

# NCBM OUTREACH



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## **VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT OF NCBM**

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

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

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 1. The Unified English Braille Code (UEB):

As mentioned in the April-June 2016 issue of NCBM Outreach, the UEB is to be adopted as the official English Braille Code and it has, therefore, been decided that UEB will be used in the Braille edition of NCBM Outreach.

Anyone needing the UEB Code booklet can request it from NCBM. Please contact Ms Wong Kwee Heong at Tel. 03-2276 2973 extension 323.

### 2. NCBM Job Pioneering Scheme:

This scheme was launched in 2012 whereby NCBM collaborates 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 03-2276 2973.

### 3. 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.

For more details, please call the NCBM secretariat at 03-2276 2973.

#### 4. Research Grant:

Anybody, blind or sighted, interested in carrying out research on employment for the blind or on blindness prevention can make application to NCBM for a research grant. The amount to be provided can range from RM 3,000 to RM 5,000.

Please contact NCBM at 03-2276 2973.

#### 5. Allianz Products for the Disabled:

In September 2014, Allianz Malaysia became the first operating entity in the Allianz group to pilot an Innovation Incubation Workshop in order to find business solutions for social issues. It was discovered that the disabled face great difficulty in accessing the financial products. This was because of the higher loading for disabled persons based on the presumption that they belong to the higher risk population.

Now, with diversity and inclusion as the truly important values adopted by Allianz, three products have been developed or modified, thereby making them accessible to the disabled. They are:

##### 5.1 The Allianz Ability Life :

This is a yearly renewable life insurance plan which is very affordable for the disabled aged between 16 to 70 years.

##### 5.2 The Allianz Care Individual :

This takes care of the health care costs in the event of hospitalisation.

##### 5.3 The Allianz Individual P.A. :

This is a personal accident cover which offers an affordable premium rate of as low as RM10 per annum for RM10,000 coverage. It will cover death or any permanent disability due to accident.

## **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

### **1. Articles, Suggestions and Jokes for the Magazine:**

Readers are reminded that their contribution 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 thumbdrive or similar mode or in Braille. If the article is in Braille, it should be on single-sided page 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 can be bank into your account.

For details concerning payments, please see the last page.

### **2. Another avenue for donations to NCBM:**

Donors can now help yourselves as well as help the blind at the same time through a new avenue of support for the National Council for the Blind.

You can make hotel bookings or do your own shopping simply by registering in the NCBM Cashback ePortal which is absolutely Free of Charge. While you yourself can enjoy some savings, you will also be helping NCBM to gain 30% of your mall cashback as a donation.

Just go to [www.dubli.com/M04OH](http://www.dubli.com/M04OH) and register for free by keying in your personal address. Your partner, DubLi, will immediately send an email for you to reply, thereby activating your account in NCBM's ePortal.

You are advised to key in your email address one more time together with your password. This will prevent your email from ending up in the spam folder.

Thank you for your assistance and support.

## **EDITORIAL BOARD**

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# THE ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT LOAN PROJECT

*by Ivan Ho Tuck Choy,  
Secretary-General,  
World Blind Union Asia-Pacific*

This project was sponsored by the Seeing Is Believing Innovation Fund of Standard Chartered Bank of the United Kingdom and it was carried out between June 2014 and December 2015. The idea originated from a survey on the problems facing the blind and vision-impaired (BVI) job-seekers in the WBUAP region.

The survey was conducted in 2009 and the three countries that participated were Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. The pilot loan project was first offered to Thailand and Vietnam but they both turned it down, citing the lack of manpower and the unavailability, of suitable candidates as the main reasons. Thus, the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM), while being aware of the heavy responsibility that acceptance would entail, took on the challenge with some trepidity.

Although the main purpose of the pilot project was to run the Adaptive Equipment Loan Scheme (AELS), it was subsequently realised that more components had to be added on in order to ensure its success. Hence, a request was made to the Royal Society for the Blind (RSB) of South Australia to send an employment consultant to facilitate a job readiness workshop for the placement officers in the member-organisations of NCBM as well as for the BVI job-seekers.

Following the workshop, the AELS was launched on June 26, 2014. The objective was to enable the WBUAP and NCBM to collaborate in identifying suitably trained BVI job-seekers who will be provided with the necessary adaptive equipment on loan, thereby enabling them to perform their work or to remain in employment.

Among such equipment to be provided are the speech software for text-reading on the computer screen, refreshable Braille Displays for the checking of texts on the monitors or smartphones, Braille embossers for printing hardcopies, OCR scanners with speech to read printed materials, CCTV's



and magnifiers to enlarge printed materials for low-vision persons, and so on.

However, it was soon realised that AELS was rather too limited in scope as it only dealt with the aspect of providing equipment. It was felt that in order to be more effective, a multi-pronged approach had to be implemented.

## **1. Approaches:**

Hence, the approaches to be adopted include the following:

### **1.1 Placement Officers:**

It was observed that the placement officers in the organisations serving the blind had not been adequately trained to handle the needs of the BVI job-seekers from higher education.

### **1.2 Awareness Among Employers:**

The level of awareness among employers concerning the capabilities of the blind was rather low.

### **1.3 Blindness-specific Skills:**

Although the BVI job-seekers had the academic qualifications, they lacked the necessary work skills and blindness-specific skills. Moreover, they did not have a good command of the English language that is so essential in the private sector.

## **2 Modifying the Scope of AELS:**

Conscious of the obstacles and limited scope of the scheme, the team realised that the strategy had to be modified if the AELS were to be successfully implemented.

### **2.1 New Inputs:**

As follow-up actions had not been taken by the Placement officers who attended the original workshop, the team assembled a group of seven BVI job-seekers and undergraduates on October 20. They were

briefed concerning the objective of the scheme so that they could contribute new inputs for the project. After listening to their views, suggestions and job preferences, it was decided to organise another workshop in order to address the concerns that had been raised.

## 2.2 Enhancing Employment Prospects:

The Workshop on Enhancing Employment Prospects for the Blind was held from January 19-20, 2015 in Universiti Malaya. The areas covered were :

2.2.1 Briefing on the Job Readiness Programme, i.e. instilling self-confidence and the learning of compensatory skills.

2.2.2 Conducting Job Search, i.e. exploring sources and resources to maximise one's own initiative.

2.2.3 Preparing Resumes, i.e. information that would be of interest to employers.

2.2.4 Mock Interviews, i.e. the do's and don'ts in attending an interview, e.g. don't allow anyone, even the placement officer, to speak on one's behalf.

2.2.5 Mastering the essentials of ICT, i.e. choosing the appropriate equipment and familiarising oneself in using the equipment effectively.

2.2.6 Fluency with the English Language:  
During the course of the two-day discussions, it was apparent that the participants lacked self-confidence and fluency in speaking and writing English, a prerequisite for entering the commercial world.

This revelation prompted the team to make the decision of encouraging the graduates to take advantage of the Policy on 1% Job Quota for Persons with Disabilities (which had been proclaimed by the Government in 1989).

### 2.3 Job Opportunities:

A letter was then sent to the Chairman of the Public Services Commission (PSC) to appeal for more job opportunities for BVI job-seekers and to offer assistance from the AELs in making available the Necessary equipment and training on their use. In addition, NCBM would be willing to organise a workshop for key personnel in the Government departments.

## **3. Workshop on Working Together to Enhance Job Opportunities for the BVI's:**

This workshop, with slight modification of the original AELS objective, was held from June 8-11, 2015 in Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan.

### 3.1 Objectives of the Workshop:

The two main objectives of the workshop were:

- 3.1.1 To Encourage and help Facilitate BVI job-seekers to apply for Government employment in order to achieve the goal of the Policy on 1% Job Quota for PWD's as announced by the Government in the 1990's.
- 3.1.2 Collaborate with the Government and Institutions of Higher Learning in Meeting the Special Requirements of the BVI's in Employment by Providing Adaptive Equipment and Training on Its Use, Career Counselling and Enhancement of Blindness-specific Skills.

### 3.2 Areas Covered in the Workshop:

The three-day Workshop was attended by 25 participants and some of the areas covered were:

- 3.2.1 What the BVI's are Doing in the Malaysian Work-force.
- 3.2.2 Types of Employment Done by the BVI's in the Industrialised Countries.

- 3.2.3 Expectations of BVI Job-seekers and the Barriers Confronting them.
- 3.2.4 Laws and Policies on Employment for the Disabled.
- 3.2.5 Overview of Assistive Equipment and how they can enhance the work efficiency of BVI Employees.

### 3.3 Workshop Recommendations:

The participants adopted a set of recommendations appealing to the relevant stake-holders to help in achieving the objectives of the workshop.

## 4. Equipment Purchased for the AELS:

The adaptive equipment purchased for BVI employees are as follows:

- 4.1 The Braille Edge, i.e. a Braille note-taker device.
- 4.2 The Braille Display that converts text into Braille.
- 4.3 Openbook OCR software, which converts text into speech.
- 4.4 The Scanner, used with the Openbook OCR.
- 4.5 The Zoomtext Software - a Magnification application for enlarging texts on the monitor.
- 4.6 The Explore 7 - a stand-alone device to enlarge printed materials for low-vision users.

## 5. Beneficiaries:

They include various groups of people as follows:

- 5.1 Blind Leaders from the WBUAP region, particularly from Philippines, Indonesia and Myanmar.
- 5.2 Personnel from the Government sector, particularly the PSC, the Department of Human Resources, the Social Security Organisation, and the National Council for PWD's.
- 5.3 Personnel from the Institutions of Higher Learning, particularly Universiti Malaya, International Islamic University of Malaysia, Universiti Zainal Abidin of Terengganu, Universiti Sains Malaysia, and Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM).

## 5.4 BVI Job-seekers:

They were:

- 5.4.1 Tuan Muhammad Mustaqim bin Tuan Cob, employed at the Kolej Teknologi Alpha as Officer-in-Charge of Student Affairs.
- 5.4.2 Noor Izati Meor Samsuddin, employed at the Challenges Magazine as an Administrative Assistant.
- 5.4.3 Chia Shui Yee, employed at the Serdang Hospital as a pharmaceutical researcher.
- 5.4.4 Mohd. Firdaus, employed as administrative assistant in the Disability Support unit of Universiti Malaya.
- 5.4.5 Dr. Wong Huey Siew, Employed as the Deputy Dean at the Open University of Malaysia.
- 5.4.6 Low Looi Seong, doing his chambering at the Ready Advocates and Solicitors Company.

## 5.5 Examples of Significant Achievement:

Here are two examples of significant achievement for the project.

- 5.5.1 Upon learning that there was such a scheme and being impressed by their enhanced performance, the employers of Dr. Wong Huey Siew and Low Looi Seong purchase the equipment outright for them. This meant that the equipment that they are using can be passed on to others.
- 5.5.2 Chia Shui Yee - she is the first BVI person in Malaysia to have received a Degree in Pharmacy. She was able to be employed at the Serdang Hospital as a Pharmaceutical Researcher after Dr. Goh Pik Pin, Head of the Clinical Research Department, was impressed with her capability in using the adaptive equipment.

## 6 Other Notable Achievements:

### 6.1 Translation into Malay:

Following the NCBM/RSB Job Readiness Workshop, some of the materials have been translated into Malay to be used as training materials for the NCBM Career Motivation Camp (Conducted on annual basis).

## 6.2 Policy of 1% Job Quota of the Disabled:

A letter was submitted to the PSC, explaining how the development of adaptive devices could assist the BVI's in performing their work more effectively.

In addition, key personnel from the PSC, PERKESO and the Department of PWD Affairs as well as several Institutions of Higher Learning (who attended the Learning Together Workshop) have apparently taken note of the recommendations as the targeted bodies have begun acting on some of the suggestions made, particularly, concerning the setting up of a steering committee to deal with issues pertaining to the employment of disabled persons and especially on the intake of BVI employees in line with the Policy of 1% Job Quota for the Disabled.

## 6.3 Partnership with Jobs Malaysia:

As a follow-up on the goal of including BVI job-seekers in the mainstream training schemes that could lead to employment, a one-day workshop on partnering with Jobs Malaysia in Promoting Employment Opportunities for the BVI's was held on November 23, 2015. The purpose of the workshop was to identify the suitable modules available for adaptation of the training programme for the blind.

# 7 Sustainability of the AELS:

The scheme has definitely brought significant benefits to a cross-section of people, especially the blind, who have either secured employment or have remained in their jobs.

NCBM, through its Committee on Employment and Economic Empowerment of the Blind, has indicated that it will continue with the scheme. To ensure its sustainability, the Employment Committee will seek annual allocations for the purchase and replacement of equipment.

## 8 Lessons Learnt:

8.1 For the project to succeed, the multi-pronged approach must be employed. Thus, besides having the right equipment, the BVI Job-seekers must also be able to present themselves as capable of performing the tasks assigned to them.

8.2 While the recruitment agencies and employers may lack the understanding or awareness concerning the capabilities of the blind, the BVI's themselves also lack the confidence and the initiative to acquire additional knowledge and skills in order to be more competitive in a challenging environment.

8.3 Despite much that has been said about the Policy on 1% Job Quota for the Disabled, no concerted effort has been made by the organisations serving the blind in exploiting this golden opportunity. Hence, It is the AELS that has alerted us to focus our attention more closely on this "Rich Hunting Ground Behind Our Backyard" which holds great potential for providing employment to scores of blind persons.

Three factors are in our favour -

- a) The Government Policy on Recruitment of the Disabled;
- b) No Language Barrier;
- c) Once employed, the Department will provide the necessary equipment.

8.4 The Blind in Malaysia have depended almost entirely on the organisations serving the blind to provide them with the necessary vocational training and job placement. Unfortunately, these organisations have not been able to keep pace with changes in order to meet the needs of the more educated blind. Neither do they have the funds to invest in up-skilling their staff or to upgrade the hardware and software.

Through the AELS, therefore, we have been able to explore the feasibility of working with the Institutions of Higher Learning to enlist their expertise for career counselling and exposure relevant to their career paths for BVI undergraduates.

## **9 Acknowledgement:**

We take this opportunity to record our deep appreciation and gratitude to the following:

9.1 the Seeing is Believing Innovation Fund of the Standard Chartered Bank in London for the generous grant of \$60,000, and to their staff in Kuala Lumpur for their active support.

9.2 The World Blind Union-Asia Pacific Committee on Employment and Economic Empowerment, under the chairmanship of Mr. Andrew Daly, for having selected Malaysia to implement the pilot project and for giving guidance and support to the team throughout its duration.

9.3 The Royal Society for the Blind of South Australia for absorbing a large portion of the expenses and for sending Mr. Brian Dibbins to Malaysia to facilitate the two workshops as well as assigning Mr. Tony Starkey to oversee the SIB Project from start to finish.

9.4 The five Institutions of Higher Learning (Universiti Malaya, International Islamic University of Malaysia, Universiti Zainal Abidin of Terengganu, Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) for sending their staff and undergraduates to take part in the workshops.

9.5 The cooperation extended to the SIB Project by the Government (PSC, Perkeso, Department of Human Resources, Department on PWD Affairs, and Jobs Malaysia) for sending their officials either as speakers or as participants.

9.6 The group of successful BVI individuals who gave inspirational accounts of their achievements.

9.7 The staff of NCBM for seeing to the hotel arrangements and logistics of the project and for demonstrating the different types of adaptive equipment.



# IS THE WORLD OF THE BLIND REALLY DARK?

*by Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong*

*Editor's note: Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong has been vision-impaired from childhood and he was an Economics Lecturer at Universiti Malaya for many years. After retiring in the 1980's, he loves to spend much of his time observing how the blind in Brickfields live and work and to share his thoughts with readers.*

*Now here he is to tell us about the world of the blind:*

One day while I was walking, I met a construction worker and I asked him this question, "How would you feel if you were to become blind suddenly?"

His answer was that he would immediately take a shotgun and shoot his own head.

Such a negative perception of blindness is obviously quite unacceptable in the world of today but sadly, this kind of perception still persists. On the contrary, if a newly blinded person views blindness simply as an inconvenience instead of a handicap, then he will be able to accomplish much more in life.

Indeed, the blind in Malaysia, especially those in Brickfields, are living examples of accomplishment. These blind people have been able to make a success of their lives as Businessmen, Teachers, Telephone Operators, Masseurs, Musicians, Administrative Officers, lawyers, and even as Psychiatrists in the hospital or as Professors in the university.

In my own walk with blindness over the past forty years, I have come across many astonishing things that the blind can do. Let me share with you four such cases.

## **1. Dato' Mah Hassan, totally blind, is an excellent chess player:**

When he was a young student at the Law Faculty of Universiti Malaya, the National Chess Association of Malaysia happened to organise an Open Chess

Tournament and the blind were invited to join. Dato' Mah Hassan competed with a sighted national chess player. The national player was shocked when he realised that he had been out-manoeuvred and checkmated by Dato' Mah Hassan. People watching the game said that they could see such embarrassment on the national player's face which had turned completely red.

Dato' Mah Hassan later graduated with a Law Degree from Universiti Malaya and subsequently a Master's Degree in Law from the University of Southampton. He then served as a tutor in the Law Faculty of Universiti Malaya and later became a consultant in Bursa Malaysia. He was also the President of the Society of the Blind in Malaysia from 2000 to 2010.

## **2. Terry Ch'ng Hwa Lian:**

Terry is the first blind person to have graduated from Universiti Malaya with an Economics Degree. He studied with the help of many volunteers who recorded reading materials on to tape and rewrote all the graphs and Mathematical equations into large print.

One day while attending the third-year Macro-economics tutorial class, he pointed out a mistake that had been made by the tutor on the blackboard. His class-mates were all very surprised as they knew that Terry could not see with his impaired vision.

In the final examination, Terry was the top student among 300 class-mates and he was awarded the First-class Honours Degree. He was also the recipient of the highly prestigious Bank Negara Gold Medal Award.

## **3. Ajong Sidim:**

He was working as a Telephone Operator in Sime Darby. To keep his body physically fit, he used to do push-up exercises 100 times a day.

Through correspondence, he successfully completed his tertiary education in Law. With the new qualification, he was able to gain employment as a Legal Officer in a private corporation.

One day while walking home after work, a man snatched his handphone from behind. Despite being totally blind, Ajong was able to wrestle with the thief and grab back the phone. After receiving some kicking and smashing from Ajong, the thief finally left with his accomplice on a motor-bike empty-handed.

#### 4. Dr. Makmur Tumin:

He was vision-impaired and also a dialysis patient when doing his undergraduate and post-graduate courses at Universiti Malaya. Nevertheless, he succeeded in obtaining the two degrees and went on to complete his doctorate studies and became a Lecturer at the university.

When he was a second-year student in the Political Science Department, he was fond of rewriting the lecture notes into articles and send them to the main-stream newspapers for publication. His articles appeared almost every week and they were highly sought after by the editors.

One day the editor of a newspaper paid a visit to Makmur at the Department. He was greatly surprised to learn that Makmur was merely an undergraduate and not a Professor.

Even his course-mates would refer to the published articles of Makmur in preparing for their examinations.

While interacting and socialising with the blind in Brickfields, I have learnt much about the life of these people and I have been amazed by the views expressed by them. Here are some of the views:

**Daniel Siow** was working as a Draftsman before he became blind due to a motor-cycle accident. Now he is working as a Masseur, married to an Accountant and they have two children. One day, he revealed this to me: “My friend used to cut off the legs of cockroaches before feeding them to his dragon-fish. One day, however, he regretted his actions when he fell down while running and felt a sharp pain in his leg.”

**Long Boon Huat** was an aircraft mechanic in the Malaysian Airline System at the age of nineteen. He became vision-impaired at the age of 30 due to Retinitis Pigmentosa and was retrained as a Telephone Operator at the Gurney Training Centre for the Blind. He is married with two children.

This is what he said, “I have many dogs in my house. When one of them died, I was surprised to see tears in their eyes. I really could feel that they were very sad.”

On another occasion, Long made another very revealing statement: He said, “Don’t hold two keys in your key-chain because they will make a lot of noise. Actually, I’m referring to those people who have two or more wives!”

There is another blind man who, despite his poor vision, had proved himself to be very capable. He was working as a Postmaster in many of the post-offices throughout the Klang valley. One day while he was working late in the evening, he accidentally activated the burglar alarm which caused a squad of policemen to rush in with the intent of arresting him. Fortunately, he managed to convince them that he was blind.

One day I was having a chat with him when he made this very shrewd statement: “I do believe in honesty and I do believe in telling the truth. Nevertheless, I won’t tell people the real truth.”

So you see, my friend, can you say that the world of the blind is really dark?



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

Congratulations to the Caliph Buskers:

The band of blind musicians known as the Caliph Buskers took part in the Juara Lagu Contest in January 2016. They won the third prize and walked away with RM 20,000.

Mohd. Zaki Ismail, the leader of the band said, “We came out tops for the music competition in 2014 and won the prize of RM 12,000. This time we came third but we had a bigger prize. This gives us a lot of courage to strive further and who knows, we may win the first prize next time.”

Zaki set up the original band called Sarhad in 2008. They took part in the Battle of the Bands organised for the first time by MAB in the same year and they won the first prize of RM 1,000. With their success, they changed the name of their band to Stylus and they were the first band of blind musicians to go busking in the city of Kuala Lumpur. Prior to this, the blind had been busking mostly singly or sometimes in pairs since the 1960’s.

In 2014 two members left the Stylus and they were replaced by two new members. Once again they changed the name of the band to be known as the Caliph Buskers. The KRU, a very popular local band of the day, discovered the Caliph Buskers on You Tube performing a hit song by Mojo of the KRU. It was in 2014 when Mojo had to leave KRU due to illness and they got the Caliph Buskers to perform Mojo’s song for that year’s music competition and they won the first prize of RM 12,000.

With the success of the Caliph Buskers in 2014, the KRU had signed them on for a recording contract with a song composed by the KRU called “Hanya NamaMu”. Once the song achieves one million viewers, the band will be awarded their first royalty.

Our heartiest congratulations to Mohd. Zaki Ismail and the Caliph Buskers and may they go on to greater success.

## **Digital Life-style Transformation for Society**

The NCBM-MCMC Forum 2016 was a collaborative programme of the National Council for the Blind and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission. In the keynote address by John Tay, the Director of the Digital Lifestyle and Society Department of MCMC, he told how the Internet of Things can benefit and have a diverse impact upon society. He said that it was, therefore, important to understand what the I.T. needs of the blind were so that MCMC could help in bringing about improvements in the digital lifestyle of the blind.

In the paper presented by Wong Yoon Loong, the Manager of NCBM (CARE Services), he highlighted a number of points. Firstly, he called for the websites created by the Malaysian Government and the private sector to be in accordance with the W3C Accessibility Guidelines. He said that the text-to-speech engine in Bahasa Malaysia for the blind was long overdue. He urged Malaysia to follow in the footsteps of our neighbouring countries - Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam - who have made this engine available to the blind in their own respective national languages.

The participants enthusiastically expressed the hope that the developer of the mobile apps in Malaysia will ensure that their apps are accessible to the blind.

The Executive Director of NCBM, Mr. Moses Choo, said that the National Council for the Blind would be willing to work with any of the organisations who want to improve their websites or mobile applications for the benefit of the blind.

## **The NCBM Motivation Camp**

Over the past two years, NCBM has been holding the National Career and Motivation Camp for Form Five and Form Six School Leavers in St. Nicholas' Home, Penang. In fact, NCBM was actually making an effort to revive the programme which had been successfully carried out for a number of years in the early decade of the 21st century.

Many of the blind participants had expressed the view that the Camp was very useful in preparing them either for entering tertiary education or for gainful employment. They were really filled with hope and inspiration by the speakers at the camp sessions.

It was in view of such considerations that NCBM had decided to revive the Programme two years ago. This year from 05 – 08 December 2016, NCBM will hold the Camp at Selesa Resort, Bukit Tinggi, Bentong, Pahang.

### **Malaysia To Adopt The Unified English Braille( UEB) In 2018**

The Braille Familiarisation Workshop jointly organised by NCBM and the South East Asia Ministers of Education on Special Education Needs (SEAMEO SEN) in May 2015 has proposed that Malaysia adopt the Unified English Braille (UEB) Code. In order to prepare the teachers of the blind for this transition, NCBM together with SEAMEO Sen organised a series of workshops to train them in UEB.

37 teachers of the blind were trained from 25-29 April and 22 teachers from Sabah were trained from 21-22 September 2016. Teachers from Sarawak will be trained in November. Representatives from member-organisations of NCBM were also trained in May. Response from the teachers on UEB were very favourable.

NCBM made a presentation at the Special Education Technical Committee Meeting for Malaysia to adopt UEB by January 2018. The proposal was unanimously accepted and a Technical Committee was set up to plan the transition to UEB. The Technical Committee which is jointly chaired by the Special Education Division and NCBM agreed to fully adopt UEB in January 2018.

NCBM will continue to organise workshops, produce training materials and reading materials to ensure that all the blind are trained to use UEB by 2018.

## NEWS FROM HERE AND THERE

Here is some news collected from different Online News Portals

The Japan Times -

### **Record 453,000 people with disabilities working for Firms in Japan.**

A record 453,000 people with disabilities were working for companies in Japan as of June 1, 2016, i.e. up 5.1% from a year earlier, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare said. The number of disabled workers hit a record high for the twelfth straight year.

The proportion of workers with disabilities in the private sector stood at 1.88%, up 0.06 percentage point. Under a Law aimed at promoting employment of people with disabilities, Japanese companies are obliged to employ disabled workers so that they account for at least 2% of the Firms' overall workforce.

The proportion of private sector companies meeting the 2% target came to 47.2%, up 2.5 points.

New York Post -

### **Apple's "Siri" is a breakthrough for Blind Users**

Apple's voice-activated assistant hasn't yet won over most mainstream iPhone users, other than niche followers such as car-driving commuters or gadget-obsessed geeks.

But for blind users, Siri's smart and sometimes smart-alecky responses are a key feature of the iPhone which, along with Macs and iPads, increasingly is proving itself a breakthrough versus competing Android-based smartphones and Windows-based PC's.



Ironically, it was the late founder, Steve Jobs' insistence on radically closed ecosystems of software and hardware that makes Apple products work especially well.

On top of Siri's ever-widening vocabulary, blind users say that the new iPhone 6s, 3D-touch feature can dramatically speed up the hassle of navigating through the apps in Apple's new iOS 9 mobile operating system.

In New York City, Robot Scientist, Marco Bitetto says Apple products have been "definitely life-changing", thus allowing him to read complex Math equations with high-revolution zooming tools.

Khaleej Times -

### Medicine Pack Made for the Visually Impaired

The first medicine pack that can be "read" by the visually impaired has been launched in UAE.

Said to be the only pack in the world with four features, including Braille calligraphy to help the visually impaired, officials said it will help patients make sure they are taking the right medicine.

Ten medicines with the new packaging for non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and asthma have already been approved by the Ministry. Arabic and English are being used for the ease of patients.

The packaging also includes an illustration of medicine intake chart which makes it easier for the user to understand. It also includes a QR Code and data matrix technology to detect expired and counterfeit goods.

With the usage of the QR Code to scan the medicine pack, patients will be able to get information on the disease such as the causes and management through life-style tips.

**To the Editor,  
NCBM Outreach**

Inspiring Read

I have been receiving your “NCBM Outreach” publication on a fairly regular basis. I note with satisfaction that your community is pretty active and is driven to succeed despite the odds.

Masitah Mansor’s article titled, “Life is not Just Eating and Sleeping”, in the January-March 2016 issue was an imminently readable article. I was struck by her perseverance and determination to overcome disappointments and setbacks. In the end, she was duly rewarded by successes in more ways than one.

Masitah’s story as an outstanding teacher of English is one of inspiration and also of a steely resolve. I salute her and wish her more successes in the year ahead. If possible and if she is willing, I would like to invite her to give a talk to teachers, principal and members of the Board of Governors at La Salle Secondary School on a mutually convenient day and time.

I was a former teacher at this school way back in the mid-sixties and seventies. I am now on the Board of Governors of three La Salle Schools. I do blog occasionally at :

*<http://benmorais.wordpress.com> on issues that are of importance as well as at LinkedIn-Benedict Morais*

I also read with interest your study tour to Ho Chi Minh City in June 2013.

Yours sincerely,  
Benedict Morais  
Email  
[benedict.morais@gmail.com](mailto:benedict.morais@gmail.com)

## A Letter to the Editor

Reflections after Reading Dr. Tan Tok Shiong's "Gambling and Banking"

I read, with great interest, the article entitled "Gambling and Banking" by Dr. Tan Tok Shiong, published in the "NCBM Outreach" of April-June, 2016. Indeed, we can only hope that friends and readers will no longer take their chances with gambling for better luck to win a fortune after having read Tok Shiong's analysis indicating the casino management company's advantage over gamblers.

According to Tok Shiong, some gamblers think that they are smart and that they have some methods that can give them an edge over the casino management. Some of the ways often talked about by the so-called "Smart Gamblers" are to increase the bet each time they lose or to bet only on those numbers which have not appeared for a long time.

At this juncture, I would like to use some simple and logical calculations to prove that both of the methods mentioned above would not give any added advantage to the "Smart Gamblers". In fact, if they are greedy, such practices could even land them in bankruptcy.

Let us now look at the following analysis carefully:

In order to increase the bet each time one loses, one must know that when the game is over each time, it is another new game which has no connection at all with the previous game. Therefore, there is no logic at all in saying that when one loses once, twice or more times, one would have better luck in winning the next time. After all each game is a new gamble and one could be lucky or just as unlucky.

With regards to the second method of betting only on those numbers which have not appeared for a long time, one must again recognise that every game is a new game. Thus, the possibility of winning or losing and the chances of being lucky or unlucky are the same (as shown in the first example).

Indeed, some casino games do appear to be fair between the casino management and the gamblers. For those who do not understand the tricks in such circumstances, they will certainly not realise that they are in a disadvantaged position.

The game of dices is but one of them. A standardised dice has six faces with numbers 1 to 6, i.e. there is a number on each face. The dice game will usually make use of three dices.

The dealer will shake the dices in a cup and then cast them out. The numbers appearing on top are the winning numbers. It does seem to be fair when there are three numbers appearing out of the six numbers for you to bet with. With the payment being RM1 to RM1 in this case, it looks exactly like a fifty-fifty chance for winning or losing. If you had betted RM1 for each of the six numbers, you would win three numbers and lose the other three, thereby getting back all your capital.

However, it would be a different story if the dices cast appear to have two same numbers. For instance, the numbers could be 1, 1 and 2. In this case, when the number you have betted appears to be double, then the casino will pay you double. This looks fair, doesn't it?

Nevertheless, if you have been able to follow me and you have done some careful calculations, you will certainly agree with me that you are on the losing side.

For easy illustration, let us again presume that you have betted RM 1 for every number and, therefore, you will be paid RM 3. Don't forget, however, that there are the other four numbers that you lose.

Similarly, if, in any game, the dices cast should appear the same for all the three dices, then you will be paid RM 3 for the number that you strike. However, there are five other numbers that you will lose.

Tok Shiong also pointed out that on average, the casino management would be paying out only about 70 percent while the remaining 30 percent will be for the casino management to run its business.

Now let us look into another type of gambling which, in my opinion, is even much more harmful and dangerous than the Genting Casino. I am referring to the four-digit, three-digit and two-digit gambling. Such gambling shops are almost everywhere which are legal but there are also uncountable illegal or underground dealers and runners. As far as I know, there are normally three draws a week, with some additional draws for the festive seasons.

I have many friends who bet on numbers for every draw without fail. Besides their favourite numbers, they will also bet on some special numbers which happen to draw their attention. It could be someone's date of birth, a car number-plate or a special address. They will turn the "lovely numbers" in all possible variations and put in their bets with all the three or four different gambling companies.

I myself am not a gambler. Nonetheless, I am really fond of sorting out numbers and this has been my passion from my school days. Do you know that there are twenty-four variations in a four-digit number? You may use the formula of 1 times 2 times 3 times 4 to get the answer 24. If two figures are the same in a four-digit number, e.g. 1123, there will be twelve variations. In case of a double-double in a four-digit number, e.g. 1122, then there will be six variations. If three figures in a four-digit number are the same, e.g. 1112, then there will be four variations.

Imagine if one just picked a few numbers and betted on all the possible variations, one would be betting on a huge amount of money. Thus, working on the same principle as the pay-out rate in the casino vis-a-vis the entire sum of the gamblers' money received by the gambling management, only around 70% of the total cash will be paid out to the winners. So if you are a regular gambler, then you actually depreciate your own money by as much as 30% without ever realising what was the cause of your impoverishment.

With regards to banking, I must admit that I have very little knowledge of it. Nevertheless, I still feel that it would certainly be wiser to put your money in the bank than trying your luck in gambling, be it in any form. It is true that a fixed deposit in the bank does yield up unattractive interest. However, it is still much safer than taking the big risk of becoming penniless overnight in gambling.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Dr. Tan Tok Shiong's advice, "If you quit gambling after reading this article, a better future certainly awaits you."

Thank you.

**Yours very sincerely,  
Wong Kow.**

**Dear Teik Hock,**

Just had the opportunity of reading your article on suitability of people with sight difficulties in formal tasks of dispute resolution - NCBM Outreach issue no. 82 ( Jan – Mar. 2016). You have used your current engagement and experience as an example within the context of Australian rules (get it? no, not the sport)

My comments as follows;

- your own experience does demonstrate that there should not be any hindrance to a job involving "face-to-face" work, with regards to the disability you live with, such as your long-standing profession as a social worker would testify,

- your professional training and experience as a social worker is suitably complementary in mediation affecting the state of individuals/families (personal emotional issues such as areas of private/public child care law) and more dispute resolution as in the Vietnamese woman and her White neighbour, (so, it is shallow to say that any lay public can go into mediation as your article imply). A person with reasonable education sharing the non-dogmatic values (like social workers, educators, etc) are appropriate for such a "job"

- Australia, or its courts system does recognised the important contribution of dispute resolution to public judiciary caseload management and this is helpful and raises its profile,

- in Malaysia, most professions tend to be "inward & self-serving" as they strenuously protect their own professional interest , for example in areas of property conveyancing and in the whole management and statutory submission of accounts of companies limited by guarantee. You need a licensed Company Secretary! Crazy. It is unlikely that the courts in Malaysia would formally accept (hey! Lawyers here have to protect, to "cari makan" for their own kindred).

A most interesting and useful article nevertheless which I am sure will give confidence for people with sight problems with much to contribute and help towards a building a community that is more accepting and inclusive.

So, when are you are visiting your place of birth again?

Best regards, rebel!

Jim

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH MD. MAHBUBUR RAHMAN - THE BLIND TV ACTIVIST OF BANGLADESH**

*by Godfrey Ooi Goat See*

*Editor's note: One day, while Mr. Moses Choo, the Executive Director of NCBM, was surfing the internet, he came across the name of Mahbubur Rahman and learned that he was working as a blind TV activist. Moses was curious to know what the job of a Blind TV Activist would entail and made contact with Mahbubur Rahman by Telephone.*



Mr. Mahbubur Rahman

***Here is the interview:***

Here is the interview:

**Q:** Hello, Mr. Mahbubur Rahman. You're so far away in Bangladesh but I'm so glad that we can still talk to you as though you're here in our office in Kuala Lumpur.

You know, we learned from the internet that you're working as a Blind TV Activist. That's really fantastic! Can you tell us what you do as a Blind TV Activist?

**A:** Hello to you, Moses and Godfrey. I'm so happy that I can talk to you both even though we're so far apart. Oh, so you want to know what I do as a Blind TV Activist? Actually, I'm working as a special correspondent with Bangladesh TV.

**Q:** Oh, please tell us more. For example, when did you start work and what do you do as a TV Activist?

**A:** I started work in 2009 and I first went on air on May 17. I have a team of workers which includes an engineer, a cameraman, an assistant cameraman, and a driver with transport provided by the TV company. I'm the one who will determine what is to go onto the programme. This means that I do the interviews and editing of the programmes. Then I do the planning and the organising with the crew in the TV station.

**Q:** Who do you interview and how often do your programmes appear on TV?

**A:** Oh, I interview blind and disabled persons who have established themselves in the society of Bangladesh. They can be self-employed or working with the Government, with the NGO's, with other disabled people, and even with International Organisations.

I do two programmes every month. The programme is screened on Sunday at 1 p.m.

**Q:** Are you the first blind person in Bangladesh doing this job and what kind of programmes do you do?

**A:** Oh yes, I'm the first blind and even the first in the disabled community of Bangladesh doing this kind of job. For my first programme, I looked at the activities of the blind in the University of Dhaka. I also do talk-shows for special occasions like for Consumers' Day.

**Q:** So this is not your full-time job. What else do you do for a living?

**A:** I get an honorarium but this is not enough to make a good living. I'm also the chief coordinator in the Bangladeshi Cricket Council and I do it FOC.

To earn extra income, I'm involved in my family's business. We collect waste fabric and send them to the factories for recycling. Actually, I'm a shareholder in my relative's company.



**Q:** Oh, that's very interesting. Can you tell us whether you were blind from childhood or are you an adult blind person?

**A:** I'm totally blind and I lost my sight at the age of two due to typhoid.

**Q:** What about your education and your qualifications?

**A:** When I was seven years old, I attended the Dhaka Primary School for the Deaf and Blind which are in separate sections. For secondary education, I joined an inclusive education programme in a neighbouring district.

My college and university education was paid by my father. I was studying in the University of Dhaka and I got a B.A. (Hons.) in History.

Well, I can say that I'm very lucky because my father was working with the Autonomous Inland Water and Transport Corporation, which is a semi-Government organisation.

**Q:** So are the blind lucky like you in Bangladesh? What are their opportunities in education?

**A:** Oh, the total population of the country is about 168 or 170 million and about 10 million of the population is blind and disabled. Many of the blind are in the rural areas and they don't go to school.

**Q:** What about employment opportunities? Are there organisations to help in finding jobs for the blind?

**A:** Actually, most of the blind and the disabled are in the rural areas and they don't work. There are six or seven organisations for the blind and there are 100 over blind teachers in the school for the blind and in inclusive education. Certainly, much more public awareness is needed to help the blind and the disabled in Bangladesh.

On my part, I have created an organisation known as DETRO. It was started in 1997 and it was registered four years later. I worked in the organisation from 2002 to 2009. Then I stopped working in 2010 and started working again four years later in 2014. I work As the Chief Executive without pay and

I help to collect donations so that we can pay the staff. We have 21 members and seven executive committee members. Our organisation helps the blind in education, rehabilitation and vocational training.

**Q:** Oh, you are really a man of inspiration not only for the people in Bangladesh but also for us here in Malaysia. Mr. Mahbubur Rahman, do you mind telling us something about your personal life? For example, are you married and do you have any other hobbies besides being a TV Activist?

**A:** Oh yes, I thank the Almighty for being one of the lucky blind in Bangladesh. I got married in 2008 and my first baby was born in 2010. My wife is totally sighted and she started working as a bank officer since 2011.

**Q:** How did you get to know your wife?

**A:** Ah, that's very interesting too. I made friends with my wife by telephone and so ours is marriage by love and not by match-making. So do you see the wonders of technology?

Actually, I'm the eldest among five siblings and I'm the only one who is blind. I'm also able to own my own house.

For my hobbies, I told you that I love cricket and I've gone to South Africa with my cricket team.

You know, I hope we can come to Malaysia one day, for cultural exchange. Is that a good idea?

**A:** Yes sure, you're most welcome. Let us know your plans and we'll try to work something out.

But for now, we want to thank you for making time available to talk with us. Thank you so much.

**Note:**

If you wish to communicate with Mahbubur Rahman, here is his email: [mce.detro.bangladesh@gmail.com](mailto:mce.detro.bangladesh@gmail.com)

# **TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: A FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE ON THE BLAZE ET**

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

While new technologies are being introduced daily in the mainstream market, technology for the blind is likewise being bombarded with new ideas and solutions. Recently, in fact, when I was at the World Blind Union/ICEVI Assembly in Orlando, U.S.A, I had the opportunity to visit the HIMS Booth. They were promoting the Blaze ET and this attracted my attention, especially the offer of a US\$100 discount. On top of that, they were also giving away a metal stand which makes it easier for the blind to operate the unit as an OCR scanner.

In case you are not aware, the Blaze ET is actually a very small MP3 player with a text reader, a built-in camera and an OCR feature. The unit is also WIFI enabled, thus making it into an internet radio receiver and an FM receiver as well. The size of the Blaze ET is almost like that of the Victor Stream manufactured by Humanware, except for the fact that this device has more functions.

The functions of the Blaze ET are as follows:

## **1. A Media player:**

As a media player, the Blaze ET can be used to play a variety of multimedia file formats, including music, audio-books, podcasts and even your own recordings. The navigation features include the tracks and time elements, the playback speed and pre-amp, equaliser settings, and more.

In addition, by connecting an external CD-Rom drive with an Audio CD inserted, the Blaze ET can be used to play commercial CD's.

## **2. A Book Reader:**

As a book reader, the Blaze ET can be quite easily used to read DAISY books and various document file types. You can navigate by pages, paragraphs, sentences, lines and other units of text as well as adjust the reading speed, volume and pitch.

By connecting an external CD-Rom, the Blaze ET can be used to read DAISY books produced on CD.

## **3. FM Radio:**

The Blaze ET can auto-scan for channels, store up to six pre-sets, and record for later listening.

## **4. Built-in Camera:**

The camera can capture images of printed textbooks, brochures or restaurant menus and recognise them by using the OCR programme. It is also able to import images from other sources and recognise them as well.

## **5. Internal/External Microphone:**

Recordings can be made using an Apple-compatible headset microphone or a line-in recording source. MP3 or Wave-file formats can be used to adjust a variety of options such as microphone sensitivity and recording quality.

## **6. Media or Document Playback:**

You can listen to a media or document playback via a Bluetooth headset connection, i.e. wireless audio listening.

## **7. Built-in WIFI:**

With a podcast application, you can subscribe to and download podcasts for listening on the go.

## **8. Web Radio:**

The web radio application can be used to stream music, news and other audio content from around the world.

## **9. Talking Clock:**

The talking clock continues to work even when the power is off. Just press the power button to check the current date and time. There is also an alarm and sleep timer.

## **10. Built-in File Manager:**

You can easily navigate through the files and folders, make your selection of files and folders, and automatically launch the playback in the associated programme.

With the file manager, you can copy, move, delete, rename, compress and extract files.

## **11. An Organiser:**

With the memo and calculator functions, you can stay organised and you can easily keep track of phone numbers or other short notes with the help of the memo function. You can also perform quick calculations on the go with the accessibility calculator.

So there you are - so many functions have been packed into a rather small unit.



## MY LIFE STORY, PART 3

*by Wong Kow*

### Part 3 Living in Danger Between Life and Death

As far as possible, I would like to wipe away all the unhappy incidents and events that I had witnessed in my childhood years in the Cameron Highlands, living closely between danger in life and the fear of death. However, try as I may, the traumatic scenes keep appearing in my mind and they remain unforgettable.

At the beginning when we move to live in the village in the Cameron Highlands, we could hardly take care of our vegetable plantation which was far away deep in the jungle. Nonetheless, we had to go there occasionally in order to pick some of the fruits and gather some of the wildly grown vegetables.

One day, I went along with my third brother to the vegetable plantation to try our luck. However, before we could pick some of the fruits, a group of British soldiers came marching along. One of them accidentally fell into a trap which we had set in order to catch some wild animals. Fortunately, the mechanism of the trap was faulty so that the soldier was not injured.

Nevertheless, the soldier got scared and he became very furious. He immediately caught hold of us and he wanted to take us to the police station for interrogation.

We could not speak English and were, therefore, unable to communicate with the soldiers. However, upon our arrival at the police station, the Police Chief realised that I was too young and that I needed someone to escort me home. As for my brother, he was fifteen years of age and he was, therefore, detained for further enquiries. In the end, he was released unconditionally after a week's stay in the police station.

Then as farming became more and more difficult, my eldest brother who was twenty-one years of age, had managed to make bamboo baskets as a part-time job. One day he went into the nearby jungle in search of bamboo.

However, as soon as he arrived at the scene, he was immediately arrested by the British soldiers. Actually, they were looking for the Communist who had killed a policeman on the previous day.

As my eldest brother made the sudden appearance, he became the suspect killer and he was thus arrested. He was taken to the Tanah Rata Police Station for a thorough investigation. He was detained for two months until the British soldiers finally managed to capture the Communist, the actual person who had killed the policeman.

The third incident occurred on a Sunday morning while I was attending mass in the chapel. The priest was saying the mass prayers when someone suddenly fired gun-shots at him. Fortunately, the priest managed to escape with only minor injuries. But the incident really frightened the wits out of me and I prayed hard for everyone's safety and the priest's recovery.

In the fourth incident, a neighbouring housewife was carrying out her usual household duties when a firing exchange suddenly took place at close proximity between the British soldiers and the Communists. Unfortunately, she got hit by one of the stray bullets and she was seriously wounded. Sadly, she passed away the next day.

Living in the house at the plantation near to the jungle, every family member had his or her own duties or activities to be carried out during the day. While my parents and elder brothers would be busy planting, reaping or watering the vegetables, we, the younger ones, would often help in clearing away the unwanted grasses or we could be wandering about playing our own games. Whatever we did, it was the usual practice for all of us to rush back home for dinner together before darkness fell.

One day, we did not see our little seven-year old sister at dinner time and we began anxiously searching around. We looked inside the house and then we went through the whole vegetable plantation but she was not there. After frantically searching for three hours, it had turned dark and we were about to run to the police station to make a report and to request for help.

At that very moment, our pet dog named Blackie, came towards us and he guided us in the direction to where my sister had laid unconscious under a tree. My father immediately carried her back home and applied some first-aid remedies. Fortunately, our little sister managed to survive, thanks to our very loyal and smart pet dog, Blackie!

Going on to the six incident, let me remind you of the nearby river which had become our routine place for lots of fun and activities. When the weather was fine, it would only be a small stream with knee-deep water a width of around 25 metres. It would be quite safe to walk across to the opposite bank of the river. However, when there was a heavy downpour, the water would rush down from the Highlands and it would become very deep in the middle of the river.

And so it was a Sunday just before the rain started when my cousin sister, Jane, had the idea of going to the river-side to pick up some small tree branches which had been swept down by the river in order to use them as firewood. Then the heavy rain came suddenly and before anyone could give Jane some advice, she had already made her way there to pick firewood.

Within minutes, the rushing water had swept her on to the deeper part of the river and no one was able to save her from drowning. Her body was found two days later, stuck in between two rocks about five kilometres down the river. Oh, what tragedy, we all sighed in dismay!

One day my parents had to attend to some urgent family matters in Ipoh and my elder brothers were left behind to take care of the younger siblings at home. At that time, it happened to rain for several hours so that the road between Ringlet and Tapah, which was the only outlet to leave and enter the Cameron Highlands in those days, had become blocked due to the landslides. It took three days for the road to be cleared up before the vehicles could pass through again.

Fortunately, my parents had wisely stored up some food at home. Thus, they found us not suffering from hunger when they returned home after three days of absence. However, it was many years later when I came to understand the anxieties that my parents faced when they could not come home because



of the road-block. Now I realise that it must have been a real relief to them when they finally came home and found that we were all “in one piece”.

Truly, I had come face to face with such unforgettable happenings during my childhood years. We were living between the dangers in life and the possibility of death at any time. I am really very thankful that God had seen us safely through such times of crisis.

Now indeed the Cameron Highlands has changed so much over the years, and so have I. Whenever I go back to pay a visit to my place of birth, I can still see the first school that I had attended and the church where I had been baptised.

However, there are only a few persons remaining who know me. The younger generations have not met me at all while my previous neighbours, friends and school-mates, who are around my age, have either moved elsewhere or they would have passed away.

On one occasion, I was fortunate enough to find one of my former classmates and close friend, Mr. Liew, still farming around the same area. In spite of his old age, he was there to welcome me and bring me back down memory lane. Indeed, a return visit to my place of birth always serves as a reminder for me to treasure whatever I possess, especially the people around me.

In conclusion, let me share with you a quotation from Abraham Lincoln : “It’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years.”

Therefore, under whatever circumstances, let us strive to live every minute of our lives meaningfully and cheerfully.

# SEPARATE DISABILITY CATEGORIES FOR THE ABILYMPICS

by Sumitha Ramasamy

*Editor's note: Ever since the inception of the Abilympics which goes back to the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) in 1981, all the disabled have been lumped into one single category for any of the competitions. Sumitha Ramasamy, who is the principal of the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB), feels very strongly that provision should be made for separate categories according to disability to compete in the Abilympics.*

*Sumitha has thus made a proposal to the Malaysia Council for Rehabilitation (MCR) for the consideration of the International Abilympic Organisation.*

*Here is the proposal:*

Proposal:

To provide for separate categories according to Disability for the Abilympic Competition :

## 1. Rationale:

We understand that it has been established practice right from the beginning not to classify the participants according to the disability categories for the Abilympics. This may be quite understandable as the Founders were probably not aware of the unequalness that characterises each different disability category.

For example, the blind and the deaf are very different from one another in terms of their disability and hence their capabilities resulting from the deprivation of one of the five senses. In other words, their abilities, capabilities and acquisition of skills are affected by the particular sense that is not available to them. The blind are unable to paint because they cannot see. On the other hand, the deaf cannot play a musical instrument because they cannot hear. Therefore, it would not be fair to let the blind compete with the deaf in painting. Likewise, it would be unfair to pit the deaf against the blind in a music contest.

Moreover, participation of the blind in the Abilympics has been quite limited. This is because most of the skills being selected for competition rely on sight rather than on hearing, thereby favouring the deaf and other disability categories and so giving the other disabled categories a much greater advantage over those without sight.

## **2. Objectives of having separate Disability Categories:**

2.1 To have more effective participation of the disabled in the Abilympics.

2.2 To bring about a fairer competition among the disabled contestants.

2.3 To enable a greater number of blind persons to take part in the Abilympics.

## **3. Recommendations:**

3.1 Recognising the different categories of disability:

The different categories of disability should be recognised as is being done in the Paralympics. This means understanding that as the disabilities are different from one another, they cannot therefore be expected to compete together on a level playing field unless some modifications to the rules are provided for.

3.2 Competing according to a specific disability:

Having recognised the different categories of disability, the disabled should then be allowed to compete according to their specific category of disability.

3.3 Introducing suitable events:

Events suitable to each category of disability should be introduced. This is especially important for the blind. In the present system of competition, the blind are unable to take part in most of the events because the skills rely mainly on sight in order to accomplish the skills.

### 3.4 Diversifying the scope of activities for competition:

More skills specific to each disability category should be considered. Currently, the blind are able to take part in only two events which are basket-weaving and English-text processing. However, even basket-weaving seems to have been dropped from the programme, thus leaving the blind with only one event to compete in.

### 3.5 Allowing more time for Competition:

Specific guidelines should be introduced in order to provide for more time or extra time for certain categories of disability taking part in the competition. For example, if the blind have to compete against others who have sight in the English-text processing competition, a certain extra amount of time should be allocated for them to complete the tasks assigned for the competition. In fact, extra time may need to be considered for certain disability categories, depending on the nature of the skill for competition.

## 4. Advantages to be Gained:

### 4.1 Effective participation:

There will be effective participation in the Abilympics because of the equal opportunities provided. A greater variety of skills for the events will be introduced. This means that many more disabled persons, particularly the blind, will be able to take part in the competitive events.

### 4.2 Generating New Ideas:

Introducing a greater number and more variety of skills could help in bringing about new ideas and innovations that will be of benefit to the disabled. For instance, if there are many blind persons taking part in the Webpage Design Competition, it would encourage the designers to come up with solutions to make the website accessible to the blind.

### 4.3 Creating Training Opportunities:

Introducing a greater number of skills to the Abilympics could help in bringing about greater awareness regarding the need to provide more training opportunities for the disabled. In the case of the blind, for instance, opportunities for training in various skills are very limited or even non-existent. However, by including many of these skills in the Abilympic competition could help to draw the attention of the organisations serving the blind and make them realise the importance of introducing more training opportunities for the blind.

Nowadays, some of the skills are considered to be old-fashioned and probably no longer useful. In actual fact, it could still be very useful to acquire some of these skills which could help the disabled in taking up some hobbies that could be productive. Some of the skills acquired may probably even help them in developing income-generating programmes.

Besides basket-weaving (which we feel should be reintroduced), other skills include macrame-weaving, bead-weaving, knitting, bakery, cooking and even Braille Music Composition.

### 4.4 Employment Opportunities:

For the disabled, particularly the blind, proving their competency in the performing of various skills in the Abilympic competition would help to promote their image as able and capable persons. This would encourage the employers to recognise that the blind are capable of functioning normally in the working environment, thereby leading to more employment opportunities for the blind.

## 5. Conclusion:

It is hoped that our ideas and suggestions will contribute towards the development and improvement of the Abilympics. We believe that with a more dynamic Abilympic programme, there will be much more positive and greater impact upon the work in rehabilitation, vocational training and employment for the disabled.



## REFLECTIONS

### **The Late Tun Hussein Onn**

After the Barisan 1978 Election victory, the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, the late Tun Hussein Onn, said, “Let this victory go to our hearts, not to our heads.”

### **William Makepeace Thackeray:**

Mother is the name of God in the lips and hearts of little children.

### **Wong Chan Wai, in Sunday Star of May 9 2016:**

Don't go overboard and don't be extreme - the same principle applies in our food intake and not just in politics.

### **Change:**

We cannot change what has happened in the past - it is like water under the bridge.

The future has not happened yet. Therefore, live the present.

You should live every moment with love, passion, peace, joy, happiness and in calmness, just like the peaceful and serene water under the bridge.

### **Beautiful Life:**

We come with nothing, and we go with nothing. However, there is one great thing that we can achieve in our beautiful life - a little remembrance in someone's mind and a small place in someone's heart.

### **The Lion and the Deer:**

In a race between the lion and the deer, many a time the deer will win because the lion runs for food while the deer runs for its life. Thus, purpose is more important than need.

### **State of Mind:**

The mind is not a dust-bin to keep anger, hatred and jealousy. Rather, it is a treasure-box to keep love, happiness and sweet memories.

So stay happy always.

### **Ladies in a Park:**

Two old ladies were sitting on a park bench. One leaned over to the other and said,

“My bum has gone to sleep!”

“I know,” said her partner. “I heard it snore three times.”

## **SOME LIFE LESSONS**

### **A Great Honour :**

A son took his old father to a restaurant for an evening dinner.

His father being very old and weak, while eating, dropped food on his shirt and trousers. Other diners watched him in disgust while his son was calm.

After he finished eating, his son who was not at all embarrassed, quietly took his father to the wash-room, wiped the food particles away, removed the stains, combed his hair and fitted his spectacles firmly.

When they came out, the entire restaurant was watching them in dead silence. They were not able to grasp how someone could embarrass themselves publicly like that.

The son settled the bill and started walking out with his father. At that time, an old man amongst the diners called out to the son and asked him, “Don’t you think you have left something behind?”

The son replied, “No sir, I haven’t.”

The old man retorted, “Yes, you have! You left a lesson for every son and hope for every father.”

The restaurant went silent.

To care for those who once cared for us is truly one of the greatest honours in life.



## **The Mount Kinabalu Disaster :**

As I think of the Kinabalu earthquake victims on June 5 2015, I am filled with shock as well as awe and wonder at the same time. It makes me think that while there are risks and dangers.

In venturing to explore nature, this should not be used as an excuse to deprive children as well as blind and disabled persons from having the opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of nature.

Indeed, I was really sad to hear that so many people died in the earthquake, especially the children and the 12-year old girl from Singapore. However, I do feel that other children and even disabled persons in the future should not be prevented from going outdoors to view and appreciate the wonders and the majesty of nature. To my mind, therefore, banning children below 15 years of age from climbing Mount Kinabalu is not the answer. The young should be given the freedom to undertake an adventure with nature with certain safeguards provided.

I remember the incident when a blind friend of mine fell into the fish-pond at the fish farm in Pulau Ketam. When he related the incident to me, my initial response was to feel shock and to be sorry for him. However, as I became aware that he was fortunate not to have sustained any serious injuries and most important of all that he did not die, I began to feel tickled and I could not help bursting out laughing, and best of all, my blind friend joined me laughing.

But then, when we told the story to a staff at the Malaysian Association for the Blind, his immediate reaction was that in future the blind should not be allowed to go to Pulau Ketam as the adventure would be too risky and dangerous.

I am further reminded of my climb up Kinabalu at the age of 63. I experienced such wonderful joy and a great triumph when I managed to reach the peak

of Kinabalu at 4095 metres above sea level. And there was a ten-year old girl there, the daughter of one of the rotary members, who organised the climb. She climbed up faster than any of us and she was down at the bottom of the hill by 3 o'clock the next afternoon when the rest of us made it to the bottom at around 6 p.m.

Indeed, the rotarian has found the answer to the Kinabalu disaster - instead of being fearful of returning to Kinabalu.

They want to go back there to help make the place safer for everyone, including the children and the disabled. They will provide the mountain guides with relief and with further training in guiding the mountain climbers and adventurers. This will certainly help the guides to build a new tomorrow and a new beginning whereby all of us will be able to continue enjoying the beauties and wonders of nature.

Thank you to Rotary and "Thank You" to the mountain guides who have helped to add meaning, appreciation and joy in our lives!

- Editor

## **SOME AFRICAN PROVERBS WITH WONDERFUL LIFE LESSONS**

The axe forgets but the tree remembers.

No person is born great; great people become great when others are sleeping.  
- Nelson Mandela

When an old man dies, a library burns to the ground with him.

A lie has many variations; the truth has none.

However far a stream flows, it never forgets its origins.

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

If you think you are too small to make a difference, spend a night with a mosquito.

A bird that flies off the earth and lands on an ant-hill is still on the ground.  
(This means that you are not going anywhere or not solving any problem)

He that beats the drum for the madman to dance is no better than the madman himself.

Don't look where you fell; look where you slipped.

Even as the archer loves the arrow that flies, so too does he love the bow that remains constant in his hands.

Where you will sit when you are old shows where you stood in your youth.

An intelligent enemy is better than a stupid friend.

## WHAT IS NCBM?

NCBM, the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia, is an umbrella body of the five major voluntary organisations serving the blind in Malaysia. For patients and clients who may need the services related to blindness and low vision, please don't hesitate to have them contact us.

The five organisations are as follows:

1. Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) - based in Kuala Lumpur.
2. Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) - based in Kuala Lumpur.
3. St. Nicholas' Home (SNH) - based in Penang.
4. Sabah Society for the Blind (SHSB) - based in Kota Kinabalu
5. Sarawak Society for the Blind (SKSB) - based in Kuching

Services of NCBM and its member-organisations:

Collectively, we provide a wide range of services to blind and vision-impaired persons to assist them in regaining confidence to participate fully in society. The services include counselling, rehabilitation, vocational training, job placement, community-based rehabilitation, advice on and sale of blindness-related equipment and low-vision aids, etc.

Some examples of these services are:

### **1. Independent living:**

Blind clients are given counselling to help them adjust to their vision loss and are given training on daily living skills. They include Orientation and Mobility, techniques on the use of the White Cane, social skills, computer literacy, how to use the Smartphone, etc.

## **2. Vocational Training:**

Depending on their level of education and interest, clients are given training on office administration, ICT-related occupations, massage, self-employment opportunities, etc.

## **3. Sales and Advice on the Use of Equipment:**

Some of these items are low-cost while others are high-tech to assist the blind and vision-impaired in living a normal and useful life or to function effectively in employment.

## **4. Braille and Audio Library Services:**

Fiction and non-fiction books in Braille and audio formats for reference and reading pleasure are available on loan from some of the member-organisations. Braille and language classes are also conducted for the newly blinded.

## **5. Early Intervention Programmes:**

Blind and vision-impaired children can get help as soon as they are discovered or reported to us. Parents with such children are advised on ways of caring for these children. Some of the programmes provide training for children as young as four years old on daily living skills to prepare them for early education.

For more information on our services and how they can cater to your specific needs, please get in touch with us by contacting the respective organisations listed below:

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

Unit 13-8, Menara Sentral Vista,  
150 Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad,  
Brickfields, 50470 Kuala Lumpur.  
Tel. 03-2276 2973  
Fax 03-2276 1653  
Email [info@ncbm.org.my](mailto:info@ncbm.org.my)  
Contact person - Administrative Assistant

## **MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND**

Kompleks MAB,  
Jalan Tebing,  
off Jalan Tun Sambanthan 4,  
Brickfields, 50470 Kuala Lumpur.  
Tel. 03-2272 2677  
Fax 03-2272 2676  
Email [mabind@po.jaring.my](mailto:mabind@po.jaring.my)  
Contact person - Welfare Officer

## **SOCIETY OF THE BLIND IN MALAYSIA**

No. 24, Jalan Tun Sambanthan 3,  
50470 Brickfields,  
Kuala Lumpur.  
Tel. 03-2274 6162  
Fax 03-2274 3818  
Email [sbmorgmy@gmail.com](mailto:sbmorgmy@gmail.com)  
Contact person - Executive Secretary

## **ST. NICHOLAS' HOME**

4 Jalan Bagan Jermal,  
10250 Penang.  
Tel. 04-229 0800  
Fax 04-227 8590  
Email [ed@snh.org.my](mailto:ed@snh.org.my)  
Contact person - Low-Vision Coordinator

**SABAH SOCIETY FOR THE BLIND**

1st. Floor, Lot 3, Bangunan Sri Damai  
Lorong Nibung, Jalan Kolam  
88300 Kota Kinabalu

Sabah

Tel. 088-218 130

Fax 088-316 588

Email : [sabahblindsociety@yahoo.com](mailto:sabahblindsociety@yahoo.com)

Contact person – Mr Jimmy Ng

**SARAWAK SOCIETY FOR THE BLIND**

Ong Tiang Swee Road,  
93710 Kuching,  
Sarawak.

Tel. 082-424 046

Fax 082-232 566

Email [arangarang21@gmail.com](mailto:arangarang21@gmail.com)

[hsiungky@yahoo.com](mailto:hsiungky@yahoo.com)

[ssbsarawak@gmail.com](mailto:ssbsarawak@gmail.com)

Contact person - Annie Soon

# **PRINCIPAL OFFICE-BEARERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS OF NCBM FOR 2016- 2018**

Mdm Jasmine Khoo Khin Sheen,  
President, NCBM

Dato' Dr Hsiung Kwo Yeun,  
Vice-President, NCBM / President, Sarawak Society for the Blind

Mr Ng Kich Sheng @ Jimmy  
Secretary, NCBM / Secretary, Sabah Society for the Blind

Mr. (James) Lau Kung Wuong,  
Treasurer, NCBM / Treasurer, Sarawak Society for the Blind

Dato' S. Kulasegaran  
Deputy President, Malaysian Association for the Blind

Datuk Rosalind Chew Bee Koh  
President, Sabah Society for the Blind

Bishop Charles Samuel  
Chairman, St. Nicholas' Home, Penang

Dato' Dr Sharom Ahmat  
St. Nicholas' Home, Penang

En. Mohd. Mustaza Mohamad Zin  
Society of the Blind in Malaysia

Mr Ahmad Shamsuri Bin Muhamad  
Society of the Blind in Malaysia



## **CHAIRPERSONS OF COMMITTEES OF NCBM FOR 2016- 2018**

Committee on Education (COE)  
Dr Kway Eng Hock

Committee on Employment and Economic Empowerment (CEEE)  
Dr Wong Huey Siew

Committee on Public Awareness (CPA)  
Datuk Rosalind Chew Bee Koh

## **AUDITOR 2016- 2018**

Inpana & Associates,  
Kuala Lumpur

## **REPRESENTATIVES OF NCBM TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS, 2016- 2018**

World Blind Union/ World Blind Union Asia Pacific -  
(WBU/WBUAP)  
Dato' Dr. Hsiung Kwo Yeun and Mr Moses Choo Siew Cheong

## **EARN SOME EXTRA CASH**

Readers are invited to write for our publication, “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.)

Disclaimer : The views and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM).

## NOTES

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