the effort that has been made on behalf of the disabled will soon fade away if the disabled themselves do not make positive moves to keep the message and the struggle alive. In the long term, the disabled cannot depend on anyone else but themselves to ensure that their needs and rights continue to remain on the active agenda of the policy-makers.

PLEASURE IN  
THE JOB PUTS  
PERFECTION  
IN THE WORK.

ARISTOTLE  
GREEK  
PHILOSOPHER,  
PHYSICIST, &  
ZOOLOGIST  
(384 BC - 322 BC)

TWO ROADS  
DIVERGED IN A  
WOOD,  
AND I--  
I TOOK THE  
ONE LESS  
TRAVELED  
BY,  
AND THAT  
HAS MADE ALL  
THE  
DIFFERENCE.

ROBERT FROST,  
THE ROAD NOT  
TAKEN - US POET  
(1874 - 1963)

# ESCAP AND THE INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY CONVENTION

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

I was the representative of the MAB and the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR) at the ESCAP fifth meeting in Bangkok, Thailand from July 26 to 27, 2005. The “fifth” meeting meant that ESCAP was meeting for the fifth year in relation to the International Disability Convention.

The convention itself would take a number of years in the process of being adopted and the sixth session of the United Nations assembly in deliberating on the document would be in August 2005.

## **1. THE BANGKOK FRAMEWORK**

This referred to the recommendations that had been prepared by ESCAP in 2004 and which had been accepted by the United Nations. The purpose of the ESCAP fifth meeting was to inform the government delegates in particular of the recommendations and to prepare them for participation in the sixth United Nations assembly on the convention in August 2005.

The recommendations in the Bangkok framework included the following:

1.1 “Nothing about us without us” should be an im-

portant philosophy of the convention, thereby emphasising the need for the inclusion of the disabled as part of and at all levels of society.

1.2 The socio-economic rights of the disabled should be recognised as they are one of the poor and disadvantaged groups in society.

1.3 The obligation of the state to eliminate barriers and the due process of remedies should be guaranteed.

1.4 The obligation of the state to initiate data collection so that the allocation of resources can be justified.

1.5 The concept of “reasonable accommodation” as a more practical measure in dealing with discrimination and legal claims should be adopted.

1.6 There should be a shift of approach from medical rehabilitation to the alternative model based on capacity-building and empowerment in rehabilitation programmes.

1.7 Technical cooperation should be an important feature of international and regional agreements involving donor agencies, technical experts and the recipients.

## **2. LEGAL ISSUES**

Some interesting questions in relation to the convention were raised:

2.1 Do separate services for the disabled mean discrimination?

2.2 With regards to “reasonable accommodation”, should special measures be temporary or permanent?

2.3 The right to abortion, the right to life till death, the right to survival, the right to protection from disaster – are they legitimate rights?

2.4 Should a person be deprived of liberty and security, based on disability?

2.5 Do criminals have rights such as the right to liberty?

2.6 Can forced intervention or institutionalisation be used to reduce, to remove or to eliminate disability?

2.7 Should the rights of family and/or care-takers of the disabled be recognised since when it comes to abuse, they are automatically included as being liable?

2.8 Concerning the freedom of thought, the right to public information and the right to official information, should the community at large be required or urged to provide accessible information?

2.9 Is the privacy of home and family inviolable?

2.10 Independent living and living independently – do these two ideas mean the same thing or are they different concepts?

### 3. EXPERIENCES IN DISABLED PARTICIPATION

#### 3.1 South Korea

The disabled people's organisations of South Korea actively participated in formulating the agenda for the disabled which resulted in the anti-discrimination act. One of their achievements was the establishment of the disability committee in parliament and their success gained international

recognition.

#### 3.2 Human Rights Commission and Equal Opportunities in Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Disability Act was approved in 1996. This act spells out the right of the disabled to development through education, employment, mainstreaming and equal opportunities for participation.

The human rights commission acts as a conciliation mechanism but it has no statutory power to compel enforcement.

After hearing the presentations from Korea and Hong Kong, there was a suggestion that these and other such experiences should be documented as examples of good practice.

#### 4. DEVELOPMENT OF ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAW IN THE ESCAP REGION

In her presentation, Esther Chan explained that "reasonable accommodation" means "making adjustments". For instance, when the obstacle arises not from disability but from environmental barriers, then there is the legal obligation to provide for access. This is understood to be "reasonable accommodation" rather than "charity" even though there may be dif-

ferential treatment.

However, "unjustifiable hardship" could be cited as a "reasonable excuse" by companies in certain cases, e.g. their claim that making the upper deck of a bus accessible is not possible.

Thus, "reasonableness" is the key to "accommodation" and "hardship". In fact, it works on the concept of compromise between obligations and positive special measures.

#### 5. ADOPTION OF STATEMENT

To conclude the ESCAP meeting on the Bangkok regional framework, a formal statement was read out and it was adopted by the meeting.

THE SELF IS NOT  
SOMETHING  
READY-MADE,  
BUT SOMETHING  
IN  
CONTINUOUS  
FORMATION  
THROUGH  
CHOICE OF  
ACTION.

JOHN DEWEY  
(1859 - 1952)

# A POINT TO PONDER: OPTIMISM AND IMAGINATION HELP TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

*By Wong Kow*

It was a Saturday morning when I dropped in at the MAB Senior Citizens' Club in order to get in touch with some old friends. We enjoyed quite a good variety of games as well as exchanged jokes and stories. Some even took the opportunity to share their experiences of family life, friendships, financial situations, and so on.

I began to realise that quite a number of my friends were encountering tough times due to ill health, the loss of a loved one, or some other mishap. I became keenly aware that they were feeling and expressing the inevitability of being upset, unhappy, lonely, disappointed or depressed.

However, this also made me realise that one could feel much happier if one could just think of the happy moments and blessings of life. Examples include savouring the first moments of being able to read and write in Braille or print; going about here and there independently; passing an examination; securing a job; purchasing one's own radio set or sound system; having a boyfriend or girlfriend; moving into a new house; getting married; having your first child; and so on.

This does not mean that you should live in the past. As one looks back, it is possible to visualise everything that we have faced either as hardships and dif-

ficulties or as challenges or tests. Will they bring us down or prepare us to face other challenges and tests?

At this juncture, allow me to relate this short story as an illustration. Robert is a sighted student in an ordinary secondary school. One day, he decided to take part in a drawing competition. The time limit for the competition was two hours and no fixed topic was given. The participants could draw anything they wished.

Robert tried very hard but he was not up to the mark that day. He requested for a change of drawing paper at least five times but still no ideas came to his mind.

Almost toward the end of the session, he realised he had only ten minutes left. Finally, in a fit of frustration, he simply brushed the whole drawing paper black and handed it up to the teacher-in-charge.

Upon seeing Robert's "drawing", the teacher fumed with anger. However, the amazing thing was that when Robert was summoned to the disciplinary office, he calmly responded to the teacher's enquiry by pointing to the drawing and said:

"Dear sir, this happens to be a moonless night in Africa – two Negroes have gone to the

backyard and they have shot five crows!"

What was the outcome? The teacher praised Robert for his wonderful imagination and gave him a consolation prize instead.

Perhaps you may regard this story merely as a joke. It is true, nonetheless, that as we go through life, there is always a way out. I believe that optimism, imagination and even a little laughter can help to solve problems.

The right attitude is needed in order to motivate oneself and to enhance one's life. When you like yourself, you will want to be better equipped and the result is that you will gain more confidence to find your way out happily.

In so doing, life's pressures can be turned into pleasures instead.

**WE NEED MEN  
WHO CAN DREAM  
OF THINGS THAT  
NEVER WERE.**

**JOHN F. KENNEDY  
35TH PRESIDENT OF US  
1961-1963 (1917 - 1963)**

## OUTSIDE INSIGHTS

### ONLINE BRAILLE BOOK STORE

Associated Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASB) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., announces the grand opening of its online Braille bookstore:

[www.asb.org/bookstore.htm](http://www.asb.org/bookstore.htm).

For the first time ASB has opened its archives and bookstore to give worldwide access to its collection of brailled books. The bookstore has nine categories and over 100 books ready for sale. The books include classics like Lord of the Flies; The Call of the Wild; and books by popular authors like Stephen King, and romance queen Sandra Brown.

With most books ranging from US\$15 to US\$35 (bound and shipped by Free Matter), the books are affordable. They are proofread and transcribed by certified Braille transcribers and proofreaders.

Braille books make great gifts. If you have a short message (under 20 words), ASB will include your note in print and Braille, [dfgodzieba@asb.org](mailto:dfgodzieba@asb.org).

(taken from Braille Monitor, Vol. 49, No. 3, March 2006)

### ONLINE DIRECTORY FOR THE DEAF-BLIND

This is a directory of worldwide resources for and about people who are deaf-blind. The website is sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, U.S.A.

It is designed to be useful to people around the world by:

1. Making available information on technology and communication methods used by deaf-blind people in daily life.

2. Closing the information gap for the deaf-blind and the general public by showcasing a vast collection of deaf-blindness information in order to empower people with deaf-blindness.

For further details, see the online directory:

[Deaf\\_blindinfo.org](http://Deaf_blindinfo.org)  
or Marisa Bennett at email:  
[webmaster@deafblindinfo.org](mailto:webmaster@deafblindinfo.org).

## EARN SOME EXTRA CASH

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

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

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

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| Puan Maziah Abu Bakar               | - Society of the Blind in Malaysia                            |
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Mr. Stephen Hsu Wee

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Miss Chok Siew Lee

**Committee for the Prevention of Blindness**  
Dato' Dr. Veera Ramani

**Malaysian Braille Press Management Committee**  
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Mr. Godfrey Ooi Goat See

**National Council of Welfare and Social Development Malaysia, NCWSDM**  
Ven. Archdeacon Samuel D. John

**Standing Committee on Prevention and Control of Blindness**  
Dato' Dr. Veera Ramani

**World Blind Union**  
Mr. S. Kulasegaran and  
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