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DEVELOPMENTS IN NCBM AND WORK FOR THE BLIND 2009, 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 NCBM Outreach" of January – March 2011. It is based on the NCBM Annual Report of 2009. Here is the second part:

2. ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL

2.1 The NCBM Tun Hussein Onn Award

The 2009 Award Ceremony was held on 12th December 2009. The Guest of Honour was Pn. Rozia Hanis Tun Hussein and she handed over the Gold Medallion to Mr. Samat Lakai in recognition of his many contributions to NCBM, SHSB and the blind people of Sabah for the past 30 over years.

The Panel of Judges, consisting of one representative from each of the five member-organisations, was headed by Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan. Our heartiest congratulations to Samat and our heartfelt thanks to Datuk Ambiga.

2.2 Promoting Braille Literacy

Whilst the provision of Braille textbooks is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, NCBM is doing its part to encourage the reading habit among the blind students by donating Braille story-books to the primary and secondary schools. NCBM has recruited part-timers and volunteers and got Scope International (part of the StanChart Group) as sponsor of the project.

2.3 Promoting Massage for the Blind

Following the dialogue with 80 over practising masseurs in March 2009 and organising of the International Therapeutic Massage Seminar in Penang last April, a task force headed by Dato' Dr. Hsiung Kwo Yeun looked into all aspects of the trade. The group has subsequently drawn up a paper containing proposals for NCBM to be brought to the attention of the Government or member-organisations for appropriate action.

Realising that the Government had decided to monitor and register practitioners of traditional and complementary medicine, the task force met with Dr. Ramli, Director, Ministry of Health, on 27th August, and one of the major decisions was that MOH would recognise NCBM as the Body coordinating the Promotion of Massage for the Blind, and for NCBM to get the blind masseurs to comply with the criteria for registration as part of the Traditional and Complementary Medicine in this country.

2.4 The ICTA Seminar 2009

As a follow-up to the National Accessibility Conference: Bridging the Digital Divide (held in 2008), NCBM decided to organise such events on a regional basis aimed at specific groups. Thus, NCBM in collaboration with SNH, Universiti Sains Malaysia and the Software Consortium of Penang organised the two-day event from 30th September 2009 at the USM auditorium. Over 100 participants in Penang took part. Three blind persons from overseas as well as local blind persons with interest and expertise on ICT Accessibility were invited to make presentations. It is gratifying to learn that ten lecturers from the School of Computer Sciences of USM participated in both the seminar and workshop. Consequently, the lecturers have started taking action to introduce accessibility elements in their projects such as giving additional marks for projects with universal access, and making available funding for research into solutions for disabled persons. This seminar was funded by NCBM while USM provided the venue and logistic support.

2.5 World Sight Day-cum-White Cane Day Celebrations

Following the decision by Exco to rotate the venue for the event, SNH accepted the challenge at short notice and put up a splendid show on 10th October 2009 by combining the two events at the Gurney Plaza. There were around 400 participants consisting mainly of staff, residents, volunteers and supporters of SNH. Mr. Daniel Soon, a member of the SNH Board, delivered the welcoming speech on behalf of Bishop Andrew Phang, and Dato' Kulasegaran gave a speech highlighting the significance of WSD, the need for public awareness of eye diseases, and the involvement of the Government in preventing avoidable and treatable blindness.

The Guest of Honour was YB Kway Teng Hai, the State Assemblyman for Pulau Tikus. He flagged off the walk which involved 300 blind and sighted persons to mark the White Cane Day. Other activities of the day included eye screening by the Bukit Mertajam hospital, exhibitions by vendors of health and eye-care companies, and the services of SNH. Visitors at the Plaza were entertained by the Recycled Contemporary Band and a Lion Dance by the staff and trainees of SNH.

To attract the participation of visitors, the Organising Committee under the chairmanship of Mr. Thangaveloo organised lucky draws and a quiz session on eye care and diseases.

2.6 The NCBM Sports Carnival 2009

With competitive sports being open to only a few selected blind persons, calls had been received for opportunities to be made available to more blind people to participate in recreational activities on the national level. As a result, the first NCBM Sports Carnival 2009 was held from 11-12th July, and it was almost single-handedly organised by SBM at the Bukit Kiara Sports Complex. Over 180 persons (volunteers and competitors) from the five member-organisations participated. The seven games played were chess, carroms, darts, draughts, scrabble, ping pong and ten-pin bowling.

The President, Dato' S. Kulasegaran, donated a challenge trophy for the Carnival which was won by SBM. The total cost came up to RM28,731.

2.7 Friendly Golf and Ten-pin Bowling Meet

To mark the White Cane Day in K.L., a friendly golf demo and ten-pin bowling meet was organised at the Bukit Jalil Golf Resort on 15th October. The President gave a very rousing address on the Importance of the White Cane to blind people, and the need for the Government and general public to be sensitive to the needs of blind people for the freedom to move around in a barrier-free environment. He urged NCBM and member-organisations to take the lead in making the White Cane Day an annual affair and to use this occasion to create the needed publicity on blindness-related issues.

The golf demo involved 32 blind and sighted golfers (16 from Hong Kong, 14 from Malaysia and 2 from Australia). The ten-pin bowling took place the following day at the Ampang Bowl. 24 players, grouped into six teams with mixed players from three participating countries, took nearly three hours to complete all the games.

2.8 The NCBM-IBSA Shooting Seminar

The Sports Committee, through the International Blind Sports Association, has introduced another sport for the blind in this country with the organising of the NCBM-IBSA Shooting Seminar at the Shah Village Hotel from 13-15th April 2009. The event received much media publicity.

3. ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS ON THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Participation in international activities is very costly but, in some cases, they are very important for the purpose of sharing knowledge and for networking. Thus, every request for attending international activities has to be scrutinised by Exco before approval is given.

3.1 8th IBSA General Assembly

The chairman of the Sports and Recreational Committee, Dr. Radha Krishnan, led a delegation to the assembly in Turkey from 1-4th April 2009. The assembly held its elections and returned Mr. Michael Barredo from Philippines as the President. They also elected continental chairpersons and Dr. Radha Krishnan retained his position as Asia Continental Chairman. The assembly also adopted several motions for the effective running of IBSA.

3.2 The WBUAP-DAB Visionary Conference

This was held in Vientiane from 4-8th May 2009 and it was attended by nine countries which comprised the sponsors from Denmark, the WBUAP Board, prospective countries for assistance, and the two countries benefiting from the current project – Laos and Mongolia. The purpose of the conference was to assess the progress of the present Capacity-Building Project which

ended in December 2009, to determine which of the SEARC countries could be the next project partners, and to give recommendations for preparing a new project proposal to source funding from the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). For this purpose, the participants adopted the Vientiane Visionary statement which sets out in broad outlines the aspirations and determination of the WBUAP Board and DAB to achieve the points contained therein.

An evaluation conference was held in Mongolia in mid-September 2009 to assess the progress made by Laos and Mongolia between 2006 and 2009. Another conference held in Malaysia in December 2009 completed an application to DANIDA for a second project to continue the work in Laos and Mongolia, and to extend some of the benefits to other countries in this region. The application amounting to US\$1.5 million had since been approved. These conferences were sponsored by DANIDA.

3.3 The WBUAP-South-East Sub-Regional Meeting

The Chairman of SEASRC, Dato' S. Kulasegaran, convened the meeting on 4th May in which seven countries from this sub-region were present with representatives from Japan as observers. This was an excellent opportunity for the members to exchange information about the various activities and programmes in the respective countries and to network with each other. At the conclusion of the meeting, a quadrennium plan of action (QPA) for SEASRC was adopted based on the one adopted by WBUAP. Each country agreed to appoint a coordinator to liaise with the WBU and WBUAP secretariats, and to implement the other provisions of the QPA where possible.

It was also agreed that the Chairman and Secretary-General should lobby strongly for the new WBUAP-DAB project (beginning in 2011) to involve Myanmar, Indonesia and Vietnam in the order of priority, and Philippines, Timor Leste and Brunei if more funds could be made available.

3.4 Visit to Myanmar

Dato' Kulasegaran, as Chairman of SEASRC, and Ivan Ho, as Secretary-General of WBUAP, visited Myanmar from 20-23rd December 2009. Long

discussions were held with the representatives from the Education Centre for Blind Affairs (ECBA) and the Myanmar National Association of the Blind (MNAB). The effort in persuading ECBA to work with MNAB met with success when it agreed to join the national organisation.

MNAB has made good progress within the last few years. They have helped with the training of masseurs, setting up of massage centres and forming an ICT Committee with the aim of teaching computer skills to blind users and teachers of the blind. MNAB has also drawn up an action plan to teach blindness-specific skills to people having connections with blind people, public awareness activities and creating employment opportunities.

A MEMORABLE GENERAL KNOWLEDGE LESSON

By Moktar Soon

Editor’s note: It is impossible to capture the total humor and vibrance of the following story just by reading it. Nevertheless, Moktar Soon has tried to remain as close as possible to the actual experience of his Memorable General Knowledge Lesson as he related it to us one day. While he brought out roars of laughter from us, I hope this article will also bring out some smiles to your faces.

Let us share Moktar’s interesting experience:

I remember very well the day when I was a blind pupil in standard three at St. Nicholas School for the Blind in Penang – this was some time during the 1960’s. We were already half way into the General Knowledge period but the teacher still had not turned up for the lesson.

Suddenly, there was a knocking on the class-room door and, to our surprise, we heard the high-pitched sing-song tone of our very own matron, Miss Perelle, wishing us “good morning” and asking us, “Have you been good children?” I heard a lot of noise.

Then she asked, “What lesson are you having now?”

When we replied, “General Knowledge,” she said, “Oh, General Knowledge is very important. General Knowledge is about this world. Do you know what is in this world?”

We were stunned because no one had ever asked us this question. “Come on,” she said in her sing-song voice, “Can you tell me what is in this world?”

“St. Nicholas School is in this world,” someone said.

“Yes, yes, St. Nicholas is in this world,” she said. “What else is in this world?”

“Cars and lorries,” someone else said.

“Yes, yes, you have cars and lorries in this world,” she said. “What else is in this world?”

Then one of the boys, Peter Pandian, shouted out, “Grass!”

“Yes, yes, what’s the colour of grass?” She asked.

“Green,” Pandian replied.

“Get the grass,” she sang out. “Go and get the grass!”

“From the field?” Pandian asked.

“Yes, get the grass from the field into the class-room,” she said.

So Peter Pandian went out and got a pile of grass and laid it on the teacher’s table.

“What else is in this world?” Miss Perelle asked again.

“Sand,” someone cried eagerly.

“What is sand used for?” She asked.

“Buildings and houses,” we replied. “For schools like St. Nicholas!”

“Yes, yes, sand is used for buildings, houses and schools,” she said. “So get the sand. Get the sand into the class-room!”

One of the boys went out to get the sand and put it on the teacher’s table.

“What else is in this world?” She asked again.

“Leaves,” someone cried out.

“Where can you find the leaves?” She asked. “On the trees,” we replied.

“So get the leaves,” she sang out again. “Go and get the leaves into the class-room!”

Another pupil rushed out and got the leaves and put them on the teacher’s table.

By this time we were all feeling very tickled and wondering what this was all about. Then she asked again, “What else is in this world?”

We thought we had mentioned everything and could not think of anything else.

“Come on, tell me what else is in this world?” She pressed on. “There are so many things in this world. God has put so many things in this world.”

Suddenly, one of the children cried out, “The sea!”

“Yes, yes,” she encouraged. “The sea is in this world. What is in the sea?”

The children cried out, “Sea water!”

“What else is in the sea?” She asked.

“Sand!” The children cried out.

“Yes, you have sand in the sea. What else is in the sea?” She sang out.

“Stones and leaves!” The children cried.

Then, to our astonishment, Miss Perelle sang out, “Get the sea! Someone go and get the sea into the class-room!”

We started asking one another, “How to get the sea? How to get the sea into the class?”

Suddenly, one of the boys, Paul Keong, laughed out loudly and exclaimed, “How to get the sea? Ayoh! How to get the sea?”

Then the other boys and girls joined in, “Eh, how to get the sea? How to get the sea?”

Suddenly, I had an idea and I suggested getting a pail, filling it up with water and then putting in some sand, stones and leaves.

“Yes, yes, that’s a clever boy! Now Moktar and Pandian, you go and get the sea!” She said.

So we both went to the bath-room and got the bucket of water. Then we went into the field to look for some sand, stones and leaves.

As we laid the pail on the teacher’s table, Miss Perelle said, “That’s the sea! You have brought the sea into the class-room! Here’s the sea!”

Then she said to the class, “Now come to the teacher’s table and feel the world! Feel the world!”

As we were touching the grass, sand and stones on the table and dipping our hands into the little sea of water, the bell rang. Miss Perelle said, “I hope you enjoyed the lesson, children. Now you know there are so many things in this world. See you next time.”

A few minutes after the matron had left, the next teacher, Miss Catherine Cheong, came into the class-room. “What’s all this mess on the table?” She asked. “Who put this mess here?”

The children explained that they had a General Knowledge Lesson with the matron. “She asked us to bring in the grass, sand and stones.”

“Can someone please clear this rubbish?” Miss Cheong said with sternness and irritation in her voice.

THE 2011 BUDGET AND ITS PROVISIONS FOR THE POOR AND DISABLED

By Ooi Hock Tiam

The 2011 Budget was tabled in Parliament on Friday, 15th October 2010. Here are some of the issues that may be of interest to the disabled as follows:

1. Community Development

The overall budget allocation for the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development has been increased from RM800 million to RM1.2 billion. This is an increase by about 50% and should, therefore, be good for Community Development. However, this will depend upon how this increased budget is to be used by the Ministry to bring about policies and programmes that are aimed at benefiting disabled persons. The question is whether the Ministry will simply use the increased allocation on creating more bureaucracy.

2. Aid for the Disabled

In fact, RM218 million has actually been set aside to provide aid for the disabled. In view of this allocation, the Disabled Workers' Allowance (or EPC) may be raised from RM300 or else the Ministry may simply consider increasing the current salary margin of RM1,200 per month to a higher level.

Generally, it is expected that the estimated number of disabled persons benefiting from this allocation will increase from the current number of 38,000 persons to about 80,000 in the foreseeable future. In order to cater for this increase, it is my guess that the Ministry will probably go for the second option of increasing the salary margin rather than raising the quantum of RM300.

3. Working Environment

RM30 million has been set aside for the purpose of providing a more conducive working environment for disabled women in particular. It is not

clear what is meant by this. Probably, the Government may be thinking of providing better nursery care for pregnant women or they are considering providing better facilities for working mothers who are disabled.

4. Excise Duty on Local Cars

This provision has been abolished and it will affect only the physically disabled who have been enjoying this benefit. The blind did not enjoy this benefit even if they may have had cars registered under their own names.

Under the provision of 50% exemption from excise duty, the amount of money exempted from payment ranged from about RM4,000 to about RM9,000 for the most expensive local car. The physically disabled will no longer be able to enjoy this benefit.

5. Low-cost Housing

RM570 million will be allocated for the building of low-cost houses. The disabled will be entitled to a discount of 20% on such housing.

6. Corporate Social Responsibility

RM70 million will be allocated for Corporate Social Responsibility. The objective is to encourage the Corporate sector and the NGO's to work in partnership with the view to creating more employment opportunities and better facilities for the disabled. This sounds like a very good idea but we hope it will be translated into positive action on the ground.

7. Sales Tax

With the abolition of the Sales Tax, there is some good news. For example, the disabled who are becoming increasingly dependent on the handphone will be happy to find the prices of such commodities dropping by about 10%.

On the other hand, the bad news for everybody is that the Sales Tax on all services will be increased from 5% to 6%. In other words, telephone bills and even things like Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald's will see a rise of 1% on the Service Tax.

8. Astro Television

There is another piece of bad news for the disabled who depend on Astro TV for information and entertainment. They will now have to pay an increase of 6% on their monthly Astro TV bills.

Nevertheless, we appreciate the move that has been taken by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development to negotiate with Astro Service to provide a discount for disabled users. Let us hope the Ministry meets with success.

On the whole, there appears to be quite a number of provisions in the 2011 Budget which are aimed at benefiting the disabled. However, with the 6% increase on Sales Tax and a further 6% increase on the monthly Astro TV bills, all the benefits to be provided are outweighed by the bad news.

Let us hope for a better Budget to come as Malaysia makes advances to become a developed nation by the year 2020.

ACCESS BARRIERS IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Now in our modern times, the blind are able to take part in the economic and social life of the community by taking advantage of the amenities and facilities being provided for the use and comfort of society. In fact, many of the blind are availing themselves of the opportunities created by economic and technological developments which are taking place at a rapid rate.

In so doing, the blind are faced with many new challenges, particularly with regards to the inaccessible barriers and hazardous obstacles in the built environment. Although the Government has made an effort to initiate user-friendly features for the blind, especially in the new buildings and infrastructure in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, the implementation of such projects has been found to be unsatisfactory and quite disappointing.

Reasons for Poor Implementation

While Government efforts at initiating a barrier-free environment for the blind and all disabled persons in general are very much appreciated, I feel that some reasons for poor implementation could be due to the following:

1. Lack of Cooperation

There seems to be a lack of cooperation between the local authorities and the Government-linked agencies providing services such as Telekom Malaysia Berhad and Tenaga Nasional Berhad. Consequently, there is no proper planning so that street furniture is not placed systematically.

2. Cost-cutting

This could be another important factor. Both the contractors and the implementers want to reduce expenditure as much as possible and so they cut corners. Thus, the user-friendly features tend to be left out or *they are* wrongly implemented.

3. Ignorance of Existing Documents

Engineers and contractors in particular may be unaware of the existence of documents that can provide a good guide in the development of user-friendly features for the blind and disabled persons in general. They probably do not know that there are a number of codes of practice in existence which provide specifications for user-friendly features when putting up new buildings or infrastructure.

4. Lack of Consultation

There seems to be a lack of consultation with the blind and disabled in general before user-friendly projects are implemented. The situation has improved somewhat and there is now some consultation with the disabled by the relevant authorities. However, the disabled would actually like to be involved in the decision-making process.

Basic Requirements Concerning User-friendly Features for the Blind

The main user-friendly features required by the blind are as follows:

1. All Open Drains Should Be Covered

Suitable materials should be used to cover the drains. For example, concrete should be used to cover the drains instead of metal grills which have gaps in between them. The grills impede travel by wheelchair-users while the white canes of the blind may fall through the gaps into the drain.

2. Pedestrian Walkways

These walkways should have no obstacles on them for at least a five-foot wide space. I believe this regulation has been instituted in law but it is often not observed.

In addition, the height of the pavement should not be more than 10” from the road level. Wherever appropriate, gently sloping ramps should be provided which will benefit not only the blind but the wheelchair-users as well.

3. Street Furniture

Such furniture should be arranged on the outer side of the pavement or outside the edge of the five-foot path.

Examples of street furniture are lamp-posts, telephone booths, sign-boards, advertisement boards, etc.

4. Traffic Lights

A sound device should be installed in the traffic lights so that they can signal when the light is green for crossing the road. There should also be a sound locator to enable the blind user to identify the press button easily in order to cross the road. A fail-safe system should also be installed so that when either the light or sound does not work, both will cease to function at the same time. In this way, the blind or deaf will not be misled into crossing the road when only one of the signals is working.

5. Overhead Bridge or Underpass

Where there are no traffic lights because of a busy road or highway with six lanes or more, such bridges or passes should be provided. If possible, a lift or escalator should also be provided. However, where there are many pedestrians using the road, then the underpass would be the best choice. Not only will the blind feel it safer to use the underpass but maintenance would also be easier.

6. Colour Contrast

The contrasting of colours from wall to floor would be very helpful for low-vision persons. Colour contrast should also be used so that objects or protrusions from the wall and even ceiling can be clearly identified by low-vision persons. In addition, the writing on sign-boards and other signage should be big and clear with suitable colour contrast to help this group of persons.

7. Tactile Blocks

Two kinds of blocks or tiles are used to help blind commuters and pedestrians – the tiles with straight lines on the surface are known as the guiding blocks while the tiles with rounded knobs on the surface are known as the warning blocks. These lines and knobs should protrude at least 5 mm above the surface of the tile or block. In order for the knobs to be easily identified by the blind person as he walks, they should be rounded on their tops rather than flattened and it would be helpful if they could be slightly raised a little higher than the straight lines (perhaps 6 mm above the surface of the tile).

Problems of Access

Some of the common problems faced by the blind with regards to access include the following:

1. Broken pavements.
2. Uncut tree branches protruding into the walkway.
3. Uncovered drains.
4. Water-pipes and even water-meters obstructing the walkway.
5. Lack of pavements so that blind pedestrians walk off the road right into the drain.
6. No railings to prevent blind pedestrians falling from high drop-offs on to the street below.
7. Ramps in particular that do not use non-slip material so that the blind can slip easily and falls, especially when the surface is wet.

DBKL as Exemplary Model

Indeed, we are most grateful to DBKL for having led the way as an exemplary model in providing user-friendly features for the blind and disabled persons

in general by initiating the barrier-free project in 2004 in the Brickfields area in Kuala Lumpur. The attention of DBKL was alerted when the President of MAB, the late Senator Datuk Dr. Ismail Salleh, raised the issue at the Deepavali dinner for the blind given by the former Minister of Works, Dato' Samy Vellu. With the introduction of the user-friendly features in Brickfields such as tactile blocks, traffic lights with sound and gently sloping ramps, the pilot project in Brickfields became an excellent model to be followed by other local authorities. Subsequently, in 2009, another pilot project was initiated by the MPPJ in Petaling Jaya.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of monitoring and maintenance, the problems in Brickfields soon became evident. Indeed, the problem still exist and they include:

1. Tactile guides which are not straight with sharp corners.
2. Sign-boards which have been placed too close to the tactile guides. The sign-boards were initially removed to positions that would not obstruct the pathway of the blind pedestrian but they were later on put back in those positions where they become hazardous to the blind.
3. The earth-wire of lightning rod that is too close to the tactile blocks or the wire even criss-crosses the tactile guides.
4. Warning blocks that are right at the edge of an opening, especially the monorail and LRT railway tracks. At least three blind persons have fallen into the tracks and got badly hurt.
5. Lamp-posts that are right on top of the tactile guides, thereby obstructing the pathway of the blind commuter. This is a good example that shows the lack of planning and cooperation between the local authorities and the service-provider such as TNB.
6. Negative attitude of the public as evidenced by rubbish heaps on the tactile blocks, motor-cycles on the tactile blocks, motor-cars parked near the tactile blocks, and even chairs placed on top of the tactile blocks.

Suggestions

1. Public education from an early age, especially in the civics course or in the extracurricular activities, can help to bring about awareness of the needs of the blind for a barrier-free environment.
2. Public awareness through the mass media would help the public to have a better understanding of the issues with regards to the needs of the blind for a barrier-free environment.
3. Awareness articles in professional journals would be helpful in exposing the engineers, architects and other designers to the needs of the blind.
4. More blind persons should be equipped with knowledge and skills pertaining to access and the barrier-free environment through special courses with proper certification. These blind persons would then be able to contribute with their expertise as access audit inspectors. Such courses are important to ensure that the blind involved in access auditing would have similar ideas and concepts with regards to access and the barrier-free environment.
5. Observance of the traffic code by motorists when they see a blind person with the white cane should be practised. This used to be practised by motorists in the old days. Perhaps one way of instilling this awareness of the code is to make sure that new drivers know about it for the test in order to qualify for the driver's license.
6. Monitoring and enforcement should be on-going and the process should start right from the beginning when plans are being made for the construction of new buildings and infrastructure.
7. Proper and regular maintenance should be carried out by the relevant authorities. Quality materials should be used in construction so that they will be durable, thereby requiring less maintenance checks which means less expense. For example, good tiles should be used for the tactile guides so that they need not be frequently replaced.

As someone has said, “Good things don’t come cheap; cheap things don’t come good”.

8. Last but not least, disabled persons should be invited to serve on the Technical Committee for the vetting process of applications for new buildings. Such a Committee has been set up by the Majlis Bandar Petaling Jaya (MBPJ) and it is hoped that other local authorities will emulate their good example.

Conclusion

Needless to say, a barrier-free environment will benefit not only the blind but everyone else in society such as the senior citizens, pregnant women, mothers pushing baby prams, and so on.

NEWS FROM THE MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

One Way Street in Brickfields

At the meeting with the Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) and the Malaysian Resources Company (MRCB) on 18th November 2010, some concerns were raised by MAB with regards to the implementation of the one-way street in Brickfields. However, MRCB confirmed that the project to implement the one-way street was already on track and, therefore, it had to go ahead.

In doing so, nonetheless, they had taken into account the needs of the blind and other needy groups with the idea of providing four bridges at important crossings. Two of these bridges will be fitted with lifts.

They say that once the bridges have been installed, all traffic lights, even those with sound, will be removed. The objective is to facilitate the smooth flow of traffic while at the same time making it safe for pedestrians to cross the streets via the bridges.

Subsequently, we were also informed that the edges of the pavements will be planted with grass and plants. While one idea is to separate the safety zone for pedestrians from the road of moving traffic, the other idea is also in keeping with the global trend of going green.

New KTM Stations

On 23rd December 2010, disabled representatives from a number of organisations (including MAB) were invited to a meeting by Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM). The purpose was for the disabled to give their comments on the adequacy of the user-friendly features being provided by KTM at five of their new train stations from Sentul to Batu Caves. The features included tactile guides, ramps and talking-lifts.

In fact, the five new stations are at Sentul, Taman Wahyu (Jalan Kuching), Kampong Baru, Batu Kentomen and Batu Caves. Subsequently, it was reported on RTM that the Government may be considering providing a cable-car to Batu Caves which is expected to cost about RM10 million.

Seven Disabled Categories

In a newspaper report, it was made known that the Government had decided to categorise the disabled into seven categories. Formerly, there were only four main categories – the blind, deaf, physically disabled and the learning disabled. The three new categories are the speech impaired, the mentally disabled and the multi-disabled.

Ten Green Pockets in Kuala Lumpur

The elderly Blind Club has been organising walks to various destinations on Wednesday mornings. They have walked to the K.L. Tower, Taman Jaya in Petaling Jaya and to the Mid-Valley Mall.

According to a newspaper report, there are ten green pockets which may be interesting destinations for the blind walkers. They are the Forest Research Institute in Kepong, the Dato' Keramat Lake Garden, the Bukit Nanas Forest Reserve at Jalan Raja Chulan's Sentul Park in Jalan Ipoh, Taman Metropolitan in Kepong, Taman Tasek Titiwangsa at Jalan Tun Razak, Tasek

Taman Bandar Permaisuri in Cheras, Taman Tasek Metropolitan Batu in Jalan Ipoh, Taman Pudu Ulu, and Templer's Park in Rawang.

MAB Dialogue With MRCB

On 2nd March 2011, the MAB Executive Director, George Thomas, made a few observations at the dialogue with MRCB. He raised the following points:

1. Lack of Safety Measures on construction sites in Brickfields

Either there were no barricades or they were haphazardly placed with open gaps so that the construction sites posed a danger to pedestrians, especially the blind commuters.

2. Tactile Guides

The tactile blocks were not positioned in a continuous line and the materials used were not according to the given guidelines in the Malaysian standards.

3. Restricted Area for the Blind

User-friendly features were being concentrated in one area, i.e. from K.L. Sentral to Kompleks MAB, because it was assumed that the only destination for the blind was Kompleks MAB. MRCB did not understand that the blind, like other people, had the same needs and, therefore, had to travel to various destinations in order to work or to carry out other duties or errands or just simply to spend their leisure time.

4. Bus-Stops and Taxi-Stands

Special indications at bus-stops and taxi-stands such as a buzzer, railings, etc. would help to enhance the mobility of the blind as independent commuters and travellers.

5. Overhead Bridges and Zebra Crossings

In certain areas, installation of Zebra Crossings and traffic lights with sound would be much less costly than putting up overhead bridges. Moreover, if lifts were to be provided, this would make maintenance quite costly. In fact, most pedestrians, including the blind, would probably prefer to take the risk of crossing the street even without traffic lights (as this would take only about a minute) rather than climbing up and down the bridge. And what about the security risks of taking the lift such as thieves, gropers and breakdowns?

6. Need for Consultation

If the dialogue with MRCB had been held much earlier, many of the issues would have been ironed out. Now MAB could only alert MRCB to the problems that may arise when the developments have been completed. MRCB promised to look into the matters raised and see what rectifications could be made.

DBKL Heritage Walk in Brickfields

On 5th March 2011 (Saturday), a number of blind persons joined the heritage walk in Brickfields. According to the guide, the walk was first being organised for the public on alternative Saturdays. This was the second walk being organised.

Some interesting historical facts about Brickfields were made known to the group. Brickfields got its name because in the 1880's, it was a quarry site for the manufacture of bricks. This came about because of a fire which had razed all the wooden houses to the ground. Consequently, the British Government introduced a law requiring future houses to be constructed using bricks.

To the Chinese, Brickfields was known as 15th Mile because in the old days, people had to travel by boat until they reached a certain area in Klang. Then they had to disembark and walk for 15 miles to the Brickfields area.

Starting from YMCA, the guide pointed out many interesting historical landmarks. They included Hindu Temples originating from India and Sri Lanka, a mosque, churches, and the Buddhist Vihara. At the Vihara, there

were some bodhi trees (which are regarded as sacred trees in Buddhism); for building developers, however, these trees pose some construction difficulties because of their long roots which could stretch for hundreds of metres underground.

Another interesting fact was that Ananda Krishnan, the second richest man in Malaysia, was a big player in the development of Brickfields. In fact, he is the owner of MRCB which is bringing about so much development in K.L. Sentral and the surrounding areas. Somewhere opposite the Buddhist Vihara, an old Malay traditional house stands empty as a historical site, bearing testimony to the fact that Ananda Krishnan was born and lived in Brickfields during his early life.

Finally, the group landed at Najib's Corner for some refreshments. This coffee-shop was somewhere opposite the fountain which had been constructed as an important landmark in Little India in Brickfields which was officially launched by the Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak on the occasion of the visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Malaysia last year in 2010.

Karya Kencana Offers the Blind Self-employment Opportunity

On 5th March 2011 at the MAB hall, Karya Kencana gave a talk on a new and special product. According to the manager of the company, who is himself a wheelchair-user, this is the first time the air-freshener is being made available to Malaysia from the United States of America. The product is special because it is a very light wafer-thin piece of flavour-filled pack. The variety of flavours includes mixed fruit, strawberry, new car smell, and new leather. The air-freshener can be placed anywhere – in the fridge, cupboard, car, office, or even just simply under your chair. It is very effective in taking away bad or strong odours.

Each piece costs only RM3.60. However, the company is willing to make it available to the blind at only RM2.60. The manager says that the product is a very saleable item.

Those wishing for more information can contact Jacqueline Emanuel at Telephone 22722677 extension 175.

SBM'S ROLE IN PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BLIND, PART II

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Editor's note: The first part of this article appeared in the January – March 2011 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". Here is the second part.

6. Research and Development

This is certainly another area which should be given serious consideration by SBM. This is because most or, in fact, all the organisations serving the blind have been inclined to shy away from this important field of work. The common perception is that research is unnecessary because it cannot yield immediate or tangible results.

Indeed, research can be very helpful in bringing about new knowledge and act as an impetus to advancing innovation and development. Of course, this will depend on how research is being viewed – are the research projects carried out merely as academic exercises or are they aimed at providing useful information or yielding answers to problems? In fact, the main objective of research in the blindness field should be for the purpose of bringing about improvements in the lives of blind persons, in providing proof regarding the positive aspects of blindness, or in disproving the myths concerning the negative aspects of blindness. Topics of research could include types of employment taken up by the blind, how to make the 1% policy on employment for the disabled effective, achievements of the blind in fields deemed unsuitable for them such as in Science and Mathematics, and so on.

Documentation and data collection are, of course, very important aspects of research. As mentioned earlier, looking at unusual jobs taken up by the blind would be very interesting indeed and this is where documentation and data collection would be most helpful. With the information, SBM may be able to help in developing demonstrative models or in providing support to existing models, thereby helping them to succeed. In addition, SBM should develop courses so that interested blind persons could learn from these successful models and perhaps venture out into these new fields of employment.

I believe the blind themselves should be equipped with the knowledge and skills of research so that they will be able to take part and contribute to research. In other words, they will be in a position where they will be able to help or complement the work of the main researchers. In this way, the blind would not only be speeding up research work with their ideas and inputs but they will also be playing an active role in bringing about progress to the blind community.

Indeed, our own Government has for a number of years now recognised the importance of research in developing the country's economy. Several official pronouncements have been made regarding the need for research if we are to bring about innovation, improvements and expansion of our industries. The Government has made known that research is essential especially as we strive to build a knowledge-based society. In fact, the Government is keenly aware that through research, Malaysia will be able to develop an effective scientific base; this will have a significant impact as research helps us to find solutions to the environment, to medicine, in education and ultimately in employment.

SBM, therefore, should take the cue from our Government. This means that SBM should allocate some resources for the purpose of research. I earnestly hope that SBM will give serious consideration to the idea of research for the betterment of the blind and improvement in their quality of life.

7. Recommendations

To ensure SBM's commitment concerning its role in promoting employment opportunities for the blind, I would like to recommend the following:

7.1 Skills Development Fund

This fund should be set up so that money will be available for the implementation of projects for the benefit of the blind. Projects could include courses, workshops and even competitions. The main objective of these projects will be to provide opportunities for the blind to develop all kinds of skills. The target groups should include blind children, blind youth and even blind senior citizens. Examples of skills to be learnt are Braille

reading, mental arithmetic, personal attitudes, social graces, leadership and management, etc.

7.2 Expertise Development Fund

The purpose of this fund is to provide scholarships for interested persons to pursue knowledge and expertise which would enable them to serve the blind community effectively. This scholarship programme need not be confined to blind persons only as the purpose is to help SBM tap manpower resources even among the sighted who would be willing to benefit the blind with their expertise.

This means that exploration should be made in order to find out where such expertise-development programmes are available. I would like to suggest that one good avenue for exploration would be the National Federation of the Blind in the U.S.A. (or NFB) which has initiated a number of interesting programmes to help the blind in America develops knowledge and expertise.

7.3 Research and Development Fund

In my view, this fund is especially needed if SBM is to be committed to the idea of research for the betterment of the blind. This fund will enable SBM to implement research projects either on its own in collaboration with other organisations and institutions, especially the universities.

In addition, we will be able to provide sponsorships for blind persons interested in carrying out research work in the blindness field. This will help to bring about active involvement of the blind in research.

7.4 Demonstrative Models

SBM should aim at setting up some demonstrative models so that the blind could learn from them. For example, SBM may consider setting up a recording studio which would provide opportunities for the blind to gain experience not only in producing their own recordings but also in the management of such a studio.

7.5 A Composite Fund

Ultimately, SBM may want to set up just one overall fund to be used for all the four purposes mentioned above.

8. Conclusion

In summary, I would therefore argue that SBM certainly has a future in the field of employment and career development for the blind. The Job Placement Unit may be important but it is not the only means for dealing with employment issues and challenges facing the blind.

There are other areas which have been neglected or given little attention by other organisations. SBM is, therefore, in a good position to rectify this problem by looking into these other areas without simply needing to copy others blindly (even though we are blind).

Finally, I would just like to reiterate what some of these areas could include:

- 8.1 Development of skills among the blind so that they will become confident and productive in employment.
- 8.2 Development of expertise, especially among the blind (but not excluding the sighted), in order to build up a pool of people who can help in designing courses and programmes for the blind or who will have the ability to teach the knowledge and skills to the blind.
- 8.3 Tapping the resources of other organisations, especially our sister organisations in other countries, with the purpose of sharing information, knowledge and expertise.
- 8.4 Promoting research and development aimed at improving the quality of life for the blind, proving the abilities and capabilities of the blind, and in breaking down the barriers of ignorance and prejudice against the blind.
- 8.5 Developing Demonstration models so that the blind could learn from them.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: ARE YOU TAKING FULL ADVANTAGE OF FREE TECHNOLOGY?

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

Screen-readers were introduced to the blind in this country in the early 1990's; however, this technology came with a very high price-tag.

My first screen-reader, Business Vision, came with a piece of hardware that had to be plugged into one of the expansion slots. In fact, I must take this opportunity to acknowledge that it was a blind friend of mine, Joseph Soon, who had in a way started me off in my quest for adaptive technology for the blind by loaning to me that first screen-reader in my life. With his encouragement, I soon purchase my own screen-reader, known as the Hal screen-reader; it also came with a piece of hardware that had to be connected to one of the communication ports.

Two years after Microsoft introduced the Windows 95, I heard about a new product called Window Eyes. This was a screen-reader which could be used with the Windows Operating System.

Blind persons who have been using computers since the 1990's are probably aware that being the owner of a screen-reader goes with a heavy price; you need to have at least RM3,000 in your pocket. Moreover, paying for upgrades is a yearly affair and these upgrades never come cheap.

Now there is good news for those of you who are just about to enter the world of technology; you will be spared having to invest so much money in technology in order to make your computer talk. In fact, a whole range of options is now available for you to choose from. Some of these options include the following:

System Access +G

This is a new screen-reader for the Windows Operating System. It is actually part of a package which may be obtained from Serotek free of charge. In order to make use of this free technology, however, you need to stay connected on the Internet. It is important for you to have a reasonably fast connection. Contact URL at - http://www.satogo.com_en/

NVDA — non-video display access

This is a free open source screen-reader. In fact, NVDA is a very small programme which can be operated with systems running on Windows XP, Windows Vista and Windows 7. The NVDA project is sponsored by NVA-access.

For more information, go to - <http://nvaccess.org>

Thunder

This is another screen-reader that is free for everyone. However, donations are always appreciated.

It comes with a free screen-reader talking software for people with little or no sight. It works well with Windows 7, Vista or XP.

Thunder is available all over the world in eight languages and it is truly absolutely free!

To get your own copy, go to - <http://www.screenreader.net>

The latest version of Thunder is 2.21. It has been available since August 2010.

Further good news is the fact that you have the choice of a portable version that may be installed onto a USB stick or the standard version. Why not try it for yourself?

Take full advantage of all this Free Technology!

THE ROAD ACCIDENT SURVIVOR

By Dr. Tan Tok Shiong

Lim Tian Hong was born in Taiping, Perak on 12th September 1983. His parents earned their living as hawkers and they operated a coffee-stall in the town of Taiping. With their income, they were able to feed him and his two sisters.

At the age of seven, he was admitted into a Chinese primary school. However, to prevent him from roaming around the town and loafing around with other children, Lim Tian Hong had to help out at the coffee-stall by serving drinks to customers.

When he was ten years old, he took part in a lantern-making project at his school. He had to bring long sticks of bamboo for the lanterns. As the bamboo sticks were too long and could not be taken into the school-bus, he carried them by bicycle.

On having completed the project one afternoon, he cycled home. The school bag was slung upon his back while he held the half finished sticks of bamboo in one hand and the handle-bar of the bicycle in the other. Just as he was about to reach home, a school-bus which was sending children home, turned the road corner and he suddenly came under one of its wheels. The bus dragged him for about a hundred metres before the bus driver heard some by-standers shouting to him to stop. The by-standers were praying to their Chinese God on the road-side and they were horrified by the sight of the accident.

Tian Hong was rushed to the Taiping General Hospital where he lay unconscious with a broken skull and a badly bruised body. According to the police officer who visited him at the hospital, there were tyre marks all over his body. The police believed that it was the thick school-bag slung to his back that must have helped him to survive the accident by acting as a cushion between his body and the heavy weight of the bus.

He was at the General Hospital for one whole day but no doctors attended to him. His father was very unhappy with this situation and had him transferred to the Ipoh Specialist Centre. The doctor there immediately carried out an operation to remove the blood clot from his head and then stitched up the broken skull. One day after the surgery, however, he had a stroke and he went into fits with the entire body undergoing involuntary convulsions continuously.

He was in a state of coma and the doctor advised his father that a second operation would be necessary. However, fearful that Tian Hong might not survive the second operation and being unable to continue paying the expensive medical bill, his father rejected the doctor's suggestion and decided to bring his son home.

Tian Hong was unable to eat by himself as he was still in coma. So his parents had to feed him by forcing open his mouth and pushing liquid food down his throat. One day as he was being bathed by his mother, she discovered pus oozing from his knee. She sent him to the clinic and the doctor advised that immediate action had to be taken or else his gangrenous leg may have to be amputated.

Thus, his parents sent him to the Taiping Specialist Centre for an operation on the leg and it was placed in a cement cast for several weeks. However, Tian Hong still remained in coma and his tongue was hidden deep inside his throat. His mum overheard the doctor telling other patients in the ward that he did not expect Tian Hong to live long.

Not knowing of any other means to save Tian Hong, his father at last decided to bring him to see an acupuncturist in Ipoh. He had to be taken for treatment every three or four days and he had to be administered Chinese herbal medicine every day. The acupuncture would cost RM20 while the medicine would cost RM60 every time he went for treatment. After several treatments, his fits began to disappear and he woke up from the coma – but he could not see anything at all.

After several sessions of treatment, he began to be able to see some shadows. The acupuncturist advised that he had tried his best but he did not think

he could help Tian Hong's vision to improve further. Nevertheless, when he returned to the Ipoh Specialist Centre later on for a check-up, the nurse expressed surprise that Tian Hong appeared to be normal again and that he was able to walk. She said that from her experience, patients like Tian Hong usually became mentally unsound and bedridden or they would most likely lose their life. In fact, the acupuncturist who had successfully treated him later became a lecturer at the Chinese school of medicine.

On the advice of his teacher, Tian Hong went back to Standard Five at the Chinese primary school. Being blind, he could only listen to what was being taught in class. After completing Standard Six, he was admitted to St. Nicholas Home for the Blind in Penang where he learned Braille. He had to repeat his Standard Five and Six classes at St. Nicholas before joining the Integrated Programme for the Blind at the SMK Haji Zainal Abidin in Penang for his secondary school education. He did well academically, obtaining three A's and three B's for the SPM examination followed by two A's and two B's for the STPM examination.

Then he was admitted to the Gurney Training Centre for the Blind in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur where he took up rehabilitation and computer skills for a period of six months. He was then admitted to the Economics Faculty at Universiti Malaya where he also did well academically. In fact, during the second year of his degree course, he earned a place in The Dean's List. After graduating, he was offered a place to read for his Master's Degree in Economics.

While pursuing his studies, he also had to go through the long and arduous procedure in order to obtain compensation from the insurance company which was the agent for the school bus involved in the accident. He was already in Form Three when his case was first opened for hearing in court. Before his case came in court, the adjusters from the Insurance Company made frequent impromptu visits to him at home and in school in order to elicit information.

He had to follow the directive of the insurance company to be present for medical examination on various inconvenient dates. The amount of scanning that had to be done on his head was frightening.

Initially, the driver of the school-bus pleaded Not Guilty to careless driving. This meant that the amount of insurance compensation would be greatly reduced. Fortunately, the driver was later persuaded by the Road Transport Department to Plead Guilty. Eventually, he was paid a compensation of RM300,000 by the insurance company; out of which 20% or RM60,000 went for the lawyer's fees. Out of the remaining RM240,000, a large chunk had to go and pay for the housing loan for which the village house had been mortgaged and heavy debts had to be settled with relatives. In the end, the amount of money left was merely RM10,000.

Ironically, the bus driver who had knocked him down is now driving an inter-city express bus. According to Tian Hong's father, the driver had been involved in two previous accidents before running down his son. In the first accident, the bus had run over two little children and they were killed. In the second accident, the driver had knocked into a pregnant woman and killed her on the spot. In the third case involving Tian Hong, the driver was fined only RM300 and his driving license was suspended for a period of two years only.

AIM FOR DIGNITY AND HONOUR: UPHOLD THE RIGHTS OF THE DISABLED

By Anthony Thanasayan

About 300 people attended a seminar on disability in Petaling Jaya recently. It was put together by the P.J. City Council. The event, in celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities in December 2010, was targeted primarily at non-disabled people who were key stake-holders in the city. These included the Residents' Association heads, leaders of various institutions, architects, local councilors and departmental directors in the various local councils.

One of the main speakers at the seminar was Prof. Dr. Chandra Muzaffar who spoke on the topic, "*Access to Dignity: Compassion in Action*".

Chandra, who is Professor of Global Studies at USM, pointed out that facilities for the disabled were a lot better today compared to the 1950's and 1960's when he was growing up in a small town in Kedah.

"As a polio victim, I was acutely conscious of how little access there was in the public and private spheres for the physically challenged," said Chandra.

He gave reasons for the change that had taken place over the last two decades. In the last 30 years, global awareness of the disabled and their rights has been increasing steadily. The U.N. declared 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP). Since 1992, 3rd December has been observed as the International Day of Disabled Persons. In 2006, the U.N. adopted the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This convention is a landmark document which recognises the dignity of the disabled and their right to access justice.

"It is partly because of this increasing global awareness that the building by-laws in Malaysia were amended in 1990 to provide access to the disabled," said Chandra who serves as President of the International Movement for a Just World.

The owners of public buildings were given three months to make adaptations. However, although the Malaysian Parliament passed the Persons with Disabilities Act in 2008, it had a major flaw. It did not provide for penalties against building owners or institutions managing public places who failed to comply with the rules and regulations on Access.

“Last year Malaysia also ratified the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities with some reservations,” said Chandra.

Poor Enforcement

Some crucial provisions of the Disabilities Act and the International Convention have not been implemented. For instance, at least 1% of employment opportunities should be reserved for persons with disabilities. This has not been done. Moreover, there has been no serious attempt to systematically enforce access to public buildings.

“On the whole, enforcement of the recognised rights of the disabled has been glaringly weak,” noted Chandra, who is Advisor to the Malaysian Animal Assisted Therapy for the Disabled and Elderly Association. “When you fail to deliver justice, you fail to uphold the dignity of the weak and vulnerable in society.”

Chandra said that the way to overcome this is for citizen groups to apply pressure on decision-makers to fulfill their responsibilities to the disabled. This calls for the end of complacency, certain cultural inhibitions and corruption. Citing the changes brought to the disabled in the U.S. through the Vietnam War Veterans, Chandra said that change was also taking place in the same way by citizen groups and individuals in Malaysia.

“An outstanding example is the city of Petaling Jaya,” said Chandra. “It is becoming increasingly more wheelchair-friendly.”

However, individual and collective efforts alone will not be enough to achieve the physical and social transformation that the disabled hope for. The mindset of the average Malaysian also has to change.

The disabled do not wish to be seen as objects of pity and charity. They want access to opportunities and justice. The disabled want to be respected as human beings with dignity, a sense of honour, and self-esteem.

Chandra said, “For able-bodied Malaysians to recognise the dignity of the disabled, they will have to substitute their feelings of pity and sympathy with a profound sense of compassion. Sympathy may sometimes conceal a feeling of condescension towards someone who is not quite your equal. Compassion, on the other hand, is the ability to put oneself in the other person’s shoes and empathise with his pain and suffering. It is when one is truly compassionate that one cares genuinely for others.”

Chandra concludes, “Petaling Jaya, which has begun to care for the disabled, should aim to become the first compassionate city of Malaysia.”

A POINT TO PONDER: TURNING CONFUSION INTO LAUGHTER

By Wong Kow

Having lived in a multi-racial country like Malaysia for many years – in fact, from the 1940’s until today – I have had to adapt myself to ever-changing situations in order to live a happy and eventful life. Indeed, I have had to cope with the tremendous confusion all these years from learning the various Chinese dialects in early childhood, studying Chinese and the English language in school, and picking up some spoken or “pasar” Malay from here and there.

Then I had to adjust myself to a 180-degree u-turn in my life when my eyesight failed me some time in my adult years. I was confused, embarrassed and frustrated when I had to turn to Braille for reading and writing and I had to use a white cane for mobility and travel. Eventually, when I managed to overcome these obstacles, I felt a sense of pride and pleasure and I was even amused with myself.

More experiences of confusion were to follow. I remember the time when my children were still young and I would be spending some of the week-

ends doing extra jobs in order to make ends meet. My wife would take care of the younger children at home while Lawrence, my eldest son, who was just seven years old, would lead me to my destination.

Whenever I hopped into a taxi, I wanted to know the racial identity of the driver. This was to enable me to communicate with him in his own language to tell him the exact place for me to get down from the taxi. So I decided to use a code between me and my son – “C” meant the driver was Chinese, “I” if the driver was Indian, and “M” if the driver was Malay. The code “CIM” worked very well so that I was able to land at the right place every time.

Then came one day, however, when I needed to go to the General Hospital and my son was guiding me as usual. Hopping into a taxi, I mentioned “CIM” again to my son. But before I could hear the reply from my son, the driver quickly answered, “My dear friend, you don’t have to mention anything. Don’t worry, sure I know you are blind and so you are going to meet your friends”.

I was upset upon hearing his remark. What made matters worse was the driver simply did not care to listen to me telling him of my actual destination. Thus, when he stopped the taxi for me to alight, I realised I was in front of the Gurney Training Centre.

Another incident occurred between the years of 1970 and 1990. My elderly parents used to commute by train from Penang to Kuala Lumpur where they would stay with us for a few months before travelling back to Penang by train again. On one occasion, they wanted to book tickets for the coming Saturday and my sister-in-law, June, was kind enough to assist them.

At the ticketing counter, June said, “Dua tiket untuk hari Sabtu ...” Upon hearing “Hari Sabtu”, my father immediately shouted from afar off in his “pasar” Malay, “Bukan Hari Satu, saya mahu Hari Enam!”

My third experience involved my eldest sister who did not have the opportunity of receiving a formal education. Nevertheless, she did manage to pick up a few words in “Chinaman” English and she was keen on showing them off in daily conversation.

On Sundays, for example, she would command us, “Get up, go to the church and play!”

Not until I reached Standard Three when I realised that my eldest sister had actually meant that we go to the church to pray and not to play.

In the fourth incident, I was in the hospital with breathing difficulties. As I was gasping, I requested for assistance to have more air. Fortunately, the nurse did not mistake the word “air” in English for “air” in Malay which meant “water”. Otherwise, I would not be breathing any more and you would not be reading this article.

Well, in spite of these and other confusing or embarrassing situations that I have faced, I must admit that life has been wonderfully interesting. When our children were young, my wife had to be a full-time housewife managing the household chores. The children attended the nearby Confucian Chinese School and when I could barely afford to give them any pocket money, I would say to myself, “Life is confusing!”

When the children were old enough to look after themselves, my wife was able to get a stable job and help out with the family expenses. As a result, we were able to send the children to the nearby Systematic Business Institution for further studies.

Indeed, life became more comfortable and it got me thinking, “We are more systematic now; life is no more confusing.”

So when we are faced with confusions in our lives, isn’t laughter the best medicine?

QUOTATIONS FOR REFLECTION

Edward Hale:

I am only one, but still I am one.
I cannot do everything, but still I can do something.
And because I cannot do everything,
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.

Leo Tolstoy:

I sit on a man's back,
Choking him and shaking him;
Carry me.
Yet I assure myself and others
I am sorry for him
And wish to lighten his load
By all possible means
Except by getting off his back.

In childhood we learn to read;
But in adulthood the reverse is true,
We read to learn.

Helen Keller:

They took away what should have been my eyes,
But I remember Milton's Paradise;
They took away what should have been my ears,
But Beethoven came and wiped away my tears;
They took away what should have been my tongue,
But I had talked with God when I was young;
He would not let them take away my soul;
Possessing that, I still possess the whole.

Gerald H. Bradley in Strike the Right Attitude:

It is your attitude, not your aptitude, that is going to determine your altitude.
Doing what you like is freedom; liking what you do is happiness.
And be always prepared to be wrong.

William F. Buckley Jr. in Windfall: The End of the Affair:

The best defense against a usurpatory government is an assertive citizenry.

Bernard Shaw:

We learn from experience that men never learn from experience.

The Legacy of Pearl Harbour – An Enduring Lesson of Military History:

What an enemy is capable of doing, there is the probability he may do it.

Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.:

The great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving.

Science without faith becomes materialism;
Religion without reason goes into superstition.

John Stewart Mill:

Responsibility is null when no one knows who is really responsible.

Robert Kennedy:

Some men see things as they are and ask why.
I dream things that never were and ask why not.

Acton:

Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.

The Serenity Prayer By Reinhold Niebuhr:

God give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things which should be changed,
And wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

Kahlil Gibofaun:

It is well to give when asked, but it is better to give unasked, through understanding.

Somerset Maugham:

If a nation values anything more than freedom, it will lose its freedom along with the comfort or money that it values more.

Cullen Hightower:

Faith is building on what you know is here, so you can reach what you know is there.

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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

Address:

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

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Also please note that if the article is accompanied by at least two relevant photographs and if they are accepted for publication, you will be paid an additional RM25.00 fee.

You should include your address, telephone number and bank account number so that the money can be sent to you easily.

For details of payment, please see the last page.

EARN SOME EXTRA CASH

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

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2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words) - RM75.00
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(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.)