

# NCBM OUTREACH



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**President**

Jasmine Khoo

**Editor**

Godfrey Ooi Goat See

B.A. (Hons.), Dip. Ed.

**Produced by**

**NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND,  
MALAYSIA**

Unit 13-8, Menara Sentral Vista, No 150, Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad,

Brickfields, 50470 Kuala Lumpur

(Locked bag 11009, 50990 Kuala Lumpur)

Tel : 603- 2276 2973

Fax : 603-2276 1653

E-Mail : [info@ncbm.org.my](mailto:info@ncbm.org.my)

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*Tel : 603 - 5632 1302 / 1307 Fax : 603 - 5632 4190 / 8011 2773 Email : [sylogprint@gmail.com](mailto:sylogprint@gmail.com)*

## **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 a channel to discuss and formulate national policies and plans and to pioneer new programmes for the benefit of the blind and vision-impaired.

It cost The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia RM 30,000.00 a year to produce both print and Braille.

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 OR MAJLIS  
KEBANGSAAN BAGI ORANG BUTA, MALAYSIA**

**MAYBANK ACCOUNT NUMBER : 5145 9813 0410**

Postal address :-

Unit 13-8, Menara Sentral Vista, No 150, Jalan Sultan  
Abdul Samad, Brickfields, 50470 Kuala Lumpur  
(Locked bag 11009, 50990 Kuala Lumpur)  
Tel no : 603- 2276 2973  
Fax No : 603 2276 1653  
Email : [info@ncbm.org.my](mailto:info@ncbm.org.my)

*\* NCBM has not appointed any agent to collect cash on our behalf.*

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# EDITORIAL BOARD

Moses Choo Siew Cheong

Wong Kwee Heong

Inungkiran Mongijal

Chin Yew Cheng

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 1. NCBM Job Pioneering Scheme:

This scheme was launched in 2012 whereby NCBM will collaborate with prospective employers in providing employment opportunities for the blind. The blind person will work for a period of three to six months and be paid a monthly allowance of RM1,200 by NCBM. At the end of the period, it is hoped that the employer will be convinced of the blind person's capabilities and give him permanent employment.

For the application form, please contact the NCBM secretariat at 603 2276 2973.

### 2. Equipment Loan Fund For The Blind:

NCBM would like to see significant improvement in job opportunities for the blind in Malaysia. Therefore, blind persons in employment who face the difficulty in obtaining adaptive equipment can get in touch with NCBM for such assistance.

NCBM is collaborating with the Standard Chartered Bank, the Royal Society for the Blind of South Australia, and the WBU Asia-Pacific in establishing the Adaptive Equipment Loan Fund.

For more details, please call the NCBM secretariat at 603 2276 2973.

### 3. Research Grant On Employment And Blindness Prevention:

Application can be made for a Research Grant ranging from RM3,000 to RM5,000 to carry out research in the fields of Employment for the Blind and Blindness Prevention. RM10,000 has been allocated under the NCBM Committee on Employment and Empowerment.

Those interested, please contact NCBM at 603- 2276 2973

## **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

Readers are reminded that their contributions of articles, suggestions and jokes are most welcome for inclusion in “NCBM Outreach”.

Please note that it would be helpful to the editor if such contributions could be submitted on a thumb drive or similar mode or in Braille. If the article is in Braille, it should be on single-sided pages in order to facilitate editing.

You should include your full name (as in the Identity Card) with your address, telephone number and bank account number so that the money could be sent to you.

For details concerning payments, please see the last page.



## **ANNOUNCING NCBM'S CASHBACK ePORTAL**

During the last 28 years or so, NCBM has been appealing to the general public via our appeal letters sent through the snailmail. In recent years, we have started accepting donations through direct banking into our Maybank account as well as through CIMB clicks and Hong Leong Online.

Now, in order to tap into the internet business and online shopping arena, NCBM has signed up with an ePortal so that we can benefit from another source of income.

Therefore, this is to officially announce NCBM's entry into the world of affiliate marketing with NCBM's own ePortal provided by DubLi. In so doing, the opportunity has been opened up for our donors to Save money and getting unbelievable cashbacks while going about their daily business.

NCBM, without having to spend additional money, will also benefit from your online transactions.

There are four sections in this ePortal as follows:

1. Travel:

Hotel bookings, flights, car rentals, vacation packages.

2. Shopping:

Access to international name brands and thirteen eMalls around the world for your shopping choice and pleasure, with more being added on as time goes by.

3. Entertainment:

Music playlists and games.

#### 4. Blogging:

Fashion and life-style articles from U.S.A.

Where you can save money are in the first two sections - Travel and Shopping.

You may discover for yourself at your own leisure the benefits to be gained in sections 3 and 4.

#### **Registration:**

Registration in the NCBM Cashback ePortal is FREE, absolutely FREE!!

Just go to [www.dubli.com/M04ZH](http://www.dubli.com/M04ZH) and register for free by keying your personal email. (You do not want your cashback to get stuck when you leave your employer and they deactivate your office email account).

Our partner, DubLi, will send you an email immediately for you to reply, thereby activating your account in NCBM's ePortal.

You are advised to key in your email address again together with your password. Sometimes the email may end up in your Spam folder.

#### **Instructions:**

1. Register your email address and password at [www.dubli.com/M04ZH](http://www.dubli.com/M04ZH): Dubli will send you an email immediately.
2. Retrieve the DubLi email (and look in your Spam folder too): Click to activate with your email address and password.

## Travel

If you are used to booking your hotel rooms through a hotel aggregator like Agoda, Hotels.com, or Priceline, please continue to do so through your NCBM account.

Just click " travel" , then " hotel" , and choose the aggregator. You will be brought to the aggregator website where you can make your booking as usual. The price you are charged will be the same whether you go through your NCBM account or directly to the aggregator's website.

The difference now is that when you go through your NCBM account, you will get a cashback ranging from 3% to 12%. As a direct result, NCBM will also get a donation from DubLi that could be worth up to 30% of the Mall cashback from the transaction.

Thus, this is a three-way win-win-win proposition whereby you, our donor, wins by getting a cashback and so save money. NCBM wins by getting 30% of the Mall cashback as a donation from DubLi. DubLi also wins by profiting from the transaction.

For example, you book hotel rooms worth RM1,000 through Agoda.

a) you go through Agoda's website indirectly - you pay RM1,000. If you sign up for Agoda's incentive scheme, you get about 4% of points as an incentive which is redeemable as payment for the hotel rooms through Agoda.

b) you go through your NCBM account - you pay RM1,000 and get a cashback of 3.9% or RM30 as a free member of the NCBM ePortal. (If you are a VIP member, you get a 9.9% cashback (or RM99).

If you have signed up for Agoda's incentive scheme, you will still get the 4% incentive.

In addition, NCBM will get 30% of the mall cashback as a donation from DubLi which is RM9.



This means that if you graciously register as an NCBM/DubLi member and you use it for all your hotel bookings, you, our donor, will benefit by saving at least RM39. Furthermore, because of your support, NCBM will get a RM9 donation from DubLi from just this one transaction.

Indeed, one good turn deserves another! So please register at [www.dubli.com/M04ZH](http://www.dubli.com/M04ZH), thereby helping us to help you save some money and helping us to get donations from DubLi.

## **Shopping**

There are thirteen eMalls in total in the NCBM/DUBLI ePortal - U.S.A., U.K., India, Australia, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Denmark, Russia, Canada - and a global eMall for your shopping pleasure.

Malaysia, in fact, is under the global eMall and it has many international names and brands that you can access such as Prada, Ralph Lauren (polo), Dockers, Levis, DKNY, Gucci, Tods, Giorgio Armani, Burberry, Christian Dior, and many many more.

Debenhams and Forzieri Italia deliver direct to Malaysia. In fact, many stores deliver directly to Malaysian addresses these days.

However, if you need any shopping to be delivered from the U.S.A. or from U.K., then you should register with [borderlinx.com](http://borderlinx.com) for free. Borderlinx will then quota a courier charge in order to ship your shopping to you in Malaysia. DHL is used to ship your goods home.

We hope that donors will support NCBM by registering as a member in the NCBM/DubLi ePortal, and make your hotel bookings or do your shopping through your account in NCBM/DubLi, thereby helping NCBM to get 30% of your Mall cashback as a donation while you deservedly enjoy some savings too.

Please register now at [www.dubli.com/M04ZH!!](http://www.dubli.com/M04ZH!!)

Thank you so much for your assistance and cooperation.

# **THE MAKPEM STUDY TOUR TO HO CHI MINH CITY**

*By Loh Kong Ken*

The Study Tour to Ho Chi Minh City was organised by the Majlis Kebajikan dan Pembangunan Masyarakat Kebangsaan Malaysia (MAKPEM) from 22-25 June 2013 (Saturday to Tuesday). The main purpose of the tour was to learn about the work for the Disabled and the Under-privileged in Vietnam.

On arrival at the Thi Nghe Nursing Centre for Children with Disabilities and the Elderly, we were informed that we could not visit the Home without prior permission being given. While the problem was being sorted out, the Assistant Director of the Centre briefed us on the work for the Disabled in Ho Chi Minh City. We learned that there is no single organisation that takes care of the needs of the Disabled for the whole country. Instead, each province has its own organisation to take care of the needs of the local disabled persons.

As the approval to visit the nursing centre was not forth-coming, we proceeded to the Thien An Home for the Visually Impaired. Mr. Fong, a totally blind person, was in charge and he informed us that there were 30 blind persons staying at the home. The in-mates are taught to play musical instruments or they are sent to another centre to learn massage. So far, 90 blind persons have graduated from the centre.

According to Mr. Fong, the common occupation for the blind in Ho Chi Minh City is, in fact, playing music or doing massage. Even though there are about 100 blind graduates, none of them work as professionals. However, apart from Mr. Fong, we did not come across any other blind person throughout our stay in Ho Chi Minh City.

Just like the NGO's in Malaysia, the NGO's in Vietnam also depend a lot on donations. The bulk of the donations comes from foreign donors while Government support is virtually nil.

In order to generate additional funds, Thien An Home is involved in the production of Braille books and white canes. The products are sold to sponsors who then distribute them to the blind all over the country.

Each Braille page costs 20 US Cents while the white cane costs about US\$6. Perhaps the member-organisations of NCBM might want to consider purchasing the white canes from Thien An Home as an alternative to the more expensive canes from other countries. (Those interested, please contact Mr. Moses Choo at NCBM).

After lunch, we returned to the Thi Nghe Centre for the Children with Disabilities and the Elderly. In actual fact, there are two homes which are being separately run although they are situated beside each other. Both homes are fully funded by the Vietnamese Government so that they need not worry about fund-raising at all.

There were 350 children with disabilities staying in the children's home. The majority of the children had been abandoned by their parents at the gate of the Home. There were a total of 255 staff to take care of the children, i.e. a ratio of five staff for every seven children.

The Home for the elderly had a capacity for 150 persons. However, there were only 140 staying there at the time. The average age of the residents was 82, with the eldest being 102 years old. The residents were given the choice to stay in a room for one person or in a room for two persons.

Furthermore, there were two categories of residents in the Home, i.e. the non-paying residents who were the war veterans and the paying residents who did not have any family members left in Vietnam.

There was a total number of 54 staff to take care of the residents, i.e. a ratio of one staff for three residents. In addition, there was a mini-hospital with a capacity of 30 beds to meet the medical needs of the residents.

Thus, what we can learn from these homes are that:

1. All the homes that we visited are very clean and there is no foul smell at all in all the rooms that we entered.
2. The homes go all out to meet the needs of the residents and the number of staff employed is considerably high. Moreover, they get the bigger children and the healthier elderly residents to help out in the homes.
3. The residents feel very much at home because they feel that they are being appreciated. This was evident from the Certificates of Appreciation posted on the walls of the bedrooms.

On our last day in Vietnam, we paid a courtesy call to the Department of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs. The Director-General of the Department was on hand to welcome us and we exchanged views for about an hour.

Then we proceeded to the Malaysia Consulate to pay our courtesy call to His Excellency, Shazryll Zahiran, the Consular-General of Malaysia. In his welcome speech, En. Shazryll informed us that MAKPEM was the first NGO from Malaysia to visit the NGO's in Ho Chi Minh City. He highlighted the fact that there were actually many homes in the city which were in bad shape, particularly the homes for the victims of Orange Agent (or Napalm Gas). He firmly believed that the three homes we visited had been hand-picked by the Vietnamese Embassy in Malaysia in order to make a good impression upon us. (Personally, I am inclined to believe so).

Sunday was our leisure day when we went for sight-seeing and shopping. Our tour guide took us to the Cuchi Tunnel located in the Cuchi district.

Briefly, the Cuchi Tunnel is a chain of tunnels dug by the Vietcongs during the civil war between the South Vietnam Government and the North Vietnam Government. It is about 212 Square Kilometres in width and there are three levels. The first level is six Feet deep, the second level ten Feet deep, and the third level fifteen Feet deep. There are about 1,000 entrances into the maze of tunnels. In fact, the Vietcong stayed inside these tunnels for a period of 13 years, i.e. from 1955 to 1968.

In order for the tourists to have an experience of what it is like to be in the tunnel, the Vietnamese Government has cemented a 100-metre long section of the tunnel for tourists to visit.

Initially, eight of us (including Moses Choo and myself) decided to go in for the experience. However, after a few feet into the tunnel, Moses gave up because of breathing difficulties. As for me, with the feeling of adventure in my vein, I elected to continue on alone by following the voices of the people in front of me. Subsequently, three other persons decided to quit, one of them being too large to enter the tunnel while the two others felt pretty scared.

By the time I had stepped aside to let my three counterparts turn back, the voices in front of me had gone faint. I tried to move quickly but I found that I could not do so as I had to bend my knees and arch my back as well as use my white cane to feel what was in front of me.

After reaching the 20-metre mark, I discovered that there were two turnings in front of me. I became a bit panicky because there was no one behind me and those in front had gone too far for me to ask the directions.

However, I could still hear some voices and I decided to turn right. I told myself that if I should lose track of the voices, I would reverse and take the left turning. Fortunately, after moving about ten Metres ahead, I caught up with the rest of the team; they were shocked to learn that there was no one with me. One of them then kindly volunteered to be my guide to the exit point.

Indeed, my little act of bravado instantly became the topic of conversation for the rest of the party. My sighted counterparts were greatly surprised as they could not imagine how a totally blind person could manage to go into the tunnel unaided and even to complete the trek through the tunnel. Many of them admitted that they really did not dare to go into the tunnel.

In narrating this incident, my intention is not to boast but what I am trying to say is that sometimes the blind need to demonstrate to the sighted what a blind person can do in order to open their eyes to the capabilities of the blind. Thinking back, nonetheless, I must admit that I had been rather unwise to have taken such a great risk in entering the tunnel alone.

All in all, I would say that the Study Tour was not an overwhelming success due to several factors such as the language barrier, the selection of NGO's we visited, and the scheduling of the itinerary. Nor was it a failure as we managed to network among the NGO's in the entourage.

One day was wasted as the flight to Ho Chi Minh City was scheduled at 6 p.m. There were earlier flights to the city and I feel that the organiser should have taken full advantage of the earlier flights in order to maximise our stay in the city.

Even though MAKPEM is the umbrella body of 55 national organisations serving the disabled and the underprivileged, only seven NGO's participated in the tour. I feel that MAKPEM should have made greater effort in getting more NGO's to come along.

Moreover, NCBM was the only organisation that sent two blind persons for the tour while other organisations only sent able-bodied persons. Of course, I am not against the idea of sending able-bodied persons but I feel that the opportunity should be made available for more disabled persons to take part and gain exposure through such experiences.

Finally, I must place on record my heartfelt thanks to NCBM for having sent me and Moses for the Study Tour.

# **THE WBUAP MID-TERM GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2014 IN HONGKONG**

*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy*

*Editor's note: Ivan Ho Tuck Choy is the former Executive Director of the National Council for the Blind. He retired at the end of 2013 but he still remains active in the work for the blind. He is currently serving as the Secretary-General of the World Blind Union Asia-Pacific.*

*Here is his report on the WBUAP Mid-Term Regional General Assembly 2014 in Hongkong:*

The WBUAP held its mid-term regional assembly in Hongkong from 21-24 November, 2014. It was hosted by the Hongkong Blind Union under the leadership of its President, Mr. Chong Chan-Yau. There were 170 delegates, representatives and participants from over 30 countries and territories within and outside WBUAP.

While all the sessions were well attended, the Youth Forum appeared to have generated the most excitement. The highlight was the presentation in person of the best eight project proposals selected from over fifty entries submitted by the youth, including one from Malaysia, vieing for the thirty sponsorships to attend the MRGA and a grant of US\$2,000 to help implement the project. These were made available by the Dialogue in the Dark Foundation of Hongkong. The 150 participants who attended the forum voted in secret for the winner after all the presentations had been made. The winning entry came from China with their E-tutorial software on teaching of NVDA to BVI learners.

Apart from the tabling of the usual documents (minutes, accounts and quadrennial report), the MRGA passed the amendments to the Constitution and adopted the Hongkong Statement.

## ***1. Amendments to the Constitution:***

Some of the major amendments to the Constitution were as follows:

- 1.1 Removal of the requirement for the MRGA to be held at the venue of the WBU General Assembly.
- 1.2 Abolishing the practice of elected office-bearers being accorded the privilege of not holding territorial status and to be considered as a delegate in his/her own right.
- 1.3 Authenticating of the national delegations at least one month before the MRGA in order to avoid the unpleasant situation of having two delegations lobbying for recognition when the Board is busy with other urgent matters at hand.
- 1.4 To declare the dissolution of the outgoing Board, before the elections, thereby avoiding a repeat of the unpleasant incident that occurred at the 2012 elections.
- 1.5 The Board will not be required to fill a vacancy on the Policy Council if the remaining term is less than six months. However, the vacancy of a principal office-bearer must be filled by the general membership through the electronic medium.
- 1.6 The candidates contesting for the positions of President and Vice President must be blind or partially sighted persons, and they must be delegates.

## ***2. The Hongkong Statement:***

Some of the main points in the Hongkong Statements are as follows:

- 2.1 Call upon Governments in the region to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty so that BVI and other persons with print disability have full access to works of literature, culture and educational materials.
- 2.2 Welcome the opportunity to cooperate with the UN Development Programme to build capacity across the region so that BVI and persons with print disability are able to advocate for greater access to information.



- 2.3 Urge all Governments and relevant bodies in the region to make all efforts towards the speedy ratification and effective implementation of the CRPD. In particular, priority should be given to ensuring the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in strengthening independent monitoring mechanisms.
- 2.4 Campaign for the acceleration of women with disabilities empowerment programmes in accordance with the Asian and Pacific Inter-Government Ministerial Declaration on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UNESCAP 2014)
- 2.5 Youth forums be held at future MRGA's, and WBU be requested to hold an international youth summit.
- 2.6 Ask all Governments in the region to implement programmes that will enable full participation in open employment, including education programmes for employers and the community, transition to employment programmes, and the provision of specialist equipment schemes by the Government.

### ***3. The Cyberport Complex:***

This is a vast sprawling place where the Assembly was held. It is linked to a five-star hotel, several restaurants, shopping outlets and exhibition areas. The layout is rather confusing for the BVI's when trying to get from one place to another. Because of this, the host had to recruit a big team of volunteers to help the BVI participants get around.

Another drawback was that some of the attendees had to be housed at other cheaper hotels and a shuttle service was needed. This meant that networking was restricted.

However, some reasons for holding the Assembly at the Cyberport were that the Government was the owner of the Complex. Thus, the venue was offered gratis, including hosting of a lunch. Also, they could be away from the city centre where the demonstrators were demanding for a freer choice of a CEO for the island state in the 2017 elections.

# **BUDGET 2016 - PROVISIONS FOR THE POOR AND THE DISABLED**

*By Ooi Hock Tiam*

*Editor's note: Ooi Hock Tiam is totally blind and holds a B.A. (Hons.) degree in History from Universiti Malaya and a Master's Degree in International Relations from Kent University in Canterbury, Britain. He is currently teaching History and International Relations at the School of Humanities in Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.*

*Here he is once again to comment on Budget 2016 and whether it does provide for the needs of the disabled.*

The 2016 Budget was tabled in Parliament by the Prime Minister / Finance Minister, Dato' Seri Haji Mohammad Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak, on Friday, 23rd October, 2015. There are some provisions in the Budget which may be of interest to the Poor and the Disabled. They are as follows:

## **1. BR1M:**

The Bantuan Rakyat Satu Malaysia (BR1M) has been increased by RM50 for the three existing categories as follows:

- 1.1 Those who have received RM350 will now be given RM400.
- 1.2 Those who have received RM750 will now be given RM800.
- 1.3 Those who have received RM950 will now be given RM1,000.

In addition, a new category has been created for those with a monthly income of RM1,000 and below. They will be entitled to receive RM1,050.

## **2. Housing:**

### **2.1 The PR1MA Scheme:**

About 175,000 houses will be built under the Perumahan Rakyat Satu Malaysia (PR1MA) Scheme. Under this Scheme, the Government will

make sure that the prices of these houses will be 20% less than the actual market value.

## 2.2 The SPNB Scheme:

10,000 houses will be built by Syarikat Perumahan Negara Bhd. (or SPNB) whereby the Government will subsidise RM20,000 for each house. Therefore, the buyer will need to pay much less than the actual market price.

## 3. **Taxation:**

3.1 The income tax relief for the non-working spouse has been raised from RM3,000 to RM4,000.

3.2 The income tax relief for each child below the age of eighteen has been raised from RM1,000 to RM2,000.

3.3 The income tax relief for each child at any institution of higher learning has been raised from RM6,000 to RM8,000.

3.4 The income tax relief for each disabled child has been raised from RM5,000 to RM6,000. If the disabled child is registered with any institution of higher learning, the tax relief can be raised by another RM8,000, thus making it a total of RM14,000.

## 4. **Salaries:**

### 4.1 Salary for Civil Servants:

The minimum salary for civil servants will be RM1,200 starting from 1st January, 2016.

### 4.2 Pension of Civil Servants:

The minimum pension of civil servants after 25 years of service will be RM950.

### 4.3 Salary Increment:

All civil servants will be given an extra yearly increment starting from 1st July, 2016.

### 4.4 Bonus:

All civil servants will be given a bonus of RM500 as a one-off payment in January 2016 while all pensioners will be given RM250.

## 5. Welfare:

### 5.1 Allocation for the Disabled:

RM445 million will be set aside for about 150,000 disabled persons in the country. This will include:

- 5.1.1 RM350 as disability allowance(EPC) for working disabled persons.
- 5.1.2 RM200 for disabled persons who are unemployed.
- 5.1.3 RM300 per month for those who are caring for bedridden persons.

### 5.2 Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti (or Community-based Rehabilitation Programme):

RM100 million will be set aside for the maintenance of the PDK Programmes. This allocation used to be set aside for the NGO's which are serving the disabled through their Community Outreach Programmes.

## **6. Education:**

### **6.1 Book Vouchers:**

RM250 book vouchers will be provided for poor students.

6.2 RM100 will be given as a one-off payment for poor students in January 2016. This is expected to benefit about three and a half million students.

### **Comments:**

While it cannot be denied that there are some goodies for the disabled in the Budget 2016, there are also the minuses to be considered. In actual fact, there is nothing really extra for the disabled.

The 6% Goods and Services Tax (or GST) continues to be levied for almost all products in the country.

Moreover, the toll charges will be going up by about 100%. In total, the Government will be taking back more than what it has given out.

Furthermore, we should bear in mind the debt that has been incurred by One Malaysia Development Bhd. Stands at about RM42 billion. For the people, this is certainly quite a burden that they have to bear.

All in all, there is actually nothing that is new for the disabled. The budget allocation for the welfare ministry continues to be maintained without any further increases.

Whatever it is, therefore, we can only hope for a better and brighter future.

# **SIAU GING LOCK - OUTSTANDING BLIND PERSON IN SARAWAK**

*By Godfrey Ooi Goat See*

Siau Ging Lock has been involved in the Sarawak Society for the Blind (SKSB) for nearly 30 years from 1987-2015. He has been especially active in promoting sports and recreation for the blind through SKSB. The games being promoted include ping pong, bowling, darts, chess and carroms.

The blind would begin preparing for the ping pong league competition in Kuching in the month of April involving at least ten individual players. They practise during the weekends, eventually culminating in the grand ping pong league tournament in July. The cash prizes are RM300, RM200, RM100 and RM50 with consolation prizes of RM20 each for all the other players.

This is followed soon after by preparations for the bowling competition from July to December involving five bowling teams - two teams from SKSB Kuching, one team from SKSB Sibu, one team from SKSB Miri, and one mixed bowling team. A total of twenty participants are involved in the event. Cash prizes of RM300, RM200 and RM100 are awarded to the winning teams. Additional cash prizes of RM100, RM70 and RM50 are awarded to the three best performers. The best team will have the opportunity to participate in the paralympics for the disabled.

Siau has also been actively involved in the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) as chairman of the Sarawak branch from 1987-1991 and 1995-2007, a period of about 16 years altogether.

Furthermore, he has also been serving as a member of the SKSB committee since 1980, i.e. over a period of thirty years.

Siau's voluntary service has been duly recognised. In the year 2000, he was awarded the Bentara Bintang Sarawak (BBS), being the third blind recipient to receive this honour from the Government.

In 2001 he received the Letter of Appreciation from the Sarawak State Government for his voluntary services. In 2002 he received the Certificate of Appreciation from the National Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat.

To crown it all, he was recognised for good service by SBM in 2012 with the Sijil Perkhidmatan Kualiti Cemerlang, RM1,000 cash, a plaque costing RM500 and whole life membership which were handed to him by the Menteri Besar of Johor.

Siau got married in 1984 and he has three children. His eldest son is working in the police force in Penang, his second child (a daughter) is a special education teacher in SMK Muara Quang in Samarahan, while his third child (a son) is studying for a music degree at the Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim in Perak.

He remembers very well the eleven-day journey (1-11 June 2015) that he made over the Pan-Borneo highway in a convoy of cars with his family from Kuching to Kota Kinabalu. On the way, they stopped by for a tour of the Kundasang Highlands.

It was early morning on 5 June at around 7.15 a.m. and Siau was sitting outside the shelter ready to go up to the Desa Dairy Farm in Kundasang. Suddenly, Siau felt himself caught up in a great seizure - he thought the whole house was running down the hill and that someone was trying to throw him over. Then, instinctively, he realised that this must be an earthquake even though he had never gone through such an unusual experience before. And so immediately when the shaking stopped, he ran out barefoot and in a panic, and he shouted to all his family to get out into the open space.

The moment he felt safe, he blurted out, "Praise the Lord for saving us!" Later, he learned that the earthquake had lasted for only seven seconds and that it had been 5.9 on the Richter Scale.

Indeed, Siau has amply demonstrated how a blind person can hold family responsibilities and face the unexpected challenges, thereby living a fulfilling and satisfying life in the community at large. At the same time, he has been able to contribute to the well-being of others in society.

Siau Ging Lock is truly an exemplary model of the blind in society.

# **LIFE IS NOT JUST EATING AND SLEEPING**

*By Masitah Mansor*

*Editor's note: It was 18 April 2015 when Encik Moktar Soon and I paid a visit to Masitah Mansor in Mantin, Negeri Sembilan. NCBM had received news that Masitah was a totally blind person living on her own in a sighted community and that she was a teacher in a Government school.*

*She wanted to learn how to use the computer with speech so that she would be able to function more effectively in her job and we had been sent to help in assessing her needs. On arrival at her home, we found Masitah to be in a hazy state of confusion as the spare room where she had placed the computer was not accessible because the key was missing.*

*Masitah was contemplating aloud what to do next when her eager little four-year-old daughter offered to help. She climbed nimbly through the window and opened the door from behind.*

*Masitah remarked that when one is faced with a problem, one cannot just stand there and do nothing. She was, therefore, very proud of her daughter who had demonstrated such resourcefulness despite her young age.*

*And now here is Masitah Mansor to relate her story:*

I was born on 5 December, 1970. I received my education in the Convent Klang Primary and Secondary Schools and did my form 6 in the Methodist Girls' School in Klang.

English had been my favourite subject in school and my ambition was to be an educator. However, in 1989 I was admitted into ITM Shah Alam for a diploma course in Public Administration. I did not enjoy the course and so I left without completing the programme before the year was through.

Then I got a letter of offer from the Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor (JAIS) in June 1991. I passed the interview and was admitted into the Maktab Perguruan Ilmu Khas (MPIK) to undergo the TESL course (Teaching of English) for a period of three years from 1991 to 1993. This made me very happy indeed because I knew that my ambition would be fulfilled.



On completion of the TESL Programme, I was sent by JAIS to the Sekolah Menengah Agama Tinggi Kuala Kubu Baru in December 1993. Subsequently, I was transferred to the Sekolah Menengah Agama Tinggi Sungai Manggis in Banting. I taught in this school from April 1994 to 1998 and I did very well as a teacher of English.

I was appointed as the Head of the English Language Department and I was given the honour of being the form teacher in different years for form one, form 3 and form 5. I also had to handle all the English examination classes for the PMR and SPM.

Ours was a division 1 school with 1,700 pupils. At one stage, however, we had only three English Language teachers and so I had to resort to mass teaching. I got the good classes, the average classes and the poor classes combined and had each of these English classes conducted in the hall. For teaching materials I used the whiteboard and printed write-ups.

I trained and prepared the students for elocution contests and inter-school debates. For the English Language week, I got the students to perform by singing popular songs like the Winds of Change by the Scorpions and We Are the World by Michael Jackson in order to demonstrate the uses of the English Language. The boys brought the Guitar and the pail was used as a drum.

The school authorities were quite shocked as only the Nasyid songs had traditionally been sung in the school. They got the lyrics checked and they were quite satisfied that there was nothing in the songs that was against Islam. Anyway, the students thoroughly enjoyed themselves and, in the end, the principal said that she was very happy with the initiatives that I had taken.

Then in 1999, I got married to a civil engineer from Iraq and got divorced after about a year without any children. Fortunately, I managed to pick up the pieces when in the same year, I got another JAIS sponsorship to pursue the TESL Degree Course at Universiti Malaya from the year 2000 to 2003. I went on to do my TESL Master's Degree in 2007 and then started on my doctorate studies in 2008. I did not complete the thesis, however, as I was getting married again to another engineer (a mechanical engineer this time)

from Iraq in 2008. This marriage is working out very well and we have a daughter who is now four years old.

It was in 1991 when I was at the MPIK that I became aware that I was actually having visual problems. One of the lecturers, Dr. Mohiaya, told me that I was suffering from Retinitis Pigmentosa and that, in fact, I was a low-vision or visually impaired person. Indeed, I had been having this condition from childhood but my parents were ignorant.

In 2009 I was posted to the SMK Mantin but this was short-lived because soon after they posted me to the Sekolah Menengah Sains Rembau in 2010. Then I got pregnant in October 2010 and I requested to be transferred back to SMK Mantin which the Ministry of Education conceded to.

It was not until 2011 when I realised that I was really losing my vision and that I was becoming totally blind. I began looking back to the days when I was in ITM in the early 1990's for my diploma studies. I was actually already vision-impaired at the time and that was why I was tripping up over obstacles and falling into drains. However, the other students would criticise or even poke fun at me and they would ask why I was pretending to be blind.

When I was transferred back to SMK Mantin in 2011, there was no principal and the senior assistant was in charge. I had a big argument with him because he refused to give me any classes and I was left doing nothing and feeling very frustrated.

When the new principal came, she bought a Linguaphone set and asked me to take charge of the Linguaphone project. I realised that this was just simply an attempt to disguise the fact that she was continuing with the idea of not assigning any classes to me because of my blindness.

When the officials from the State and National Education Departments came to visit the school, the Principal lied to them by telling them that I was teaching. Fortunately, after some time, a Counsellor from the Education Department came to see me and I revealed the truth. I told the Counsellor that I was feeling so bored and she promised to do something about it.

In 2013 I was given the opportunity to teach some of the English classes but I had to share them with other teachers. After a few months, the teachers found that I could cope very well with the classes. My partner teacher decided not to come to my class any more without the knowledge of the Principal. Then Luck came my way in 2014 when we had a new principal and senior assistant for the school. They had trust in me and allowed me to handle many of the things on my own. They let me do the marking of the books and I was allowed to relieve the teachers when they were on leave.

However, now that I was going blind, I realised that I would need a computer with speech. I was already well versed in using the computer when I still had a lot of vision. So I approached MAB and I got a crash course in learning how to use the computer with speech. However, this year (2015), I found that my skills in using the computer with speech were inadequate and so I approached NCBM for further assistance. Thus, I was filled with joy and excitement when I saw Encik Moktar and Encik Godfrey who paid me a home visit on 18 April, 2015.

Indeed, I find that the community in Mantin is quite positive towards the blind and they understand that the blind can live a normal life. The people at the bank, the health clinic and the police know that I am a capable person because they have seen how I am living a normal family life, how I am taking care of my child and that I am successful in my career as a teacher. In fact, I have appeared on TV3 in 1996 and on TV1 in 2006. I was also interviewed on the THR radio station in 2001 regarding my promotional activities for the disabled in Universiti Malaya. Even UNICEF has invited me to write about my life and experiences as a blind person in order to share with the general public concerning the challenges and achievements of a blind person.

Before I met Encik Moktar and Encik Godfrey, I thought I was the only blind person trying to live a normal life with sighted people. I used to go out with sighted friends for shopping or to see the movies. I would go out for late nights and enjoy having a “lepak” with my sighted friends. They would comment that they have never known any blind person other than me who is mixing around with sighted people.

One day last year (2014), an old friend of mine from Sarawak paid me a visit. It was raining after school hours but we had to go to the income-tax department. My friend drove the family car and we had to park quite far away from the department. Fortunately, my friend knew that I wanted to be treated like a normal person and she let me run along with her to the department which took us about ten minutes. Phew! It was really exhilarating and I was so glad that I could run with her! Many people think that when you are blind, you cannot run because your hands and legs are also blind!

In fact, I am often asked the question as to why I want to struggle so hard since I am already blind. My answer to them is that it is true that I am blind, but life is not just eating and sleeping!

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

### **Introducing Allianz Products for Persons with Disabilities:**

In September 2014, Allianz Malaysia became the first operating entity in the Allianz group to pilot an innovation incubation workshop, i.e. a thinking workshop with the aim of finding business solutions for social issues.

Mr. Zakri Khir, Chief Executive Officer of Allianz Malaysia Bhd., said, “Diversity and inclusion have always been important values at Allianz and this has spurred us on to look at the issue of accessibility for Persons with Disabilities as our design challenge.”

Allianz employees as well as representatives from the disabled people’s organisations, Bank Negara Malaysia and Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM) worked together at the five-day workshop. They strove hard to come up with solutions that could be used by Allianz as an insurer in addressing the issues faced by the disabled.

In order to gain a better insight of the situation of persons with disabilities, the sighted participants were required to carry out simulation exercises. By putting themselves in the shoes of the disabled, it would help them to be aware of their assumptions and pre-conceived ideas, thereby having a better understanding of the challenges confronting the disabled.

Mr. Zakri Khir said, “What we found out from the workshop was that persons with disabilities have difficulty in accessing financial products. Although the disabled have been able to purchase insurance services in the past, the underwriting agents have always led us to believe that the disabled are the higher risk population and that we should, therefore, impose a higher loading for them. Subsequently, however, we have received plenty of feedback to show that the disabled are not at much higher risk of accidents. In fact, they do not need special treatment and only want to be treated fairly.”

Mr. Zakri Khir continued, “It is because of this commercial viability consideration that our products do not cater for all the seven types of disability. Currently, we are unable to cover persons with learning disabilities. This is a learning process for us and we need to evaluate how the products are received before further adjustments can be made.”

Later on at the official lunch in Aloft Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Mr. Zakri Khir announced that three Allianz Malaysia products had been developed or modified and are now accessible to the disabled.

The first of the three products is a yearly renewable life insurance plan known as the Allianz Ability Life. This is a very new product for the disabled and it is a very affordable life insurance plan for disabled persons aged between 16 to 70 years.

The second product is the Allianz Care Individual. It is actually an existing plan which has now been extended to the disabled. It takes care of the health care costs in the event of hospitalisation.

The third product is the Allianz Individual P.A., which is a personal accident cover. It is another existing plan which has been extended to the disabled. It offers an affordable premium rate of as low as RM10 per annum for RM10,000 coverage. The plan will cover death or any permanent disability due to an accident.

***At Allianz, diversity and inclusion are truly important values.***

Mr. Zakri Khir concluded, “We value and respect each individual and seek to understand them and to provide what is best for them. Thus, we hope that these three products will be able in some way to help the disabled by providing insurance solutions to cater for their needs.”

“NCBM appreciates very much what Allianz is doing for the disabled,” said Moses Choo, the Executive Director of the National Council for the Blind. “We would like to see more companies making such offers to the disabled. It is not so much a matter of competition but rather the idea of inclusion for persons with disabilities.”

## ***Sarawak Makes Its Museums Accessible to the Blind***

At the meeting with the Sarawak Museum Department on 3 July 2015, NCBM was informed that Sarawak hopes to come up with the first museum in Malaysia that is accessible to the blind. The project will be done in three phases -

In the first phase, consideration will be given to the designing of architecture that will be accessible to everybody. It will take into account the idea of physical options, safety of items, the importance of preservation and possible enjoyment by everyone.

The second phase will look at new means of accessibility through audio and tactile facilities.

In the third phase, the development of audio-descriptive facilities will be looked into. This may involve the training of tourist guides in the audio descriptive techniques.

The inspiration of this project came from Penang where they have come up with the audio descriptive heritage trail for the blind in George Town.

According to Karen, “Audio description is a bit art and a bit Science. Trying to describe the colours is a very useful experience. In the end, you decide what to describe and what to leave out so that the blind person still has a pretty idea of the whole scene or scenery.”

Why have audio description? Again Karen replies, “Because the blind person cannot touch everything. Therefore, intonation and vocabulary are very important elements in audio description. Their ability to hear and to smell help to enhance the experience of the blind visitor.”

## ***The Fifth ASEAN Disability Forum Conference***

The Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled (MCD) organised the Fifth ASEAN Disability Forum Conference at the Istana Hotel, Kuala Lumpur from 20-21 October, 2015 (Tuesday and Wednesday).

Some of the issues touched upon in the statement included the following:

- The disabled should be in the mainstream agenda through budget allocation and the disabled must make a stand in order to ensure that it happens.
- political participation starts with the general elections which will then allow the disabled to initiate a dialogue with the powers that be concerning education, employment and inclusion in development.
- There must be cooperation between the ASEAN Disability Forum (ADF) and the ASEAN member countries for effective implementation of the Third ASEAN Decade of Disabled Persons (2011-2020) and in achieving the ten goals of the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for the disabled.

### ***Ruvindiran Mohan’s Involvement in the Fifth ASEAN Disability Forum Conference***

Although he is totally blind, Ruvindiran Mohan was able to serve as a rapporteur for the Fifth ASEAN Disability Forum Conference held in Kuala Lumpur. By using an adaptive gadget with voice, Ruvindiran was able to make notes and help in drawing the Fifth ASEAN Forum Statement.

Ruvindiran was a student at Universiti Sains Malaysia (in Penang) from 2011-2015 and he graduated with a First-Class B.A. (Hons.) Degree in social work.

Ruvindiran became blind at premature birth in 1990. His mother, who was a nurse, was able to help him seek medical treatment and he underwent ten eye operations without any success.

He would like to pursue his education and ultimately to obtain his Master’s and Doctorate Degrees.



## ***MAB Fosters Healthy Living***

OCBC Al-Amin Bank Bhd. Director and Chief Executive Officer, Syed Abdul Aziz Syed Kechik, handed over tandem bikes to MAB Vice President, (DR.) S. Radha Krishnan. The tandem bikes were for their 230km cycle expedition from Kuala Lumpur to Taman Negara from 3-5 December, 2015. This expedition is part of MAB's ongoing plans to enhance bonding and to strengthen endurance levels amongst the blind.

It was also aimed at fostering social interaction and in increasing the propensity for healthy living and for sporting activities among the blind.

OCBC Al-Amin is a subsidiary of OCBC Bank (M) bhd.

The tandem bikes were handed over to MAB on 21 October, 2015.

## ***The Ukulele Music Programme***

The Ukulele Music lovers' Association held two training sessions for the blind on 20 September and 27 September (Sunday). This ultimately culminated in the ukulele jam session held in the MAB Hall on 31 October, 2015.

Five blind persons were able to perform on the ukulele with a number of sighted persons. The two items that they performed were "Rasa Sayang" and "You Are My Sunshine" which had the audience clanging on percussion instruments in time with the music.

## ***The Maybank CSR Day Programme:***

About fifty blind persons took part in the Maybank CSR Day Programme at the Tasek Indah, Shah Alam on Sunday, 5 September 2015. Two of the main activities were kayak riding and a treasure hunt.

The kayak race was won by the team from MAB and the team members were Vincent Eng, Mohd. Ezhar bin Anuar, Chong Wai Sum, and Siti Nadiah Omar.

The winners of the treasure hunt were the Combine Line Group and the Yours Mine Group.

### ***Elderly Blind Excursion to Penang:***

The Elderly Blind Club of MAB organised an excursion to Penang for its members from 12-14 September 2015 (Saturday to Monday). At least 20 blind persons and 20 volunteer guides took part in the programme.

Four main highlights of the trip were the visit to the Tropical Fruit Farm in Telok Bahang, Penang Hill, Kek Lok Si Pagoda Temple in Air Hitam, and St. Nicholas' Home.

They were also able to drop in at the various food paradises in Air Hitam, Kimberley Street, New Lane and the Chowrasta Market in order to taste the local delights like Asam laksa, Har mee, Oh Chien, and Chendol.

Then they had the opportunity to visit a number of well known outlets like Hua Tai, Chocolate Boutique, Coffee Tree, and Cheong Kim Chuan for the many local delectables like sate fish, durian cake, tausah biscuit, chin cha lok, har koh (prawn paste), durian coffee, jeruk fruit and condiments.

### ***Battle of the Bands:***

12 September 2015 saw some new bands of the blind battling it out with the veteran bands of the blind. There was very great improvement in the performance standards and the stakes for winning had indeed been raised.

The winners were the Recover Band with RM2,000, the Eye Lits Band with RM1,500, while the Chocolate Chips came third with RM1,000.

The best drummer was Mohd. Zaki Norizan, the best bassist was Haikal Zainoren, and the best guitarist was Mohd. Danish Aiman. They were each awarded RM300.

The event was organised by MAB in collaboration with Petronita who sponsored all the cash prizes.

### *The Incheon Strategy Seminar:*

NCBM was one of the organisations which took part in the Incheon Strategy Seminar organised by the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR) on Wednesday, 19 August, 2015 at UTM Jalan Semarak, Kuala Lumpur. The Seminar was officiated by the Deputy Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, Datuk Hj. Azizah Datuk Sri Panglima Haji Mohd. Dun.

In the opening speech by the president of MCR, Dato' Khatijah Sulieman, she said that the objectives of the Seminar were to review the progress in implementation of the Incheon Strategy by Malaysia and to share ideas and experiences to achieve the ten goals of the Incheon Strategy during the third Asia-Pacific decade of the disabled from 2013-2022.

In launching the seminar, YB Datuk Azizah, Deputy Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, reminded that the theme for the new decade of disabled persons was "Make the Right Real' for the disabled. This meant adoption of the rights-based approach in meeting the needs of the disabled by implementing inclusive programmes, thereby doing away with discriminatory practices against the disabled.

In this connection, the Deputy minister said that more should be done to get the disabled registered with JKM. She also said that the Ministry of Women alone cannot meet all the needs of the disabled and that the other ministries should play their part as well. She proposed the setting up of a task force that will take on the twin-track approach in the implementation of the Incheon Strategy.

## **WALKING – THE BEST FORM OF EXERCISE**

*By Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong*

The Elderly Blind Club of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) was set up in 2011. The main objective of the Club is to involve the blind senior citizens in organising activities for themselves.

Walking is certainly one of the best forms of exercise for the blind, especially for blind senior citizens. You only need to take advantage of your two legs to carry you along without incurring any cost to anyone. With the help of sighted volunteers as guides, the Blind person will have little trouble walking from place to place.

Therefore, with these ideas in mind, the club organised a fun walk for blind senior citizens from Kompleks MAB to the Petronas Twin Towers on Saturday, 22 August, 2015. For those above 70 years of age, the walk was a little more arduous but everyone was willing to take on the challenge.

Prior to the walk, everyone gathered at the MAB cafeteria for some coffee and biscuits. Then the secretary of the Club, Godfrey Ooi, gave a short speech to thank all the volunteers, particularly the teacher-in-charge, Puan Toh. The Club Vice Chairman, K.K. Goh, then paired off the blind participants with the volunteer guides, specially ensuring that all the pairs could speak a common language with one another, thereby facilitating communication with each other.

In all, there were 20 blind persons and 20 volunteer guides. The volunteers were members of the Brickfields Girl Guides, consisting of 16 young secondary school students and four of their teachers.

When everybody was ready, Puan Toh gave the green light and we started walking in pairs out of Kompleks MAB at around 8 a.m. Indeed, it was a fine Saturday morning when we all set out for the journey from Brickfields, each blind person holding on to a sighted guide. The air was filled with excitement

as everyone chit-chatted on the way to our first destination, which was Petaling Street.

First, we passed by the three Hindu temples along Scott Road – the temples were bustling with activity on a usual Saturday morning. Instead of walking along the main road, we crossed Jalan Tun Sambanthan and walked along the recently built long overhead bridge which linked the old Kuala Lumpur railway station with the Pasar Seni bus station. Puan Toh was very surprised to discover that they were, in fact, being led by the blind to use a shorter and more convenient route. She commented that in this walk, “the blind are leading the sighted!.

In Petaling Street, we passed by numerous stalls which had just opened for the day’s business. The young girl guides were thrilled as they had never been to this part of the city. At last, we arrived at the Subway where we could rest and enjoy the six-inch long tuna or chicken bun and a cup of cocoa, coffee or tea. After everyone had finished their brunch, one of the blind participants struck up with the guitar and the group sang “Roses Are Red”, “Ging Gang Guli Guli” and “If You Are Happy, Clap Your Hands”. The owner of the restaurant was so impressed that she promised to make a donation in the future and she took some photographs.

We started leaving the Kuala Lumpur Chinatown at about 11 a.m. and we walked along Jalan Pudu and Jalan Bukit Bintang for about thirty minutes before reaching the Sungai Wang Plaza. We stopped here for shopping and for some refreshments. We found the things here to be relatively cheaper than in other shop outlets nearby such as Giant on the basement floor and Daiso on the first floor. The food court was on the fourth floor.

We then walked along Jalan Raja Chulan and we passed by other major shopping centres, including Lot 10, Fahrenheit, Starhill and Pavillion.

At the end of Pavilion was the starting point of the Bintang Walk. This walkway was actually an air-conditioned pedestrian bridge of about 1½ kilometres in length which linked Bukit Bintang with the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) and the Petronas Twin Towers.

This bridge was declared open by the present Prime Minister, YAB Dato' Seri Najib Tun Razak, several years ago. We found the bridge to be most pleasant to walk upon (both for the blind and for the sighted). There was protection by the security guards and there were many facilities available along the way such as five-star hotels, an aquarium, a food court with international cuisines, a convenience shop and a well maintained public park.

When we passed by the food court, we decided to stop for a rest. Someone brought out a chair from one of the shops for the guitarist and we began to break out in song. After singing two numbers, the guard came and gently told us that singing was not allowed there. A customer in the food court commented that we were singing so well and wondered why we had to stop so suddenly.

And so we walked on to the end of the Bintang Walk and we came to the Suria KLCC, which was the shopping complex of the Petronas Twin Towers. From there we headed straight to the Putra LRT train station.

It was about 2 p.m. when we reached the train station and we bought forty half-priced tokens for the whole group of walkers (both blind participants and sighted volunteer guides). Unfortunately, the first train that came by was crowded with passengers so that some of us had to get on the next train. At the K.L. Sentral Station, which was our final destination, the guard opened up the barrier so that all of us could exit from the station without needing to use the tokens.

Once in Brickfields, the blind and sighted walkers exchanged goodbyes and the volunteers took leave while the blind made their own way back to their homes.

Although we had walked a total distance of eight kilometres, nobody complained of physical exhaustion – not even the septuagenarians, i.e. those 70 years and above. I believe this was because we stopped at a number of places in order to rest our feet so that no one felt really tired.

Indeed, I feel that this was an adventure which benefited both the blind and the sighted. For the blind, the adventure afforded an extremely good opportunity for them to get out of the routine and to expose themselves to new environments and situations. As for the sighted, it was a very good opportunity for them to learn about the blind and to see how the blind were able to cope with living without sight.

Walking is indeed the best form of exercise for blind senior citizens because it can be done at a leisurely pace and with the flexibility of time. Moreover, there is so much to be gained in terms of knowledge and discovery of new environments and various facilities available.

## **MEDIATION** **- UNUSUAL PROFESSION FOR THE BLIND**

*By Lim Teik Hock*

***Editor's note: Lim Teik Hock has been low-vision from childhood but he did not go through the run-of-the-mill programme as his blind compatriots in Malaysia. As a consequence, he eventually landed up in Australia where he was able to take up Mediation, which was indeed an unusual profession for a blind person. Here is what he says:***

Well, besides the run-of-the-mill jobs for a blind person such as basketry, massage, telephony or stenography, have you ever considered venturing out of the square? Let me explain how I got involved in an unusual kind of profession called Mediation.

Yes indeed, Mediation is really something completely different for a blind person to embark upon - it is certainly quite unlikely that a blind person in Malaysia would be taking up this kind of profession! Indeed, in some parts of the world, occupations thought to be impossible for the blind have proven to be untrue.

I migrated to Australia more than twenty years ago where I got employment as a Social Worker. However, it was only after retirement when the opportunity opened up for me to take up this unusual profession called Mediation. This

profession is alternatively known as Dispute Resolution. In other words, I am required in my job to bring two parties together in order to help sort out a difficult tangle, quarrel or dispute.

In Australia, Community Justice Centres have been set up whereby members of the public can come to seek assistance in meditating to settle disputes between neighbours and separating couples. The ultimate aim is to help in reducing the workload of the law courts. In fact, the magistrate and the judges are very keen to have such disputes referred to the mediation service, thereby sparing themselves from the tedium of having to hear the matter in court.

Unlike the courts, the clients are encouraged to “talk out” the issues among themselves rather than using a lawyer to argue for them. In other words, Mediation is not adversarial in nature and it works towards a win-win situation as the final outcome. In the case of the normal traditional court system, one party will win and the other party will lose.

Mediation cases could involve disputes so severe as to be life-threatening. A neighbour may be accused of throwing rubbish over the fence, or allowing tree branches to protrude into his compound, or even the constant barking of his dog. In fact, the dividing fence is often an issue between neighbours - who will repair the worn-out fence - who will replace the fence when it collapses?

In the case of separating couples, the hatred and anger are sometimes so severe that both husband and wife find it impossible to communicate with one another. So they will try to find someone else - more often than not it is their own children - who will be the go-between. Nevertheless, using children as the go-between is actually a “no, no” in the Mediation model - the technique is strongly discouraged by the psychologists because of the psychological scars. The child becomes confused as to which party it should be siding and he may grow up with mental health problems in adolescent or adult life.



So where do I come in as the Mediator? I may be blind but my role as a Mediator is no different from that of any other sighted Mediator. I had no legal training at all but in Mediation that did not matter so long as one remained neutral and non-judgmental. As a Mediator, it was very important that I made no value judgments at all times and that I allowed the two warring parties to have an equal say.

On the other hand, it was not my job to provide them with solutions. Instead, I had to guide them to where and how they could resolve their differences. In fact, I would merely act as the facilitator which is totally unlike the judge in a court.

In practice, there will be two Mediators sitting in a case. This arrangement makes it possible for either of us to observe, watch and help one another. Despite my blindness, I would not negate my responsibilities and I would indeed try to do more than what was required of me.

Usually, I would take the role of the conversationalist - I would welcome the client and set the agenda for the discussion. Given my difficulty in writing longhand to take down notes, the other Mediator would usually act as the scribe while I did the listening, verbalising and summarising. In actual fact, we both worked hand in hand in order to facilitate the casework operations.

At the end of the hearing, we would try to come up with an agreement on what they had decided to do. However, this agreement is actually not a legal document but it can be used in the family court and it can be registered as an order.

In a dispute between two neighbours, the Vietnamese woman loved to plant sugar-cane and she planted it next to the fence. On the other side of the fence, the Caucasian woman had her clothes-line. She complained that on windy days, little prickles from the cane got on to her washing. Fortunately, she agreed that it would be easier for her to relocate the washing-line in another part of the garden than for the sugar-cane to be replanted by her Vietnamese neighbour. Thus, through discussion they came to an amicable resolution of the matter.

When I am able to help settle such disputes or conflicts, it gives me a real sense of satisfaction. I may be blind but I found the job to be my calling. Moreover, I loved the work because it suited my life-style. I could work on an ad hoc basis and it was up to me to accept or refuse the work without any penalisation.

Indeed, in countries like Australia and in the west, the Mediation Service is being actively promoted by the attorney-general and even the lawyers. This is because the needs and interests of the people are being given high priority in these countries. The reduction of case-loads in the courts are a great help to the people in saving time and in sparing themselves a lot of inconvenience.

I truly feel that this is quite a suitable career for the blind. This is because lay individuals can be easily trained and you do not need to have the qualifications of a lawyer.

Nonetheless, this profession is not being commonly practised in Malaysia as one would have to pay for the services of a mediator. Moreover, too much would be at stake for the lawyers if the Mediation Service is introduced in the country.

# **TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IN TECHNOLOGY**

*By Moses Choo Siew Cheong,  
Executive Director,*

*National Council for the Blind, Malaysia*

It cannot be denied that the development of technology has had a tremendous impact on communication among the people. Indeed, technology has affected human relationships in many ways. I must say, however, that technology has had both positive and negative effects upon the lives of people.

For example, the creation of new technologies has affected the way in which we interact with one another today, be it in business, education or social life. The businessmen, teachers and doctors use these technologies to communicate with one another and it has certainly made their lives much easier. With the handphone and the internet, the people in business in different countries are able to interact with one another without needing to meet physically.

Moreover, with the help of technology, we are able to carry out our work much faster and more efficiently. With the photostat machine, many copies of a single book or document can be produced within minutes. Thus, a teacher is able to produce multiple copies of the same handwritten notes for circulation to the students.

Furthermore, computer services are helping to create new relationship possibilities. For example, it is possible for a student in one country to take video lessons with a teacher in another country. Students in one country could also carry out group studies with students in another country by using Skype. Telephone conferencing could also be done via Skype without having to meet each other face to face.

Indeed, this type of communication has enabled people to build rapport and relationships no matter how far they are from each other in their own respective countries. They can contact each other at any time and at their own convenience. In fact, many people use the social networks such as Facebook to make new friends or find people who share common interests and they interact through their computers rather than meeting face to face.

These developments can certainly be very positive indeed. In the past, cooperation between people in different countries was much more difficult when communication was limited to written letters or telegrams. Nowadays, interactions via email, phone calls or video communication are as good as face-to-face interactions. Thus, many of us are able to benefit from these interactions either at work or in the social context.

On the other hand, however, technology could have negative effects upon the people. For example, people become very individualistic as they spend much time in front of the computer chatting with friends via Facebook or Skype rather than spending time communicating with their loved ones. The lack of interaction among family members could cause relationships to deteriorate as there is little understanding concerning the needs or problems faced by individuals.

In fact, Facebook could pose a danger as people misuse it for cheating in business. For example, a fake photo of someone's profile could be posted on Facebook in order to gain some income. Indeed, as there is no face-to-face interaction on the social networking sites, relationships among people become merely virtual and they are actually a very poor substitute for real friendship

Thus, the availability of new communicational technologies can have very negative effects upon the people because they are inclined to isolate themselves and they do not involve themselves in real interaction with other people. Increasingly, the youngsters, in particular, prefer to make friends online rather than mixing around with their peers in the real world.

In conclusion, technology can make our relationships with one another either better or worse, depending on how we use it. Therefore, it is vital that children, in particular, be taught how to use technology wisely rather than bringing harm to other people.

Truly, technology has certainly revolutionised communication and it has changed our lives for better or for worse. I fervently hope that it is for the better.



## **A POINT TO PONDER: A JOKE TO REFLECT ON REAL LIFE**

*By Wong Kow*

Why are you in a hurry?

It was raining cats and dogs as two men ran quickly along the main road in order to rush for shelter. As they came near to the mental hospital, they saw a young lady walking leisurely in spite of the heavy rain.

The two men overtook the young lady and shouted at her, “Hey, young lady! It’s raining heavily. Why don’t you run faster to look for shelter?”

Impatiently, the lady replied, “You must be mad! Don’t you know that it’s also raining ahead of us and far beyond? What’s the difference if I were to run faster?”

Indeed, we are often inclined to think that we are smart in rushing faster to reach our destinations. Nevertheless, if we are unclear of the actual direction, we may be running from one problem to another and so we are never able to fulfil our goals in life. In fact, there are many instances in which it is the slow and steady who ultimately win the race.

Although I told the little incident in jest, it does lead me to share with readers two true stories. The first involved my nephew, Johnny, who is a sales representative in a direct sales company with lots of products.

In order to reach the sales target to qualify for promotion to the rank of Top Sales Representative for the Year, he had to rush around the breadth and length of Malaysia. The purpose of his rushing, of course, was to meet up with clients for product presentation, to give motivational talks, to recruit new downlines, and to find new product users by bearing testimony to the benefits of consuming the various products of the company.

Johnny was practically working for more than fourteen hours a day and for nearly 365 days in a year without a break. Indeed, he eventually managed to reach his target and he was thus rewarded with a better income and an official position. Nonetheless, at the age of fifty, his health began to deteriorate.

Even worse, he had hardly any time for his family. The young children especially missed the loving care of a father.

In the second story, there is Josephine, my niece, who works with an international organisation. She can be considered to be quite fortunate because her home happens to be near the LRT station. Her office is also within walking distance from another LRT station which is about six or seven stops away from where she would board the train to work.

Thus, she practically does not have to face any transport problems. And yet, she is almost always rushing to the LRT station to catch the train; then, upon alighting from the train, she would once more rush to the office in order not to be late.

As a result of habitually doing things in a hurry, like rushing to and from work, she is making life difficult for herself. Because of her rushing, she would often forget to bring along essential items or documents and mishaps are likely to occur.

One day while on a family visit to our home, she shared with me the problems that she was facing. My advice to her was, “Why must you be in a hurry? Just get up half an hour earlier every morning. This will give you enough time to check through things and to walk slowly to the LRT station. Then most of your problems will dissolve automatically.”

In the third story, my cousin, Thomas, is the CEO of a manufacturing company. He used to hold regular meetings with his staff.

More often than not, right till the end of the meeting late in the evening, crises and problems would keep popping up without any solution in sight. Aware that everyone is tired and that no one would be likely to come up with some bright ideas, Thomas would adjourn the meeting.

With his sense of humour, he would say, “Don’t worry! Go home and have a good rest. The sun will rise again tomorrow.”

In this way, Thomas and his team have been able to manage in solving the problems that they are confronted with. Undoubtedly, it is important to maintain financial stability by working hard to attain the higher goals in life. However, good health and family prime time should never be compromised.

I remember an English proverb which says, “Stop and smell the roses.” Indeed, if one could take some time out of one’s busy schedule to enjoy the beauty of life and to appreciate the wonders of mother nature, then one would be able to live life to the fullest.

## **SOME ANECDOTES**

*By Wong Kow*

### ***An Inspiring Story***

In 1987 a 74-year old trishaw puller by the name of Bai Fang Li came back to his hometown planning to retire from his back breaking job. There he saw children working in the fields because they were too poor to afford school fees.

Bai returned to Tian Jin and went back to work as rickshaw puller, taking a modest accommodation next to the railway station. He waited for clients 24 hours a day, ate simple food, and wore discarded second-hand clothes that he found. He gave all of his hard-earned money to support the children who could not afford education.

In 2001 he drove his rickshaw into the Tian Jin Yao Hua Middle School to deliver his last instalment of money. Nearly 90 years old, he told the students that he could not work any more. All of the students and teachers were moved to tears.

In total, Bai had donated a sum of 350,000 Yuan in order to help more than 300 poor students to continue with their studies. In 2005 Bai passed away, leaving behind an inspiring legacy.

If a rickshaw puller who wore used clothes and had no education could support 300 children to go to school, imagine what you and I could do with the resources we have to bring about positive change.

### ***A Beautiful Day Today***

A blind boy sat on the stool of a building with a hat by his feet. He held up a sign which said, "I am blind, please help." There were only a few coins in the hat.

A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. He then took the sign, turned it around, and wrote some words. He put the sign back so that everyone who walked by would see the new words.



Soon the hat began to fill up. A lot more people were giving money to the blind boy.

That afternoon the man who had changed the sign came to see how things were. The boy recognised his footsteps and asked, “Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?”

The man said, “I only wrote the truth. I said what you said but in a different way. I wrote: ‘Today is a beautiful day but I cannot see it.’”

### *The Crow*

A crow lived in the forest and was absolutely satisfied in life. But one day he saw a swan. “This swan is so white,” he thought, “and I am so black. This swan must be the happiest bird in the world.” He expressed his thoughts to the swan.

“Actually,” the swan replied, “I was feeling that I was the happiest bird around until I saw a parrot, which has two colours. I now think that parrot is the happiest bird in creation.”

The crow then approached the parrot. The parrot explained, “I lived a very happy life until I saw a peacock. I have only two colours, but the peacock has multiple colours.”

The crow then visited a peacock in the zoo and saw that hundreds of people had gathered to see him. After the people had left, the crow approached the peacock. “Dear Peacock,” the Crow said, “You are so beautiful. Every day thousands of people come to see you. When people see me, they immediately shoo me away. I think you are the happiest bird on the planet.”

The Peacock replied, “I always thought that I was the most beautiful and happiest bird on the planet. But because of my beauty, I am trapped in the zoo. I have examined the zoo very carefully and I have realised that the crow is the only bird not kept in a cage. So for the past few days I have been thinking that if I were a crow, I could happily roam everywhere.”

So what’s the secret of being happy? Discard the comparison which leads only to unhappiness.

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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
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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