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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.

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 channel to discuss and formulate national policies and plans and to pioneer new programmes for the benefit of the blind.

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LET'S NOT WORRY ABOUT OUR EXCHANGE RATE

By Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong

Editor's note: Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong has been visually impaired from childhood and he was 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 work and sharing his thoughts with readers.

This time, however, he would like to share his ideas on the exchange rate. Here it is:

The exchange rate of our Ringgit (i.e. RM) can be defined as the amount of Ringgit one has to pay in order to purchase one unit of the currency of a foreign country. For example, the currency used in the United States is the US Dollar. On November 1, 2014, one had to pay RM3.31 in order to purchase one US Dollar.

On the same day, one had to pay RM2.57 for a Singapore Dollar, RM0.10 for one Thai Baht, RM0.27 for one thousand Indonesian Rupiah, RM0.11 for one Taiwanese Dollar and RM2.95 for one hundred Japanese Yen.

Like any other currency, the exchange rate of the Ringgit is determined in the foreign exchange market through buying and selling. When there is less demand for the Ringgit, the currency will depreciate. Depreciation of the Ringgit means that we will be paying more Ringgit to purchase the same amount of foreign currency. Similarly, when there is a higher demand for the Ringgit, it will appreciate and this means that we will be paying less Ringgit to purchase the same amount of foreign currency.

When the Ringgit depreciates, many are worried because of the increase in financial costs. They include those who are going overseas on holiday, those who send their children abroad for education, and those who are purchasing imported goods. However, if the Ringgit appreciates, some others will also worry.

For example, exporters of Malaysian goods will find it harder to sell our goods in the foreign market. The profits of local hotel owners will also decrease as there will be less foreign tourists visiting the country.

According to the long established principle in Economics known as the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) theory, we should not worry about the fluctuations in the exchange rate. According to the theory, if conditions are the same, the prices of goods and services should be the same in every country. In other words, we have Purchasing Power Parity. Exchange rates vary so that we will be paying the same amount of money to purchase the same amount of goods in every country.

To explain the theory, let us assume that there is only one homogenous commodity in this world called the Walking Stick. Assume also that the commodity can be transported costlessly from place to place and that there are no taxes and no barriers to trade. In this case, therefore, the prices of the Walking Stick in Malaysia and Japan (or any other country) must be the same. So if the Walking Sticks cost more in Japan and cost less in Malaysia, then we can make money by simply doing arbitrage, i.e. we are simply buying Sticks in Malaysia and selling them in Japan and vice versa.

It, therefore, follows that if a Walking Stick costs ten Ringgit in Malaysia and costs ten Yen in Japan, then the exchange rate will be one Ringgit to one Yen. However, if a Walking Stick costs ten Ringgit in Malaysia but it costs one thousand Yen in Japan, then the exchange rate will be one Ringgit to one hundred Yen.

If the price of the Walking Stick suddenly doubles in Japan, then arbitrage will occur until the value of the Yen depreciates to half of its original value. Similarly, if the price of the Walking Stick in Japan suddenly drops to half, then arbitrage will also occur until the Yen appreciates to double of its original value. In other words, the exchange rate will move up or down so that the prices of Walking Sticks in terms of Ringgit or Yen will be the same in both countries.

The implication, as shown in this simple example, is that if prices of goods and services in both countries do not move together, then the exchange rate

would alter in order to ensure the parity in purchasing power.

At this juncture, you will probably have realised that even though the value of one Japanese Yen or one Taiwanese Dollar is so much lower than one Ringgit, yet eating out in Tokyo or Taipei is certainly more expensive compared to Kuala Lumpur. In fact, the real prices of goods are not determined by monetary factors such as the exchange rate.

VIJAYA KUMAR A/L KISHIN SINGH – BLIND ACHIEVER IN EDUCATION

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

One day, at the age of five, Vijaya Kumar crashed into a coconut tree and nearly cracked his skull. Nonetheless, young as he was, Vijaya could not admit the fact that he may be going blind; and so he quickly dismissed the incident as being a mere accident.

Then, on another occasion, he dropped a coin and he had difficulty in locating it with his sight. Thus, he had to stretch out his hand in order to feel for the coin. That was when he realised with a shock that he must be having a serious visual problem; however, he still chose to ignore the matter as he did not want to admit to himself that he may really be losing his vision.

For Vijaya Kumar, this was easy enough to do because his grandparents, with whom he lived, also refused to admit that he was having a visual problem. They chose to believe that he was no different from other children and that everything was normal with him. In actual fact, they were quite concerned about their reputation as his grandfather was a renowned person, especially in the Indian community – he was a big-time contractor and he was one of the top guns in MICA Holdings, the company that had been set up by the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) in order to help the poor among the Indians with investment opportunities.

Eventually, however, the time came when Vijay (his pet name) had to come face to face with his visual problem when he was in Form Four. He loved Science and wanted to opt for the Science stream. Nevertheless, his teachers were of the view that he should go into the Arts stream because of his poor eyesight. Thus, they called up his grandparents and told them that Vijay should be referred to an eye specialist. The diagnosis proved not to be positive and so the doctor advised that Vijay should join the Arts stream. Nonetheless, Vijay was adamant and he was determined to be in the Science stream. In the end, therefore, the teachers yielded to his wishes.

In fact, Vijay coped very well with his studies despite his visual problem. However, when it came to examination time, Vijay found difficulty in reading the question papers and in writing out his answers. Thus, he had to request to be positioned in a brighter spot.

He managed to obtain Grade One with three A's for the SPM examination. Later, he went on to sit for the STPM examination but he did not fare so well because of the practical test. Fortunately, he just managed to scrape through.

When Vijay entered Universiti Malaya in 1992, he did not declare his visual status for fear of being denied the opportunity to take up the Science course. Thus, for the first year, he was able to do Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics. The Physics course was included in the second year. For the third year, he wanted to specialise in Chemistry; unfortunately, he had to give it up because there was too much of practical work requiring the use of eye sight. Neither could he specialise in Mathematics because the lecturers were not willing to give him the extra support that he needed.

He felt that the lecturers were very discriminatory and quite stuck up. They insisted that a blind person could not do Science and they refused to provide him with the additional print materials for Maths.

Thus, Vijay had no choice but to opt for Zoology. He had the feeling that the people here were much more humane and that they had a brighter spark of humanity in them. Moreover, Zoology was apparently much easier to comprehend and what it required was only lots of reading and ability to understand the subject. Ultimately, he did exceedingly well merely with the lecture notes and some printed materials from the lecturers.

At age eighteen, Vijay was still in University and he was in need of some money to finance his education. Thus, he approached some tuition centres and he was given the opportunity to teach Physics, Chemistry, Add Maths, Biology and General Science. In actual fact, Vijay had only received a loan for his first-year studies and, therefore, had to be self-supporting in subsequent years.

Anyway, Vijay found teaching to be a real blessing for him. Giving tuition was very beneficial to him as it enabled him to have a better understanding of what he was actually learning at university. He particularly enjoyed Anatomical Identification and Physiology. As for the practical, particularly in the dissection of animals, he needed to have lots of imagination. He dissected so many animals, including frogs, rats, fish and even cockroaches. Nevertheless, realising that he was rather weak in his practical, Vijay decided to put in as much effort as he could in scoring for the theoretical part of the course.

Eventually, as time drew near for the second-year examination, Vijay had no choice but to declare his blindness to the university authorities. He had to tell them that he was actually a low-visioned person and he, therefore, needed larger font-size and bolder print to do his work for the examination and that he required extra time to complete the test. Fortunately, the university authorities were very understanding and they complied with his requests.

When asked why he had not considered learning Braille, Vijay explained that he had made an attempt to do it. In fact, while he was at university, he had attended Braille classes at MAB but he found that he just simply had no mind for it. He discovered that his fingers were not sensitive enough to enable him to master the skill.

Thus, Vijay turned to the computer, a skill which he had, in fact, picked up during his Form Five days. Unfortunately, that was when his vision began to deteriorate quite drastically so that he had to resort to the pen with very dark ink in a very bright light. Then it was around 2009 when he was able to use the computer again with the help of a talking screen-reader.

Indeed, Vijay was practically on his own at university. He received little assistance from the administration and there was no support group among the students in those days for him to lean on for encouragement and assistance. It was at this time when MAB started reaching out to the blind community with the establishment of the Welfare Unit in 1998. Thus, he was able to make contact with the Association and he was able to receive some financial assistance through the Education Support Scheme of MAB.

Ultimately, Vijay had to request for one year extension at the university because of a motor-cycle accident in 1995. He was the pillion rider and it was on the eve of Deepavali when a car hit him and his thigh-bone was broken.

After graduating, he spent the next ten years or so pursuing an entrepreneurial career. He did a lot of training plus motivational and consultancy work. It was at this time when he met the love of his life, Rani. However, neither she nor anyone else in the community at large was aware that he was facing much hardship because of his visual deficiency. Then one day, when he confessed his love to Rani, he also disclosed to her the real truth about himself. Indeed, he was so thankful to The Almighty when she told him that she would accept him for whoever he is.

In time, Rani made Vijay see that despite his disability, he was a truly capable person and that he really had all the worth within himself. Hence with his wife's great encouragement and support, Vijay gradually overcame the pain he had been carrying inside for many years. He had actually come from a broken family and, therefore, had to spend his childhood years with his grandparents instead of his parents. Gradually, the new and meaningful relationship with his wife enabled him to let go of the past and all the hurts gradually dissipated away.

After working for some years, he decided that it was time for him to further his studies. Thus, in 2011, he took up his Master's in Counselling at the Open University of Malaysia (OUM). He found the off-campus programme to be most ideal. This was because the flexibility in time allowed him to continue taking care of his business activities as well.

Having obtained his Master's Degree, Vijay was not content to rest on his laurels and went on to study for his Ph.D. in Psychology. He felt that the inputs gained from his Master's studies would be very grate advantage to him in his current pursuits. Furthermore, he was convinced that with the knowledge gained from his intellectual endeavours, he would be able to broaden his understanding concerning the nature of business, the behaviour of employees, and relationship dynamics.

Indeed, Vijay is very happy that his efforts have paid off with the recognition that he is the first blind Science graduate in Malaysia. He was 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 Vijaya Kumar as a National Record Holder and has placed him amongst the "Best of the Nation".

Vijay received the certificate from Tan Sri Datuk Danny Ooi, Founder and Managing Director of the Malaysia Book of Records. Vijay was handed the certificate on July 14, 2014 (Monday) at the Menara Uncang Emas, Jalan Loke Yew, Kuala Lumpur.



The Executive Director of the National Council for the Blind, Mr Moses Choo, and the former Executive Director of NCBM, En. Ivan Ho, were on hand to witness the ceremony.

We would like to take this opportunity to extend hearty congratulations to Vijaya Kumar for his achievements and success. We wish him all the best and blessings from The Almighty for a bright and prosperous future.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MUSIC PROGRAMME AND FORMATION OF THE BANDS AMONG THE BLIND

By Muhammad Fairuz bin Abdullah

Editor's note: Muhammad Fairuz bin Abdullah has been serving as the Access Audit and Development Officer at the Malaysian Association for the Blind since 2011. In the preceding years, however, he was the Sports and Recreation Officer. In this capacity, he had helped in the development of the Music Programme and in the promotion of the talents of the blind through various activities such as "The Battle of the Bands".

In this article, Muhammad Fairuz takes a brief look at the development of the Music Programme among the blind and gives some ideas on how the programme should move forward.

Here it is:

The MAB Band was initiated in the 1960s and it lasted until the early 1990s. At the time, the idea of having a resident band for MAB was most suitable. This was because of few of the blind were interested or involved in band music in those days and much effort had to be made to entice the blind to become band members.

Hence, the members of the MAB Band were given very special or favoured treatment. The privileges included being the band to perform at the official functions and events of MAB with transport, food and lodgings provided. They had their own band uniform which was all paid for by MAB. They were in charge of the band instruments and only they had access to the music room. What made them most happy was that they often received a generous amount for their pocket money.

In fact, the person who had actually helped to set up the first band of MAB was Bro. Senan. He was a teacher at St. John's Institution in Kuala Lumpur. He was also a member of the MAB Council which appointed him as the

Chairman of Education. Indeed, Bro. Senan found the band to be quite an appealing idea. With the band, he was able to organise public awareness and fund-raising activities in support of MAB.

Later, Mr. D'cruz, who joined St. John's as the resource teacher for the blind, became the trainer of the band. Together with Bro. Senan, they organised many trips all over Peninsular Malaysia. Thus, the band members were able to travel here and there to perform at the schools and for charity events. They travelled from Penang, Perlis, Kedah and Perak in the north to Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor in the south and even to Kelantan on the east coast.

Eventually, however, the band broke up in the 1990s as the band members moved away or they were busy with other preoccupations. Thus, the band instruments were abandoned in a badly maintained room so that most of them were destroyed or spoilt during a heavy downpour.

Towards the end of the 1990s, efforts were renewed to revive the idea of the band. In fact, Mr. Godfrey Ooi who was then the principal at the Gurney Training Centre, was very keen to get the idea going again. Incidentally, he was the vocalist for the MAB

band during the 1960s and they took part in the TV Band Contest known as Juara Kugiran.

Financial support was solicited from various sources and eventually the band instruments were donated by Star Publications in 1999. Subsequently, the feasibility of having a sound-proof music room was explored. Eventually it was decided that the room with a fire-proof door next to the meeting-room on the second floor in block A would be most ideal for the purpose. Thus, the room was made sound-proof and it was ready for use in 2002.

It was then that the idea of reviving the MAB Band was raised. After some deliberation, however, it was agreed that this would not be the best way forward. Instead, it was decided to encourage the blind to form their own bands while MAB would make available the facilities and instruments for all the band groups to have their practices. Ultimately, it was found that this

idea worked very well and, therefore, there was no necessity to revive the MAB Band for the following reasons:

1. There are many more blind persons interested or involved in music today in comparison with those days in the 1960s.
2. The blind feel happy and satisfied because no group is being singled out for favoured treatment and the instruments are not being monopolised by just one band.
3. All the band groups formed by the blind are able to make use of the amenities provided by MAB.
4. Besides making band music available and providing the opportunity to a much larger number of blind persons, MAB is able to run the service at a much lower cost.
5. Instead of supporting only one band group, MAB is able to provide support to so many more band groups among the blind.

What support is being given to the blind? The music room and instruments are being rented out to the blind at a very low rate on reservation basis. In addition, band competitions are organised in which all interested blind persons are given the chance to take part. This means that musical talents are being developed among as many of the blind as possible rather than just among one small group of blind musicians.

Indeed, the current system of providing support to as many band groups as possible is much better than the former idea of having just one resident band for the organisation. This is because MAB is able to choose from among the existing band groups to perform for any function according to suitability of the occasion. Moreover, the bands are not dependent on MAB for their survival and they can absorb much of the costs involved in engaging a band for functions. In this way, MAB does not have to incur any cost; at the same time, MAB is helping to promote musical talents among the blind. Furthermore, it provides the opportunity for the blind musicians to earn some supplementary income.

A care-taker is engaged to take bookings, to open and close the music room for band practice sessions, and to issue receipts for payments.

MAB charges RM15 per hour for all band groups at the MAB music room. A nominal fee is also charged for rental of band equipment to any blind group for functions.

New Initiatives

Most of the equipment in the music room is more than ten years old and much of the equipment is spoiled and in a dilapidated condition. Therefore, replacement of the equipment needs to be looked into as soon as possible. In fact, in the recent past, we have received numerous complaints from the users of the music room regarding the condition of the equipment.

In order to encourage more blind persons to get involved in music, the following measures need to be taken:

1. Upgrade the music room and have all the equipment repaired or replaced.
2. Seek help from professionals in coaching our blind musicians so that they can perform as well as their sighted counterparts.
3. Organise competitions and other music activities in order to improve the quality of blind performers.
4. Conduct classes in learning musical instruments such as the violin, classical guitar, piano, flute and various traditional instruments like the tabala and angklong.
5. Provide opportunities for the blind to participate in music activities organised by other entertainment bodies.
6. Make recordings of talented blind singers and musicians for sale in the open market.

The recommendations can be carried out in stages. Nevertheless, the upgrading of the equipment must be given first priority. I believe that with proper supervision and commitment from the management of MAB, blind musicians will ultimately be able to develop a career in music or at least rely on music for a supplementary income.

In order to succeed in its endeavours, MAB should work closely with Government and private agencies in developing the Music Programme and in promoting talented blind musicians. MAB will certainly need their support in sourcing for funds to implement the various programmes and activities.

NEWS FROM THE ORGANISATIONS SERVING THE BLIND

Elderly Blind Talentime 2014

The Elderly Blind talentime was one of the programmes held at the fourth gathering of the MAB Elderly Blind Club originally scheduled for December 20, 2014. However, the gathering had to be postponed to January 10, 2015 due to unavoidable circumstances.

Besides the talentime, there were birthday celebrations for those in the months of October to December as well as a lucky draw. Twenty of the lucky draw prizes were sponsored by MAB while more than twenty additional prizes were sponsored by a very generous member of the Club, Mr. Fong Ah Kan.

There were twelve contestants for the talentime and the first-prize winner was Yahya Ahmad with the Malay song, “Dara Pujaan” or “Dream Girl”. It was a great surprise, even to Gordon Tan himself, when he was announced as the second prize-winner with the Mandarin song, “Mei Jiu Jia Ka Fei” or “add coffee to wine”. What a thrilling moment it was for Gordon who had expected his name to be at the bottom of the list for the consolation prizes.

The third prize went to Lee Yoke Lin with the Mandarin song, “xiao xiao yang er yao hui jia” or “Little Goats Want to Go Home”. The three winners were awarded cash prizes of RM150, RM120 and RM100 respectively. Consolation prizes of RM20 each were given to the other nine contestants.

There were three judges for the contest, two of whom were sighted while one was a totally blind person. According to comments from the judges, while the voice and singing style were very important factors, another determining factor was the presentation of performance, i.e. some body movements, dressing not too casual, and no carrying of personal belongings or baggage up to the stage.

Datuk Idris Jala Meets with the People

It was indeed a rare occasion when Datuk Idris Jala, minister in the Prime Minister's Department, appeared in front of the general public in a coffee-shop at the NU Sentral in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. He gave a very interesting talk on business and economics, much of it was based on his own experiences in running corporations and agencies. NCBM took the opportunity to send its staff and a number of blind persons to attend the talk.

This was indeed a moment to be cherished as Datuk Idris Jala shared very useful insights gained during his career. Aspiring business entrepreneurs will do well to pay heed to this precious tip that he imparted: "To turn a company around, the most important thing is to look at the profit and loss account. This is the first thing that must be done. Don't worry about how much money the company is making or losing".

Another useful tip that he gave is worthy of being noted not only by the corporations but also by the non-governmental organisations and even by individual persons. He said, "Two important things for success in life are to be focussed and to be competitive".

Regarding the Goods and Services Tax (GST), he said that this had been successfully implemented in many countries which started with 10 %. However, Malaysia is introducing the GST with only a 6 % tax.

He explained that with income tax, many people do not pay the taxes. With GST, however, there is more levelling because everyone pays when they pay for commodities that they purchase. But in Malaysia, the basic commodities will not come under GST such as rice. In this way, the poor will not be affected by the GST.

As for the service tax on food and beverages, this will be replaced by the Goods and Services Tax, i.e. GST.

At the end of the talk, Datuk Idris Jala treated the public to his splendid performance of two songs, the first in Bahasa Malaysia and the second in English. He was a superb guitarist and a beautiful singer.

Youth Parliamentary Representative for the Disabled

Muhammad Haiqal Hazani bin Abdullah, totally blind, has been appointed as Youth Parliamentary Representative for the Disabled in Malaysia. The term of office runs from the day of appointment, i.e. December 18, 2014 till the year 2016.

We extend hearty congratulations to Muhammad Haiqal Hanafi!

Dialogue with JKM Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur

At the request of NCBM, the dialogue with the Director of Welfare of JPKL was held on March 4, 2015 at the Rukun Tetangga in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. About 70 blind persons attended the dialogue. This provided the opportunity for a number of issues to be clarified.

Firstly, the Director clarified that as recommended by the Auditor, receiving of the Elaun Pekerja Cacat (EPC) should not be automatic. This means that application for the allowance will only be valid for twelve months and the recipients must reapply for extension, using the Borang 20. New applicants to receive the allowance for the first time must use Borang 18.

The second issue raised was indeed a hot topic to handle. One recipient complained that he had received a letter from JKM informing him that his EPC had been cancelled because he was receiving an allowance from Baitumal. He felt that this was Government money and JKM, therefore, had no right to cancel his EPC allowance.

Another recipient asked why his EPC allowance was cancelled just because he had a house of his own.

The third complainant said that his EPC allowance was cancelled simply because he had signed the application forms for a number of clients in order to confirm that they were employees at his massage centre.

The Director of JKM explained that the amount of income earned per month and the amount of property or assets owned were important factors being

considered. Under the current rules, the income earned per month should not exceed RM1,200. If the client is receiving the Baitumal allowance in addition to his monthly income which would together exceed the RM1,200 income level, then he will be disqualified from receiving the EPC allowance.

Regarding clients who own more than one house and who are making use of the credit card, JKM will make an investigation before deciding whether the person is to be disqualified from receiving the EPC allowance. As for the signing of application forms, the information given on the form must be properly verified before affixing the signature to the form.

At the end of the dialogue, the clients were very happy to be given the opportunity to check their current status with JKM concerning receiving of the EPC allowance.

OPPORTUNITIES, NOT SYMPATHY, FOR THE DISABLED

By Siti Huraizah

Editor's note: Siti Huraizah is totally blind and she is working as the Public Relations Officer at the Malaysian Association for the Blind. She made her presentation at the Puteri UMNO Conference on November 26, 2014. Here is what she said:

YB Datuk Hajah Mas Ermieyati Shamsudin, Ketua Puteri UMNO Malaysia,
Yang Bahagia Saudari Zahidah Arik Chen, Naib Ketua Puteri UMNO
Malaysia,
Conference Representatives,
Participants,
The Press,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Assalamualaikum WBt...

First of all, I wish to express very grateful thanks to the Puteri UMNO for having invited me to make my presentation concerning the aspirations of the disabled youth.

Whenever a disabled person is seen anywhere, what actually takes place? Many will just look on and say in their hearts, "Oh pity, he is disabled!".

The disabled are often looked upon by the public with pity or sympathy rather than with empathy. In actual fact, we disabled people do not asked to be pitied or to be considered as being strange. I am here today as an independent person and I do not seek for pity or special privilege. Rather, I am here to tell you that we seek recognition as human beings with equal rights in this sovereign land of ours in Malaysia.

The disabled youth, in particular, will become the new generation that needs support, encouragement, opportunities and prospects in various aspects of life. Indeed, we appreciate very much all the efforts that have been put in our Government in tackling disability issues in general and for the disabled youth in particular.

However, greater efforts need to be made in dealing with the challenges facing the disabled. In the process of empowering the disabled, the inclusive approach should be adopted. Rather than having special programmes to meet the needs of the disabled, the planners should see how the needs of the disabled can be catered for in all the existing programmes or in new programmes to be formulated rather than isolating the disabled in certain programmes. For example, including disabled women in training programmes for women in general can help to promote the integration of the disabled with the non-disabled. We do not wish to be isolated; what we need is more attention from the authorities in helping us to overcome the challenges of disability.

Furthermore, efforts must be made in creating awareness regarding the needs and potential of the disabled. This can be done through the various media, particularly the print media and the Government electronic communication channels. These media can be used to create public awareness concerning the struggle of the disabled for achievement and success and how they are trying to live a normal and independent life.

In view of this, certain matters must be given attention so that Malaysia will be a happy place for the disabled. While the disabled population may be small, their number is still a force to be reckoned with. Out of 29.7 million citizens in Malaysia, about 4.4 million are disabled persons. Our Government recognises this estimate of the World Health Organisation (WHO) which had been issued by the World Bank. Until July 2014, the number of registered disabled persons is 506,228 persons.

However, the issues concerning the disabled are various and complex, including birth, experience, employment, livelihood, housing, and legislation. Although these issues are of a general nature, they must be given specific attention in the areas where they affect the disabled in particular. Here

we do not mean special assistance or privileges for the disabled. Rather, whatever programmes or assistance given to help the non-disabled in society should also be channelled to the disabled based on the idea of equality and rights, thereby ensuring that they are not marginalised in the Government development programmes.

In employment, for instance, both the disabled and non-disabled women have the educational qualifications and experience needed to help drive the National Economy forward. Nowadays the disabled have a lot of educational opportunities that are similarly available to the non-disabled. Unfortunately, after graduation, employment opportunities for the disabled are very limited. The higher a disabled person goes in education, he finds it increasingly impossible to find a job suitable to his qualifications.

The policy of 1 % quota for the disabled in employment in the public sector introduced in 1988 is still very disappointing. Nonetheless, credit must be given to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in having tried to fulfil this quota. We are hopeful that the efforts of this Ministry will not stop merely at 1 % but that it will continue to provide more opportunities for qualified disabled persons in the future.

We would also like to stress that employment opportunities for the disabled should not be limited to the positions of operators and customer service personnel. The disabled want more opportunities to be placed in decision-making positions. Many disabled school-leavers and post-graduates are faced with this problem. It is true that non-disabled women are given low priority in many matters; however, this is an even more serious plight being experienced by the disabled youth.

As mentioned earlier, the empowerment of the disabled is a right that has been enshrined in the law. Nevertheless, this matter is still being dealt with as an issue of sympathy and welfare. This certainly poses an obstacle in the development and progress of disabled youth. Besides being regarded as helpless beings requiring only assistance and sympathy, the disabled have long been denied the opportunity to prove that they are capable people.

Finally, the disabled are not able to contribute towards national development

unless they are able to enjoy equal status with the non-disabled. As the Malay saying goes “Berdiri sama tinggi, duduk sama rendah” – this is what the disabled aspire for.

Efforts towards realising Government aspirations have been made through various commitments on the international level concerning disability matters. Conferences, forums and dialogues with the disabled have been held and those with expertise in law and legislation must be engaged. Legislative reforms that have been introduced must be made effective in championing the rights of the disabled.

In this connection, we wish to suggest that a planning unit on disabled people’s empowerment be set up at the highest level. This unit must be responsible to the Cabinet in ensuring that the disabled are able to exercise their rights. In addition, this unit should be able to monitor, evaluate and ensure that the policies and laws are implemented in meeting the needs and realising the potential of the disabled.

In order for the aspirations of the disabled to be realised, the recommendations for change must gain the support and encouragement of the various authorities, particularly those in Government.

Pembahas OKU di Persidangan Puteri UMNO (26 November, 2014)

Terima kasih Pengerusi Tetap
YB Datuk Hajah Mas Ermieyati Shamsudin,
Ketua Puteri UMNO Malaysia
Y.Bhg. Saudari Zahidah Arik Chan,
Naib Ketua Puteri UMNO Malaysia
Wakil-wakil Majlis Tertinggi Umno, Malaysia,
Sidang Perwakilan
Para Pemerhati
Para Media
Tuan-tuan dan Puan-puan Yang Dihormati Sekalian

Assalamualaikum WBT...

Pertama sekali, saya ingin mengucapkan jutaan terima kasih kepada pihak Puteri UMNO kerana sudi menjemput saya bagi menyampaikan aspirasi beliawanis OKU.

Apabila melihat golongan Kurang Upaya atau OKU di mana-mana, apakah yang masyarakat lakukan? Kebanyakan orang akan memandang OKU dan berkata dalam hati, “kesian, cacat,”. OKU sering dipandang simpati tetapi jarang sekali masyarakat empati terhadap OKU. Sebenarnya kami, golongan OKU tidak minta dikasih belas atau dipandang luar biasa. Berdirinya saya di sini hari ini, bukanlah untuk meminta simpati atau keistimewaan. Tetapi, Hadirnya saya di sini adalah untuk menuntut kesamarataan hak sesama manusia di Bumi Malaysia yang merdeka ini. Golongan muda khususnya pemuda OKU yang akan menjadi pelapis generasi bangsa memohon sokongan, galakan, peluang, dan ruang dalam pelbagai aspek. Sesungguhnya, kami amat menyanjung tinggi dan menghargai segala usaha kerajaan sedia ada dalam menangani isu OKU umumnya serta Beliawanis OKU khususnya. Namun begitu, usaha perlu digiatkan bagi mencapai pengupayaan OKU secara lebih meluas. Dalam proses mengupayakan OKU, golongan ini harus dilibatkan dengan semua program yang dirancang tanpa mengasingkan OKU dengan mengadakan program yang khusus untuk OKU sahaja. Apa saja program dan latihan yang dirangka untuk wanita haruslah mengintegrasikan wanita OKU dalam program tersebut. Kami tidak mahu pengasingan, apa yang kami mahu perhatian yang lebih

khusus daripada pihak berkenaan.

Selain usaha-usaha pengupayaan OKU itu sendiri, usaha-usaha memupuk kesedaran tentang keperluan dan potensi seseorang OKU kepada seluruh pihak sangat diperlukan. Di mana usaha-usaha ini boleh dilakukan melalui pelbagai saluran terutamanya menerusi media cetak dan elektronik cilik kerajaan. Medium ini seharusnya digunakan sebaiknya bagi memupuk kesedaran di kalangan masyarakat dengan memaparkan rialiti kehidupan, keupayaan, kejayaan OKU, serta cara komunikasi dengan golongan berkenaan agar OKU ini tidak asing pada pandangan umum.

Oleh itu, beberapa perkara wajar diberi perhatian bagi menjadikan Malaysia sebagai sebuah negara mesra OKU. Meskipun bilangan OKU dianggap kecil, ia masih satu jumlah yang besar. Daripada anggaran 29.7 juta rakyat Malaysia, 4.4 juta daripadanya adalah OKU. Kerajaan mengiktiraf anggaran World Health Organisation (WHO) ini yang dikeluarkan oleh Bank Dunia. Sehingga Julai 2014, jumlah OKU

berdaftar adalah seramai 506,228 orang. Justeru, isu didepani OKU kian pelbagai dan kompleks bermula daripada kelahiran, kemahiran, pekerjaan dan sara diri, perumahan, dan perundangan. Meskipun isu-isu tersebut boleh disifatkan umum, namun bagi OKU yang diciptakan sedemikian rupa, perhatian khusus mestilah diberi. Perhatian khusus di sini bukan bermakna bantuan khusus atau keistimewaan tertentu bagi OKU. Tetapi, pemberian hak, program atau bantuan yang diperoleh oleh golongan normal hendaklah disalurkan secara saksama terhadap golongan OKU agar golongan ini tidak terpinggir daripada sebarang program pembangunan yang dirancang kerajaan.

Dalam bidang pekerjaan misalnya, golongan wanita OKU sama seperti golongan wanita normal yang punya pendidikan dan kemahiran tertentu yang dijadikan aset bagi menjana Ekonomi Negara. Jika dilihat, dewasa ini rata-rata OKU mempunyai pelajaran. Peluang pendidikan yang diberikan terhadap golongan ini amat luas sehingga OKU berjaya menandingi pelajar normal dalam pelajaran. Malangnya, setelah tamat pengajian, peluang pekerjaan amat terhad. Makin tinggi tahap pendidikan yang dimiliki OKU maka makin terhad peluang memperoleh pekerjaan yang bersesuaian

dengan kelulusan. Kuota 1 peratus pekerja OKU dalam sesebuah jabatan sebagaimana menjadi dasar kerajaan sejak 1988 masih menyedihkan. 26 tahun berlalu, kebanyakan sektor awam masih belum memenuhi kuota ini. Namun pujian harus diberikan kepada Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat kerana berjaya memenuhi kuota ini dan kami amat berharap supaya Kementerian ini tidak berhenti setakat 1 peratus sahaja malah terus memberi peluang tersebut kepada OKU yang mempunyai kredibiliti bagi menyandang jawatan di Kementerian itu pada masa akan datang. Kami juga menyeru agar peluang pekerjaan tidak hanya tertumpu kepada jawatan-jawatan yang menjadi kebiasaan bagi OKU umpamanya operator dan khidmat pelanggan. Tetapi, peluang menyandang jawatan di peringkat pembuat keputusan harus diberikan. Kebanyakan OKU yang menghadapi masalah pekerjaan ini adalah OKU lepasan sekolah dan keadaan lebih runcing bagi mereka lepasan IPT. Sepertimana wanita normal tidak menjadi keutamaan dalam banyak hal, keadaan Beliwani OKU lebih lagi terjejas bilamana golongan ini terdiri daripada wanita dan ditambah dengan kecacatan yang dialami.

Sebagaimana telah kita sedia maklum, pengupayaan OKU adalah satu hak di sisi perundangan. Walau bagaimanapun, ianya masih berhadapan dengan cabaran pendekatan kebajikan dan simpati. Hal inilah yang menghalang kepada pembangunan serta kemajuan OKU. Selagi OKU dianggap lemah dan penerima bantuan atau simpati, selama itulah peluang bagi OKU membuktikan keupayaannya tertutup. Akhirnya, golongan ini tidak dapat menyumbang kepada pembangunan negara sedangkan OKU mampu “berdiri sama tinggi, duduk sama rendah” dengan golongan normal. Usaha ke arah menjadikan inspirasi kerajaan yang ditampilkan melalui pelbagai komitmen di peringkat antarabangsa dan serantau dalam hal-ehwal OKU mesti dijelmakan. Pelbagai wacana, forum, dialog bersama OKU dan mereka yang berkepakaran dalam perkara-perkara perundangan dan dasar mesti dipergiat. Pembaharuan perundangan sedia ada mesti dilakukan agar ianya lebih berkesan dalam mempertahankan hak golongan ini.

Sehubungan dengan itu, kami ingin mencadangkan agar satu unit berupa unit pengupayaan OKU di peringkat tertinggi yang bertanggungjawab kepada kabinet bagi memastikan hak yang diberi kepada OKU benar-benar dirasakan oleh OKU dan keluarga ditubuhkan. Lebih dari itu, unit ini akan berfungsi

sebagai unit yang memantau, menilai dan memastikan semua dasar serta peraturan bersesuaian dengan keperluan dan potensi OKU.

Semoga aspirasi ini akan membawa perubahan kepada golongan OKU dengan sokongan, dorongan serta peluang daripada pelbagai pihak khususnya pihak pemerintah.

Sekian, terima kasih.

NOOR JASMEE BT. OTHMAN – A SUCCESSFUL BLIND BUSINESSWOMAN

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Yes, she is blind and of course, she is a woman – and yet, she has proven that these are no obstacles preventing her from becoming a successful businesswoman. She is a supplier of cakes, nasi lemak and handicrafts. How did she do it? What were the challenges that she had to overcome in order to succeed?

It was Saturday, October 25, 2014 when I first met Noor Jasmee bt. Othman in Alor Setar, Kedah. She was involved in the White Cane Walk and exhibition being organised by the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) in conjunction with the International White Cane Day which falls on October 15 every year. She is, in fact, the Vice Chairwoman of SBM's Kedah branch which was set up in 2006 with only seven members at the time.

Noor Jasmee has been visually impaired since childhood when she had only some vision in the left eye. However, she became totally blind at age 37 when she lost all of her residual vision.

Her grandmother, with whom she lived in a kampong in Perlis, doted on her and would not allow her to go anywhere out of her sight for fear of any mishap that might befall her. Consequently, Noor Jasmee was denied the opportunity to go to St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang when she was at the age of ten.

Subsequently, after completing her SRP examination in a mainstream school in the kampong, she was not allowed to continue schooling as this would mean that she had to go somewhere far away in town. Thus, she had to stay at home while her brothers and sisters had the opportunity to further their education. With their educational qualifications, they were able to gain respectable jobs with the Government.

Fortunately, however, Noor Jasmee did not remain idle at home. Instead, she chose to follow in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother who

were involved in the business of selling nasi lemak and Malay cakes for a living. She spent some time in observing what they were doing and then, one day, she offered to help in making the cakes and preparing the nasi lemak. While her mother and grandmother agreed, they were rather doubtful that she would be able to cope. To their great surprise, however, they found that Noor Jasmee was quite adept in her preparation and cooking skills.

One day when Noor Jasmee was already in her thirties, she heard of the St. Nicholas' Occupation Centre for blind women in Penang. She decided to apply for admission to the Centre in 1998. By then she was already married to a blind man who was working as a reflexologist and they had a daughter. Nevertheless, she accepted the offer for admission to the Centre. There she took up a course in making handicrafts which proved to be a very useful skill in later years.

On completion of the course, she returned home and set up her own business enterprise which she named as Pembuat dan Pembekal Barangan Rotan. At the same time, she also made the traditional cakes and prepared nasi lemak at home. The cakes and nasi lemak were all packed at home and then delivered to certain contractors for sale. The contractors included the Government agencies such as Baitumal. Noor Jasmee prefers all the food to be produced domestically so that she would be able to ensure that the standard and taste are properly maintained. Her earnings for the cakes and nasi lemak come to about RM70 per day.

With regards to the production of handicrafts, Noor Jasmee first made applications to certain Government agencies for financial assistance. Fortunately for her, she was given the plot of land which was right next to her house measuring 15 feet by 15 feet. The Jabatan Pertanian helped in the construction of the workshop building while the Jabatan Tenaga Kerja provided her with equipment such as a compressor, a cutting machine and a punching machine. As for the sign-board, this was provided Free of Charge, by MARA. With the setting up of the handicrafts workshop, she has been able to provide employment for some blind persons. The two most saleable items are the dulang and the tudung saji.

Indeed, Noor Jasmee's achievements and success have been recognised as she is the holder of several awards. In the year 2000, she received the Entrepreneurial Award for Blind Women from St. Nicholas'. In 2003 she received the Perlis Disabled Woman Leader's Award and in 2004 she received the RISDAH Disabled Woman Leader's Award.

When Noor Jasmee heard that Musa Abdul Rahman had come back from Kuala Lumpur to help set up a local branch of SBM in Kedah, she was filled with excitement and offered her assistance. Thus, the SBM Region of Kedah was established in 2006. She found Musa to be a great motivator and she felt very much inspired. Hence, she agreed to take up the post of Vice Chairwoman for which she was eligible as the Kedah region also serves the blind in the state of Perlis. Thus, through the Development Committee, Noor Jasmee has been able to initiate a number of courses that are of benefit to the blind in Kedah and Perlis. The courses include massage, cooking and handicrafts.

When asked what lies behind her achievements and success, Noor Jasmee explains: "Firstly, I believe that I can maintain the standard and taste of my products by being personally involved in their production. The personal touch, therefore, is very important. Secondly, I feel that my products can be promoted more effectively by creating a marketing network. Thirdly, and this is most important of all, prices must be reasonable at all times and the taste must always be maintained. Even if I get a small profit, I am not worried at all because all my products are sold out."

What advice does Noor Jasmee have for other blind people? She says, "Tak yakin, tak boleh; jangan mudah putus asa." In other words, "Don't be easily discouraged; you must have confidence in your own self."

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: THE NEW GENERATION EBOOK READER

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

Here is some good news for those who enjoy carrying around an ebook reader – HIMS has just announced the coming of a new generation ebook reader which will replace the Braille Sense.

Its specifications are as follows:

Product name: BLAZE EZ.

Model name:T60EZ.

Flash Memory:16 gigabytes.

Interface:1 micro USB, 1 SD Slot, Bluetooth 3.0, Wifi702.11b/g/n.

CD-Rom:

Supported – audio; OCR Capture – save and read.

Applications:

Player 2.0, 2.02, XML Daisy, Ansi/Niso Z39.86 (Daisy 3.0), Nimas 1.1, NLS, Learning Ally, Bookshare.org, Cerotek (Samnet), Open Library.

Media player: MP3, MP4, WAV, WMA, WMV, NGG, ASF, AAC, AVI, ILAC, 3GP, MPG, M4A.

Book Reader:TXT, RTF, HTML, HTM, XML, DOC, DOCX, PDF, EPUB, FB2.

On-line Services:Web radio, Daisy on-line, podcast.

FM radio:Supported.

Clock:Supported.

Battery Life:More than 12 hours; free spare battery provided.

Size:116.7 x 58.9 x 16.3 mm.; 4.59 x 2.31 x 0.64inches.

weight:138 grammes or 0.30 lbs.

There you are – this is truly a reader in every way.

The price is expected to be between RM2,000 to RM2,500.

German-designed Implants Restore Vision to the Blind

German-designed implants aimed at restoring vision to patients blinded by retinal disease have succeeded in the second phase of trials, researchers reported.

The device was tested for up to nine months among nine people with Retinitis Pigmentosa, an inherited disease in which the light receptors on the back of eyeball degenerate and they eventually cease to function.

Of the nine patients observed in the study, three patients were able to read letters spontaneously. The study appears in the proceedings of the Royal Society B, a journal published by Britain's De Facto Academy of Sciences.

The device consists of a tiny light-sensitive chip measuring 3 mm by 3 mm, which sends electrical signals down the optical nerve to the brain, providing a diamond-shaped black-and-white image with a field of 15 degrees.

One had to drop out of the experiment after the optic nerve was damaged during the operation. Another experienced a build-up of eyeball pressure which was successfully treated with drugs.

Although the restoration of vision is limited, blind persons with no alternative therapy options regard this type of artificial vision as an improvement in their everyday life.

Fighting Blindness with Bionic Retinas

Indeed, scientists see a world of light in this new system. Once doomed to a life of darkness, dozens of people stricken by retinal diseases are rediscovering a world of light.

In fact, Bionic retinas enable blind people to “see” sidewalks, doorways and even over-sized text while gene therapy has allowed a small boy to put away his white cane and take up Little League Baseball.

“Things that were thought impossible a few years ago are a reality today,” said Maria Cantosolar, Director of the Retinal Research Centre at Johns Hopkins University in the United States. “It wouldn’t be appropriate to say that we will find ways to cure retinal degenerative diseases in just a few more years, but we are surely on the right track. It is just a matter of time.”

Retinal Degenerative Diseases such as Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) affect more than 30 million people around the world, according to the Foundation Fighting Blindness, based in Columbia, Maryland, U.S.A.

DOES BLINDNESS MEAN THE END OF THE WORLD?

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

While many people tend to be fearful of the word “blind”, being blind does not need to mean the end of the world or the loss of all hope in life. At least, this is the experience of those who have been faced with the prospect of becoming blind. Contrary to what has been defined in most dictionaries, blindness does not really mean living in a world of darkness.

In Malaysia, blindness or visual impairment is defined as a visual field of 6/24 (20 degrees) or less in the best eye. As for the World Health Organisation (WHO), the definition of blindness or visual impairment is a visual field of 6/60 or less in the best eye. Therefore, not all blind persons are totally blind.

While there are many who experienced blindness from birth, there are many more who become blind later on in life. Some will face blindness during their teenage years while some others may become blind due to age-related diseases such as Diabetes or macular degeneration when they are in their fifties or sixties.

For those who are born into the world of blindness, they no longer need to face a bleak and unpromising future. This is because opportunities are available nowadays for the blind to have an education and to undergo vocational training. As for those who encounter blindness later on in life, they too have the opportunity to go through the process of readjustment and rehabilitation which will enable them to cope with the new challenges of daily life without the use of sight or with the use of limited vision.

Moreover, with the introduction of modern tools, there are many things that can now be accomplished without the use of sight. Such tools include computers, print reading machines and smartphones which are fitted for talking screen-readers, thereby enabling the blind to operate them easily. With the help of these modern aids and various software solutions, the blind are now able to function normally in the actual work environment and they

can participate more effectively in the decision-making process. Indeed the possibility of the blind holding or continuing to hold administrative, executive and professional positions has been greatly enhanced. Ever increasingly, many more of the blind are able to take part in social networking chats on Facebook, Skype and so on.

If one's hobby is reading, it need not be abandoned just because one has become blind. Nowadays adjustments can be made in order to enable one to continue with reading. Books and magazines can be made available in audio format. Alternatively, with the optical character recognition solution, print materials can be converted to the audio or even Braille format. Indeed, such equipment and solutions are meeting with rapid improvements by the day so that it will not be long before new ideas and solutions will become reality which could be in the form of a pair of spectacles or sun-glasses.

With regards to the requisite skills of daily living and the need to carry out home chores, it is just simply a matter of adapting to a new way of life and doing things differently. Even those with sight have to depend on the other four senses – hearing, touch, taste and smell – in order to perform certain tasks effectively. For example, in order for one to know whether the inside of a cake has been cooked or is ready, one would have to use something like a tooth-pick.

If you wish to assist someone who has been affected by the loss of vision, you can get on to our webpage at www.ncbm.org.my where you will be able to locate the contact of five more organisations serving the blind in Malaysia other than NCBM. Should you prefer to contact us directly at NCBM, you may call 03 -2272 4959 or 03 -2272 1442.

Please assist in making Malaysia a home for all, including the blind and the visually impaired.

A POINT TO PONDER: HAVE YOU BEEN WAITING PATIENTLY?

By Wong Kow

When Robert (not his real name) was born, he had been waiting in his mother's womb for around forty weeks before emerging into this world. He started in life with a loud cry to announce his arrival to the family.

From his cry, he would probably have meant, "Oh, I'm finally here after such a long waiting period!" He could not have realised that there would be yet countless other waitings as he travels through the journey of life.

For the first few months of life, Robert was a helpless baby. When hungry he could only cry louder and louder so that he would be fed as soon as possible. In fact, he had to wait for someone to help him with all the necessities of life.

As he grew older, he began to think that he could do many things by himself and he would not have to wait for anyone. Consequently, he would roll down from the bed and hurt himself. Otherwise, he would simply crawl and later he would walk snatching at anything he liked, getting into accidents and causing problems for other people.

As Robert grew older, however, he began to learn that he had to wait patiently for most of the things that he needed. For example, in the kindergarten and later at school, he had to learn to wait for the teacher to enter the classroom. Then he had to wait for his turn to do various things such as asking a question, saying something, reading a passage from a book, the availability of transport for him to commute to and from school, and so on. Of course, he had to wait for the results after sitting for an examination.

In adulthood after leaving school or graduating from tertiary education, Robert would have to start seeking for employment. He would have to send resumes to various corporations and agencies and bear out the long wait before being called for interviews. Then he had to go through another agonising wait before finally gaining acceptance for a position in the job market.

Indeed, there is no end to the waiting list – the application for an identity card, the renewal of a passport, the approval of a driving licence, and so on. What about the time of waiting at the bank, waiting at the airport, waiting for a friend – all this waiting can be so uncomfortable!

Now Robert is a retired senior citizen. As he continues to grow older, his health begins to deteriorate and he has to make regular visits to the clinic or hospital. Then more time would have to be spent waiting for the doctor, waiting for the medical personnel, waiting for the nurses.

Then he has to make an effort to meet up with friends and with former colleagues every now and then. He would have to wait for his grown-up children and close relatives to visit him at home during most of the weekends.

Thus, Robert is keenly aware that time spent on waiting is unavoidable. He realises that in order to make full use of time and in order to minimise the time of waiting in whatever circumstances, he needs to follow certain simple rules which he sets for himself as follows:

1. Try not to have any business dealings on Fridays with Government departments because of the long lunch break.
2. Be on time for hospital, dental or other appointments on the appointed date and time and to phone up and inform of the change of appointment if he cannot keep the date agreed on earlier.
3. Find out the approximate time of intended visits by children, relatives or friends on a certain day.
4. Be punctual in keeping any appointments or for any functions, thereby setting a good example even though he may not be able to change someone else's bad habits.

I guess you would have faced a similar experience as Robert. However, you may have better ideas on how to spend your waiting time more effectively and much more meaningfully. Why not share your ideas with us?

Personally, I would usually bring along a small radio or a mini-recorder together with some recorded materials or books. I always have to make sure that I do not forget the earphone so that I can listen at my own convenience without disturbing other people.

Besides, I always get certain items and documents ready for whatever application that may arise. They include the passport-size photo and photostat copies of the identity card and OKU card.

By being well prepared, I am able to cut down or reduce the waiting time as much as possible.

HISTORY AND THE QUESTION OF TRUTH

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. He lectures on International Relations and Modern European History.

At a seminar in the university, he presented a paper on "History and the Question of Truth". He has made available his paper so that readers, especially the blind, have the opportunity to share and learn even though they are not university students. Here it is:

According to E. H. Carr, "History is a dialogue between the past and the present". This means that History is a discipline which connects the present with the past. In the process of connecting between the past and the present, a historian must endeavour to find the absolute truth.

Absolute truth can be divided into two categories, i.e. interpolation and extrapolation. With regards to interpolation, the historian seeks for the truth concerning an event that has occurred but nothing is known about it. For example, while it is known that Tunku Abdul Rahman brought about the independence of Malaya in 1957, the historian would have to use the interpolation method in order to find out how he did it.

With regards to extrapolation, the historian needs to ascertain the truth that is yet unknown and uncertain. Through the extrapolation method, the historian seeks to determine the extent to which Tunku exerted his efforts in gaining independence for Malaya and how subsequent leaders have managed to maintain independence in Malaysia.

Indeed, the historian faces great difficulty in seeking for the truth. This is because truth is a term that is being constantly debated by intellectuals with many differing meanings and approaches.

In the relationism approach, the meaning of truth is assumed to be partial or incomplete. This means that the historian cannot say whether a factor is absolute and all-encompassing. In this approach, all factors or matters reflect only part or half of the truth.

For instance, if it is assumed that the main factor for causing World War II was due to the attitude and personality of Hitler, this factor only reflects half of the truth. This is because besides the attitude and personality of Hitler, there were also other factors such as the involvement of Italy and Japan.

Thus, in using the relationism approach, the historian will argue that all the factors concerning the outbreak of World War II are inter-related. This means that no single factor is more important than another which led to the war. In this context, Therefore, the historians must cooperate and accept ideas from one another concerning historical events.

In the second approach, which is Relativism, it is argued that no single truth is more true, more noble, more pure or higher than any other truth. The Relativist will admit that all truths emerging from history are irreconcilable, incommensurable and incompatible.

In this approach, if the main factor for the British intervention in Malaya in 1874 is considered to be an economic factor, than the historian using the relativism approach will say that the economic factor was actually the primary factor that brought about the British intervention. Nevertheless, other factors that may be accepted as true will depend on the historian concerned.

Indeed, the Relativist will admit that the truth is only true from the perspective of the individual. Nonetheless, he will respect the views held by other people. No matter what, however, he will still hold on firmly to his own view of the matter.

According to A.F. Charmers, the Relativist can be defined thus: “He denies the existence of a single universal criterion of validity with respect to which no one theory could be judged better than another”.

In the third approach, which is rationalism, the historian argues that the truth is absolute and universal. This means that he will accept only one single truth and will reject any other theory or view that clashes with his own.

A.F. Chalmers says of the rationalist, “He sees the existence of a single universal criterion of validity with respect to which all other rival theories need to be assessed or rejected”.

For example, if it is theorised that economic causes lead to imperialism when using the Rationalism approach, the historian will only accept the economic factor as being valid.

In the fourth approach, which is Objectivism, truth is not only seen as being absolute but it is also impossible to be known. In this approach, it is argued that truth is absolute because it is independent of human conjecture and analysis. If the truth is based on human analysis, then it cannot be absolute and, therefore, it cannot be true.

Moreover, human truth cannot be true because it is constantly changing. Truth, therefore remains beyond the ability and comprehension of man. This approach, therefore, is rarely used by historians and it mostly remains in the realm of philosophy. Man would regard the factors beyond his speculation and understanding to be merely myth or legend.

According to Aristotle’s philosophy of “The Doctrine of the Mean”¹ no single matter can be regarded as true or universal. Something may be true or false, depending on where and how it occurred.

This doctrine also emphasises that human action must be characterised by moderation and it must be opposed to extremism. In a way, this doctrine is somewhat similar to the relativism approach.

According to Plato, truth is absolute and beyond human comprehension. In “The theory of the form”, Plato argues that “Form” or shape is permanent and cannot be changed. He says that whatever changes is merely human interpretation.

For example, something that is regarded as beautiful will not improve no matter how many people say it is beautiful; neither will this thing of beauty become ugly even if many people say it is ugly. In accordance with Plato, therefore, that beauty is absolute and it cannot be changed. Only the views and feelings of human beings are changeable. This means that truth is free and it is beyond man's understanding. In fact, this theory is similar to the objectivism approach.

According to the philosophy of Descartes, he says, "Cogito, ergo sum", which means "I think, therefore I am". Thus, truth actually resides within the domain of human opinion and thought. In fact, this can be said to be similar to the Relativism approach because the attitude and thinking of an individual depends on his ability to think and rationalise. Nobody else other than the person himself is responsible for the formulation of his own thoughts.

Although historians and philosophers have their own arguments with regards to the meaning and approach to the truth, the meaning of truth itself has commercial and economic significance. An example relates to the issue of the discovery of the merchant ship, Portugimang, which sank in the Melaka waters in the 16th century. Who is the owner of the vessel is indeed an important question as items of historical value have been found in the ship. It is, therefore, up to the historians to determine whether it is Malaysia or Singapore that has the right to possess the ship. In this context, the truth not only has historical meaning but it is also open to economic and political interpretation.

This matter also arises with regards to the issue of the Spratly islands. Possession of the islands remains as a bone of contention between Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam and China. Even though China has claimed the islands in 1988, the issue has not been settled officially. If oil is discovered in the islands, the squabble for control of the area is bound to escalate among the contenders.

This demonstrates that a historian has the high and moral responsibility in ascertaining the truth. If the differences cannot be resolved academically, then the settlement will ultimately fall to the politicians.

According to the Dictionary of Modern Thought, truth can be divided into four kinds -

1. Truth is true if a statement conforms with reality. For instance, if a table is square, the statement is true if it can be proved empirically that the table is really square.

2. Truth is the truth if a statement is similar or corresponds with another statement. For example, if it is said that “Two multiplied by three equals six” as the first statement, and that “six is the same as three times two” as the second statement, then both of the statements are regarded as being true because the two statements corresponds with one another even though they look different from the aspect of presentation. In this context, therefore, truth is known as “the Theory of Correspondence”.

3. Truth is something that has utilitarian value. Thus, if it is argued that something has no utilitarian value, then no one will bother to debate over the matter. This idea is related to the economic concept, i.e. anything that has limited value and is supported by demand will be of economic significance.

4. Truth is usually related to the moral value. This is because a value usually reflects the values and culture of a society. What may be regarded as truth in one society is not necessarily regarded as true in another society owing to a different culture and a different way of life.

In short, truth is a concept that is being upheld by man for academic, religious or economic reasons. As this concept is associated with humanity, it is, therefore, subject to change in accordance with the changes that are brought about by human beings. If humanity is changing, then truth is also changing.

According to Prof. Butterfield, “The only absolute is change”. Thus, whatever is permanent is whatever is changing. So if truth always changes, what is its function in history? Is truth absolute or is absolutism always changing?

According to E.H. Carr, “The absolute in history is not something in the past from which we start; it is not something in the present since all present thinking is relative. It is something still incomplete and in the process of becoming something in the future towards which we move”.

In conclusion, allow me to explain in very simple terms concerning the history and the question of truth. In accordance with the philosophers, there are four ways of defining what is truth –

1. Relationism, which is partial truth or partial right; think of an elephant but you only see part of the elephant, which is part of the truth.
2. Relativism, which means many truths; think of an elephant and then imagine that you see many parts of the elephant, which means that you see many truths.
3. Rationalism, which is a single truth; in this case, you see only one elephant.
4. Objectivism, which means that truth cannot be known. i.e. truth is not an elephant or anything else that human beings can understand

Reflections on Work for the Blind

John Wilson in the International Rehabilitation Review
October 1990:

On the concepts of prevention, rehabilitation and the equalisation of opportunities, he said:

“I want to try to integrate these concepts, not by creating new vertical structures but by doing it within the on-going programmes of health and development, both nationally and internationally”.

Community-based and Centre-based Rehabilitation:

A holistic view is required concerning community-based and centre-based rehabilitation. Both systems should not be looked upon as isolated concepts or as being divorced from one another. Both systems can compliment one another in the rehabilitation and development process.

Caring for the Blind:

Traditionally, the onus has been on the sighted community to care for the blind; and so the saying goes, “How they fair depends on how much you care”.

Nowadays, with the blind having received education, they realise that caring for the blind is as much their responsibility as that of the sighted community through collaborative or joint partnership; and so the updated version of the saying goes: “How they fair depends on how much you and I care”.

An Effective Organisation:

Every organisation is faced with the same imperative – build or wither, grow or die.

The spirit of an organisation lies in its openness to imaginative thought and its belief that better and more effective programmes can be created.

This is true for corporations and for charity bodies alike.

Leadership:

The three principles of leadership are the guiding vision, the passion and hope, and integrity.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

The **ABC** for living - **A**ttitude, **B**elief, **C**ommitment.

The three A's of inspiration for the blind - **A**ccept, **A**djust, **A**chieve.

The five C's for directing your life –

- C**hart a course to determine where you want to go;
- C**ourage to take up challenges and deal with setbacks;
- C**apacity and drive;
- C**ommitment and dedication to a cause;
- C**ompassion and feeling for a cause.

COD – Cash On Delivery: For the corporate organisations,

COD stands for the following –

- C**ommunicate your ideas effectively;
- O**bserve and appraise the situation carefully before speaking or making any judgments;
- D**edicate yourself to building relationships, including those at the bottom of the line, in order to build and grow your organisation.

The three M's of leadership – **M**otivate, **M**entoring, **M**indfulness.

The **RECIPE** for retirement –

- R**esourcefulness
- E**xercise
- C**oping strategies,
- I**ntellectual activity,
- P**urpose in life,
- E**ngaging with people.

The three S's of life according to Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia – **S**implicity, **S**peed, **S**incerity.

Smart Goals – **S**ustainable, **M**eaningful, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-measurable goals.

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

1. Original articles on the achievements of blind people or of an inspirational nature (about 500 words) - 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.)



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