

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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WHAT'S IN THE BUDGET 2015 FOR THE DISABLED?

By Ooi Hock Tiam

The 2015 Budget was tabled in Parliament by the Finance Minister and Prime Minister, YAB Dato' Sri Mohd. Najib Tun Haji Abdul Razak in Parliament on October 10, 2014. Let us see if there are any benefits for the disabled in the Budget.

1. Education

The allowance of RM100 for school students is being maintained. The Book Voucher of RM250 for tertiary students will also remain the same. This means that these benefits will also go to the disabled who are in school or in tertiary education.

2. Welfare

The Welfare allocation remains the same at RM1.2 billion. However, there is the good news that the Disabled Worker's Allowance (or Elaun Pekerja Cacat – EPC) has been increased by RM50 per month, i.e. from RM300 to RM350. For the disabled who are unemployed, the allowance has been increased from RM150 to RM200 per month.

3. Housing

Eighty thousand houses will be built under the PRIMA Project, i.e. the Projek Rumah Satu Malaysia. More significantly, however, is that another twenty-six thousand houses will be built by the Jabatan Perumahan Negara and twelve thousand houses will be built by the Suruhanjaya Perumahan Negara Bhd (or SPNB).

The houses built by SPNB will be of benefit to the disabled because they will be given a 20 % discount of the house price. This provision was, in fact, made available in the final budget under the administration of Dr. Mahathir (which was tabled in 2003). Unfortunately, nothing has been mentioned

about the discount. I myself do not know of any disabled person who has enjoyed this privilege.

The housing loan for civil servants will be increased from the minimum sum of RM80,000 to RM120,000. The ceiling of RM450,000 is to be raised to RM600,000. This means that the civil servants will be able to buy bigger and better houses. Thus, this will also be of benefit to the disabled civil servants who may be interested in purchasing such a house with a Government loan.

4. Taxation

4.1 Income-Tax Relief

The Income-Tax Relief for a disabled child, parent or spouse has been increased to RM6,000. Previously, the Relief given was only RM3,500 for a disabled spouse and RM5,000 for a disabled child or parent. In other words, for a person who is paying income-tax and who is himself disabled and at the same time also having a disabled spouse, he will be able to claim a Relief of RM6,000 for himself and another RM 6,000 for his spouse.

4.2 Personal Income-Tax

All tax payers will be given a 1 % to 3 % deduction on their personal income-tax. This will definitely be of benefit to the disabled who are paying income-tax. Nevertheless, no details are available regarding this provision.

5. Other Allocations

RM50 million has again been allocated for charity work undertaken by the NGO's, i.e. the organisations who are serving the disabled. However, there are no details concerning the implementation of this provision. I myself do not know of any organisations having benefited from this provision in the past.

Comments

On October 2nd, 2014, the Government raised the price of Ron 95 Petrol from RM2.10 to RM2.30 per litre. In other words, the price of petrol has actually been increased by 20 sen per litre, which is about 10 %.

How does this relate to the disabled in terms of the Welfare Allowance, i.e. the EPC? In fact, the increase of the EPC from RM300 to RM350 would be equivalent to an increase of 10 %. Thus, the increase of the Allowance to the disabled would actually come to nothing due to the increase in the petrol price. Moreover, the increased petrol price will ultimately result in price increases for all other products.

Therefore, as there is no change in the Budget allocation to the Welfare Ministry (for Women, Family and Community Development), it should not come as a surprise if the disabled are going to have a harder time applying for the Welfare Allowance.

In addition to the fact that the Welfare Budget Allocation has not been increased, there will be much stiffer competition among the Disabled for the allowance. This is in view of the fact that the total number of Disabled persons has increased from 350,000 last year in 2013 to 498,906 as at October 2014.

To make matters worse for the disabled, the application for the Welfare Allowance has to be renewed every year. This causes a lot of inconvenience for the Disabled.

Furthermore, on top of the petrol price increase will come the Goods and Services Tax (GST) which will be imposed from 1st April, 2015. This means that the Goods listed under the GST will have a tax of 6 % imposed at every level of transaction.

For example, if a certain product goes through three levels before reaching the consumer, this means that the consumer will end up having to pay an extra 18 % for a particular product.

So can you imagine the rate of inflation that the poor consumer will have to face with the implementation of the GST?

Well, all said and done, is there still any hope for the disabled? I WOULD SAY YES, I.E. IF THE Government exercises more prudence in its spending and makes a concerted effort to stamp out corruption at all levels.

It is our hope that with the income gained from the petrol price increase and from the GST, the Government will do much more to help the poor and the disabled.

As we are all aware, the total budget for 2015 is about RM273 billion. As for our national debt, it is about RM570 billion. In other words, it is just like saying that we are having RM1 in our pocket while our personal debt is RM2. Can we afford to pay our debts?

Well, your guess is as good as mine!

AMANDA KONG HWEI ZHEN – BLIND ACHIEVER IN EDUCATION

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Editor's note: NCBM would like to express deep appreciation and grateful thanks to the Brickfields Asia College for having given the opportunity for the blind to study in their college. Many blind students like Amanda Kong have faced great difficulty in gaining admission into the higher institutions of learning. In accepting Amanda Kong and a number of other blind students before her, the Brickfields Asia College has set the good example which it is hoped will be emulated by other institutions in the future.

The following article shows how Amanda Kong has been able to be one of the blind achievers in education.

Amanda Kong Hwei Zhen was overjoyed when she heard the news of her astounding success. The Brickfields Asia College had telephoned one morning to inform her that she was the top student among more than four million all over the world for the Cambridge A-Levels Examination 2012-2013. They told her that in recognition of her fantastic achievement, she will receive the Outstanding Learner's Award 2013 to be presented to her by Dato' Mary Yap, Deputy Minister of Education, at the Subang Holiday Villa.

Two years earlier, Amanda had been offered a scholarship of RM13,500 by the Brickfields Asia College to do her A-Level studies there. Her fantabulous results for the A-Level Examination were A-Star for law (more than 90 points), A for Business Studies (between 80 to 89 points) and B for Economics (between 70 and 79 points).

She had been awarded the Brickfields Asia College Scholarship because of her outstanding results for the SPM examination of 2011. Her SPM results were A-Plus for six subjects (English, Bahasa Malaysia, Science, History, Economics and Commerce), A for two subjects (Moral Studies and Mathematics) and B-Plus for Add Maths. Her results for the two subjects in Mathematics were truly spectacular, especially in consideration of the fact that the blind do not often excel in Maths.

She was awarded another sponsorship of RM15,000 to take up Law Studies at the Brickfields Asia College. She had to pay the balance of only RM6,000 for books and examination fees. She is doing the 2 +1 UK Transfer Programme 2013-17, i.e. two years in Malaysia and one year in England. The core subjects for her first year 2013-14 were Public Law, Common Law Reasoning (History and Principles of the English Legal System), Criminal Law and the Law of Contract.

For her second year 2014-15, the core subjects will be the Law of Torts, Land Law and the Law of Evidence plus an elective subject on Family or Company Law.

What is the secret to Amanda's success?

“There’s no secret at all,” she says. “It’s just a lot of hard work with plenty of support and guidance, especially from my parents and teachers,” she humbly admits.

According to her father, “Amanda is a very disciplined student and there’s no need at all to urge her to study. During exam time, she doesn’t need to sleep!”

“Oh yes,” Amanda said. “I need to study at least three to four hours a day during the semester period. At revision time, I have to study five to six hours every day. Then just before the exam, I could be studying seven to eight hours a day.”

What Foundations In Education?

For her primary education, Amanda was in the Sungai Kantan Integrated Programme in Kajang, Selangor. She had a very good foundation in education because of Cikgu Hareyah, a very dedicated teacher. She was Amanda’s resource teacher from Standard one to Standard Six. She guided the blind students very well in preparing for the Standard Six UPSR Examination, especially with her production of many embossed diagrams and Mathematics. In fact, she was a very approachable teacher and most of the blind students under her care had good results for the examinations.

For secondary education, the parents of the blind students were very keen to have an integrated programme in Kajang and they made an appeal to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry eventually agreed to open up a programme at the Kajang Utama Secondary School. Initially, the school was quite reluctant to have the programme. Later, however, when Amanda scored excellent results for the PMR and SPM examinations and was given the Excellence Award by the Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Selangor, the school was very proud of the fact that a blind person like Amanda could bring up their name and reputation. She was commended by the Patron of the School, Datuk Dr. Ismail Salleh, who was also a blind person and a well known economic planner for the Government of Malaysia.

How she coped with maths, Amanda said, “I think I was naturally good in calculations but my mum was a great help. She produced many embossed diagrams And graphs with the spur-wheel for me to feel and touch. This gave me a very good foundation, particularly in understanding geometry.”

How Did She Cope In College?

As a law student in college, Amanda would be provided with the soft copies for books and texts. As she prefers to read the materials in Braille, her mum would help to convert them into Braille. If it is a very thick book, then she has no choice but to listen to the text with the help of the JAWS screen-reader. For some patented books, she would have to purchase them and scan the pages one by one to “read” by listening. She does not like this method, however, as the pages have to be torn from the book so that they can be fitted in the scanner.

“I feel so sorry as it’s such a waste to have to tear the book apart,” she said. “And reading this way is so laborious.”

Amanda is very grateful to NCBM for helping to produce the question papers in Braille for the examinations. During the examination, she would type out the answer scripts with her laptop. She is given four hours (which includes one extra hour) to complete the test.

“For every question, I need to type at least four pages and I have to type very fast,” she says humbly.

According to her father, “She is such an expert in computer typing – even the teacher said so! In four hours, she can type fifteen to sixteen pages and each page has 400 to 500 words.”

75 % of the marks are scored through the examination while another 25 % must be attained through assignments. She enjoys doing the research papers on such topics as Common Law, Judicial Biasness and Case Studies. Her personal input is very important but she also works with college-mates in doing the assignments.

The college lecturers are very helpful and they are very willing to draw up extra question papers for her to practise.

“Sorry Miss, sorry for torturing you,” she would say jokingly as she did not want to sound demanding. Of course the lecturers were ever ready to lend her a helping hand.

Amanda remembers going to a famous college which was, in fact, one of the top institutions in the country. When she enquired about the possibility of enrolling in the college as a law student, the officer-in-charge replied, “The blind can study law? I never heard of a blind person studying law?”

So she went to the Brickfields Asia College where the CEO was very happy and willing to recognise the capabilities of the blind. In fact, he immediately responded to her request and admitted her into the college for the A-Levels Cambridge Programme which had Law as one of the component subjects.

Why Did Amanda Want to Study Law?

In her childhood days, Amanda had loved reading crime fiction and thrillers which were available in Braille. She was fascinated by the scheming, the intrigues, investigations and detective work.

“There are not many blind lawyers in Malaysia and not a single blind woman. Maybe I should lead the way and become the first blind woman lawyer in Malaysia,” she says.

Facing Life's Challenges

Amanda has been brought up in a happy home with parents who are very loving and understanding. Going to college, however, has thrown her into the rough and tumble of life. She has to learn how to socialise with other sighted students. Sometimes she goes out with them for lunch in a coffee-shop or food outlet. However, if the place is too far away, the students were unwilling to let her follow and she herself would prefer to stay in college and have her packed lunch from home.

For transport, Amanda's father will usually drive her to and back from college. If she travels by train, she would be accompanied by her mum.

“I need to learn some cane travel skills so that I can be more independent. I will be on my own when I go to England for my third-year studies.”

And so we take this opportunity to wish Amanda all the best in a bright and promising future.

NEWS FROM THE ORGANISATIONS SERVING THE BLIND

Multiple Voices and Action in the Work for the Blind

Did you know that there are now at least fifteen registered organisations serving the blind in Malaysia? The main organisations, of course, are the National Council for the Blind (NCBM) and its five member-organisations which are the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB); St. Nicholas' Home, Penang (SNH); Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM); the Sabah Society for the Blind (SHSB); and the Sarawak Society for the Blind (SKSB).

In addition, the new organisations that have sprung up since the 1990's include the Blind Islamic Organisation (PERTIS); the Agape Services for the Blind; the Blind Recreational Organisation (PESROB); Khidmat Masyarakat Orang Buta; Pertubuhan Perkembangan Orang Buta (PPOB); Malaysian Blind Sports Association (MBSA); Massage Association of the Blind; the Adult Blind Association of Selangor (ABAS) and the Voice of the Blind in Brickfields.

The two latest organisations to be registered are the Blind Empowerment Society of Selangor and the Koperasi OKU (serving the blind and other disabled persons).

World Sight Day Celebrations

In 2014, NCBM collaborated with Health Care bhd. (or KPJ) in celebrating World Sight Day. In conjunction with the event, a campaign on avoidable and preventable blindness was conducted with assistance from the Lions Club of P.J., the Rotary Club of Greater K.L., and the CIMB Bank. A total number of thirty persons received the gift of sight through free cataract surgery.

NCBM extends hearty congratulations to KPJ for having set up the Eye Specialist Centre. It is located at 20A Jalan Pahang, Level 4, Kuala Lumpur.

White Cane Day Celebrations

In order to keep up public awareness concerning the importance of providing the blind with independent living skills so that they can lead a normal life with meaning and dignity, NCBM collaborated with SBM in carrying out the White Cane Day Celebrations in Kedah on October 24, 2014. NCBM made available a sum of RM20,000 for hosting of the auspicious event by SBM.

The event was launched by the Menteri Besar of Kedah, YB Datuk Mukris Mahathir. During his speech, he announced that the Kedah State Government will provide a sum of RM10,000 for the development of the Kedah Region of SBM. The Kedah Region was set up in 2006 with only seven members at the time. The Region serves the blind in Kedah and Perlis.

More than 200 blind persons took part in the walk in Alor Setar. There was also an exhibition highlighting the services being provided by SBM such as the training programmes on the use of adaptive and technological equipment and the entrepreneurial development programmes with the sale of various commodities, including handicrafts made by the blind.

The MAB White Cane Walk Around Brickfields

The MAB organised the White Cane Walk Around Brickfields on November 8, 2014. Indeed, the inclement weather did not deter some 200 blind persons and volunteers from braving the elements as they took part in the walk.

The event was organised by MAB in collaboration with a corporate organisation known as SBM Off-Shore Malaysia.

The participants walked for about an hour from Kompleks MAB in Jalan Tebing to Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad, Jalan Tun Sambanthan, and Jalan Tun Sambanthan 4. The walk, which started at 8.30 a.m., was led by a group of kompang drummers, which contributed to the celebratory mood.

“This is the first time SBM Off-Shore Malaysia is working with MAB in its corporate social responsibility programmes,” said the Project Director, John

Leemeijer. He flagged off the walk with the MAB Chief Executive Officer, Dato' Ganesan Supayah. Leemeijer said that the company will help MAB in improving its training facilities.

Dato' Ganesan said that the computers of MAB needed to be upgraded. He said that many of the blind would be sitting for their diploma in computer studies administered by the Education Ministry.

The Association also wants to develop its Call Centre in order to train the blind in tele-marketing. In addition, MAB needs funds so that the Agro Centre in Taman Harapan in Temerloh, Pahang, which provides training in fish and chicken rearing and vegetable farming, can be raised up to international standards.

Dato' Ganesan said that 40,000 blind persons had been registered with the organisation. He said that between RM3 to RM5 million was needed to run the Association. However, it was only able to get about RM500,000 from the Government and another RM1.5 million from the private sector.

He hoped that more companies will help the Association to provide better training services for the blind.



Thanks to the kompong Drummers, there was a celebratory mood despite the rain.



Participants walk for about one hour.

The SBM Kinabalu Expedition (KINABEX 2014)

24 blind persons were determined to put their names in the record-book as they scaled Mount Kinabalu from November 2-4, 2014. They climbed Malaysia's highest peak in order to mark the Society's Golden Jubilee year.

SBM President and expedition leader, Mohd. Nazari Othman, said, "The climb will encourage the blind to work towards their own advancement." He said that making the attempt would help the blind to improve communication and understanding with the community. He added that the three-day expedition would pose many challenges in terms of perseverance and endurance amongst the members.

In its fifty years of existence, SBM has encouraged Braille reading and writing, organised courses in language learning, computer literacy, creative writing and handicrafts as well as leadership training seminars for its members.

This time SBM would like to enter the Malaysia Book of Records with the most number of blind persons climbing Mount Kinabalu.

Congratulations are extended to the brave climbers in their successful quest to achieve the amazing record, thereby creating another historical moment of success in conjunction with the 50th anniversary celebrations of SBM.

The Mahaba Memorable Night for the Blind

It was the first time ever for about 24 blind persons (including five blind persons from Hong Kong) dining out at the Mahaba Restaurant in Petaling Jaya on September 16, 2014. The food of the Yeminis in a far-away middle eastern land was truly unique and most sumptuous.

Refreshing mint tea was served as starters which made you feel cool and ready for the main meal. Then came the delicious mutton stew which is eaten with crispy unleavened bread (which is something like roti nan). It also goes well with the savoury rice, chicken, beef and vegetable salad – a very delectable and tasty blend!

The food was finally washed down with a special yemini teh tarek consisting of goat milk and natural sweet herbs. The drink was such a wonderful booster for good health that it got the blind diners on their feet to sing an old favourite of Alan Tam from Hong Kong, “Pangyau” (or “Friend”).

The President of Blind Empowerment, Mr. Eddy Chong Ted Hin, thanked the restaurant owner, Agnes, for supporting the blind empowerment project by treating the blind with the once-in-a-lifetime experience in trying out the fineness of Yemini food. Among the blind attending the dinner was Patricia Lee Foong Yee, who is not only blind but also partially deaf, partially crippled (using a wheelchair) and a dialysis patient.

Eddy Chong rates the Mahaba as a five-star restaurant based on the sumptuous food, satisfactory arrangements, conducive environment, as well as warmth and friendliness of the staff. He truly appreciates the excellent service provided.

The Hong Kong friends expressed the hope that the restaurant owner might consider opening its branches in Hong Kong.

The NCBM Career Camp

After a lapse of several years, NCBM has reintroduced the Career Camp, bringing together Form Five and Form Six school leavers. The camp was organised on the initiative of the NCBM Committee on Education. The Career Camped is aimed not merely at training per se but it also seeks to prepare the blind school leavers for entry into the job market. The participants are provided with exposure to all kinds of situations so that they will not be pigeon-holed into just a certain kind of job. Rather, they are being motivated to think of the different kinds of jobs or careers that they could go into.

St. Nicholas' Home is the most ideal place for such a career camp. They have the readily available facilities such as lodgings, the ICT Lab and the cafeteria.

The Braille Reading and Writing Competition

NCBM is in the process of establishing the Braille Council of Malaysia. Its main purpose will be to help in developing, monitoring and promoting Braille as a tool of education and functional literacy for the blind in this country. In view of this, an important function of the Braille Council will be to organise the Braille Reading and Writing Competition.

Meanwhile, NCBM has reintroduced the Competition, with the first round being held amongst the member-organisations of NCBM. The national level competition was then held at St. Nicholas' Home in Penang in October 2014.

The participants doing well in the national level competition will be given the opportunity to compete in the Second International Braille Reading and Writing Contest to be organised by the Thailand Association of the Blind. The Competition is expected to take place some time in January 2015.

As a reminder, Malaysia won the second and third prizes for the Reading Competition (25 years and above category) and the first prize for the Reading Competition (below 25 years category).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Standard Chartered Bank “Seeing is Believing” Equipment Loan

NCBM is collaborating with the Royal Society of the Blind of South Australia and the WBUAP with assistance from the Standard Chartered Bank in setting up the Equipment Loan Fund for the Blind entering employment in Malaysia. It is hoped that with this initiative, we will be able to see a significant improvement in job opportunities for the blind in this country.

Blind persons in employment who face the difficulty in obtaining adaptive equipment can get in touch with NCBM for such assistance.

2. Koperasi OKU

The Koperasi Oku has been registered with the Suruhanjaya Koperasi Malaysia and it received its Certificate of Operations on November 6th, 2014.

The Cooperative is now, therefore, on a membership drive and would like to invite interested blind and disabled persons to join as members.

For more information, you can contact Mr Gunabalan at handphone 018-3727 223.

3. Two New Books From The Ministry Of International Trade And Industry

There are two new books available at the MAB library and blind users can request for their own copy in Braille or in soft-copy. They are:

- (a) The MITI Report 2013 (in English and Malay Braille)
- (b) Thinking Globally, Prospering Regionally – the ASEAN Economic Community 2015 (English).

Please get in touch with Nabilah at telephone 03 2272 2677 extension 154.

4. 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 2272 4959.

5. 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 2272 4959.

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

Address:

94-B Jalan Tun Sambanthan, Brickfields

50470 Kuala Lumpur

Tel: 03-2272 4959

Fax: 03-2272 4960

TECHNICAL, EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING – A CAREER TRANSITION PROGRAMME FOR THE BLIND IN MALAYSIA

*By Sumitha Ramasamy,
Principal,
Gurney Training Centre,
Malaysian Association for the Blind*

In the Technical, Educational and Vocational Career Transition Programme, i.e. the TEVT Transition Programme, the existing courses at the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) have been restructured while new courses have been introduced. All these courses have been accredited by the Government, thereby providing the blind who excel in the tests with legitimacy and recognition in their qualifications. The ultimate goal is to make it easier for employers to be convinced of the abilities and capabilities of the blind, thus helping to create and to increase new job opportunities for the blind.

Specific reasons in support of the TEVT Career Transition Programme:

1. Process of Training

The process of training itself will help greatly in improving and enhancing the opportunities of the blind for employment. This is in view of the fact that the training programme will enable the blind person to cope much more effectively in the real work situation.

In the process of training, the trainees have to prepare their own folio prior to the final assessment. This folio will then have to be audited both by internal and external auditors.

The actual ability of the trainee will be reflected in the content of the folio. This is because upon completing each module in the course, the trainee is required to enclose his classwork such as the assignments, worksheets and performance assessments. All these documents will serve as evidence of how the trainee has performed in the Programme.

Indeed, this folio is very important as it can be used as a good supporting document for the blind when attending an interview. The data and information contained in the reference material will indicate the kind of tasks that have been performed in the classroom by the candidate.

In fact, the tasks undertaken in the classroom are actually based on the requirements of the National Occupation Standard Skills (or NOSS) Programme. NOSS is the document which contains the list of duties and tasks that have to be performed in the workplace in accordance with the industry concerned. The list has, in fact, been compiled by experts in the respective industries under the supervision of the Human Resources Ministry. These are actually the tasks that have to be carried out in the classroom situation and the trainees are expected to excel in the performance of these tasks.

When the employer, who is on the interview panel, is able to have a look at the abilities and skills learnt in the classroom and he finds that they are in line with the requirements of the Industry, there will certainly be a much greater likelihood of him considering the blind candidate for employment.

2. Modification of the Dual National Learning System:

Another important feature of the TEVT Programme is the Dual National Learning System. In the original system, 20 % of the training takes place in the organisation while 80 % of the training is carried out in the workplace which could be the sheltered workshop or in any other business or production outlet owned by the organisation.

In the case of the TEVT Programme, the approach has been adapted to suit the specific needs of the blind. In other words, the reverse is true – here 20 % of the training takes place in the organisation while 80 % of the training is carried out in the potential worksite.

In fact, we believe that two kinds of courses will do very well in this system. These courses are related to the wellness and computer industries. Of course, these courses will first need to be accredited by the Government.

Undoubtedly, through this approach, many more opportunities can be opened up to the blind. This is in view of the fact that employers will be encouraged to take on blind persons for on-the-job practice without any definite commitment until they are convinced that the blind person can perform effectively in the job.

By undergoing 80 % of the training in the workplace, the blind person is given the opportunity to learn and adapt to the work culture of the industry. At the same time, however, he is not tied down to the actual responsibilities and he is, therefore, free from the pressures faced by a permanent employee. Moreover, this affords him the much needed time for learning and preparation without having to be fearful of committing errors or making mistakes.

Thus, this makes it easier for the blind person to achieve the goals of training. This will ultimately facilitate the acceptance and absorption of the blind person into employment.

Furthermore, in the original system, the Government supports the TEVT programme by providing grants to the trainees in the programme. It is, therefore, hoped that in the future the Government would also consider providing incentive grants to the employers, thereby encouraging them to make available training opportunities for the blind.

3. Training Opportunities for Blind Graduates:

This system can also be of great benefit to graduates as they need to acquire some skills before going into full-time employment. With the acquisition of skills through the TEVT Programme, their employability will be significantly enhanced. Even taking up the TEVT Programme on a part-time basis can be most helpful to them in improving their employment opportunities.

Being thus equipped, blind graduates need not be fearful of competing with sighted candidates when attending an interview and ultimately in employment. This is because where the sighted person may have only academic qualifications, the skills acquired through the TEVT

Programme will give the blind additional mileage at the interview and subsequently in employment.

4. Abilympic Skills Training:

Some of the skills taught in the TEVT Programme are also the skills that have been adopted by the Abilympic Organisation for competition. Thus, some of the skills learnt in the TEVT Programme could help to provide the blind person for participation in the Abilympic competition both on the National and international level.

If the blind person takes part in the Abilympic competition and wins, he will surely gain recognition of his abilities and capabilities. This will definitely help to enhance his image and thereby improve his opportunities for employment.

5. Rate of Unemployment:

In accordance with the statistics from the National Welfare Department up to August 2014, there are about 45,000 blind persons out of a population of around 30 million. The rate of unemployment among the blind is generally assumed to be about 70 %. This means that the number of unemployed blind persons in Malaysia would be about 31,500 in 2014.

This can be compared with the rate of unemployment among the sight population which is a mere 3.29 % in 2014. This translates to a figure of about 987,000 for sighted persons in the whole population of 30 million.

We believe that through the TEVT Programme, a significant reduction can be made in the reduction of unemployment among the blind population.

Conclusion

For all the reasons given above, I have no doubt that the TEVT Transition Programme implemented at the GTC may be a small but very significant step forward in helping to improve and increase employment opportunities for the blind in Malaysia.

RAMAN NAGAPAN – EXEMPLARY MODEL OF THE BLIND IN EMPLOYMENT

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Born blind in Kuala Lumpur in 1960, Raman Nagapan did his primary education at the Batu Road School and his secondary education at St. John's Institution. Then he joined the Gurney Training Centre of the Malaysian Association for the Blind in 1974 where he took up telephony training.

While waiting for a job after training, he went selling tidbits from door to door. One day when returning home, two guys offered to help him. Stopping at Jalan Berhala in Brickfields, they asked him for money. When Raman said that he had only RM20, they took the money, threw him into the drain and left. He climbed slowly out of the drain as he was in pain and he walked home with some cuts and bruises.

Eventually, MAB found him a job as telephone operator in a wine company where he worked for six months. Then he went to the Pantai Medical Centre where he worked for another brief period. Finally, he was placed in the Carrier Air-conditioner Company where he worked until he was retrenched due to the austerity drive at the time. Thus, he had worked for six years as telephonist from 1981 to 1986.

This seem to be the end of the road for Raman and he did not know what to do. He had been estranged from his family since the secondary school years when he was staying at the Pure Life Society in Puchong, Selangor. No one in his family bothered to find out how he was fairing and they cared nothing at all for his well-being. He was desperate and needed to work but MAB could not find him another job.

After some time, Raman decided that he could not allow this hopeless situation to keep him down. He began reminiscing on the good old days in school and he remembered the teacher, Bro. Senan, who had made him the tambourine player in the MAB band. With the band, they went all over the country to perform at the various schools and clubs such as the Lions and Rotary.

Fortunately, while working as telephone operator, Raman had also taken up the hobby of playing the harmonium, the accordion and the keyboard – in fact, all the instruments were self-taught. Thus, he was able to turn to music for a living.

One day, Raman had the fortune of accompanying a veteran artiste from India.

Raman said, “He told me about the music ragas, i.e. the Indian music scale. I was fascinated to find out that there were thirty-two scales in Indian music. The parental raga has seven notes while the branch ragas have less than seven notes – actually, they have four, five or six notes.”

He continued, “I also discovered that there were eight different kinds of rhythm – the rubak or waltz, the chaka for disco, rumba and samba, the athi with four or eight beats, the kanda-sabu with five beats, the misra-sabu with seven beats and the nine-beat tala.”

When Raman performed for the Indian dance artistes, they invited him to sing for them and they gave him the song words to learn by heart. This was a new opening for Raman and he really enjoyed singing the classical Indian songs. Some of the lines had to be sung repeatedly for as many as forty-one times before going on to the next line. So he came up with an ingenious method in order to deal with this problem.

“I would create some variation on certain lines to indicate the number of the line. In this way, I will be able to know when to change to the new line.”

Indeed, the Indian dancers often marvelled at how Raman knew when to change to the new line without reading the music notes.

Later on, Raman was even asked to help compose tunes. He would go to the internet to look for the classical pieces in order to figure out the phrasing of the lines for himself. He was then able to compose the tunes for Tamil poems by Malaysian writers. Soon many aspiring singers began to give him song lyrics for him to compose the tunes. The duration of the tunes varied from three to eight minutes. Raman would compose everything in the key

of c as he did not have the natural hearing pitch for music; yet he had this uncanny ability to compose so many tunes.

Subsequently, he received many requests for track recordings of his compositions. Arrangements were thus made for his compositions to be recorded (initially on cassette and later on CD) in the studio. This enabled the singers to practise their songs with the pre-recorded tunes before finally making their song album in the studio.

In the 1990's, Raman spent a number of years in Singapore where he had a performing contract with the Indian Association there. He said those were very happy times indeed as he worked very well with Patrick who was in charge of the Association and he was able to earn more than S\$2,000 per month. However, with the change of boss in 1997, conditions were less favourable and his situation declined drastically. So he decided to return to Malaysia and continued to perform as singer and keyboard player.

Raman actually got married in 1989 and he was really lucky because it was love which had found him. The lady saw him at a performance and she decided to pay him a surprise visit in Cheras where he was staying in a rented room. She asked the house-owner if she could take him out for a while and they had their rendezvous in the Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet.

The lady started with a question. "Can I ask you something?"

"Can," he replied rather tentatively.

"Will you marry me," She asked.

In amazement he replied, "But shouldn't you think twice about this?"

"I have thought enough," she said.

"But marrying a blind man and living with him is very tough, you know," he said. "Are you sure you can cope with me?"

"Why not?" She said in gentle laughter. "Just say yes or no."

Raman kept very quiet.

“Does quiet mean yes?” She asked teasingly. “It’s the girl who is shy but this time the boy is shy!”

And so they got married and Raman found out that his wife had been a teacher in a Tamil Primary School in Kuala Lipis, Pahang. Her family was not happy at all with the proposed marriage and got the Hindu Priest to dissuade her from going ahead with the idea. When they failed and tried to harass her, she sought protection from the police.

They had a very intimate relationship even though no child was born to them. She would accompany him on his performances, acting like his bodyguard and serving as his secretary. Late one night Raman was working on a composition and he played softly on the keyboard. He was pleasantly surprised to hear her humming the tune and he said, “Hey, I thought you were sleeping!” “No,” she said. “I was listening to you playing and I like the tune very much.”

One day Raman told her that he was a very lucky man. She replied, “I’m the lucky woman!”

On another occasion, she asked him whether he would like her to go to work. When he replied no, she said, “Oh, I thought you are like other men. They prefer their wife to work!”

Time passed by very quickly with twenty years of married bliss. It was in 2009 when his wife passed away due to sudden illness. Raman was very sad indeed but he knew that his wife wanted him to carry on with his career.

After his wife’s death, Raman found it difficult to look for food. So he wrote to the Pure Life Society and they immediately made a room available for him to stay. In exchange for free board and lodgings, he would hold music sessions on Sundays for the in-mates of the Pure Life Home. On the weekdays, he would give harmonium lessons to the former in-mates of Pure Life. In turn, they are teaching others by running harmonium classes all over Puchong.

In 2010, Raman received an invitation to perform in Mauritius and South Africa. The Prime Minister of Mauritius was so impressed that Raman has been invited again to perform for the President next year in 2015.

Raman says, “My music career is better than busking or telephony. I can perform on the keyboard, I compose tunes for poets and singers, and I can sing in Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam and Hindi for Indian Classical Music as well as in English and Malay for pop songs.”

Raman speaks of his wife with fond memories and deep appreciation. Now without his wife to help him, he still packs his instruments and gear in a travelling bag ready to go at a moment’s notice.

REMINISCING THE WARMTH THAT USED TO BE

By Moses Choo Siew Cheong

As I reflect back to the time during the period from the 1960's to the 1980's, I can remember with nostalgia the warmth that used to be in the institutions for the blind – St. Nicholas' Home in Penang, the Malaysian Association for the Blind and the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur and the Princess Elizabeth School in Johor Bahru.

In those days, the buildings of the institutions and organisations for the blind were quite simple structures and there seemed to be a lot of open spaces. There was no air-conditioning in those days and yet no one really complained of the heat. In fact, the rooms with their doors and windows open were very airy, warm and inviting.

At St. Nicholas', there were several rooms in the main building where the blind students and ex-students could sit around and socialise. There was a common room where the blind could spend their time playing some indoor games. There was a round table in the porch which was actually part of the staff-room; the blind were allowed to sit around and even have a chat with the staff on duty.

At the GTC, there was also a staff room where the staff on duty were stationed during the weekends and holidays. For the blind, however, it was actually a common room as they could come here to play the piano, listen to music on the record-player and have a chit-chat with the duty staff.

There was a recreation centre at the front porch of the GTC where trainees and ex-trainees played pingpong all day long. Others could just sit around and watch the game, have a friendly chat or relax.

Likewise in PES, both the blind and visitors felt very welcome because they could sit around in the porch to relax, have a chat and perhaps sing a song or two with the guitar. Indeed, you could sense the warm and friendly atmosphere here just as St. Nicholas' and at MAB.

I remember that the popular hours for the blind to be around could be just about any time – it could be during the holidays, the weekends or even the office hours. I cannot remember any situation when the rooms were ever locked except at night. Blind persons could just simply walk in and sit around to relax or have a chat with friends. This was truly the warmth that used to be.

Nowadays, wherever you go in St. Nicholas', MAB or PES, the doors are always locked and TV cameras are focussing everywhere ostensibly to keep the blind safe from harm. Ironically, this seems to be having the reverse effect. Blind visitors feel like aliens in their own land because the TV cameras may suddenly zoom in on them to spy on their activities. In spite of the TV cameras, however, things like handphones and handbags still get stolen.

For the blind, who are hostelites, students or trainees, where else can they go for social interaction besides lying down or lazing about in their bedrooms? Well, naturally the best place for them is by the drain where they can hang down their feet from the big drop and enjoy friendly intercourse.

In the case of MAB, the blind feel like they have to go through a barrier in order to see office staff for assistance because the main doors to the office premises are always locked. Fortunately, the MAB cafeteria is still accessible to the blind even after the place has been equipped with air-conditioning facilities. The blind do find the cafeteria quite a cozy place to hang out and spend time with friends.

Moreover, by introducing the idea of the clubs in the 1990's, the presence of the blind is quite visible as they come to the Kompleks MAB to take part in various activities. The Elderly Blind Centre was set up in 1998 and the Elderly Blind Club was formed in the year 2000. This was followed by the formation of other clubs such as the Recreation Club, Youth Club, Cyber Club and the Blind Women's Club.

However, about three years ago, even all this was in great jeopardy of disappearing. This was because the management of MAB was thinking of closing down the clubs and taking back all the rooms. They had the idea

of converting the whole complex into an education centre. Apparently, the new centre will admit not only blind students but sighted students as well. I think this will be a great tragedy in the work for the blind if this were to happen – this is because meeting the needs of the blind will soon lose its way as priorities become confused.

Fortunately, the decision to close down the clubs was resinded after the raucous protests from the blind. Indeed, it came as a great relief to me when I got the news that the Blind Association had “listened” to the Voices of the Blind.

As for St. Nicholas’, it looks as if many of the blind are oblivious of its existence nowadays. Well, we don’t want to say who is to be blamed for the sad situation that has set in. Nonetheless, I am pretty sure that the matter can be reversed if more is done to enable the blind to appreciate St. Nicholas’ through the services provided.

No doubt, Kuala Lumpur is the place where many of the blind are gathered. Nonetheless, there is still quite a sizeable number of blind persons in Penang as well and it is our hope that things will change for the better at St. Nicholas’.

Indeed, it is with a tinge of sadness and nostalgia as I reflect on the situation of the blind in Malaysia today. I guess there is no point apportioning blame to this or that quarter for things having turned out this way.

Well, let us keep our fingers crossed and hope that the future for the blind in this country will be much better ultimately.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: COMMUNICATIONS SOLUTIONS FOR THE DEAF-BLIND

By Moses Choo Siew Cheong,

Executive Director, National Council For The Blind, Malaysia

Although most of us in Malaysia have not had the opportunity to use ready-made devices or equipment that have been assembled together to enable the deaf-blind to communicate with someone else, such devices and equipment do, in fact, exist in the western world. Indeed, the disabled in this part of the world are so fortunate that such equipment can be made available to them because special funding is provided by the governments there.

Some of the devices include the following:

1. Deaf-Blind Communicator (DBC):

This consists of a BrailleNote mPower and a companion Smartphone running DBC chat software. (Braille or qwerty keyboard models are available).

The product allows deaf-blind users to communicate in person, through SMS text messaging, or traditional TTY. All the features of the BrailleNote mPower can be activated at one go to give the user a mobile computing platform as well.

2. HIMS Chat:

This is an iOS app that has been developed to connect the line of note-takers and Braille displays in order to provide face-to-face communication for deaf-blind users. It allows users to save conversations for later perusal as well as the use of macros for commonly used phrases.

This has been created by HIMS and it is available at the iOS App store. It should be noted that this solution will require a Braille Display manufactured by HIMS.

Price: Free.

3. Face to Face PC Communicator:

This software allows a deaf-blind user to communicate, using a Pac Mate note-taker, with another person using a bluetooth-equipped PC. Messages are displayed on both units.

Quick-messages can be pre-programmed for easy recall. Text can be copied to the clipboard and pasted into the Face to Face programme. Face to Face comes together with the software for the Pac Mate and PC together with a compact flash bluetooth card.

So these are three possible solutions for the deaf-blind. In my opinion, communications between a person who is deaf-blind and friends can be easily solved with a use of a simple display paired with a Smartphone. For the moment, however, Apple's IOS seems to be the most ready while more solutions will be on the way soon.

As far as I know, the most inexpensive Braille display is the Seika Mini which is being carried by St. Nicholas' Home in Penang.

With a Seika Mini connected to an iPhone and an internet connection, one can use the regular text messaging service or any other social networking applications such as Skype, Whatsapp, Line Viber and Facebook. The advantage of using these social networking applications is that they are free of charge, i.e. as long as you have the internet connection.

Besides using the social networking applications, Smartphones are now also able to run mail clients. Thus, one does not even need a computer for emailing purposes.

And so it just leaves me to conclude that the future truly looks bright, i.e. as long as you have the money!

ADAPTIVE GADGETS AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BLIND

By Siti Huraizah

Editor's note: Siti Huraizah, totally blind, is the editor of the NCBM Community News on the Blind in Bahasa Malaysia and the first issue came out in August 2014. In that issue, there was an interesting report concerning the impact of adaptive equipment, especially on the blind community. The information may not be new but it still serves to keep readers updated on such developments.

Here it is:

The lack of employment opportunities among the blind is due to the fact that adaptive equipment is too expensive. As many people are aware, the use of technology, particularly the computer, is very important for the blind in employment.

However, the use of computers and other adaptive gadgets by the blind also require the use of the screen-reader which would cost several thousand ringgit. Therefore, some employers are unwilling to provide this extra expenditure just for the sake of employing a person who is blind.

Fortunately, there are some corporations which are willing to take on the responsibility of finding solutions to the problem being faced by the blind. For instance, the Apple Corporation has come up with a product that has its own screen-reader. It is known as the Invoice Over. Another company, Android, uses the Operational System that was produced by Google known as Talkback. It goes well especially with Android Version 4.2 which is most suitable for the blind.

Meanwhile, NVDA has come up with a screen-reader for the Windows System which can be downloaded free of charge from the NV Access website. In fact, a collection was made at the Assembly for the Blind in Bangkok in 2012 to the tune of US\$45,000 and the money was used by NVDA to develop and adapt the Microsoft PowerPoint Software for the blind. On January 14, 2014, GW Micro Inc. made an announcement that it will be

collaborating with Microsoft Corp. to make improvements to Window Eyes, thereby enabling the blind to use all the Microsoft Office software products free of charge.

The new Window Eyes software will enable the blind to use the computer that will be free from the obstacles posed with the application of voice or Braille. In fact, both GW Micro and Microsoft have taken this global initiative which means that Window Eyes can now be used in fifteen languages together with Microsoft Office 2010.

Such access to technology is most critical for the blind in order for them to be competitive among other sighted individuals in the employment market. Such cooperation by the Corporations has the potential of bringing down the barriers of access to technology for the blind.

Furthermore, this adaptive technology has an important impact on the ageing society. As one grows older, the vision also declines due to a number of factors such as Muscular Degeneration.

According to Andrew Weirich, the Vice President of GW Micro Marketing and Sales, this new technology is capable of helping millions of people to gain access to the computer; better still, this adaptive technology can be provided free of charge and can thus be made available to the blind throughout the world.

According to Rob Sinclair, the Chief Accessibility Officer of Microsoft, those using Microsoft 2010 and beyond will be able to download the software through www.WindowEyesForOffice.com

Indeed, GW Microsoft (www.gwmicro.com) has long believed in the need to pioneer the adaptive technology industry since 1990 resulting in many innovations to help its clients.

For further information, you can contact Weirich at:
and@gwmicro.com

You could also contact the NCBM Executive Director, Moses Choo at telephone 03 22721442.

A POINT TO PONDER: LAUGHTER FOR RELAXATION

By Wong Kow

I am in my late 60's and I have not been doing any serious reading or writing for some time now. So when writing becomes necessary, I have to resort to using short forms and abbreviations, thereby taking the easy way out. Consequently, I have become poor in my spelling, especially for those words which have vowels in between the consonants, such as the letters e and a.

On one occasion, I had to submit some medical bills to the Insurance Company for my accident insurance claims. I carefully put the doctor's report together with the medical bills in an envelope. To ensure that my claim would go to the right department for prompt attention, I wrote on the envelope: MAD cert and bills for insurance claim.

Of course, I included my full name, policy number and contact number.

On the following morning, I received a telephone call from the officer of the Insurance Claims Department. He said, "Mr. Wong, if you are mad and would like to claim your bills for that matter, you are required to obtain a medical certificate from the relevant specialist in order to prove that you are really mad."

Oh dear, spelling, spelling, spelling! I probably have to go back to Standard Three or Standard Four to pick up the spelling bee skills again!

IT'S COOLER AS YOU GET NEARER THE SUN

By Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong

Editor's note: Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong is visually impaired and he has been an Economics lecturer at Universiti Malaya for many years. After retiring in the 1990's, he spends his time observing how blind people live and sharing his thoughts with readers.

This time, however, he would like to share his ideas on the paradoxical phenomenon concerning the weather which gets cooler as you get nearer the sun.

Here it is:

Truly, it is cooler as you get nearer the sun. This seems to be an absurd statement but there is certainly no doubt about it. When you climb up on a mountain on a hot afternoon, the sun is directly above the head. Yes, you are certainly nearer the sun as you climb higher up the mountain and yet you feel cooler!

Now why is this so? This is because as you climb higher, the air becomes colder. Generally, the temperature drops by about six degrees celsius for every one thousand metres of increase in altitude. For instance, the average ground temperature in Malaysia is about 28 degrees celsius; however, the average temperature in Genting Highlands (which is about 2,000 metres high), the average temperature is about 16 degrees celsius while the average temperature on Mount Kinabalu (which is about 4,000 metres high) the average temperature is about 4 degrees celsius. On Mount Kilimanjaro, the tallest mountain in Africa, where it is nearly six thousand metres high, the mountain is cooler with thick snow almost all year round even though it is located near the equator.

When asked why the temperature decreases with altitudinal increase even though we are higher up as we get nearer to the sun, most people will give the wrong answer. They will say that the higher we are, the lower will be the air pressure, thereby resulting in temperature decrease.

In actual fact, changes in air pressure will only have a small effect upon temperature. For example, if one increases the air pressure in a car tyre, it does not make the tyre significantly hotter. Likewise, soft drinks kept in pressurised cans or bottles does not make them noticeably hotter. On the other hand, the vacuum inside a vacuum flask has zero air pressure; yet it does not make the flask cold. On the contrary, the vacuum helps to keep the water inside the flask warm.

Thus, why is it cooler when you are higher up on a mountain even though you are nearer to the sun? The real reason is that the higher you are on the mountain, the further away you are from the earth's surface. Sunlight actually penetrates through the atmosphere and its heat is finally absorbed by the earth's surface (including the grounds and the seas). The heat from the earth's surface in turn heats up the air above. Of course, the air just immediately above the earth's surface will receive more heat and it is, therefore, warmer. This is similar to putting your hand near an oven. The nearer your hand is to the oven, the hotter you will feel.

Thus, when you are at sea level, you will feel warm because you are surrounded by the warm air. On the other hand, when you are standing on the summit of a mountain, you will feel cooler because you are surrounded by the cool air. If you are on the summit of Mount Kinabalu after a hard climb, you will certainly feel cool because the atmosphere is so far away from the earth's surface so that it hardly receives any heat.

So now that you have understood why it is cooler when you are nearer to the sun, try asking the question to a college Science student. Don't be surprised if they give you the wrong answer!

SOME QUOTATIONS

Mark Twain:

Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.

Unknown

We do not stop playing because we grow old. We grow old because we stop playing.

Unknown

The heart of a volunteer is not measured in size but by the depth of the commitment to make a difference in the lives of others.

Unknown

He who runs away today lives to fight another day.

Senator John Glenn:

My view is that to sit back and let fate play its hand out and never influence it is not the way man was meant to operate.

Unknown

The happiest people in the world are not those who have no problems, but those who learn to live with things that are less than perfect.

Unknown

When we are young, we learn to read. When we grow up, we read to learn.

Unknown

When life gives you one hundred reasons to cry, show life that you have one thousand reasons to smile.

(This quotation was seen on the wall of the JKM Office in Subang Jaya, Selangor)

Unknown

It is not the minds of the blind that are limited; it is the opportunities.

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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
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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.)