

# THE NCBM OUTREACH



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## **EDITORIAL BOARD**

Moses Choo Siew Chong

Wong Kwee Heong

Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

Chan Yin Fan

## **RICKY WONG YOON KIONG – A STORY OF SUCCESS**

*By Ooi Hock Tiam*

Since losing his sight at the tender age of twelve, Ricky Wong has never given up on life. Instead, he strived for excellence and continued to stay motivated in pursuit of his dream to become a professional motivation speaker and writer.

After passing all his important government examinations in high school and pre-university education, Ricky managed to secure a place in the country's oldest university, i.e. the University of Malaya. His visual disability did not deter him from going full swing into his studies which culminated in his obtaining his first degree in Bachelor of Arts (Anthropology) in 1987.

In his efforts for further development, he pursued a certificate programme in Public Relations at the Institute of Public Relations, Malaysia (IPRM). In 1988 he emerged as the best student of the year and won the “best student” award.

With the quest of knowledge still burning in him, Ricky made up his mind to pursue his second degree for the Master of Arts in Urban Anthropology. Again, his visual disability did not stop him from achieving his goal – he obtained the Master’s degree with straight passes from the University of Malaya in 1992. While pursuing his Master’s degree, Ricky served as tutor at the university for a period of two years.

Armed with academic and professional qualifications, Ricky broke the record by being the first blind person to be employed as Management Trainee at MAS. Subsequently, Ricky served with MAS for fifteen years and he was deployed in many different departments and divisions, including Human Resources, Corporate Training, Human Potential Development, Ground Services Training, People and Technology, and management Development. While holding the last post in MAS as the Management Development Controller, he took up the challenge of developing his talents as a Motivational Speaker. Thus, he was able to prepare himself to venture out on his own as a Motivational Trainer after leaving MAS in 2006.

During his tenure of service in MAS, Ricky had been responsible for the training and development of more than 15,000 employees, including managers, controllers, executives, supervisors, officers, clerks, security guards, drivers, pilots, the cabin crew and management trainees.

As a fervent believer in continuous and life-long learning, Ricky successfully completed a course in 1994 leading to the award of a certificate in Training and Development with distinction from the Institute of Personnel Development (IPD), London, UK.

To further develop his skills in speaking and training, Ricky joined the Toastmasters International (TI) and was awarded the Competent Toastmaster (CTM) and Advanced Toastmaster Bronze (ATMB) awards in 2003.

With his knowledge and expertise, Ricky conducted programmes in training and development for other organisations such as GCH Retail (M) Sdn Bhd, Khe Demag, Dimensi Eksekutif, Association of Accounting Technicians, Bio-Young, Great Eastern, AIA, Amway, Cosway, Sunway College, Totoku, MBF Cards, Intan, Maybank, Power Light, RTD, and UKM.

Indeed, Ricky is a source of inspiration and motivation for many. He has lived his life with vision, positive thinking, self-confidence, determination, and, above all, with staying power in today's competitive market despite being visually challenged.

In order to share his life story, Ricky has put them all together in a book entitled *Live to Win*. To give you an insight into the book so that you will not miss the opportunity of owning one copy of the book for yourself, a synopsis is provided as follows:

“Live to Win” is an easy-to-read book with inspiring and motivating personal stories shared by Ricky Wong himself. It contains adventures and experiences in the world that he can see and in the world that he cannot see.

In chapter one, he expresses thankfulness for the abundance of blessings in his life.

In chapter two, he describes the realities of his unique family in which five siblings are sighted and four siblings are blind.

From chapters 3 to 12, he shows how he accepted the challenge of blindness, how he regained self-confidence in living a positive and productive life, how he excelled in his academic pursuits, how he obtained gainful employment, and how he started his family.

Chapters 13 to 17 provide insights on how he got himself accepted into the work-force of the country's national carrier, Malaysia Airlines, in spite of his blindness, and how he joined the Training Division where he was able to realise his passion for developing, designing, delivering and evaluating training programmes.

In chapters 18 to 25, he shares his views on visualising success. He says that attitude is everything and you are what you think. Other subjects include positive thinking, conquering fear, unlimited potential, knowing yourself, and taking charge of your life.

In chapter 26, he gives a detailed account on how he made one of life's biggest decisions – the change of career. This led him to establish his own training consulting business and to begin his life as an entrepreneur.

Finally, in chapter 27, the most important chapter in his book, he shares seven ingredients for achievement and success. The first ingredient is vision.

The book is written for everyone who wants to live an abundant life to the fullest. It is suitable for students, teachers, educators, parents, counsellors, social workers, trainers, human resource practitioners, corporate executives, entrepreneurs, etc.

Look out for his book at any of the popular bookstores.

You may also contact Ricky Wong at the following:

Tel. 6019-3117770

Email: [info@yktpc.com](mailto:info@yktpc.com)

If you have problems contacting him, you can get in touch with NCBM.

# **PAK LAH'S LEGACY FOR THE POOR AND DISABLED: A HOPE FOR THE FUTURE, PART III**

*By Ooi Hock Tiam*

*Editor's note: The second part of this article appeared in the July – September 2010 issue of The NCBM Outreach. Here is the third part: Comments on News Reports Concerning Pak Lah's Legacy*

## **Report 1. RTM News, 15 June, 2007:**

According to RTM News, the Minister of Higher Education, Dato' Mustapha Mohammad, announced that all disabled students studying in local and foreign institutions of higher learning will be able to receive RM300 per month from the Ministry of Education.

This is indeed a good move because disabled students definitely need the money while studying at any institution of higher learning. However, it is hoped that disabled students receiving this aid will not be automatically disqualified from receiving other forms of aid as well. This is because RM300 per month alone is definitely not sufficient for a college or university student nowadays. This sum will probably be just enough to pay for tuition fees.

## **Report 2. RTM News, 6 August, 2007:**

According to RTM News, the Director of General Welfare had announced that a sum of RM1,000 will be given to each disabled student upon entering a university. This money is meant to help such disabled students meet with immediate expenses.

This is certainly a good move. However, paying up this money should be speeded up or else it would defeat the purpose for which the money is intended.

### **Report 3. RTM News, 11 August, 2007:**

According to RTM News, the government had allocated RM22 million under the 9th Malaysia Plan to set up a fund from which grants will be paid to disabled entrepreneurs who are able to generate employment opportunities for other disabled persons. According to a member of the committee administering this fund, about RM4.5 million has been paid out to disabled massage entrepreneurs and small businessmen.

Thus, this move by the government has certainly been helpful in enabling the disabled to become self-reliant and in encouraging them to generate employment opportunities for other disabled persons. The disabled have been given the capacity to “fish” for themselves instead of just being given “fish” by the government.

### **Report 4. The Star, 18 August, 2007: “Welfare Urged to be Positive”**

According to this Report, The Minister of Family, Women and Community Development, Datuk Sharizat Abdul Jalil, has urged Welfare Officers to be more “proactive” in their efforts to locate, identify and refer disabled persons to institutions or services and to find out what are the particular needs of an individual instead of merely waiting for the disabled to come and see them. Indeed, this call is very timely because I believe there must be at least about one million disabled persons out there who need to be registered with the Welfare Department. In the past, it used to be the practice of Welfare Officers to go out into the kampongs to reach out to the disabled and the communities in which they live. Nowadays the Officers mostly stay indoors and wait for their clients to come for assistance. I hope the call of the Minister will bring about change and encourage Welfare Officers to reach out to the people in need by going out into the field as they used to do in the past.

### **Report 5. The Star, 18 September, 2007: “New Criteria to Define Poor”**

According to this Report, the Minister of Family, Women and Community Development, Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, said that having a radio,

refrigerator or television set at home should no longer be considered as expensive luxuries as in the past. Therefore, having such appliances or equipment in the home should not disqualify a person from receiving welfare aid.

My views indeed concur with those of the Welfare Minister. In fact, some of these amenities may have been donated by well-wishers or friends or they could have been purchased before the person became disabled or poor. Aid should be given according to need and should not be according to the whims and fancies of assessing officers.

#### **Report 6. The Star, 3 October, 2007: “All Under One Roof”**

According to this Report, all the services for disabled students provided by the Ministry of Education will be handled by a single department under the Ministry. This is to make it easier for parents and guardians of disabled students to obtain assistance or advice from the Ministry.

This is certainly a good move not only for parents but for the general public as well.

#### **Report 7. The Star, 5 December, 2007: “Special Department for the Disabled, Kids and Senior Citizens”**

The Minister of Family, Women and Community Development, Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, announced the setting up of a Special Department under her ministry to deal exclusively with problems of the disabled. According to reliable sources, this Department has indeed been established – each state welfare office now has an officer from the National Department and he or she has four assistants. However, we are still not clear how this department will be helping the disabled. As far as I know, no guidelines have yet been drawn up for the effective running of the department.

#### **Report 8. The Star, 15 November, 2007: “Employ the Disabled, Says Prime Minister” By Loon Meng Yee**

This call has been highly applauded and welcomed. Disabled employees in

the public sector number only about 200 while there are even fewer disabled workers in the private sector. Since 2008, however, we have observed some positive moves in the public sector. For example, a totally blind person was accepted as a Welfare Officer in 2008 at the National Welfare Department. Another visually impaired graduate while undergoing the executive trainee scheme at MAB in 2009 was called to the Human Resource Department in Kuala Lumpur to take up the post of Manager in Counselling. Recently, we also heard of the good news that a totally blind teacher had been promoted to the post of Assistant Director in the Examinations Board of Malaysia.  
(To be continued)

# **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, story-books and other Braille materials in Malaysia started back in 1948 when the late Major D. R. Bridges was the Welfare Officer in the National Welfare Department. Major Bridges was a British soldier who was blinded in the Japanese-Burmese war. He received his rehabilitation training at St. Dunstan's in England and was then posted back to Malaysia to help set up services for the disabled, particularly 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) was to provide employment to some of the blind job pioneers such as Kathan Pillai, Elizabeth Hoe and Mary Poon (who have passed away). Their job was 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 this country.

They also produced Braille books for the Princess Elizabeth School for the Blind (P.E.S.) when it was established in 1953 on a piece of land that had been presented by the Sultan of Johor to celebrate the wedding of Princess Elizabeth. Funds were also contributed by the British Public Expatriates to start the school. P.E.S. was then placed 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 were transferred to MAB around the turn of the 1960s. However, all the staff who were working in the 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 could not meet

the supply, St. Nicholas School and the Society of the Blind in Malaysia purchased their own embossing equipment in order to meet their own specific requirements.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the Special Education Department felt confident enough that they possessed the necessary Braille expertise and decided to establish their own Braille printing section adjacent to the Setapak School for the Blind. Thus, they discontinued their orders from MAB. MAB, in turn, concentrated on developing other services and gave very low priority to the production of Braille materials.

The Braille Printing Unit of the Special Education Department, on the other hand, 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. Thus, blind students were deprived of the much needed Braille textbooks. The students either had to copy their own books or they were fortunate enough to have the services of dedicated resource teachers.

In 1993, after learning about the deplorable state of affairs concerning the shortage of Braille materials in the Asian Region, Tetsuji 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 in ten countries and to provide them with the necessary equipment and software; on returning to their respective organisations and countries, they would be able to produce more materials with the computerised Braille Production Technology. Eventually, the goal was accomplished with the holding of ten yearly workshops and the training of 110 personnel. Some of the beneficiaries were NCBM and its member-organisations plus 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. The council of NCBM was thus convinced to support the proposal. Subsequently, appeals were sent out to member-organisations and the Department of Special Education requesting them to take up the challenge of setting up a fully equipped Braille press in order to overcome

the yearly recurrence of the shortage of Braille textbooks. None of the organisations paid attention to the call. Finally, therefore, NCBM decided that it could no longer wait for such an urgent project to be implemented. Thus, NCBM decided to proceed with the project.

In 1997, NCBM sent two teams, one to the United Kingdom to look at the setup of the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB), and the other team 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 was being done in the UK. The NBP structure was not adopted as it would entail the setting up of an independent registered body with the right to raise funds to meet 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 was a coordinating body, and, therefore, should not be operating a service.

To confuse matters further, MAB was under the impression that MBP would become a profitable entity rather than a service to meet the special needs of Braille users. Thus, for the next two years, MAB continued to oppose the setting up of MBP. Finally, around the year 2000, a delegation from NCBM, headed by Dr Tan Yaw Kwang, met with Tan Sri Mohd. Azmi (who was then President of MAB) and they came to an agreement that MBP should continue to meet the urgent needs of the Braille users.

When the Chairmanship of the MBP Management Committee was assumed by MAB, only then did they fully realise the importance of such a service. Henceforth, 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 by embracing 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 historical 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.

Attached is the Report which was tabled and accepted by the MBP Management Committee and by the Council.

### **Report On The Malaysian Braille Press** **Terms Of Reference**

1. To conduct a Review of Operations of the Braille Production methods and the DAISY Audio Production facilities.
2. To suggest a plan of improvement should it be necessary.

### **General**

1. The facilities are housed in a newly acquired but relatively old third-floor terraced building. Adjacent and connected to the National Council for the Blind (NCBM) in Brickfields, KL, these offices are within a short walk from Sentral Station making access for blind people relatively easy. The Braille unit is situated on the second floor in recently refurbished offices. There are three good-quality studios on the third floor. There is no designated copying or tape transfer area.
2. There is a mission statement in place and a set of reasonably ambitious objectives, some of which may be difficult to attain in the wider sense.
3. There are adequate control systems in place, covering pricing, output and production flow diagrams, and basic Profit and Loss and charging records. Most organisations of similar size have very few controls, so although there is some fine tuning necessary, it was pleasant to find the extent of control in place.
4. I did not find anything that was not under consideration. Hence the age-

old expression of “a consultant is there to tell you what you already know but not able to implement”.

## **Staffing**

1. Malaysian Braille Press (MBP) has a staff complement of four, with one budgeted but unfilled post. There are three involved in Braille transcription and one in embossing, collating and binding. In addition to this there are five part-time paid staff and three volunteers.
2. There is no staff involved in any audio production, DAISY or other at this time.
3. Governance and funding is ultimately NCBM and the manager reports to this body.
4. The unit appears to be well managed; there are defined output targets and the manager makes every effort to keep abreast of new developments and to implement them where necessary.

## **Activity Levels**

1. The Braille production is dedicated to the production of text-books on behalf of the Ministry of Education’s Special Education Department and in principle is not available to the “walk-in” user (although there are some exceptions).
2. The output is a mixture of scanned and keyed texts, for the most part via either a Malay translator or via Duxbury for English.
3. The unit produces tactile diagrams.
4. Output is via embossers supplied by Index of Sweden.
5. Binding is GBC with stiff cover (usually printed) and is undertaken by the embosser operator.

6. The programme is set by the Ministry and the set texts defined annually.
7. The output level is low, mainly due to the proportion of trainees within the unit.
8. There is no audio (DAISY) activity although there has been a training course on site that was open to other organisations.

## **Recommendations**

1. Amend the production statistics so that “master pages” produced is shown.
2. An achievable figure for reasonably straight-forward texts is 27 completed master pages per day per person. However, in this case, for example, I would assess, 1 skilled =27, manager (part working day) =10, trainee =15, trainee =15. Say, 67 pages per day. I do not think that the unit is achieving this. If text-books are heavily illustrated, then this figure will be lower. The output for scanned English texts should be higher and for books in Malay lower.
3. The quality of tactile diagrams is higher than necessary, being more suited to a sighted person. A tactile diagram should be simple. RNIB used to have a guideline. (I will see if I can get a copy).
4. Recruit the unfilled post. It is essential to have a member of staff who understands simple mathematics and Sciences.
5. Consider increasing the staffing level by at least one more person. The current staffing level is too low. If two persons were away for any reason and say in conjunction with annual leave, it would be impossible to hit the output levels required; worse, output would stop.
6. Move the facilities to the ground floor when possible; it makes no sense to have to carry stock etc. upstairs. There is a down side to this; in order to attain staff flexibility, it would be desirable to mix audio and Braille skills. The proposed move would shift the Braille production away from the audio. However, I still recommend moving the Braille

- unit when the ground floor becomes available.
7. Obtain “the Brailist’s Manual” if you do not have it already, from RNIB.
  8. Recruit audio skills in order to commence DAISY training and production.
  9. Increase the number of volunteers.
  10. Consider where the volunteer reception area will be.
  11. There must be a suitable area for audio technicians. There are essential tasks that are not studio-based that need to be addressed – copying, editing, checking, etc. There is also the important task of preparing the text for the narrator. (This is one of the tasks where a temporary interchange of staff could be beneficial).
  12. Set up a more comprehensive control system; look into the purchase of a production control board. The key facts are: date in: extent (no. of pages of copy): estimated no. of Braille pages: date to be completed (at each stage of production): the allotted operator for each process: any other time critical fact. It is possible to do this via a PC, so look at both.
  13. Be a prime mover, the stake-holder in a Text-book strategy initiative. Organise with other producers a seminar to address the problems of the lack of specialised Braille skills (Maths, Sciences, etc.) Look into the standardisation of the Braille page; this is essential, even if it only standardises the paper size! There are many others that can be considered that are not so essential, like the style of binding, for example. The seminar should consider and discuss a simple system that would enable the various groups to know what other producers are about to produce or are in the process of producing and when it will be available. This is particularly important to avoid duplication. A unified Production Control System would be of benefit. The seminar should highlight areas of cooperation. The selection of participants is critical for this type of seminar. It must comprise Decision-Makers and Technicians from each organisation.

# INCREASING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BLIND

*By Godfrey Ooi Goat See*

*Editor's note: This paper was first presented at the workshop on "Enhancing Resources for the Disabled" organised by the Sarawak Social Welfare Council and the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation. The seminar was held at the Hilton hotel in Kuching, Sarawak on 15 June, 2002.*

*The paper has been updated by the writer. Here it is:*

## **1. Independence Through Economic Empowerment:**

Why is employment so important to the blind and other disabled persons? What is the main objective of employment for any person? It is to gain economic independence through economic empowerment.

In fact, we are talking about the value of earning a living through one's work. We all want employment because it will enable us to gain independence, i.e. we will be able to stand on our own two feet without having to rely on others for housing, food, clothes and other necessities.

In other words, through employment we are able to gain a sense of dignity and self-worth as human beings because we are able to fulfill that deep sense of need to feel that we are valuable and useful in society. We cannot run away from the fact that there is an unbreakable bond between earning a living through our own work, the achievement of independence, and the feeling of being able to play a useful role in the community. Our ultimate aim, of course, is the high goal of "full participation and equality" in society by the blind and other disabled persons.

## **2. Efforts In Creating Employment Opportunities For The Blind:**

In the past the organisations serving the blind in Malaysia have tried to meet the needs of the blind for employment by providing them with vocational skills through the urban-based vocational training programmes, agricultural

skills through the rural-based programmes, and village-based or domestic skills through the community-based rehabilitation programmes (CBR). However, in view of the rapid technological advancements and much more competitive employment market today, there are many new challenges to be overcome and pressing issues to be dealt with.

The questions and challenges to be faced include the following:

- (a) What must be done to help the blind meet the changing demands in the job market of the computer age?
- (b) Do sheltered workshops still have a place in our modern computer age?
- (c) Are entrepreneurial activities a viable alternative for the blind?
- (d) Are the community-based rehabilitation programmes (or CBR) effective in meeting the needs of the blind for economic independence?
- (e) Does the education system have an important role to play in preparing the blind and other disabled persons for employment?
- (f) Should quality skills and products be expected from the blind and other disabled persons and what can be done to ensure they will be able to meet such quality standards?
- (g) Should the government be expected to play a more important role in developing employment opportunities among the disabled?
- (h) How can the NGOs work together with the government in developing and promoting employment opportunities for the disabled?

### **3. New Employment Opportunities:**

In dealing with the questions and challenges that have been posed, we need to consider the following:

#### 3.1 Vocational Courses – Telephony:

Because of the technological changes taking place in the new computer age, one of the favourite occupations given to the blind, i.e. telephone operating, is expected to become obsolete very soon. To meet this challenge, it is encouraging to note that the organisations serving the blind have provided some solutions. For example, both MAB and St. Nicholas Home have introduced the computer literacy programme in the 1990s in order to equip the blind with computer skills. This has enabled

many of the blind to fulfil their job functions more effectively in various jobs and careers as administrators, teachers, and so on.

The MAB has introduced the Office Administrative Assistants' course at the Gurney Training Centre since 2009. In this course, the blind will still learn telephony skills but they will also be equipped with various administrative skills, thereby enabling them to be more flexible in the office work environment. The skills include Computer Literacy, File Management, Public Relations Etiquette and Reception of Customers.

Of course, there is much more that needs to be done in preparing the blind so that they will be able to adapt themselves in meeting the growing demands of the job market. A question that has been raised quite frequently is whether the Braille Shorthand Course should be reintroduced at the GTC. Some are of the view that with the computer, shorthand skills are no longer necessary. Yet others argue that even computer and handphone users are still using shorthand in conveying messages to other users. At a brain-storm with some of the blind, they felt that Braille shorthand would still be useful in enabling them to take down dictation or messages quickly. In fact, the Braille slate and stylus could still be a very handy tool for taking down shorthand because it is cheap, light and easy to carry about, and does not need any sophisticated technology for it to function entirely.

### 3.2 Sheltered Workshops:

In the old days, Sheltered Workshops were less expensive to maintain and it was much easier to market the cane products of the blind workers. Today the strong feeling is that such workshops are very difficult to maintain financially; moreover, the handicraft items made of cane are not able to compete with the plastic wares which are sold much more cheaply.

Indeed, does the Sheltered Workshops still have a role to play today in meeting some of the employment solutions for the blind? Some argue that the Sheltered Workshops could still be maintained merely for the purpose of rehabilitation. Others are of the view that they could still

be run as production workshops as is still being done in countries such as Thailand, India, Hong Kong, China, and even Britain and the United States. In Malaysia, therefore, we still need to consider this matter carefully before dismissing the idea altogether.

### 3.3 Self Employment:

Door to door sales became a very popular occupation for the blind in Malaysia, especially during the mid-1970s and 1980s. Some of the blind, who found the occupation to be rather tough-going, preferred to take up busking as street musicians or to sell tissue packets. Some just simply opted for the begging-bowl and simply asked for alms.

Other more fortunate blind persons have been able to enter the massage profession after receiving training as masseurs at the GTC in Kuala Lumpur since the 1980s. Subsequently, some of the blind masseurs began to set up their own massage enterprises. In fact, massaging became a very lucrative trade for the blind; in Brickfields where the blind first set up business, there are about 20 massage enterprises run by the blind.

The concern now facing the blind masseurs is that Brickfields is becoming over-saturated with blind massage enterprise. Fortunately, many of the blind have taken the bold decision to move out of Brickfields and set up business elsewhere. However, the greater challenge facing the blind masseurs today is to secure solid support from the Government for their profession.

The blind masseurs would like various measures to be adopted by the government in order to protect their trade. These include banning of foreign masseurs (who are flooding the Malaysian market) and providing special incentives to blind massage enterprises. Some of these incentives are currently under consideration by the Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) such as a much lower rate of payment for floor space used for the massage business. The current rate is about RM50 per square metre while the blind are requesting to return to the old rate of RM12 per square metre.

However, besides the massage trade, are there other viable alternatives in self-employment for the blind? What other business enterprises would be suitable for the blind?

But are we putting the cart before the horse? Surely, the more important question is whether the blind should be equipped with business skills? Once the blind have these knowledge and skills, then they themselves will be able to explore and decide what sort of business they might enter. Once they have the know-how and the where-with-all to do it, who knows what amazing solutions the blind may come up with?

Therefore, It is hoped that some organisation or agency will come up with a proper Business Training Programme for the blind. I believe that being thus equipped, this will enable the blind to explore more opportunities for themselves in the future. They will be able to lead the way.

(To be continued)

# THE TACTILE GRAPHICS WORKSHOP

*By Maswirda bt. Morad*

***Editor's note: Maswirda Morad took up the post of Librarian at MAB in 2009. She would like to share with readers the knowledge and experience she had gained at the Tactile Graphics Workshop in Thailand.***

Attending the Tactile Graphics Workshop in Bangkok, Thailand was a great opportunity and experience for me. I was among twelve participants from various countries, including Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, and Vietnam.

We were housed at the Salaya-Pavilion hotel which was near the Mahidol University International College, about 96km from the International Bangkok Airport.

The Workshop was held at the Ratchasuda College and our instructor was Mr Yan Zhang from the American Printing House for the Blind in the USA. Under his guidance, we were shown the various ways to produce tactile graphics for Braille books. We learned how to use multiple software and hardware, how to carry out the different methods of production, and to identify the types of paper that were suitable for producing tactile graphics.

On the first day, we were given a briefing on the concept of Tactile Graphics. Decisions and plans had to be made on the production and presentation of tactile graphics. Before deciding on the production method, we had to understand the teaching strategies being used for the blind and what would be the most efficient steps in proof-reading. We looked at the techniques required to create quality tactile graphics and how to analyse the finished product.

On the second day, we dealt with examples for editing and designing. The lecturer demonstrated how to use the tactile graphics kit and we were then given the chance to practise using the equipment for shaping the graphics.

On the last day, we were given a demonstration on how to operate tactile

hardware and software. We operated various machines which included the Tiger Embosser, Basic Embosser, PIAF Machine, and others. We used different types of paper and materials for production such as Micro-Capsule Paper Good-Quality Braille Paper, Brailon Paper and Aluminium Foil. We dealt with software that may be suitable for the production of Braille and tactile graphics such as Microsoft-Word and the Adobe Photoshop.

Participants were then given the opportunity to share the experiences from different countries. We looked at the various samples that had been brought by participants and then shared our views and opinions on the different styles used for production.

I showed how at the Braille Publishing Unit of MAB the manual technique was used to create tactile and graphic documents. For example, we used string to make the lines, buttons for the round graphics and various materials to create different textures such as sand-paper, fabrics and Braille dots.

Indeed, the Workshop had opened my eyes to the various methods that could be used to produce tactile graphics that would be effective for the blind. Computer software were particularly useful in producing Pie Charts, Graphic Bars, Maps, Tables and so on.

Through the Workshop, I was able to gain a clear picture of how the blind “see” the world. For example, when we produce the chair in tactile graphics, it would not be necessary to create the exact image of a chair with a chair-back, holder and so on but a tactile square on graphic with a Braille label would suffice.

Also, large tactile graphics should be avoided. This is because it would take too much time for the blind to read big images compared to small images; moreover, it would be easier to include the Braille label outside the tactile image.

I believe this Workshop will enable me to serve the blind and visually impaired more effectively. The MAB library will be able to produce tactile graphics more quickly and accurately. The graphics will be simplified, more comprehensible and relevant to the needs of our blind service-users.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to MAB for having given me this wonderful opportunity to learn so that I will be able to be more effective in serving the blind and visually impaired.

## WHAT IS HYPERTENSION?

*Editor's note: In 2009, the students of Monash University in Kuala Lumpur carried out their community-based project with MAB. The ultimate goal of that project was to come up with guidelines on hygiene standards for massage centres run by the blind.*

This year in 2010 the Monash students had their second community-based project with MAB. This time their task was to carry out a sample survey on the health of the elderly blind in Kuala Lumpur. The survey took place on 5 June among 30 to 40 elderly blind persons. An awareness talk on health was also given by a lecturer from Monash University.

### **The following is a brief summary of the talk explaining what is Hypertension.**

High Blood Pressure (HBP) or hypertension means raised pressures in the arteries or blood vessels. The arteries carry blood from the pumping heart to all the tissues and organs of the body. The normal range of blood pressure in a healthy individual is below 120/80. Blood pressure between 120/80 and 139/89 is known to be “pre-hypertension” while a BP of 140/90 or above is considered to be high. Hypertension is diagnosed when the patient has raised BP's in several consecutive consultations.

Symptoms include headache, dizziness, shortness of breath, blurred vision and fits.

Most often, however, the individual does not show any of the above symptoms.

### **When And Where Do I Need To Check My Blood Pressure?**

You are encouraged to check your blood pressure at least once in a year or during every visit to the clinic. BP measurement can be done at any government or private clinic and hospital.

## **Am I At Risk Of High Blood Pressure?**

You are at a higher risk of developing high blood pressure if you are:

- Obese
- A woman over 60 years old
- Male
- Eating too much sodium (salt)
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Not getting enough potassium in your diet
- Not enough physical activity
- Smoking
- Stressed
- If you have a family history of HBP or stroke.

## **Why Do I Need To regularly Check For My Blood Pressure?**

Its importance is to determine whether you are having hypertension or not. 90% of hypertensive individuals have no symptoms; only 10% of individuals show the symptoms. Thus, maintenance of normal BP is vital in preventing death due to heart attack, stroke, kidney failure and blindness. In fact, heart attack and stroke are the two main causes of death in Malaysia.

## **Prevention of BP In Seven Simple Steps:**

1. Follow a healthy diet
2. Reduce the salt intake
3. Maintain a healthy weight
4. Exercise regularly
5. Limit alcohol intake
6. Quit smoking
7. Visit your GP for Regular check-ups.

## **What Can Hypertension Lead To?**

1. Heart failure
2. Kidney failure
3. Blindness
4. Brain damage
5. Stroke.

# **TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: NVDA – FREE FOR ALL**

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

Many of you will probably remember that the blind started gaining access to the computer as early as the late 1980's. This was during the era of DOS and HAL, screen-reader solutions developed by Dolphin Inc. When the multi-media computer and Windows came into the market, there was no longer the need to purchase the piece of hardware called the Voice Synthesizer. However, for the blind to gain access to Windows, they had to pay for a screen-reader which cost between RM3,000 and RM4,000.

Nevertheless, technological advances continued to be made and in 2006, NV came up with the idea of a free and open source screen-reader known as NVDA. In fact, NV Access is a non-profit organisation based in Melbourne, Australia. They are dedicated to the ideal that access to technology should not incur extra cost for the blind and vision impaired. They believe that the blind should be able to use any kind of technology at the same expense as their sighted peers. Thus, their primary purpose is to support projects and initiatives that provide free and open-source computer software solutions that will bring about accessibility for the blind.

## **NVDA has the following main features:**

1. Ability to run entirely from a USB stick or other portable media without the need for installation.
2. Easy to use talking installer.
3. Browsing the web with Mozilla Firefox 3.
4. Working with email using Mozilla Thunderbird 3.
5. Support for Microsoft Internet Explorer.

6. Basic support for Microsoft Outlook Express/Windows Mail.
7. Support for Microsoft-Word and Email.
8. Support for accessible JAVA applications.
9. Support for Adobe Reader.
10. Early support for IBM Lotus Symphony.
11. Automatic Announcements of text under the mouse and optional audible indication of the position.
12. Support for many refreshable Braille displays.

### **How to Install NVDA**

If you already have the NVDA installer, simply press “enter” “double click” on the file and the installer will start.

As the installer loads, you will hear the NVDA installation music. Once loaded, a temporary copy of NVDA will allow you to follow the prompts of the installer and NVDA will be installed.

On successfully completing the installation, the installer will alert you that the installation has been done. If you happen to be reinstalling NVDA, it may ask you to reboot the system. It is important that you follow the prompt because failing to do so may result in undesirable consequences.

If it did not ask you to reboot, then you should press “finish” to close the installer and start the newly installed version of NVDA.

### **Portable NVDA**

If you have the portable version of NVDA, all you have to do is press “enter” or “double click” on the file, and follow the prompts. It will ask you where on your system you wish to place the files.

## **Getting Started**

To start the portable version of NVDA, press “enter” or “double click” on nvda.exe. As NVDA starts, you will first hear an ascending set of Tones to indicate that NVDA is loading. When NVDA starts for the first time, you will be greeted by a dialog-box which gives you some basic information about the NVDA modifier key and menu.

The dialog-box also contains two checkboxes. The first lets you know whether NVDA should use the caplock as a modifier key while the second lets you know whether the Welcome dialog should appear each time NVDA starts.

## **Packaging**

Currently, there are two ways in which NVDA is packaged. One way is with an installer which will talk you through the installation procedure. You can then run it at any time from the Start Menu.

The other way is through a self-extracting archive file that contains a fully portable version of NVDA. You can run it from anywhere, including a USB thumb drive or CD.

To get a copy of NVDA, go to  
*<http://www.nvda-project.org/wiki/download>*

For further information, go to  
*<http://www.nvda/project.org/>*

# **SBM PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE: HOW TO REMAIN RELEVANT TODAY, PART II**

*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy*

*Editor's note: Ivan Ho was one of the founder-members and the second President of the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM), which is one of the five member-organisations of NCBM. He presented this paper at the "National Seminar to Chart a New Direction for SBM" which was held from 28-30 March, 2010 at the Hotel Sri Malaysia in Bandar Gohtong Jaya of Genting, Pahang.*

*Here is the second part of Ivan's paper:*

## **2. How Can SBM Remain Relevant Today?**

I must admit I know very little about SBM today due to my heavy commitments in NCBM and the World Blind Union Asia-Pacific (WBUAP). Rightly or wrongly, these are my perceptions of SBM at its present stage:

2.1 SBM has expanded to cover almost the entire country with eleven branches. As I know, some of them are not really effective. Therefore, their functions need to be reviewed in order to maximise manpower and other resources to make them work effectively.

2.2 Currently, SBM has around 3,000 ordinary and 1,000 associate members. If I remember clearly, this was about the same number back in the early 1990's. If we were to take the registered blind population of around 21,000, our grassroots support is not very encouraging. SBM must reach out and recruit more members. More efforts should be made to attract successful blind persons to become members.

2.3 To cut down cost is a marvellous practice but not when it affects the organisation in some ways. The staff has increased, membership stands at 5,000, and we are sending out more appeal letters. However, imagine a donor trying to contact the organisation which has just one telephone line. I have on several occasions given up trying to contact SBM for general

information. Of course, we can get everyone on their handphones, but not everybody knows their numbers, especially the donors. Moreover, when you have to contact people on their handphones, this can become somewhat personal.

2.4 The image and appearance of an organisation is very important, especially from first impressions. Walk into the headquarters of SBM and you quickly notice that the place is congested with things piled up everywhere. We do not need a posh place, but we need to create an acceptable image which means the place must be upgraded. We need to think about this matter more seriously.

2.5 SBM is operating many schemes, and several of them are extensions of those that were introduced some years back. The original aims of these schemes were to give members some benefits in order to attract membership, to help them tie-over hard times, and to enable the needy ones to take part in certain excursions. These schemes should now be reviewed so that they may achieve two main objectives – that of empowering members to achieve certain goals, and to assist those who are facing emergency situations such as a fire. Giving merely welfare assistance should be phased out as there are many sources where such assistance can be obtained. For example, the government has introduced several schemes to meet the welfare needs of citizens.

### **3. Expectations And Challenges:**

As SBM moves to celebrate its golden jubilee in 2014, it would be great if we could draw up an action plan which would, amongst other recommendations, take the following points into consideration:

#### **3.1 Membership Recruitment:**

Every effort should be made to increase the membership so that SBM can truly claim to represent the voice of blind people in the country. We must attract successful blind people as well as newly-blinded adults in order to tap their experiences, know-how and connections. We must learn to tap human resources to our advantage. This category of members

is unlikely to seek for welfare benefits. Perhaps it is time to form some special-interest groups like what is being done in the National Federation of the Blind of the U.S.A.

### 3.2 Improve The Image Of SBM:

As blind people become more educated and have higher expectations, we must pay serious attention to how people think of us. When they come to the premises and find the place congested and poorly maintained, they would form a low opinion of the organisation, and consciously or unconsciously, they would accord that status to its leaders.

Corporations spend millions of ringgit to maintain their image. We may be blind, but we should likewise remember to project an acceptable image of ourselves. We should pay attention to our branding although it is not necessary for us to spend a huge amount of money.

### 3.3 Clear Guidelines For Branches:

Let the branches take on the responsibility of running social activities and meeting welfare needs as they know best what their members want. This would leave the Central Office free to concentrate on more serious matters. If certain branches want to provide more welfare benefits to its members than other branches, they could be encouraged to do so without too much interference from the Central Office. In order to fund these activities, however, the Central Office could consider matching such schemes on a Ringgit-for-Ringgit basis. This means that the branches could raise funds but they would have to keep the Central Office informed in order for the matching programme to operate. In this way, the branches would be encouraged to do more in order to get more.

### 3.4 Ensure A Quota Of Participation In Activities:

When activities are participated by the majority from one group, the rest tends gradually to withdraw from such programmes. For instance, if an excursion has mostly men participants, the women may not feel like taking part.

Thus, I suggest that perhaps a system should be worked out whereby 50% of the participants would be Malay, 35% Chinese, and 15% Indian.

If the quota is not taken up, then it could be opened up to anyone. In the same way, gender balance should also be taken into consideration.

### 3.5 Schemes and Services:

All the schemes and services of SBM need to be reviewed to achieve certain objectives. These services should either assist members to be successful or to help them meet emergency situations. Consideration could be given to the idea of sponsoring job training, massage training, ICT literacy, and so on.

Nowadays there are many sources for tapping funds, especially from the government. Indeed, the “subsidy mentality” is almost impossible to eliminate. Nevertheless, SBM should try to discourage the “subsidy mentality” among its members, especially for those who can afford to do without it. Instead, we should promote dignified living, which must be based on rights-based actions in order to succeed. Many of the blind no longer need to depend on SBM for such assistance as medical fees or even benevolent grants.

### 3.6 Skills Training:

It sounds great to conduct Leadership Training but how much can we achieve with such short sessions? Even with such training, do members have the opportunity to become leaders?

I believe it is more important that we focus on producing quality leaders. To do so, we need to equip members with skills. This means that skills training should be given much greater emphasis.

### 3.7 Playing the Advocacy Role:

In order for SBM to play this role effectively, it must have full-time personnel with the appropriate knowledge to execute the decisions more expeditiously. The role of policy-makers and administrators should be clearly defined so that things can move without unnecessary hindrances. Policy-makers should make the decisions and the administrators should carry them out. When there are uncertainties, nobody moves and nobody takes the responsibility.

SBM should work with other organisations genuinely undertaking

difficult projects – the elderly, deaf-blind, etc – so that things can move faster and we can make meaningful contributions. On the other hand, SBM should be brave enough to voice its views such as pointing out shortcomings when certain agencies do not meet their publicised objectives such as Braille production, sale of adaptive equipment, and so on.

In other words, SBM must remember that it is a consumer organisation. As members, therefore, we should exert ourselves in championing the rights of the blind. SBM should take the lead in such issues as promoting Braille literacy, celebrating white-cane day, and speaking out on discriminatory actions.

Certain services were initiated by SBM because of shortcomings by other organisations or we had to prove that SBM was capable of more than just talking. For example, SBM gave active support for Braille production to be undertaken by NCBM when other affiliates did not come forward. After more than ten years, this project is still being questioned. SBM should stand up and put things right once and for all so that the project can move to the next phase of development.

### 3.8 Sense of Belonging:

SBM could explore the feasibility of setting up a cooperative whereby members would hold shares in the project as is done in Thailand. A member would be allotted a certain amount of shares partly funded by the organisation and partly by the members. This would be a much better scheme than giving outright grants to members. Moreover, this would also enable SBM to look into the matter of job creation more seriously.

### 3.9 Advisory Team:

An advisory team should be formed comprising a group of past leaders which would contribute ideas with the aim of keeping the past and the present together. The ideas and views given by the team need not necessarily be accepted by the Management Committee. The main objective is to create another avenue for consultation before major decisions are taken or implemented. This is being done by the Thailand Association of the Blind.

### 3.10 Set Up A Help Unit:

With mobility getting increasingly difficult and expensive, SBM should consider setting up a Help Unit. This unit would assist members in sourcing for information when applying to various schemes of the government and NGO's. This would be especially helpful to the adult blind and to parents with blind children. Perhaps setting up a tele-links service or internet service may be considered.

### 3.11 Active Involvement In WBU And WBUAP:

As SBM was one of the founders of the International Federation of the Blind (IFB), and it was a charter member of the merger with the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind (WCWB) leading to the formation of the World Blind Union (WBU), SBM should now play an active role in the world movement.

WBU's representation comprises at least 50% of movements of the blind. Countries in our region, especially in the ASEAN sub-region, need encouragement from the more well established organisations of the blind. This is an area in which SBM can play an effective role, particularly at this time when self-help movements are beginning to lose their influence and identity by being lumped with the other disabled groups.

It is interesting to note that organisations of the blind in Australia and New Zealand are partly funded by their service-providers. Of course, this type of funding would never be acceptable to the NFB in the U.S.A. as it compromises too much.

### 3.12 Survey:

In order to gauge how members think of SBM, and what ideas they have for the progress of SBM, a simple survey form should be sent out annually in order to get their views. This feedback could be looked at by the advisory team for impartiality.

## **4. Conclusion:**

Although SBM was formed nearly five decades ago, it still has a very

important and significant role to play in changing what it means to be blind. SBM is a consumer group, and if service-providers do not provide quality services, SBM should act.

SBM is the voice of the blind; if it is silenced, we will be left to the whims andfancies of the service-providers whose policy-makers mostly know nothing about blind people before they joined the organisations.

As stated by the immediate Past President of WBU, Dr. William Rowland, “Nothing about us without us”.

Thank you.

## A VERY NARROW ESCAPE

*By David Gip Soong Yew Joe*

***Editor's note: David Gip has faced many challenges in his life as a blind person. In particular, he had a very close shave with death. Here is his story:***

Born in Ipoh, I had a very pleasant childhood. Being the only son with three other sisters, I was naturally given a lot of attention. As I grew older, I became very active in sports, representing my school in athletics and basketball. As a young teenager, I had great ambitions to be successful in my career.

But when I reached fourteen, tragedy struck. I suddenly realised that all my future was gone. My eyes started giving me problems. My vision gradually became dimmer each day due to some nerve problems. Neither I nor my family was aware of this at the time.

One day while I was doing my homework, the eraser suddenly fell from my hand. I heard the eraser rolling on the table but I could not see where it was. So I stretched out both hands to search for the eraser like a blind person. My sister was passing by and saw me and she said in a raised voice, "Why are you so lazy? Why didn't you use your eyes to see?" This made me very sad – I did not understand why I could not see the eraser that was just right in front of me.

After this incident, many more misunderstandings occurred between me and my family, my friends and even my school teachers. Eventually, my parents observed that there were something wrong with my eyesight and brought me to an eye doctor. I remember that evening very clearly – after the doctor had diagnosed my eye condition thoroughly, he asked me to wait outside. After a few minutes, I saw the door open and my mum walked out. I ran quickly to her and asked, "Mummy, what did the doctor tell you?" She did not answer but kept walking towards the door. I followed her from behind. At the door, she stopped at once and looked at me. With tears in her eyes she called my name and said, "Don't worry, I will bring you to see other better doctors until you are completely cured." On hearing the voice of my

mother crying, I could not hold back my tears and soon found myself crying together with her.

Following that episode, my vision became worse each day. Fear struck me and my entire family. My parents were very sad because they loved me very much but could not do anything to help me. Big sums of money had been spent on medication and doctors but nothing could be done.

As time passed by, I could no longer read books or take part in sports. Soon I did not even dare to walk out from my house alone. I felt ashamed of my own condition and wondered how my friends would treat me. Life became more and more miserable and friends began to reject me. I almost gave up hope.

Then in 1988 I received news from my cousin about a special school for the blind in Kuala Lumpur. Within several months, arrangements were made for me to go there and resume my education.

I had to start my life all over again as a blind person. I had to learn A, B, C once again; only this time in Braille. I felt strange mixing around with my new blind friends. It was very depressing having to accept and coming to terms with my new identity as a blind person.

In 1990, I began to involve myself in the youth fellowship of my church as a musician. Several months later, however, I felt I could not do much in the church apart from being a faithful musician. Every time before and after youth meetings, I just sat still in one place feeling very helpless as I observed the other sighted youth running about performing various duties such as cleaning the premises.

So I decided to go to church two hours earlier before the youth service every Saturday to help in stacking the chairs. To me, that was the best time because there was nobody around except one of the church staff. I might bang into the chairs or pillars in the church hall and no one would be looking at me. At first, it was quite difficult to put those heavy cushion chairs on top of one another. They got stuck most of the time. But after a while, I could even throw the chairs on top of one another accurately without any problem.

I always tell my blind friends, “That’s where my first ministry began – the ‘stacking chairs’ ministry.” After a while, I moved on to wiping windows and kitchen cleaning. I enjoyed doing those chores more and more because I always felt good after that.

After completing my form six in 1992, I enrolled for a computer programming course at the Gurney Training Centre, a vocational training programme of the Malaysian Association for the Blind in Kuala Lumpur. During my one and a half years there, I served actively in the Christian Fellowship. Shortly after that, I was asked to lead a small fellowship outside the Centre which consisted of a few blind members who spoke Bahasa Malaysia. As a leader, I had to teach and preach every now and then. I found it quite a challenge because I had no training in these areas of work. Moreover, I did not have a good command of the Malay language. Very often, the members would laugh at my broken Malay.

1995 was a crucial year for me – I had to decide whether to opt for computer programming as my future career or to serve in the Agape Services for the Blind, a very young Christian ministry at the time. After much consideration and prayer, I chose the latter. I had no office for an operating base. My office was my own bedroom which I shared with my room-mate. We had no table, chairs or Braille equipment. All I had was my own personal note-book computer and a telephone. Every morning, I would put my note-book computer on a bucket which served as my working table, while my telephone would be on the floor right beside the bucket.

Later on, I had a proper office with three rooms one of which we turned into a Braille library with one huge metal book-shelf in it. The shelf extended from one end of the room to the other, with its height touching the ceiling. You can imagine how huge and heavy that shelf was!

One day, I had a feeling that I should turn that room into a prayer room where our blind friends could gather and pray. Because I was so used to working alone, and as I was feeling very excited too, I could not wait for anyone to come and help me dismantle that giant angle iron book-shelf. So with one screw-driver and a plier in my hand, I got down to the task.

I began removing those screws holding the various sections of the shelf. I lacked wisdom and put myself in great danger. I did not realise that I had to start removing parts of the shelf from the top first and then slowly work downwards. Instead, I began dismantling from the bottom first. Part by part I was doing it. When I reached the third compartment and as I was trying to remove the metal bars, the giant shelf suddenly tumbled down on me. Instinctively, I caught hold of the sides of that shelf hoping to push it back to the wall.

But my effort was in vain. The weight of the shelf was incredible, pressing me down like a giant on top of me. For about half an hour, I was caught in between and was holding on to that giant shelf without knowing what to do. What a fix I was in! There was no one with me and if I were to scream for help, my neighbour had no key to come in for the rescue. I started to panic and for the first time in my life, I thought that I was going to die!

I prayed hard and suddenly found that I was able to wriggle out from the big mess and to go on dismantling the entire shelf all by myself.

## TRAFFIC DISPERSAL IN BRICKFIELDS

*Editor's note: Blind residents and commuters in Brickfields will surely remember 3 August, 2010 (Tuesday) when they woke up to the reality of speeding and seemingly uncaring traffic along Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad and Jalan Tun Sambanthan. Apparently, the blind had not heard of the implementation of the three-month trial of the one-way street in Brickfields. Consequently, a group of blind persons voiced their protest on Thursday, 5 August in the presence of a representative from the Democratic Action Party (DAP).*

To explain their position, the Malaysian Resources Corporation Bhd (MRCB) had made available to NCBM a collection of articles taken from The Edge Malaysia City and Country, August 2010. The articles have been produced in Braille and the compilation can be obtained from the Malaysian Braille Press, tel: 03-2272 4726.

The following is a summary of the articles concerning the one-way street in Brickfields and other related developments of MRCB in KL Sentral. Here it is:

The main objective of traffic dispersal in Brickfields is to enhance the allure of KL Sentral, crown jewel of Malaysian Resources Corporation (MRCB). According to MRCB's CEO, Mohamed Razeek Hussain, this will ease traffic congestion and ultimately this will make Brickfields into a very accessible area.

The traffic dispersal will be done in five packages.

- (a) Construction of the Jalan Travers flyover which has been completed and launched on 2 August, 2010.
- (b) Conversion of Jalan Tun Sambanthan and Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad into one-way streets in order to reduce waiting time at junctions. In traffic terminology, you have a-grade junctions where there is no waiting time at all. And there are the B, C, D, E and F junctions. An F is a fail while an E means a long waiting time. Currently, most junctions in Brickfields are E and F junctions.

(c) The third package will entail another flyover from lot J, home to the four corporate office towers of MIDA, SSM, UEM Quill. It will move traffic from the external roads of KL Sentral straight to the city via Jalan Damansara and the Mahameru highway.

Both the second and third packages will proceed together, with the second package slated for completion in 12 months while the third one will be completed in 14 months.

(d) Construction of pedestrian bridges in Brickfields and KL Sentral.

(e) The fifth package will involve upgrading and road repairs at KL Sentral.

The packages fall under the RM110 million stimulus package meant to ease traffic woes in Brickfields and Bangsar.

“I would like to clear up the misconception that KL Sentral is choc-a-bloc with traffic on a daily basis when it’s not, especially after we complete our first to fifth packages of traffic dispersal. You will see the traffic reticulation around the area is going to be very accessible,” says Razeek. “The re-routing of traffic was decided upon after a lot of research and recommendation by traffic consultants, not according to our whims and fancies,” he adds.

### **Little India:**

MRCB is also working on the beautification of Brickfields by upgrading the vistas to a Little India, where the public spaces, proposed arches, streetscape and new structures will be infused with a vernacular architecture.

Costing RM35 million, the first phase of works started in July 2010 and is expected to be ready by October, in time for the expected visit of Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh to Malaysia.

Besides upgrading the roads and building pedestrian walkways, a hawker centre will be built on the road reserves.

### **Developments in KL Sentral**

KL Sentral, crown jewel of MRCB, took off with the launch of Stesen

Sentral, Plaza Central offices and condominiums. Now the transport hub is moving to a new level with significant developments, especially its “green” mall, NU Sentral.

KL Sentral’s integrated development is valued at RM12 billion. KL Sentral is located on a 28.8 hectare site and it is just a 20-minute drive from the central business district, which has a market of about 3.5 million people.

### **NU Sentral**

The retail launch of NU Sentral took place on 6 August. It is coming up on Lot G (8.5 acres) opposite the Hilton KL and Le Meridien hotels. Besides the mall, Lot G will also feature three office towers and a hotel.

The mall comes with green features to reduce energy consumption, with lighting and ventilation designed to achieve this goal. It also has emissivity glass to prevent the build-up of hot air in the building, which gives rise to the greenhouse effect. It will probably be Malaysia’s first green mall.

Its anchor tenant is Parkson. The mall will also house a supermarket, electronics and IT centre, a cinema, bowling centre, karaoke lounge and amusement centre, as well as a hobbies and leisure section. Food and beverage outlets, clothing stores and an event area will be included.

### **GSB Sentral or Lot 348**

Currently under construction, the Leed Gold-Certified building comprises an office tower and 143 residential units. It is being developed by GSB Sentral Sdn. Bhd, a joint venture between Gamuda Sdn. Bhd. and MRCB.

### **St Regis Hotel and Residences**

This will be a six-star, 200-room hotel. St. Regis is renowned for its hospitality, epitomised by its butler service. The hotel will be completed by 2015.

## **KL Sentral Park**

With mixed development comprising transport hubs, hotels, shopping complexes, five office towers, condominiums and green areas spanning 982,000 sq feet, it is touted as a campus office park. The park will see MRCB introducing its connected real estate (CRE) product, which is quite simply an IT platform that supports all the necessary technology in communications. This project is slated for completion by 2011.

## **Lot D**

On Lot D will be 722 luxury serviced apartments housed in 50-storey towers. The area provides views of the National Museum, Lake Gardens and the city centre.

## **Lot F**

This is the last piece of land in KL Sentral to be developed – a 5.7 acre parcel next to NU Sentral. Work will start in 2013 and completed in 2016. It will probably be designated for three commercial office towers.

## A POINT TO PONDER: TEAM SPIRIT

*By Wong Kow*

Thanks to the advancement of modern science and technology, we are now able to receive news from almost every part of the world without much delay. Nevertheless, it seems to me that much of the news we are getting is not good news. It is not uncommon for us to hear of bombings, conflicts, racism, terrorism, killings or murders, destruction of lives and property – they occur every day and everywhere. And they are often the result of greed, jealousy, dishonesty, mistrust, and so on.

In spite of this gloomy scenario, nonetheless, perhaps it may be fair to say that not all news is actually bad news. Occasionally, we do hear of happy news such as the saving of a life at a hospital operation theatre due to the pains-taking and utmost efforts of a team of more than ten surgeons. In the next minute, however, the contrasting news depicted on television is stark and frightening – a bomb blast has killed hundreds of people or the entire village or town may have been destroyed by the monstrous weapons of a super-power.

As I reflect on these things, I am reminded of an ancient Chinese poem written more than 1,800 years ago. In the narrative poem, the elder son of a ruler became jealous of his younger brother simply because the latter appeared to be a genius. Looking for a way to put his younger brother to death, the elder brother commanded him to complete a poem within the time limit that he would take to walk seven paces. If he failed, he would lose his life.

Surprisingly, before the elder brother could finish counting seven, the young lad, who was barely ten years old, had produced his poem and he read it out loud:

“When you fry the beans, you unknowingly use the tree trunk of the beans as firewood to set fire. But do you realise that the beans are crying helplessly in the pan?

We have been growing up from the same roots;

Why are you burning me so hurriedly?”

Thus, the younger brother managed to escape death because of his excellent poetry.

Human beings are supposed to be the masters of all other creatures in this world. However, I guess we could learn a thing or two from the following folk tale about the dog, the cat, the mouse and the bird.

Once upon a time the dog and the cat were good friends in their master’s house. The master had in his possession a very precious diamond ring; one day this precious ring was stolen by a thief.

The dog and the cat were asked by their master to help find the ring. The two creatures walked closely together and hunted for the ring. With his keen sense of smell, the dog was able to sniff his way to the ring; it was hanging somewhere under the roof of the house and it was tied up with string. The dog told the cat to help out but the string was too tough for the cat to snatch away the ring. So the cat got the assistance of the mouse which bit the string and, within minutes, was able to hand over the ring to the cat. The cat handed the ring to the dog because he could run faster and would be able to return the ring to the master without delay.

As the dog and the cat ran past the wooden bridge, a piece of bone floating in the stream caught the attention of the dog. Feeling hungry and forgetting that he had the diamond ring in his mouth, the dog tried to bite the bone and immediately the ring dropped into the water and was swallowed by a fish.

They were feeling very helpless – the dog could not catch the fish while the cat could not swim at all. Fortunately, the cat remembered his good friend, the king-fisher; so he called upon the bird for help which caught the fish and the ring was secured. This time the dog made no further mistakes and the ring was brought safely back to the master.

The master was very pleased and would have rewarded all the four animals, had he known of their fantastic teamwork. Unfortunately, the dog was too greedy and wanted all the reward for himself. So he lied to the master that

he was the one who found the ring and that the cat had done nothing at all.

Eventually, the master found out the truth and he decided to punish the dog by setting upon him the task of guarding the house and property for the rest of his life. As for the cat, he was rewarded with the freedom to stay in the house and go wherever he pleased.

Thus, even up till today, the dog, the cat, the mouse and the bird can never stay harmoniously together. They need that team spirit, as demonstrated in the story, in order to achieve harmony and happiness as one community.

Ah, how wonderful life would be if human beings, other living creatures and all non-living things could co-exist with one another through mutual love, understanding and respect.

Truly, like the dog in the story, we human beings have been charged with the responsibility of ensuring that team spirit does not fail; if we are greedy like the dog, there will be no team spirit and the earth may be destroyed before we wake up from our slumber.

So let us get up the team spirit and give everyone and everything the chance to savour the beauty of this life and existence.

## QUOTATIONS FOR REFLECTION

The following quotations are taken from the book, “Opening the door of your heart” by Ajahn Brahm, a British Buddhist monk:

“Everything that can be known can fit into your mind. Your mind must be the biggest thing in the world.”

“When is the most important time? – Now. Who is the most important person? – The one you are with. What is the most important thing to do? – To care.”

“Wanting has no end to it. Contentment is the only time you have enough.”

“Two kinds of freedom can be found in our world: The freedom of desire is people’s freedom to realise their desires as far as is possible; it is remarkable that such people do not feel very free. Conversely, the freedom from desire celebrates contentment and peace; people feel free.”

“Real freedom is freedom from desire; never freedom of desire.”

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