

# THE NCBM OUTREACH



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# **VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT OF NCBM**

To ensure blind people will receive appropriate training and enjoy quality services regardless of where they live in the country.

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# **THE FIRST MALAYSIAN WITH A GUIDE-DOG**

*By William T. S. Koh*

I am a Malaysian citizen residing in Melbourne, Australia. In 1999, I was diagnosed of having glaucoma which slowly worsened through the years and finally led to complete blindness in 2009.

However, in this day and age, I am fortunate enough to be able to avail myself of the various aids and assistance that would make my life as a blind person easier and more convenient. Among all these conveniences, the greatest blessing for me is my dog-guide named Smartie. Indeed, to have a dog-guide would have cost me more than AU\$30,000 for his training. But thanks to the SEEING Eye Dog of Australia, (or SEDA), I was presented with the “gift of sight”, i.e. Smartie, free of charge.

Smartie came to me in July 2011 when he was two years old after he had graduated from SEDA. I was then officially listed as being the first Malaysian to own a dog-guide in the Book of Malaysian Records. From that moment on, my dog-guide has given me invaluable service as I move on in life.

Smartie guides and assists me in my daily trips to the shops, supermarkets, the bank, post office, restaurants and the like. The dog helps me locate the places where I want to go. He helps me get to the bus-stop, assists me in crossing the road safely, and then brings me right home to my doorstep.

In April 2012, I went to the General Hospital for a very minor surgery due to the enlargement of my prostate. I had to stay in the hospital for two nights. A week before the operation, I rang up the ward manager to obtain more information about my working dog. She informed me that if I were to bring Smartie on the day before the operation, I could have a room with a bathroom attached. Otherwise I would have to share a room with four other patients. The ward manager even told me that each morning the nurse would bring my dog to do his business and in the late evening another nurse would walk with Smartie for an hour.

On the day of the operation, I brought my dog along with me. I was given a rock-star welcome before being ushered to my room. After the operation, I was brought back to the room where Smartie was waiting anxiously to welcome me. Most of the time, he would sit on the floor beside me. In the evening, the nurse came and took him for his hour-long walk. After the walk, he was given food and drink in two separate bowls which were placed at the corner of the room. For entertainment, I switched on the tv while he played with his favourite toy. Then we both slept soundly for the night.

The next morning, breakfast was given to Smartie. Two hours later, a nurse came and took him to do his business. In the evening, another nurse came and took him for the long walk. In a way, I felt that he was luckier than me because he got so many beautiful nurses to take him out.

After the third day, I was able to walk. Each time I went to the bathroom, Smartie would guide me there and he would show me where the toilet bowl was by placing his nose very near to it. Then he would also show me where the basin was before leading me back to the bed. Actually, Smartie would place his nose on or near to an object and I would then place my palm and slowly slide to his nose, thereby enabling me to find things such as the door handle, the basin, the toilet bowl or even an empty chair. In fact, Smartie would simply follow any command or instruction that I gave.

From my experience in the hospital, I found that every medical staff was very fond of and very caring towards the working dog. I am truly appreciative and my heart is full of gratitude for each and every member of the hospital staff for having made my stay at the hospital so pleasant and comfortable.

Besides playing the role of dog-guides to the blind, dogs can also serve as Search and Rescue Workers. Indeed, there are so many natural and man-made calamities these days such as earthquakes, typhoons, tornadoes, landslides and the collapse of buildings and structures. People get buried under the rubble and there is little that man can do to save them. Thus, man has to turn to the dog for help because dogs are able to track where the victims are through their human scent.

It is said that the dog is a man's best friend because they are known to be very loyal to their masters or handlers. Indeed, I have found this to be true from experience with my own dog-guide. I would, therefore, urge that we should be kind and caring towards dogs.

Anyone wishing to know more about dog-guides or who would like to communicate further with me on the subject of dogs, you can contact me as follows:

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# **NCBM REVIEW ON WORK FOR THE BLIND 2013**

*By Moses Choo Siew Cheong*

*Executive Director*

*National Council for the Blind, Malaysia*

NCBM is managed by a Council comprising two representatives from each of the Member-Organisations. The Member-Organisations of NCBM are the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB), Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM), St. Nicholas Home, Penang (SNH), Sabah Society for the Blind (SHSB), and the Sarawak Society for the Blind (SKSB).

The committees include the Committee on Employment and Economic Empowerment chaired by Dr. Wong Huey Siew (representative from SBM), Committee on Education chaired by Dr. Kway Eng Hock and the Committee on Wellness and Prevention of Blindness chaired by Dr. Choong Yean Yaw.

Representation from the Government ministries include the Ministry of Health, Social Welfare Department, Special Education Department and the Human Resource Department.

In order to support the implementation of policies and activities, the Council has assigned the duties to an Executive Committee comprising four principal office-bearers and one representative from every Member-Organisation.

NCBM has a total of fourteen staff to plan and implement all the programmes and activities. They include the executive director, executive staff, supervisors and coordinators, assistants, clerical and support staff.

With only a small number of staff, the majority of them will be involved in certain activities of NCBM. In 2013, NCBM continued to serve the blindness community with Braille support. As in previous years, we printed and circulated three thousand Braille calendars. Though there are now electronically available calendars on mobile phones, the demand for our Braille calendars has been on the increase.

In 2013, we also experimented with a Braille writing frame that is cheaply available, allowing blind people to take down notes using a very simple device. This device was given away as gifts to the blind. Indeed, our efforts will be continued with the hope of encouraging the use of the Braille writing frame by the blind.

Our production of Braille books came up to 20 titles (or about 3,000 braille volumes), the majority of them being for the use of education. In order to be able to meet the production target, a total of RM160,000 had to be spent on upgrading and replacement of Braille embossers. Currently, we have a total of twelve embossers of different make and type.



### **Committee on Education**

In supporting the Ministry of Education concerning its Education Blueprint, NCBM organised an Education Seminar and brought together experts involved in the education of the blind in Malaysia. With the realisation that the number of children with multiple disabilities is on the rise, an invitation was extended to a speaker from Sense International of India, an organisation with better experience on dealing with such children. Consequently, NCBM has pledged to support efforts in moving towards helping blind children with additional disabilities.

Towards the end of 2013, St. Nicholas Home in collaboration with Universiti Sains Malaysia started working towards holding an education workshop on the training of teachers for children with multiple disabilities.



Realising the importance of Braille in the lives of the blind, the Committee on Education had been advocating for the formation of the Braille Council of Malaysia. Towards achieving this end, the Committee had made two presentations. The first was to the Advisory Committee on Education chaired by Y.Bhg. Dato' Haji Sufa'at bin Tumin, the Timbalan Ketua Pengarah (SOP), Ministry of Education.

The second presentation was made on December 5 to the Majlis Pembangunan OKU chaired by YB Datuk Rohani Abdul Karim, Minister of Women, Family and Community Development. As a result, NCBM had been charged with the duty of setting up the Braille Council of Malaysia. In order to realise this goal, NCBM would have to allocate a small budget to begin the process in 2014.

### **Committee on Employment and Economic Empowerment**

Realising that funding is needed for blind persons in pioneering new jobs, the NCBM Pioneering Scheme Grant had been launched in 2012. Successful candidates will be provided with an allowance not exceeding RM1,200 per month up to a maximum period of six months.

With the introduction of the Traditional Complementary Medicine Act (TCM) by the Government, the Employment Committee had set up the Massage Task Force in February to pursue the following:

- (a) Assist blind masseurs who have not received formal training in finding solutions arising from the implementation of the TCM Act passed by Parliament.
- (b) Draw up proposals for the upgrading of the Massage Training Curriculum up to the SKM 3 (Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia 3) level.

The Task Force was tasked to do the following:

- (a) Hold dialogues with Member-Organisations and the blind masseurs to get feedback for the drawing up of an Action Plan to achieve the objectives.

- (b) Present the Action Plan and to work with JPK (Jabatan Pembangunan Kemahiran) in realising the objectives of the Task orce.
- (c) Organise workshops and exchange programmes for massage instructors.

A total of five dialogues were held with the blind masseurs – in Penang, Kuching, Sandakan, Kuala Lumpur and Melaka.

### **Committee on Wellness and Prevention of Blindness**

As an initiative to keep eye professionals informed about the services provided by Member-Organisations, NCBM has produced a contact booklet for eye professionals to hand over to patients and clients. The booklet contains information on basic and generic services provided by NCBM and Member-Organisations. So far a total of 2,000 copies have been circulated.

In May 2013, NCBM took part in an activity to create awareness of the problems related to retinal diseases. NCBM set up a booth at the 1Utama Shopping Complex. Our hope is that persons affected will be directed to the right organisations that can offer support and rehabilitation.

On October 10, 2013, NCBM joined all the other eye-related companies, organisations and the Ministry of Health in celebrating World Sight Day in Alor Setar, Kedah. NCBM sent a team of five persons which operated a booth to showcase the different services offered by our Member-Organisations. We are very happy that the NCBM booth was visited by the Yang DiPertuan Agong, AlmuTasimu Billahi Muhibbuddin Tuanku Alhaj Sir Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah Ibni Almarhum Sultan Badlishah. He showed great interest in the different computer-related tools for the blind.

In addition, NCBM also sponsored the World Sight Day and White Cane Day celebration programmes of St. Nicholas' and SBM.

In continuing support for research, NCBM announced a small Research Grant for students ranging between RM3,000 and RM4,000.

## **Centre for Advocacy, Research and Empowerment (CARE)**

Realising that this department will have a major role to play, CARE was expanded with the appointment of a Manager and a Consultant.

- (a) CARE made arrangements for Placement Officers to attend the Job Coach Training for NGO's from February 25 to March 1 conducted by Job Coach Malaysia Network and sponsored by JICA and JKMM. Although the emphasis of Job Coach was on training persons with learning difficulties, the course content can be adapted to suit the needs of other disabled groups.
- (b) CARE was involved in organising the DBKL-Swedish Business Council Conference held on March 5 that brought together major local and overseas professional planners in the field. Disabled people were able to voice their problems concerning inaccessibility to the town planners and equipment developers.
- (c) On May 16, NCBM took part in an Access Audit Training Session organised by Beautiful Gate for the personnel of MPPJ. It was observed that the access needs of other disabled people were prominently covered while those for the blind were given negligible attention. As such, NCBM hopes to give further attention with regards to the matter of access.
- (d) In September, CARE organised an Access Workshop on September 4 and 5, bringing together a total of 40 persons from Member-Organisations to learn about the idea of creating better accessibility to meet the needs of the blind and other disabilities. Instructors and volunteers were provided by Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- (e) In order to meet the deadline for reviewing the public comment on the new Malaysian Guidelines on Accessibility provided by SIRIM Bhd., NCBM formed a small working group to formulate suggestions. After a hard day's work, NCBM submitted the recommendations to SIRIM Bhd. On October 7.

Other activities include:

**1. The Tun Hussein Onn Award**

Sessions were held to review the Tun Hussein Onn Award. To be more effective, NCBM hopes to increase the number of awards for different categories.

**2. Human Resource Guide-Book**

While NCBM has existed for about 26 years, no such policy has been put in place. Thus, the NCBM Council appointed some members to formulate The Policy. The appointment of a Human Resource company was recommended by the HR Committee. The HR Committee is working with Tricor Talent Inc. in formulating The Policy.

**3. NCBM Constitution**

Although the NCBM Constitution has been the guide and inspiration for the Council to operate, it was felt that the Constitution should be reviewed. Thus, a committee was appointed to review the whole document. The work is in process.

In conclusion, I would like to record my heartfelt thanks to our staff and volunteers for their contribution to the growth of NCBM.

I would also like to record our very sincere and heartfelt thanks to the donors, without whose support our work for the blind could not have been carried so smoothly. Your contributions have enabled NCBM to achieve its targets and goals for 2013 that will ultimately be of great benefit to the blind.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 1. *Research Grant for Blindness Prevention and Employment for the Blind*

Application can be made for a Research Grant ranging from RM3,000 to RM5,000 to carry out research in the fields of blindness prevention and employment for the blind. An allocation of RM10,000 has been made available under the NCBM Committee on Employment and Empowerment. Those interested should contact the NCBM Secretariat at 03-22724959.

### 2. *NCBM Job Pioneering Scheme*

The NCBM Job Pioneering Scheme was launched at the NCBM Brainstorming Workshop on Job Placement and Support Services which was held from November 28 – 29, 2012. Under this Scheme, NCBM will partner with prospective employers in providing employment opportunities for the blind. The blind person will work for a period of three to six months and will be paid a monthly allowance of RM1,200 by NCBM. At the end of the period, it is hoped that the employer will have been convinced of the blind person's capabilities and give him permanent employment.

Blind persons wishing to take advantage of this programme can request for the application form from NCBM. Please contact the Secretariat at 03-22724959.

## **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.

## **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 :

### **NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, MALAYSIA**

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# THE TWELFTH VISION CONFERENCE 2014

*By Moses Choo Siew Cheong*

*Executive Director,*

*National Council for the Blind, Malaysia*

The 12th Vision Conference 2014 was held in Melbourne, Victoria in Australia from March 30th to April 3rd, 2014. Although the conference registration and welcome had been scheduled for March 29th, I planned my arrival a day earlier in order to allow myself some time to get familiar with the venue, especially as I had to walk some distance from the hotel to the conference centre. The hotels nearby the venue were too costly.

Indeed, the conference venue was a very huge place and it was capable of holding several conferences concurrently. In fact, the main plenary room itself could house a total of 1,800 participants. However, only about 650 participants were in attendance.

## **Presentations**

Over a stretch of four days, there were more than 80 speakers and most of them presented more than one paper. The age of the speakers ranged from as young as four to ninety. Of course, the four-year old person was a child and he was used as a sample case for the early intervention programme.

The papers covered a wide range of topics which included bionic vision, retinal implants, visual disorders and driving, falls related to people with low vision, the use of smart phones by people with visual impairment and audio descriptive videos and movies.

In fact, there were nineteen main topics with many more sub-topics associated with the main topics. At one point, there was a total of seven concurrent sessions. Each session had as many as six different speakers, each of them being given a total of 15 minutes to make their presentation. Consequently, many of the speakers only had time to present summaries of their research findings. In actual fact, many research projects were still on-going and the results were not yet available. Hence, the participants were

advised not to photograph the presentations as the facts and figures were not really published data.

Personally, I found this rather disturbing as the participants had to pay a conference fee of AU\$1,000. And yet so many researches were not conclusive so that their data and information could not be quoted.

Although there were less than ten participants from Malaysia, two papers came from our country. They were:

**1. Mental health among newly diagnosed low vision patients by Mohd. Harimi Abdul Rahman, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rokiah Omar, Dr. Zaiora Mohamed, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zaleha Md. Isa, and Dr. Mushawiahti Mustapha from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.**

During the low vision assessment, rarely were mental health patients screened objectively. Hence, the mental status of newly diagnosed low vision patients were still not fully understood.

According to the study, forty-five newly diagnosed low vision patients had been randomly picked for standard low vision assessment and mental health screening using the depression, anxiety and stress scale (DASS). The major causes were found to be diabetic retinopathy (35.6 %), degenerative myopia (15 %), maculopathy (13.3 %), and cataract (11.1 %). The mean visual acuity was 0.26 LogMar plus  $\pm$ 0.23. The DASS screening scores showed that the majority of the subjects (71 %) suffered from one or more mental health disorders.

Of the 32 newly diagnosed low vision patients, 55 % (25) experienced depression, 42.2 % (19) experienced anxiety and 44.4 % (20) experienced stress. These findings suggest that the mental health of newly diagnosed low vision patients is affected substantially in all categories, even by mild visual impairment.

In conclusion, the mental health status of newly diagnosed low vision patients can be screened objectively using DASS. Understanding their mental health status will enable us to provide better low vision assessment services.



**Paper 2. The operational model for implementing low vision services by Dr. Chris Okoroji, Dr. Ananth Sailoganathan and Prof. Veera Ramani from the Malaysian Optical Council and the Ophthalmology Society of Malaysia**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that a major hindrance to low vision care is the unavailability of services. Thus, this study examines the application of operations management in an optometry clinic with the view to incorporating low vision services into the programme. By applying a parallel model, the process technology was strengthened to enable full utilisation of the facility. It was also found that outsourcing of the customer service increased patient flow while outsourcing of training, rehabilitation and monitoring improved customer satisfaction. Incorporating low vision services ensured full capacity utilisation with reduced idle time while the application of lean production led to the maximisation of space and the reduction of motion.

Moreover, it was found that quality control should be driven by self-audit while the supply chain management should be driven by demand and built on trust and strategic partnerships. Based on the analysis, an operational model for a low vision service can be developed and it provides the rationale for the inclusion of the orientation and mobility specialist in the Human resource Development Strategy of vision 2020. The application of this framework is expected to encourage practitioners to incorporate low vision services into their mainstream clinics with an added expectation of increased competitiveness and profitability.

Two of the plenary sessions were specially significant – the first plenary gave us an overview of the different low vision services available in some countries while the last plenary gave us an idea of the way forward.

## **Overview of Low vision Services**

### **1. Hong Kong Society for the Blind**

In his paper, Delivery of Low Vision Services in Hong Kong, Mr. Joseph Chun-Wah shows how the HKSB recognised the need for low vision services in Hong Kong by opening the first low vision clinic 30 years ago. Together with the Rehabilitation Centre, these two early service units provided services for low vision persons. Other services introduced later were the adaptive equipment service and the Parents Resource Centre for Visually Impaired Children. Through collaborative effort, these programmes helped to meet the different needs of low vision clients and to provide for continuity of service from medical and psycho-social rehabilitation to skills training and career development, thereby allowing the visually impaired to learn new and useful skills and to developing their full potential.

One of the biggest challenges for HKSB was the financial burden because of limited Government resources. In spite of such hardship, nonetheless, HKSB manage to establish many services locally as well as in other developing countries. For example, HKSB helped to set up a three-year Home and Community-Based project in December 2013 to improve the independence and safety of elderly low vision persons and to introduce three National Focal Persons Training Courses on low vision in over thirty developing countries.

### **2 Development of Low vision Services in Nigeria**

**by Hassan Minto, Brien Holden Vision Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan**

The current coverage of low vision services is less than 5 % in Africa. Consequently, many children lose the opportunity for education and many adults are excluded from productive working lives. However, with an increase in literacy coupled with the rising life expectancy, the demand for low vision services in Africa is also increasing.

As most people are in the rural areas, the most affected are also the rural poor, the underserved and the marginalised groups. The key constraints to

the effective delivery of services in the public sector are the acute shortage of trained Human Resources, weak service delivery approaches and high cost. Despite all the odds, nonetheless, a few countries have made major strides in the development of low vision services.

At the forefront is Nigeria which has seen significant growth and the integration of low vision services within the health system of the country. Hence, services are now available through a network of low vision clinics under the charge of the eye departments in public hospitals spread all over the country.

### **3. Strengths and Weaknesses of low vision services in the Netherlands by Prof. Her Van Rens, University Medical Centre, Amsterdam, Netherlands**

The Netherlands has 16.8 million inhabitants, out of which 320,000 are visually impaired persons. In addition to monodisciplinary optometric low vision services, there are two national multi-disciplinary rehabilitation organisations – Bartimaeus in the centre of the country and the Royal Dutch Visio in the north and south of the country. Both organisations offer intramural and extramural services, including schooling, housing and services for patients with multiple impairments.

Identification for referral to rehabilitation services for visually impaired persons is based on the second version of the Dutch evidence-based guidelines entitled “visual disorders”. Almost all services, including low vision aids, are paid for by the National Health Insurance or provided for under special legislation.

The Dutch Scientific Field includes four professorships. Their research groups are dedicated to studying deaf blindness, their socio-educational background, psychology, visual information processing, ophthalmology and other various fields. Most of the scientific work is sponsored by the National Scientific Organisation. Grants for Ph.D. scholarships are awarded through a competition. In fact, much of the scientific work is funded by the Royal Dutch Visio and Bartimaeus.

Concerning the weaknesses, both the ageing of the Dutch population and the financial crisis are threats to the preservation of the system.

#### **4. The Italian Model of Vision Rehabilitation by Dr. Filippo M. Ashore, Valeria Silvestri and Silvia Superbi, National Centre for the Prevention of Blindness and Rehabilitation, Rome, Italy**

In Italy, the rehabilitation services are implemented and organised thanks to a governmental law. This law provides for the distribution of visual rehabilitation services and funding. Thus, low vision services are made available through the public and private hospitals, community-based offices, organisations funded by the government, non-governmental organisations and even private ophthalmologists.

These services provide a variety of assistance to low vision patients, including ophthalmological assessment, prescription of devices, vision rehabilitation as well as orientation and mobility training. The range of services vary across the country and, unfortunately, they are not well distributed geographically. Moreover, not every centre is fully equipped.

Nevertheless, low vision services are continuing to evolve into the multi-disciplinary model. Generally, the staff include many different professions – an ophthalmologist, an orthoptist, a psychologist, a nurse and an Orientation and Mobility trainer. In addition, an optician is involved in the selection of visual aids and he sells the low vision devices.

#### **5. Vision Rehabilitation Services in Scandinavia by Prof. Rolf Lund, Sekwa Research Institute for Vision Science, Norway**

Scandinavia normally refers to the countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark with a population of around 20 million. The three countries together have around 70 low vision rehabilitation centres with a staff of around 600 employees. In addition, there are vocational rehabilitation services while the schools have their own educational support services.

Although all the three countries are independent nations, their health care systems and reimbursement practices are quite similar; and yet they are not identical. In these three countries, the country and municipal level authorities play an important role in administering the health care services as well as allocating the local health care budgets and overseeing the procurement of medical devices and supplies.

Their health ministries formulate the national health policies and provide support through coordination and advisory services on the local level. Most of the services are free of charge, including assessment, training and provision of optical and technical devices.

Access to the services is done through a strict referral system from the ophthalmologists. Almost all the low vision centres in Scandinavia have the same upper limit for referral. A referral to an eye clinic is possible when you have a visual acuity of 0.3 (20/60 or 6/18) or less, with best correction. Exceptions are made for referrals of people with better eyesight if they have big vision problems, e.g. a progressive eye disease, or severely reduced visual field, and for children.

## **6. Chinese Dream: Modern Low Vision Rehabilitation in China by Prof. Jianmin Hu, the Second Affiliated Hospital, Fujian Medical University, PR China**

China, with the largest population in the world, has a huge number of people with visual impairment. The reality is that various organisations are looking for more effective ways on vision rehabilitation (LVR) in China. Improving the living standards of people with low vision and integrating them into modern society is a Chinese dream.

As the main executive department for LVR, the Chinese Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF) is supported by the Chinese Government. It plays the leading role with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education in exploring the most efficient models in multi-disciplinary and comprehensive methods of service delivery for the whole of China.

By cooperating with Lions Clubs International, CDPF has been able to carry out the Project Vision First, Chinese Action on LVR since October 2011. As the first pilot provinces, Guangdong and Liaoning, established the standards for a provincial-level LVR Centre. This helped to set off the first important and excellent influence on LVR in China.

Another model in Fujian is an innovative trinity linkage mechanism. CDPF provides financial and policy-related support; medical institutions and special schools provide the services for people with visual impairment, covering the situation where there are no occupational therapists and no professional visual trainers on LVR in China.

Although establishing an integral and appropriate model on LVR poses a great challenge in China, they believe they will be able to realise the Chinese dream.

## **7. Models of Vision Rehabilitation Delivery in Canada and the United States by Dr. Mary Lou Jackson, Meei, Victoria, Canada**

Vision Rehabilitation Services vary considerably across North America. In general, agencies and individual practitioners provide the services. Ophthalmologists and optometrists conduct vision rehabilitation consultations in both private practice and multi-disciplinary settings. The services vary greatly from rural to urban settings.

Canada has a national agency, the CNIB, which provides services in communities across the country for blind and visually impaired individuals. In the United States, extensive tiered services are offered to veterans. State agencies provide varied services and they have been identified as being the provider of the most hours of client service, according to the national survey of 608 vision rehabilitation services in 2009 conducted by Owsley Et al. In this survey, the most common difficulty reported by patients was in reading.

Eligibility for devices varies considerably throughout Canada and the United States. Barriers to care include lack of referral, transportation issues and patient unwillingness to attend services.

Challenges include identifying effective and efficient models for providing rehabilitation, ensuring that patients can benefit from services such as access to care, and ensuring that patients requiring devices can acquire them.

## **8. The Current Model of Low Vision Service Delivery in Japan by Etsuko Tanaka, Kyorin Eye Centre, Hamamatsu, Japan, Prof. Koichi Oda, Tokyo Woman's Christian University, and Satoshi Nakadomari, National Rehabilitation Centre for Persons with Disabilities**

As a great advancement in recent times, Japanese Health Insurance now covers low vision services in medical facilities. This insurance coverage defines the current Japanese model in which certain eligible persons with visual impairment will be prescribed appropriate aids based on medical evaluation and/or on referral to specialised rehabilitation institutions for further needs.

An advantage of the new model is that low vision services are potentially available to more people in every local community. The new model has attracted interest in medical fields and several educational opportunities are now available. Furthermore, cross-institutional collaboration, which benefits patients, is being encouraged.

One disadvantage, however, is that the new model also defines the content of the services in a rather vague manner. Almost no systematic control over service quality is provided. Furthermore, the identification of effective interventions by outcome studies and the sharing of knowledge among specialists is kept by the successful low vision services in Japan.

## **9. Low Vision Services in Wales by Rebecca John, School of Optometry and Vision Sciences, Cardiff University, Wales**

The Low Vision Service Wales (LVSW) was established in 2004. It is a community-based service provided throughout Wales by 183 optometrists and dispensing opticians who have undergone post-graduate training and

accreditation with Cardiff University. It has largely replaced the previous hospital-based service.

Studies have shown that the LVSW provides clinical outcomes which are as good as the hospital-based low vision services with the added advantages of decreased waiting time and better accessibility.

In fact, the LVSW is available to everyone. Referrals are accepted from ophthalmologists, optometrists, educational and social services, and from patients themselves. Funding from the Welsh Government means that there is no charge to the patient for the service while all aids are loaned free of charge.

The entry criteria for best corrected distance vision is 6/12 or N6 (with a plus 4.00 dioptre add). It also allows for early intervention and support to patients facing progressive loss of vision. There is a wide range of aids on offer, including electronic aids and visual field expanders.

The LVSW is continually evolving. Service development and continued practitioner training are guided by audit. Maintaining the equal geographical spread of services, raising awareness among the allied health professionals and maintaining of relationships with the social services are continual challenges.

LVSW is currently working towards increasing the number of patients seen for second annual assessments, identifying patients at risk from falls and from depression and helping those with undiagnosed hearing loss by directing them to the relevant services.

## **10. Models of Vision Rehabilitation Delivery in India by Dr. Beula Christy, The L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad, India**

In India there is an estimated number of 8 million blind persons, of whom one to two million are irreversibly blind. There are over 54 million low vision persons of whom 10 to 12 million across all age groups have low vision. The Andra Pradesh Eye Disease Study estimates that one out of every 100 persons in this state have low vision.



The common approach of service delivery in India is centre-based in the urban areas and community-based in the rural areas. In the centre-based model, the integration of services is lacking as the primary focus is on low vision devices. On the other hand, in the majority of CBR services, there is a lack of focus on low vision services.

Hence, through the initiative of Vision 2020 Right to Sight, low vision has been given priority in the country. Several organisations have initiated low vision service delivery but the majority are still urban-based or private programmes.

In the study conducted by the L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, a comparison was made concerning the effectiveness of low vision rehabilitation interventions delivered using four different methods. The key finding was that all four methods had a significant impact on quality. It was found that this model had the potential of integrating the low vision services at the primary, secondary and tertiary level and would be able to cover the largely underserved low vision population under the Vision 2020 initiative.

## **11. The Vision Alliance Policy Paper on Low Vision by Penny Hartin, World Blind Union, Toronto, Canada**

With this presentation, The Low Vision Policy Paper was officially launched. The Paper had been developed by the Vision Alliance Low Vision Committee, which had been established in 2009 by the WBU, the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), and the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI). The objective is to explore synergies and areas of cooperation and common interest among the three organisations.

One such collaborative initiative was the establishment of the joint low vision committee, recognising that each organisation previously had a separate low vision committee and that there would be opportunities for sharing and joint work. The development of the low vision policy statement is an example of that joint work.

## **The Way Forward**

In Plenary Session 6, the chairwoman, Ms. Maryanne Diamond, raised the question, “What does the future hold?” The answer is given in the following presentations.

### ***1. The Global Burden of Vision Loss by Prof. Jill Keeffe,***

L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad, India and University of Melbourne, Australia

The aim is to describe the Global, sub-regional and national examples of prevalence and causes of visual impairment, low vision and blindness and to discuss the implications for the provision of low vision services. The 2010 Global Burden of Disease Study Vision Loss Expert Group assisted in the collection of data on 178 countries.

The meta-analysis shows changes in the prevalence and causes of vision loss between 1990 and 2010. In many countries the prevalence of blindness was lower in 2010 than in 1990 but the numbers of people affected had increased. The lower prevalence was often due to the changes in vision loss from cataract. However, the prevalence was higher in some countries and sub-regions due to causes such as age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

These changes together with demographic changes will assist in the planning of national and regional low vision services. It is not just the number of people with low vision who will need access to services but the longer life-span will also have an impact on the need for services.

### ***2. Stronger Together by Prof. Bob McMullan,***

International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness

What does the future hold? The collaborative effort in the past few years have created a window of opportunity to drive real improvement in the lives of people with low vision and vision impairment. The new WHO Global

Action Plan 2014-19, UNCRPD, participation in the post-2015 agenda, and the many bilateral opportunities made possible (e.g. by Australia and the United Kingdom) have provided the foundation for low vision services to reduce risk, promote best practices and increase the quality of clinical and non-clinical care. These opportunities provide the fulcrum for the development of low vision services at the primary, secondary and tertiary level as part of National Eye Health Plans.

Adaptive technology is also improving in leaps and bounds, thereby offering new possibilities for comfort, access and social acceptability. Organisations working for the visually impaired and their partners in the eye health sector need to explore or strengthen partnerships with allied campaigns, be it on ageing, diabetes or the wider disability movement. In the next couple of years, efforts will revolve around implementation at the national level; working together will give the chance to generate real progress.

### **Acknowledgment**

My sincere appreciation to the NCBM Council for having approved my participation in the 12th Vision Conference 2014. In order to maintain contacts and to be kept in the know, such participation may be expensive but very necessary. As a representative of Malaysia, I am aware that it is my duty to ensure that the information I have obtained from such a conference will be disseminated to all Member-Organisations.

In my report, I have tried to show what developments are taking place in countries all over the world. In so doing, it is hoped that perhaps some of the ideas could be picked up by Malaysia and plans may be drawn up for implementation in our country.

## **NEWS FROM THE ORGANISATIONS SERVING THE BLIND**

### ***Criminalising the Poor***

Early in July (2014), which happened to be the month of fasting for the Muslims, a campaign was launched by the Minister of Federal territories to clean out the beggars from the city of Kuala Lumpur. They wanted to close down the soup kitchens and food distribution centres as they claimed that these were encouraging the beggars.

A coalition of organisations for the poor (which included Muslim organisations) said that there were about 1,300 homeless persons in Kuala Lumpur and they were doubtful of the motives of the authorities in wanting to arrest these people. The poor were being criminalised, arrested and placed under lockup without any legal recourse for justice. Such actions were being taken despite Article 8 of the Constitution which prohibited discrimination and was against the poor being treated like criminals without proper evidence.

According to the Coalition, the Government should first seek to understand the backgrounds of these poor people and to be aware that many of them do not have their own homes to go to. The authorities should engage directly with these people, obtain reliable statistics, provide assistance to these people and work with them in finding solutions such as gaining a means of livelihood.

The Coalition took the decision to continue with the distribution of food and clothing to the poor. NCBM and SBM had representatives at the meetings with the authorities concerning the issue.

## *The First Blind Science Graduate in Malaysia*

Mr Vijaya Kumar has been certified as a National Record Holder by being the first visually impaired person to obtain the Bachelor's Degree in Science, majoring in ZOOLOGY, by the Malaysia Book of Records. This recognition has thus ranked Mr Vijaya Kumar as a National Record Holder and has placed him amongst the "Best of the Nation".



The certificate was presented to Mr Vijaya Kumar by Tan Sri Datuk Danny Ooi, Founder and Managing Director of the Malaysia Book of Records on July 14, 2014 (Monday) at the Menara Uncang Emas, Jalan Loke Yew, Kuala Lumpur.

Mr Moses Choo, the Executive Director of NCBM and Mr Ivan Ho, the former Executive Director of NCBM, were present to witness the ceremony.

Our hearty congratulations to Mr Vijaya Kumar for such a great achievement!

## ***New Device To Aid The Blind***

A device called “My Second Eye” has been conceptualised and developed over a three-year period. The device resembles a pair of spectacles that has built-in sensors. The purpose of creating this gadget is to aid the blind in gauging the distance of objects.

The device was conceptualised by a group of researchers at the Universiti Teknikal Malaysia, Melaka (UTeM). Ten blind persons were chosen from Society of the Blind (SBM), Melaka who be will be the pioneer to use the device

The UTeM Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Shahrir Sahifuddin, said, “Apart from being a sensory gadget, the device is capable of a 170-degree scan and can detect any obstructions above the upper body level. It will warn the user of any obstacles by producing a beeping sound, thereby informing them of the obstacles in order to guide them. It is powered by a battery which is rechargeable with a USB cable.”

He added that the participants will be undergoing a trial run within the next few months. With the feedback thus gained, further efforts will be made to enhance the device.

The cost of the device is expected to be around RM500 each.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Mohd. Yassin, launched the event on August 11, 2014 (Monday) and presented the device to the selected recipients, including the Melaka Society of the Blind Chairman, Encik Hashim Ishak.

## ***MAB Open House***

MAB held its Hari Raya Open House for the blind on August 23, 2014 (Saturday) from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. About 1,000 blind persons came to celebrate the occasion. The Guest of Honour was YBM Tan Sri Dato’ Seri Tengku Azlan Ibni Almarhum Sultan Abu Bakar, the President of the Malaysian Association for the Blind.

YBM Tan Sri Tengku Azlan Sultan Abu Bakar touched on three important matters in his opening speech. Firstly, he said that he was aware of the concerns of the Blind that MAB had intentions to sell away its property, especially the land in Temerloh, Pahang. He confirmed that MAB had 113 acres of land in Temerloh and he personally had no interest in allowing the land to be sold off. Instead, he will work with the MAB Council to turn the Taman Harapan assets into income-generating ventures through various projects which will ultimately be of benefit to the blind.

Secondly, he declared that the Tun Hussein Onn National Eye Hospital (THONEH) had been set up with the objective of helping the poor and the blind. The hospital was not meant to be treated as a cash-cow for people to get rich. The programmes and projects of the hospital should be of benefit to the blind and the needy.

Thirdly, he observed that most of the blind in Malaysia are working for other people. YB Tan Sri Tengku Azlan has the hope to see more of the blind becoming entrepreneurs and owners of enterprises. Efforts are being made to achieve this objective by upgrading the vocational training facilities and programmes in Temerloh and Kuala Lumpur, thereby equipping the blind with the requisite skills in order to enter the entrepreneurial market.

### ***The New Presidential Council of SBM***

The Tenth Biennial General Meeting of SBM was held from June 21-22, 2014 (Saturday to Sunday) at the Pearl International Hotel, Jalan Klang Lama, Kuala Lumpur. Elections to the new Presidential Council for 2014 to 2016 were held and saw the return of the President, Secretary-General and Treasurer unopposed.

The new leadership line-up for SBM is as follows:

President – Tuan Haji Mohammed Nazari Haji Othman;

Vice President – Mohd. Fekkeri Md. Jusoh;

Secretary-General – Rosham Sidek;

Treasurer – Jasmine Khoo Khin Sheen;

Chairman of Youth Development Committee – Ahmad Shamsuri Mohammad;  
Chairman of the Human Capital Development Committee – Dr. Wong Huey Siew;  
Chairman of the Arts, Culture and Social Committee – Siti Huraizah Ruslan;  
Chairman of the Finance Committee – Mohammad Mustaza Mohammmd Zain;  
Chairman of the Women and Community Development Committee – Fazilah Aziz;  
Chairman of the Sports Development Committee – Hanisah Ismail;  
Chairman of the Communications, Advocacy and Basic Rights Committee – Moktar Soon;  
Chairman of the Economic Development Committee – Loh Kong Ken.

## **TUAN MUHAMMAD MUSTAQIM – BLIND ACHIEVER IN EDUCATION**

*By Godfrey Ooi Goat See*

***Editor's note: It was in July 2014 when I first met Tuan Muhammad Mustaqim at the NCBM office. At the time, Tuan Mustaqim had not received his final examination results from Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kedah. He was also facing great difficulties in looking for employment. This was the time when the article on Tuan Mustaqim had been written. Here it is:***



1. Tuan Mustaqim is receiving the Special Student Achievement Award from UUM – 2013





2. Tuan Mustaqim is working at the computer in the NCBM office – 2014

There is certainly much more that lies behind the soft-spoken and unassuming personality of Tuan Muhammad Mustaqim. It was in early 2014 when I first came into contact with Tuan Mustaqim at NCBM where he was doing his four-month practicum from February to May for his third-year studies at Universiti Utara Malaysia In Kedah.

In fact, Tuan Mustaqim had actually applied to forty companies for the internship programme. Unfortunately, he had met with total negative response.

After completing his practicum in NCBM, Tuan Mustaqim had again made application to at least ninety companies to fill up any vacancy for a marketing executive. However, only five companies called him for an interview and he was immediately turned down when they discovered that he was a blind person. He had the qualifications but they were not interested because he was blind.

According to Mustaqim, “I think they were not interested in me for two main reasons. They were fearful that a blind person would drive away all the customers. Moreover, they could not believe that a blind person could travel independently as a marketing executive would need to do a lot of travelling.”

Tuan Mustaqim admits that it is a very tough struggle but he is not about to give up just yet. Indeed, he is really keen to gain a job opening in the business world where he believes he can make his mark in a successful career. Ultimately, if this were to fail, then he might consider studying for a Master's Degree in Business.

Truly, Tuan Mustaqim has shown that he is made of sterner stuff. As a student, he has certainly achieved much. Initially averaging off as an arts student in secondary education, he eventually excelled in business studies at the university.

Tuan Mustaqim hails from Macang, Kelantan. In 2005 when he was in Form 3, He contracted glaucoma which caused him to become blind. Thus, in 2006 he gained admission to the Special Secondary School for the Blind in Setapak, Kuala Lumpur as a low vision student. Subsequently, he became totally blind in 2008 when he was in Form 6. He was not deterred and worked hard at learning the Malay Braille Code all by himself with some guidance from friends. This enabled him for the STPM examination to read the examination question papers in Braille by himself and also to prepare the answer scripts in Braille. Although he did not shine for the STPM examination he achieved quite creditable results for the STPM examination of 2009. He obtained A for History, B for Syariah and Malay Literature, and C for Bahasa Malaysia and the General Knowledge Paper, i.e. one A, two B's and two C's. This more than compensated for the SPM examination in which he did not fair too well.

After Form 6, he gained admission to the Gurney Training Centre of the Malaysian Association for the Blind where he took up the pre-university course. He developed a keen interest in Information Technology and, on completion of the six-month programme, he decided to stay on at the GTC in order to undergo the PJSK course (Pembantu Juru Teknik Sistem Komputer) for one semester.

When he was accepted by Universiti Utara Malaysia in Kedah to study for the Bachelor's Degree in Business, he continued pursuing his interest in I.T. and he was even willing to pay his own way for the Computer Technician's Course, the Laptop and Desktop technician's Course and the Windows Server

Installation Course. For all these courses, he obtained three certificates in computer skills.

Tuan Mustaqim was in the Arts stream when he was in secondary education. However, he made a complete switch from the Arts to Business Studies, which could be deemed as quite a drastic move. In fact, he dared to take the risk when he discovered that his inclination was towards Business rather than the Arts. Hence, in 2011 he was accepted by UUM for the three-year course in Business Administration from 2011 to 2014.

Tuan Mustaqim had received a KPTM Scholarship from the Ministry of Higher Education and he was the first blind student in UUM. Being first, however, did not mean that he had all the advantages – in fact, there were no facilities available to him as a blind student. So he had to get his own books in Braille by scanning the textbooks from the university library in order to make a soft-copy for conversion into Braille. Fortunately, the lecturers were very helpful and they were even willing to give him extra classes.

He had no problem socialising with other sighted students. They all accepted him as a normal person so that he had many friends. When there was the opportunity, they went picnicking, barbecuing and camping. He tried to barbecue his own chicken and friends would tell him whether the chicken was cooked or not.

He was vindicated by the spectacular results for his final examination. He obtained a B-plus for Finance Management 1, A for Finance Management 2, B-plus for Accounts, B for statistics, A for Strategic Management, B for Business Mathematics, and A for Research Methodology, i.e. three A's, two B-pluses and two B's. This could be considered to be a fantastic achievement as many of the blind would generally shy away from this course. His current CGPA score is 3.3 while the final score awaits the result of the practicum or internship programme.

In the meantime, Tuan Mustaqim continued on his job hunt for suitable employment. To keep him going, NCBM extended his work programme for another six months on volunteer contract. The programme flexibility allowed him to do and learn whatever he could in the organisation, thereby

affording him the opportunity to prepare himself for the day when he finds his career.

One day in July, Tuan Mustaqim received a telephone call from the CEO in the Alpha College of Technology in Seremban 2, Negeri Sembilan. He has been offered a job as Student Affairs Officer in the College and will begin work from August 4, 2014.

We take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt congratulations to Tuan Mustaqim and wish him success in all his undertakings for a bright and prosperous future.

## **WAR AND CONFLICT – THE CLASH OF VARIOUS PARADIGMS**

*By Ooi Hock Tiam*

*Editor's note: Encik Ooi Hock Tiam is totally blind and he has been a lecturer at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang since 1991, i.e. for a period of about 24 years. He lectures on International Relations and Modern European History.*

*At a seminar in the university, he presented a paper on War and Conflict which is a topic very close to the hearts of many readers of this magazine. Hence, this article has been included as a matter of knowledge and interest, especially for our blind readers.*

Ever since the emergence of human civilisation, the phenomenon of war and conflict has been a matter that can be prevented. The question is why human society is being persistently haunted by this predicament and negative attitude. Are human beings by nature at enmity with one another or is human conflict simply a product of the environment? Such questions have been debated by philosophers, politicians, religious teachers and intellectuals. Ultimately, can all these questions be resolved, thereby leading to world peace and prosperity for everyone.

One of the early philosophers to delve into this question was Confucius of China (551 to 470 B.C.) During his lifetime, China was in constant turmoil. The feudal states were fighting one another with the goal of subjugation and conquest. Confucius thought hard and deeply on how to bring about political stability.

He believed that family solidarity was the basis for happiness in the feudal state. He postulated the idea of a social structure that can be stable and strong based on five relationships--

1. The relationship between the leader and citizens;
2. The relationship between husband and wife;
3. The relationship between father and son;
4. The relationship between elder and younger brother;
5. The relationship between friends.

Three of the relationships are concerned with the family while two of them have to do with society. Nevertheless, in order for all the five relationships to be accomplished and to proceed smoothly, they must all adhere to six principles as follows:

1. “Ren” – Gentlemanly behaviour;
2. “Li” – Customs and traditions;
3. “De” – Virtue;
4. “Xiao” – Respect;
5. “Tian” – Heavenly order;
6. “Wu Wei” – Non-action.

For all these concepts to be realised in the relationships, every individual had to play his role as an honest broker in whatever existing condition. This concept is known as the “Rectification of Names”.

In the principle of “ren”, the leader must be a gentleman, i.e. a person who is well educated with good morals and virtue. Such a leader will gain respect from the citizens and he can thus rule with legitimate authority.

In the principle of “li”, Confucius believed that it was proper for society to practise the customs and traditions handed down from the ancestors, particularly ancestral worship. This was because everyone had their origins in the flesh and blood of their ancestors.

In the principle of “de”, Confucius believed that an individual should “Do to others as you would have them do unto you”. If all of society followed this principle, then there would be happiness and peace, thereby causing war to be averted.

In the principle of “xiao”, Confucius stressed that the young should always have respect for those who were older than them. Thus, they had to be courteous and respectful to their parents while the older persons should reciprocate with gentleness.

In the principle of “tian”, Confucius believed that society would be in a stable condition if the requirements of the Heavenly Order were fulfilled. For instance, if a leader did something wrong, it will cause the Heavenly Mandate to bring about a change of leadership in the state.

According to the principle of “wu wei”, a leader who rules with “Ren” and “De” will not need to resort to force in ruling the state. The citizenry will respond naturally with respect and obedience to the leader.

In accordance with Taoism, a peaceful life means a life that is simple and in harmony with nature. Taoist belief was originated by “Lao Zi” round about 400 B.C. According to Lao Zi, every human action would produce an equal and opposite reaction. For example, if someone is praised, this will cause a feeling of envy in another person. Such a reaction cannot be avoided and it is a natural phenomenon. Thus, the best course of action is not to react when provoked. Ultimately, strength and weakness are the positive and negative elements as in “Yin” and “Yang”, both of which are inseparable from one another.

In spite of their efforts, Confucius and Lao Zi did not succeed in finding peace. It was only in 221 B.C. when China was united as a single political unit under the Chin Dynasty.

In modern times, various other paradigms have emerged in quest of the same answer. They can be grouped under three main paradigms – the Realists, the Pluralists and Structuralists. According to the Realists, human beings were naturally bad and they liked to have power over others. In fact, human conflict is a natural phenomenon. Thus, the best way forward is to bring about a balance of power between nations so that no single nation is sidelined and every nation would have a role to play in international politics. Proponents of this paradigm are Hobbes, Machiavelli and Mogenthau.

As for the Pluralists, they have four basic beliefs. Firstly, all human beings have the same basic needs such as food and sleep. Secondly, the world is one and it is occupied by all human beings. Thirdly, the world has no political borders. Fourthly, conflict is a consequence of poor environment.

Conflict, therefore, is not natural. According to philosophers like Rousseau (1712-1778), human beings are born free and good but they are everywhere bound in chains. However, he can be nurtured, thereby freeing him from the negative elements; he will become noble and he will not be inclined to war.

According to the Structuralists, conflict occurs as a result of the structural factors. Human being are in constant self-conflict because of debt, rent, fees and capital. They believe in the equal distribution of wealth as a means of getting rid of class in society. Debts and rents will be cancelled, fees will be paid equitably and the acquisition of capital by the rich will come to an end. The world will become one with everyone being united in a Communist world. These people are also known as the Marxists.

Today, however, the Neo-Structuralists have emerged. They believe that the differences between the rich and poor nations have to do with unfair trade or trade imbalance and the unequal distribution of capital among the nations. The best solution is to bring about free and fair trade among the nations.

The first efforts on the international level to settle a serious crisis was the Vienna Conference in Europe from 1815 to 1822. Its purpose was to bring about a settlement of the problems resulting from the Napoleonic wars from 1795 to 1815 involving the big powers of Europe. They were France, Britain, Russia, Prussia and Austria-Hungary.

The first principle was the guaranteeing of peace in Europe by ensuring that no nation became stronger than any other nation.

Another principle was the denying of support to the reactionaries or to any group that wanted to destroy the status quo. The aim was to prevent revolution, thereby averting war.

In the case of the Pluralists, they advocated that the best way forward was to bring about cooperation between nations. Their thinking was in line with the Vienna Conference which had agreed to eradicate slavery in Africa, promote free shipping in the Atlantic and encourage free trade among all nations.

In Confucianism, the question of morals among the nations is of utmost importance. When punishing France, however, the question of morals did not figure at all in their considerations. The victors were merely interested in France making big reparations based on self-interest. Consequently, the Vienna Conference failed in guaranteeing happiness in Europe.

Thus, the Vienna Conference was terminated in 1830 and Europe continued to be caught up in a number of wars. They included the Crimean war (1854-56) in which Britain and France opposed Russia, the Prussian war against Denmark (1864), Prussia against Austria (1866) and Prussia against France (1871).

World War I (1914-18) was another dreadful event that occurred in the early 20th century. It led to a great debate amongst the various paradigm proponents concerning the question of war and peace. Efforts led by President Woodrow Wilson of America resulted in the setting up of the League of Nations. The objectives were to guarantee world happiness, bring about international cooperation and, most important of all, promote the concept of collective security. This meant that if any nation refused to cooperate and wanted war, united action will be taken by all nations against that nation.



Unfortunately, America herself, who had initiated the League of Nations, did not become a member. Russia's membership was opposed by various nations until 1934 because she was considered to be backward as a consequence of the Communist Revolution of 1917. Thus, the League could not function properly without the cooperation from all nations.

For the Realists, this was not the way to settle conflicts. Without the balance of power and the involvement of all nations, collective action could not be taken against any opposing nation.

For the Pluralists who advocated international cooperation, they felt great relief with the signing of the Geneva Protocol in 1924 and the Kellogg Pact in 1929. According to both agreements, all nations will declare that war is undesirable and that it is not the way to settle conflicts. The nations which signed the two agreements also agreed to cooperate in other fields.

As for the Structuralists, they maintained that World War I was between the Capitalists who wanted to grab the wealth for themselves. In the view of Lenin, they will eventually be destroyed as a result of enmity amongst themselves. Moreover, Lenin believed that the victory of Britain and America after World War I was only temporary; one day all nations will become communist because the capitalist system was not good and the people were being oppressed. Ultimately, the capitalist nations will fall.

As for the Confucianists, World War I could have been avoided if all the nations had been sincere and open-hearted in making an agreement for peace. As espoused in the principles of "ren" and "de", there is no necessity for suspicion amongst nations.

In this context, war would have been avoided if Austria did not have any intentions for the destruction of Serbia following the assassination of the successor to the Austrian throne. It was the desire of Austria to seek vengeance that provoked other nations and war was the consequence.

Thereafter, hot debates became the rage of the 1930s. Many argued that human beings were not free from war. Nevertheless, serious efforts were made to prevent another terrible war. Unfortunately, all efforts met with failure when Hitler conquered Poland in 1930.

World War II opened up the old question once again. Why is it that such a terrible war could occur and how can war be averted? New efforts were made to bring an end to the war and to ensure that it would not happen again.

Thus, it was proposed to set up a new body known as the United Nations with its structure almost similar to that of the League of Nations. In principle, this could still be considered to be a strategic move as the focus was on universal rather than national interest. The U.N. would be governed by a security council which is to be entrusted with the duty of maintaining peace in the world. The principal members would be the powers who had won the war and they would be given the power of veto and a permanent seat in the council. These were the victorious nations of World War II – Britain, France, Russia, China and America. Ten other members of the council would be chosen by the General Assembly for a limited number of years and without the power of veto.

The Realists were happy that the U.N. was still bound by the concept of the balance of power and under the control of the big powers. In case there was a crisis, the big powers could use the veto to prevent the U.N. from passing any resolution in favour of war.

While it is true that the U.N. was still bound by the principle of power, efforts were at least being made to deal with international crises from the aspect of universal interest. With the establishment of a number of commissions such as the High Commission for Refugees, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNESCO in order to help the poor nations, international cooperation was being fostered. This was in line with the proposition of the Pluralists who espoused the principle of universal interest.

In the view of the Structuralists or Communists, establishment of the United Nations was not for the good as it was not in keeping with their desires and goals. Their vision was one world united and in peace for ever through communism. Hence, with the ending of World War II, the Cold War emerged. This was a war of ideologies and conflict of understanding between the Communist nations led by the Soviet Union opposing the Democratic Forces and the Capitalists led by America. Indeed, the heat of the war dragged many other nations to either side of the conflict between the West and the Communists.

After World War II, the heat of the Cold War was felt greatly in the Asian region with serious clashes occurring between the West and the Communists. The Korean War (1950-1953) involved the Soviet Union and America indirectly. Both wanted to defend their ideological interests with America supporting South Korea and the Soviet Union supporting North Korea. The war ended with the country of Korea still divided in two.

The Vietnam war, which actually began after World War II, became a great Chess Game between the Communist Powers and America. After France was defeated by Vietnam in 1954, America became openly involved in order to prevent the Communists from taking power in Vietnam.

In the view of the Structuralists, the Cold War was inevitable. Thus, they sought to expand their influence with the ultimate aim of the whole world coming under Communism one day. Unfortunately for the Structuralists, nonetheless, the Cold War came to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Subsequently, the Neo-Structuralists emerged and its proponents were Wallestine, Gundar Frank and Galtung. They were of the view that the world was not divided by Communism and Non-Communism but they were divided into two Blocks, i.e. the Northern Nations and the Southern Nations. The two blocks were split by the question of Capitalism. They felt that a big portion of the capital was being possessed by the Developed Nations and this was impeding the development of the Southern Nations (also known as the Third World). The best way forward was to bring about free and fair trade amongst all nations and it was not necessary for every nation to be Communist.

The Confucianists espoused the view that a nation was neither Capitalist nor Communist and it was not important whether the world was being controlled by the balance of power. More crucial was the need to uphold high moral values among all the members of the U.N. If every nation upholds the principle of “ren”, “de” and “xiao”, the world will definitely be peaceful while each country may have a different ideology with a different political and economic system.

Today the human community has entered the Third Millennium A.D. However, in our modern age, the war between the Palestinians and the Israelis still rages on in the middle east. This conflict can be said to have originally arisen in the age of Prophet Abraham about 4,000 years ago. Can the answer be found in the Confucianist, Realist, Pluralist or Structuralist Paradigm in quest of a solution to settle this conflict that has been plaguing our human society ever since the existence of human civilisation?

## **BRICKFIELDS IS UNIQUE IN THE BLIND WORLD**

*By Dr. Tan Tok Shiong*

Editor's note: Dr. Tan Tok Shiong is low-visioned and he was an Economics lecturer at Universiti Malaya for about 15 years. After retiring in the 1990s, he took an interest in observing the life around him, especially in the world of the blind. Here are his observations about the blind in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur.

According to Sudiarto, a blind Indonesian who is residing in Malaysia, "Brickfields is unique in the blind world" There is nowhere else on earth like it where there are so many blind people living together in this tiny part of Kuala Lumpur."

The land area of Brickfields is only about two square kilometres, and it was formerly a production site supplying bricks needed by the construction sector in Kuala Lumpur. Today it is a bustling town due largely to its proximity to KL Sentral, a transport hub of the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. In this little area, there are so many sky-scrapers, several commercial banks, about a dozen medical and dental clinics, many national primary and secondary schools, several private colleges, an international school, a post office, about a dozen budget hotels and a variety of shops operating businesses such as restaurants, mini-markets, handphones, computer repairs, pubs and so on.

The population residing in Brickfields is about fifty thousand and they live in various types of accommodation, including the expensive condominiums

such as Scott Villa, medium-cost apartments such as Palm Court, four-storey shophouses such as those behind the YMCA and low-cost flats in Jalan Berhala. There are also some rows of old terrace houses near the Vivekananda School which were previously used as the quarters for Government servants.

Why are so many blind people in Brickfields? Many of the blind have been trained in the Gurney Training Centre, a vocational institution of the Malaysian Association for the Blind situated at Jalan Tebing, Brickfields. After having received their training at the GTC, the blind continue to stay in Brickfields and some even earn their livelihood there. Many of the other blind in Brickfields work in other parts of the city but they choose to reside here.

Many of the blind work as masseurs and they rent the flats on the upper floors of shophouses in Brickfields in order to run their massage enterprises. Along the streets of Jalan Tun Sambanthan 4, Jalan Thambapillai and Jalan Padang Belia, you can find about twenty massage centres in active operation by the blind.

Inside Brickfields, there are a number of organisations serving the blind such as the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB), Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM), National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) and the Agape Services for the Blind (ASB). Many other organisations also choose to do charity work in Brickfields because of the blind population there. They include the Lions Club which gives out free vegetarian food every evening of the week-day outside the RRC building, the Drop-in Centre at Jalan Padang Belia operated by the Trinity Methodist Church from Petaling Jaya, a free food-stall providing curry chicken rice and teh tarik outside the YMCA building every Saturday afternoon at 1.30 p.m., and delicious vegetarian food packets every Saturday at 5 p.m. distributed by some Buddhist individuals outside the Golden Photo Studio.

Many of the pavements in Brickfields are laid with tactile blocks which are very helpful to the blind commuters. When the blind walk on these pavements, they just need to tap or glide their walking-sticks along the grooves of the tactile blocks. By following these blocks or tiles, the blind can easily find their way to the banks, post office, bus-stop, shops and food-

stalls. Every Thursday evening, the blind can also enjoy going to the Pasar Malam (or night market) at Jalan Berhala.

Due to the large population of the blind in Brickfields, they have become an important sector of the market that cannot be ignored by the shop-keepers and hawkers in the area. As a result, the blind are very well treated as customers. When a blind person turns up at a restaurant, the owner will almost certainly tell him loudly about the food that is available. When the blind person is in a bank or post office, he is allowed to cut the queue and the officer will help him to fill up the necessary forms. At the bus-stop, the public are accustomed to telling the blind the number of the on-coming bus and taking them right to the door of the bus. Most of the barber-shops in Brickfields will give a discount to their blind clients.

There is another reason why there are so many blind people in Brickfields. In 1951, the British Advisor, Sir Henry Gurney, gave out three large pieces of land to the Malaysian Association for the Blind and declared Brickfields as being “The Village of the Blind” (or “Perkampongan Orang-orang Buta”.) Thus, the MAB decided to build the Gurney Training Centre at Jalan Tebing, a hostel for the blind at Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad, and a Braille Library for the Blind at the main road of Jalan Tun Sambanthan. Unfortunately, he was later shot dead by the Malayan Communists in Perak while he was on his way to the Cameron Highlands.

In the course of my interaction and mingling with the blind in Brickfields, I have taken note of the impressive views that some of them have expressed. I would like to share these impressions with readers.

Lim Mooi Lian was an active agent for a direct sales company but she became blind in her late forties due to glaucoma. MAB representatives made several visits to her house and she was later provided training as a masseur. She says, “I was depressed when I became blind until one day when I met a young lady. She told me that she preferred to be blind like me. She had been bedridden due to limpa cancer and passed away five months later, leaving behind two young children.”

Chan Chen, who passed away recently, was blind since childhood when chicken-pox spread to his eyes. We remember him as an able speaker of many languages, especially Tamil, which he was able to speak so fluently. He said, “Don’t let the regret of the past and the worries of the future spoil your present.”

Yam Tong Woo was an auto-engineer but he became blind several years ago due to food poisoning while working in Yunnan, China. After his rehabilitation, he got involved in the programmes of MAB and was elected as the Chairman of the MAB Cyber Club. He went on to set up the Adult Blind Association of Selangor (ABAS). He says, “My aim is always to bring the blind one level higher, not one level lower.”

Zaid served as a young soldier in the Malaysian Armed Forces. He sustained serious head injuries and he became blind when the army truck that he was driving fell into a deep ravine. Now working out at the gymnasium in Kompleks MAB is his favourite pastime. He says, “Most people have two faces. If you are my friend, I will have just one face and share with you my true self. However, we should realise that as human beings, we are basically one and the same self.”

Lee Ah Kau gradually lost his sight due to retinitis pigmentosa. When he became blind, he gave up his sub-contracting job and got work as a telephone operator. He has many admirers because of his good physique and his talent in singing the English oldies. He says, “My uncle’s name is Lee Ah Kau. My father and uncle could hardly understand Malay. So, when I was born, my father asked my uncle to report my birth at the police station. When the Malay police officer enquired what my name was, my uncle thought the police was asking for his name. That is why my name is also Lee Ah Kau.”

Ganesh was a student at Inti University but he became blind when his motor-cycle was knocked into by a hit-and-run car. Thus, he had to take up a rehabilitation course at the Gurney Training Centre. He also loves to spend his time at the gymnasium in Kompleks MAB. He says, “I have two passions – animals and music. I want to live the rest of my life in pursuit of these two passions.”

Mazwan is a masseur working in Brickfields and he goes to Kompleks MAB regularly for sporting activities, Mazwan Shakri says, “Bangkitlah orang-orang buta. Orang buta mesti menegak hak anda. Jika prestasi MAB adalah tidak memuaskan, biarkan kita cuba menukarkan pemerintahnya.”

Taslim Kosni is a retired telephone operator and he is currently the Chairman of the MAB Elderly Blind Club. He is fond of making jokes and he is outstanding as a public speaker. During the birthday celebrations at a gathering of the Elderly Blind Club, he said, “It must be a male who is having this lucky draw number 010!”

Grace Lim Siew Chong will certainly remind you to have the wind-screen of your car tinted for security. She loves exercising on a stationary bicycle at the gymnasium in Kompleks MAB. She says, “My fate changed in a split second when the car in which I was sitting crashed and the glass from the wind-screen sprayed into my eyes.”

Loo Ah Hong says, “When my good friend who was blind, Yu Huat, passed away, the pain I felt was so great that it reached into my bones.”

Lam Fan Tai says, “When I became blind after a motor-bike accident, I wanted to commit suicide. Fortunately, the doctor quickly sent me to the Malaysian Association for the Blind where I discovered that there were so many things that a blind person could do. So I knew that there was hope for me.



# **A POINT TO PONDER: ALONE BUT NOT LONELY**

*By Wong Kow*

Due to the nature of their work, my grandchildren often have to travel about in different places, thus leaving me and my wife to be alone together most of the time. Sometimes I am even left alone by myself when my wife needs to travel with her sisters or to join some activities organised by her former class-mates. At such times, I would prefer to stay at home and be alone – in fact, I feel that we do need to be alone at certain times.

Likewise, I may go on visits to look up some friends either in Malaysia or in some other country such as China. Otherwise, I may decide to take part in some activities or functions planned by my former school-mates in the Old Boys' Association or some other programmes. In such instances, my wife would not follow me and she would be alone at home.

It would be ideal, of course, to have our own companions at home when our spouses and our family members are not with us. Nonetheless, it will be inevitable at times when we will have to be alone. We should regard such occasions as being the opportunity for taking a break and to enjoy being alone with our ownself. When loved ones, relatives or close friends ring up to find out if I am lonely, I would tell them that I am happily alone although I do truly appreciate their care and concern for me.

Indeed, I have found that spending my life in retirement is truly “free and easy”. I realise though that it is essential to use this time effectively and efficiently by having some programmes and activities for our own benefit. Such programmes could include the following:

1. Carrying out suitable physical exercise such as swimming, playing games or going for walks in order to maintain good health.
2. Pursuing an interest or a hobby such as reading, writing, singing, learning a new language, cooking, gardening, and many more.

3. Establishing good relationships with family members, relatives, friends, former colleagues or class-mates and even playmates from your childhood by taking part in family and neighbourhood activities, church programmes, community functions, and so on.
4. Maintaining a sense of humour at all times and participate in activities that promote joy, smiles and laughter.

By occupying one's precious time with certain plans, programmes and activities, one will not have to just sit idly by and feel lonely even when one is alone. On the contrary, I have felt most lonely in other circumstances despite being in a large group or having many people around me.

For instance, when I was sent to a boarding school at the age of ten, the first week was really a lonely time for me. There were many people around but I did not have any friends then because I did not know anybody.

When I developed eye problems in my early adulthood, I felt very lonely because I could not share my feelings with anyone. This was despite the fact that I was in the company of my parents and I was able to talk with consulting doctors and eye specialists from one hospital to another.

I also experienced some lonely times during the first days of my working life. I had no inkling at all with regards to my daily duties. I was not able to communicate with my superiors or build up rapport with my colleagues. No one understood the problems or difficulties I was going through.

Truly, one could be in the midst of a large group of people and still feel lonely if one is not mentally or psychologically tuned into the right or appropriate frequency for easy reception and communication. On the other hand, one could be thousands of miles away from one's loved ones and yet one would be able to feel the closeness or togetherness with these people in our hearts and minds. At such times, just a phone call or a short message with some words of love and friendship can do wonders.

If one can cultivate the right attitude and the wisdom to face life in all kinds of situations, it is less likely that one will have the time to feel lonely even if one is alone. So just spend a little time chewing on this and then begin to enjoy your life!

## REFLECTION

### *The Seven Wonders of the World*

A group of students were asked to list what they thought were the present “Seven Wonders of the World”. Though there were some disagreements, the following received the most votes:

1. Egypt’s Pyramids
2. The Taj Mahal
3. The Grand Canyon
4. The Panama Canal
5. The Empire State Building
6. St. Peter’s Basilica
7. China’s Great Wall.

While gathering the votes, the teacher noted that one student had not finished her paper yet. So she asked the girl if she was having trouble with her list.

The girl replied, “Yes, a little. I couldn’t make up my mind because there were so many.”

The teacher said, “Well, tell us what you have, and maybe we can help.”

The girl hesitated, then read: “I think the ‘Seven Wonders of the World’ are:

1. To see (picture of a child holding a red tulip)



“2 To hear (picture of a man playing the mandolin)



3.To touch (Picture of a baby touching her pet dog)



4. To taste (picture of a girl eating ice-cream with her dog)



5. To feel (Picture of a mother playing with her baby)



6. To laugh (Picture of a child laughing)



6. To Laugh...

7. To love (Picture of a couple in their wedding dress and holding hands in the garden”.



The room was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop.

The things we overlook as simple and ordinary and that we take for granted are truly wondrous. Indeed, the most precious things in life cannot be built by hands or bought by man.

## **THE VERY BASIC AND SIMPLE THINGS OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

To realise  
the value of a brother or sister,  
ask someone who doesn't have one.

To realise  
the value of ten years,  
ask a newly divorced couple.

To realise  
the value of four years,  
ask a graduate.

To realise  
the value of one year,  
ask a student who has failed a final exam.

To realise  
the value of nine months,  
ask a mother who gave birth to a still-born.

To realise  
the value of one month,  
ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby.

To realise  
the value of one week,  
ask an editor of a weekly newspaper.

To realise  
the value of one minute,  
ask a person who has missed the train, bus or plane.

To realise

the value of one second,  
ask a person who has survived an accident.

Time waits for no one;  
treasure every moment you have;  
you can share it with someone special.

To realise  
the value of a friend or a family member,  
LOSE ONE.

(The origin of this letter is unknown but it brings good luck to everyone who  
passes on the message)



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1. Original articles on the achievements of blind people or of an inspirational nature (about 500 words) - RM80.00
2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words) - RM80.00
3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250 - 500 words) - RM40.00 - RM80.00
4. Interesting articles taken from magazines or documents of limited circulation - RM15.00.

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

## **NOTES**

- (a) Full payment will be made for articles which require little or no editing.
- (b) Articles submitted by officials of NCBM or its member-organisations will not qualify for payment unless the submissions have nothing to do with their daily office duties.