

# THE NCBM OUTREACH



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# VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT OF NCBM

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

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

Moses Choo Siew Cheong

Wong Kwee Heong

Inungkiran Mongijal

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# INTERVIEW WITH IVAN HO TUCK CHOY: EXEMPLARY MODEL OF ACHIEVEMENT AND SUCCESS

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Editor's note: Ivan Ho Tuck Choy was one of the founding members of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) when it was formed in 1983. He was elected as the first Vice President of NCBM and held this post from 1986 to 1990. He became the second President of NCBM (after Tun Hussein Onn who was the first President) and he held this post from 1990 to 1995. Subsequently, he was appointed as the Executive Director of NCBM in 1996 and he served NCBM in this capacity until his retirement in December 2013.

Currently, he continues to hold the post of Secretary-General of the World Blind Union Asia-Pacific region (WBUAP). He has been holding this position since 1996 to 2000 when the body was known as the Asian Blind Union (ABU) which included India and most of the ASEAN countries. He continued to be the Secretary-General from 2000 till the current date with the restructuring of the body to become WBUAP which now comprises all the ASEAN countries, East Asia and Pacific Oceania.

Ivan Ho Tuck Choy is an exemplary model of achievement and success and there is much that we can learn from his experience. Here is the interview.

Q. Your work with the blind goes back to the 1960s when you were involved in the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM). What inspired you and what were your aspirations?

A. One of my teachers was blind, the late Ma Koh. Although he had some shortcomings, he did show that blind people could still be useful. I found out that sighted people would laugh at Ma Koh for certain manner of behaviour and dependence. However, thinking over it myself as a blind person, I ask whether people would also laugh at me because I am blind and for not doing what sighted people can do. I believe that it is this kind of thinking that has shaped my life.

Q. Regarding NCBM, you had to start from scratch. What were the challenges and obstacles in getting NCBM started?

A. In 1962 I was working in Guthrie when the late Dr. Issabelle Grant from the National Federation of the Blind of U.S.A made a world tour to get blind people empowered. She stopped over in Pakistan and pulled Dr. Fatimah Shah out from her isolation. Consequently, Dr. Fatimah became the President of the International Federation of the Blind and also one of the founders of the Pakistan Association of the Blind.

After hearing about her philosophy, I got interested and I decided to correspond with Dr. Grant. Subsequently, a group of us initiated the formation of the Selangor Society of the Blind (SSB) in 1964. Although I was active, I was too young (19 at the time) to hold any position.

NFB followed up with another visit by Russ Kletzing, a blind lawyer, to help push for the formation of the International Federation of the Blind (IFB). SSB decided to join and Lee Ah Kow went for the formation of IFB in Phoenix in 1964. Meanwhile, I kept up correspondence with Dr. Grant as I was very interested in developments in the U.S.A. and I took up a correspondence course with Hadley School for the Blind in U.S.A.

I continued playing my part in SSB and I was elected the President and Vice President between 1964 and 1969. It was in 1969 when I made the trip to Sri Lanka to attend the first IFB Convention with money from SSB and the contributions of members. I again met Dr. Grant and she kept encouraging me and suggested that I attend the next convention in Berlin in 1974. As I had no money, she made a collection from among the members of the NFB California Branch and sent it to me.

In Berlin, I was elected on to the exco of IFB, a position which I held for two five-year terms. Indeed, I was given assistance and I was greatly inspired to do what I had to do in an organisation of the blind.

What about the challenges in NCBM? After having worked for some time with SBM, I began to realise that we were moving alone in isolation; some of us felt that there was the need for an organisation in which we

could work in partnership and collaborative effort with other agencies . hence, this led to the formation of NCBM.

To do what organisations serving the blind ought to do was my aspiration while my philosophy was that blind people should be in control of their destiny. However, it was not easy putting into practice my philosophy and what I aspired for. Some organisations were not willing to cooperate or collaborate because they wanted to be the prime organisations.

When I saw that certain things were not being carried out and I got NCBM to do it, they complained that we should not be doing it. But when NCBM did not do it, those who complained did not do anything either. Jealousy, hatred and dislike of Ivan and NCBM were the consequence.

Unfortunately, blind people who were put in positions in these organisations took sides in order to protect themselves or to make themselves seem great. In other words, these blind persons were pulling ourselves down in the process.

Q. What was the vision and mission of NCBM when it started and has the vision changed in any way towards the end of your career?

A. The vision and mission of NCBM has not changed. However, they have not been realised due to opposition and insincerity. Some leaders did try to work with me but there were others who openly tried to pull me down. But let me say this . God is great and he kept me going.

Before retiring from NCBM, I had put in place what NCBM should and ought to do, taking into consideration the ever-nagging position that NCBM should not be doing this or doing that as NCBM is just a co-ordinating body. My only regret in forming NCBM is that I got myself tied up to the system so that I was not able to do what I believed ought to be done. My conviction is that if you cannot do something or if you are unwilling to do it, then let others do it rather than prevent them from progressing - in fact, progressing for the advancement of the blind. I was prepared to lose my job when I wrote emails which hit hard at some leaders who were trying to bring me down.

Q. You had a lucrative and easy-going job with Kumpulan Guthries. Why did you give it up to work in NCBM?

A. Why did I give up my job in Guthrie? It was because I genuinely believed I could do something and I realised that blind people shared the same fate with me . we had to progress through equal participation. And, of course, the philosophy of the movement of the blind was my impetus.

I can say with pride that I never bargained for very high salary. When I borrowed money from a bank to purchase a car, she recognised my status as Executive Director and she commented, %Why you earn so little?+

Q. Your career with NCBM has spanned over a period of 26 years from 1988 to 2013. Is there any significant difference between working as a volunteer and as a paid employee?

A. As a volunteer, you cannot really pay full attention to your work. As a paid staff you can but your hands are tied. When you are given freedom with accountability, much can be achieved. This was clearly shown during the period between 1996 and 2000 when the late Datuk Lau Hui Kang was the president of NCBM. We had no money and yet we were able to purchase a building as well as run several seminars, workshops and set up the Braille Press at a time when blind students were in dire need of braille textbooks. When NCBM became richer, the attention was changed to bringing a professional touch to the organisation. More attention was given to following Government regulations and learning from the experience of the corporate world, especially by those who came to be the new leaders of NCBM.

Q. Does NCBM have an ideal and effective organisational structure in dealing with the relationship issues of coordination, partnership and collaboration? How were you able to steer the course between leadership and partnership, thereby staving off the negative perceptions of member-organisations that NCBM was trying to behave like a %big brother+? Can one be a leader and a partner at the same time?

A. As the late Tun Hussein Onn said to me at a personal meeting, "Some things you introduce may not be accepted now, but you must keep on reintroducing it when there is the opportunity. Pushing it will bring resistance and failure."

That's what we tried to do. Coordination is just a convenient word. you cannot compel people to do something if they don't want to do it. So you just stand by and feel frustrated.

We did achieve certain things anyway, although I believe we could have done much more if there was genuine sincerity in working for the blind. When NCBM wants the other organisations to do something, they say NCBM is behaving like a "big brother". But they think otherwise when they need money from NCBM. NCBM poured in ten years of funding for a service to be set up in one of the organisations. At the end, it all came to zero. Was NCBM behaving like a "big brother"?

Q. Should NCBM remain as an exclusive organisation or is there an alternative model which would broaden the network in the work for the blind in this country?

A. Every organisation can do their part and they should not keep on nagging at NCBM. If you were a transportation company, for instance, you cannot run all the services. road, rail, air and shipping. Concentrate on your core business, help others if you can, and don't spend your time trying to kill the one you think is over-shadowing you.

Q. You have helped to put NCBM in a very sound financial position and with creditable assets. Could you give some tips without giving your secret away? Can the NGOs survive in Malaysia without some involvement in business activities?

A. We collect funds in an unconventional way which others may despise. If whatever method brings money, give it your full attention. Don't try to be too professional with percentages, hours of manpower, or eye-catching events to uplift your profile.

Q. Has Malaysia made any significant impact on the international scene concerning the work for the blind and what are the contributions?

A. No, Malaysia has not made international impact although we did try. Even up to last year people still ask why we should be concentrating on world affairs when at home things are still not that good. Others have become top leaders, they have made big financial contributions and they have started projects around the world. We have contributed a bit but very reluctantly.

Q. Facing the ups and downs of your challenging career must have given you great moments of satisfaction and terrible moments of depression. Would you like to share some of these memorable or crucial moments?

A. I am happy when people work together and we achieve results. When we see things not moving and blind people grumble, I am disappointed. One of the things I regret most is not having done anything for the elderly blind after having talked so much about plans to help them back in early 2000.

Q. Would the challenges have been different in running a business organisation rather than an organisation for the blind? Would your blindness have hindered you from being as effective as you have been in NCBM?

A. Frankly, I have no interest in business. I was asked to be an insurance agent and I was given lessons by a very successful agent, Fay Wilson, who sold millions of Ringgit in coverage. Yes, I have a bit of interest but no enthusiasm. In other words, I was too much influenced by the work for the blind.

Q. ~~No~~ Nothing about us without us+- what steps were taken in concretising this statement for NCBM?

A. ~~No~~ Nothing about us without us+can only be achieved when blind people understand and help each other along. Trying to be smart in the presence of sighted people will bring you some self-satisfaction but it will bring no progress for the blind community.

Blind people should help one another instead of trying to pull each other down. Kua Cheng Hock, a blind guy from Singapore, truly put this philosophy into practice. Mr. Kua was the President of the Asian Blind Union (ABU) from 1998-2000 and subsequently the World Blind Union Asia-Pacific region (WBUAP) from 2000 to 2004 during which I had been serving as the Secretary-General. He had excellent public relations skills and was most encouraging. He got me involved in many functions and events and introduced me to many influential personalities such as Arne Husveg and John Heilbrunn. He was not fearful nor was he suspicious of me trying to usurp his position.

My wife, Jill, and other family members have been very supportive of me and my work. Jill served as the first clerk when NCBM was very poor and subsequently she helped as a part-time worker. My son and daughter and their spouses also gave much assistance, especially when fund-raising and public relations events had to be carried out in the earlier and uncertain years.

Sad to say, I don't know if people were jealous or they were just simply spiteful. Unfortunately, however, rumours spread that NCBM was my family business. I tell you, when Jill stopped working with NCBM, my daughter-in-law was so glad and greatly relieved because she could go back to work as an accountant while my wife took care of the grandchildren. The earnings of my daughter-in-law were three to four times of that earned by my wife in NCBM. I truly appreciate the sacrifices of my wife in particular in furthering the cause of the blind.

Q. Do you feel that work for the blind in Malaysia is going in the right direction? What are some of the future challenges that need to be overcome?

A. There is much to be learnt from the more successful people around the country and in the world. Blind people must get together to discuss the issues that affect them and they must be strong in voicing out their opinions. They must be ready to take action if others do not.

I have shown that NCBM can give out money without feeling impoverished. Try asking other organisations and you get all kinds of excuses.

Q. There is much that other up and coming blind persons can learn from your exemplary life of service in the work for the blind. Some parting words of advice would, therefore, be much appreciated.

A. No matter how successful you are, you are still a blind person. Sometimes you get high praises and respect; at other times you get scornful remarks and disrespect. I have stood before kings and emperors and I have sat among highly learned people around the world . yes, Ivan Ho is just a blind bloke who thinks he can change the world. I cannot change the world; but I believe by working together in genuine partnership, and blind people realising their common fate, will help each other along the way.

# THE NCBM DEVELOPMENT GRANT TO MEMBER-ORGANISATIONS

By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy,  
Moses Choo Siew Cheong  
and Wong Yoon Loong

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) was formed back in 1984 by the five major organisations serving blind and vision-impaired (BVI) persons with the desire and a dream to work collectively for the introduction and progressive development of programmes and services for the clients they serve.

In order to transform that dream into reality, NCBM depended heavily on the generous financial support and moral backing of the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind (RCSB) based in the United Kingdom under the then chairmanship of the late Sir John Wilson, and the Christoffel Blindenmission (CBM) based in Germany under the then presidency of the late Pastor Weisinger. Mr. William Godwin Brohier was then the representative for both these organisations, and he played the pivotal role in advocating for the formation and soliciting the funds from these two organisations. RCSB has since changed its name to The SightSavers International, and CBM has since changed their focus and ceased to be an Associate Member of NCBM.

TODAY NCBM is funded by local resources in continuing to pursue the dream of helping develop and upgrade services for the BVI $\text{\$}$  in the country. NCBM believes that progress in the development of blindness-related services should not be hindered by organisational borders, and BVI $\text{\$}$  should be able to receive appropriate training and enjoy quality services regardless where they live in the country. Moving in this direction, NCBM is humbled to be the first organisation devoted to the BVI $\text{\$}$  in the country to embark on a bold move . by distributing its funds to Member Organisations . to help bring this dream a step closer to reality.

## 2. PURPOSE

The NCBM Development Grant shall be used for the following purposes:

- 2.1 Encourage the introduction of new programmes and services of direct benefit to the BVI. These can include providing support services for early intervention, education, rehabilitation, vocational training, employment, BVI additional disabilities, the newly-blinded adults, the elderly, etc. It should not be used for public awareness campaigns, competitive sports, one-day get-together, buying tables or advertisements for charity dinners, etc.
- 2.2 Upgrade existing services or expand facilities to cater to more BVI clients.
- 2.3 Training the trainers, upskilling the expertise of personnel to ensure continuity of quality services, exchange programmes, etc.

## 3. THE NCBM DEVELOPMENT GRANT

- 3.1 NCBM will make available in 2014 an amount of RM100,000 (one hundred thousand Ringgit) per year to each of its five Member Organisations totalling 500,000. This is subject to the availability of funds in its treasury and on annual review at the time of drawing up the budget.
- 3.2 The Grant is not accumulative; that is, money not spent within the stipulated period shall not be carried forward.
- 3.3 To access the Grant, there must be an application with a detailed proposal spelling out clearly the following components:
  - (a) Purpose
  - (b) Target group
  - (c) Personnel in charge
  - (d) Budget

- (e) Duration of the project
- (f) Expected outcome
- (g) The impact on the BVI
- (h) Commitment of the applicant to sustain the project
- (i) Other useful information to support the application.

3.4 Disbursements shall be on claim basis. A start-up amount will be released on approval of the application. The Grant money cannot be released to the applicant without due compliance to the conditions laid down.

3.5 All claims for disbursement must be received by NCBM on or before 15 December of each year.

#### 4. RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 The applicant must submit a Mid-point Progress Report and a Final Report on the project. Failure to comply with the condition satisfactorily may result in the suspension of the Grant.

4.2 The applicant shall commit at least 20 % to match the Grant applied for. It can be in the form of salaries, utility, facility, equipment, etc.

4.3 The applicant must be prepared to accept a monitoring team should the Executive Committee deem it necessary to gather information for verification, for documenting the project for best practice, or for replication.

#### 5. APPROVAL

5.1 All applications shall be addressed to the Executive Director of NCBM via the electronic format. He/she shall vet the applications to ensure all conditions are met before submitting them to the Exco for thorough examination. Exco shall then make a recommendation to the Council for approval whose decision shall be final. If the Council meeting is not in session, it shall be decided through a majority postal vote. The result shall be conveyed to the applicant and be recorded in the Minutes of the next Council Meeting. The whole process shall be completed within two months upon receipt of the applications.

## 6. TERMINATION

6.1 The applicant may request for the Grant to be suspended or terminated due to problems with its implementation.

6.2. NCBM reserves the right to suspend or terminate the Grant if the applicant fails to implement the approved project in accordance with the stated purpose or to follow the conditions laid down.

## OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF BLINDNESS

By Ruth Yong Wang Theen

*Editor's note: Ruth Yong Wang Theen is the first totally blind student to have been admitted into Monash University, Kuala Lumpur. She was enrolled in 2013 to take up the course in journalism and media studies. This year (2014) she is specialising in psychology and reading.*

In 2010 Ruth received the %best blind student+award for the 2009 SPM examination from the Malaysian Association for the Blind.

Readers will remember Sek Kit Xuan, the first low vision student at Monash University, Kuala Lumpur just a few years earlier. In an article published in %The NCBM Outreach+, she shared her experiences as a student at the university.

Now here is Ruth Yong Wang Theen to give her sharing on the experiences of overcoming the challenges of blindness, particularly at the university. Here it is.

In March 2012, I was elated to hear the news that I had reasonably good results for the STPM Examination of 2011. The examination results were A for Business, B for Bahasa Malaysia and C -plus for History and the General Knowledge paper.

Armed with these results, I was able to apply for admission into university to further my education. I applied to various public universities, including the University of Malaya, but my applications were all turned down. The reason given was that my CGPA score of 2.75 was not up to the mark; I was only 0.5 short as the required score was at least 2.80.

I was a little disheartened but I told myself that I should not give up. So I applied for a place at a private university, i.e. the Monash University of Kuala Lumpur. I received the good news that my application was under consideration. However, as entry into Monash University was very competitive and challenging, there were a number of procedures that had to be followed. This was in keeping with the rules of Monash University as one of the prestigious universities in the world.

Firstly, I had to sit for the International English language test (IELTS) in order that I meet with the average requirement for entry into Monash University. As this was my first time sitting for such a test, I was filled with fear and nervousness and I lacked confidence. At times, I felt like giving up and the tears welled up in my eyes. On the other hand, I had the determination to study harder in order to achieve the required result. At this time, fortunately, I sensed an inspirational feeling from God and his message came to me in a verse from the Bible, %can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.+I was then able to put all the effort and energy into my studies to prepare myself for the test.

Taking the IELTS test was indeed a very harrowing experience for me. Initially, my test had to be postponed for one month due to repeated technical errors by Cambridge. When the requested Braille examination paper did finally arrive, there was a mismatch in the question and answer script for the listening test, thereby requiring the examination to be postponed once again.

I was slated to undergo a degree programme in the Arts and Social Sciences for the February 2013 intake. Subsequently, however, my application was rejected because one of the components in my IELTS results did not meet up with the Monash University requirement for entry into the course. My average band score was 6.5 which met with the Monash University requirement by my score for the reading component was only 5.5. I was, therefore, advised

by the Prospective Student Office to undergo the English Language Bridging Programme (ELBP). This included studying more academic stuff such as essay writing and the referencing style. Hence, I took on the Programme in March 2013 and it lasted for a period of fifteen weeks.

This was my first time away from home to do the Programme and I often felt home-sick. I cried a lot as I did not have many friends to cheer me up. Nevertheless, I remained strong in the Lord by seeking Him and praying for His help. Sometimes, tears came into my eyes for no rhyme or reason.

I faced unfair treatment by one of the lecturers and this made me fearful of entering the class. Eventually, I managed to pluck up courage and reported my case to the Student Welfare Body of the university.

Then my heart was filled with joy and I thanked God when I got news that I had passed the ELBP, thereby qualifying me to be accepted for the Degree course. Thus, I began pursuing the Degree course in the Arts and Social Sciences in July 2013 at Monash University of Kuala Lumpur. I felt very aware that my life would now be even tougher and much more challenging. I knew that I was the only totally blind student at the university. I went through another harrowing experience during the first semester. For the first seven weeks of the twelve-week semester, there were a number of technical issues that had to be resolved.

Firstly, I had difficulty in reading the PDF version of the lecture notes even though I was able to use the JAWS software. Indeed, it took a mighty long time for the Student Welfare Department to help convert them into the readable format.

Another difficulty I faced was in accessing the Monash webpage in order to look for Journal articles for my assignments. Furthermore, when communicating with the lecturers about my problem, their response was very slow which left me in frustration and despair.

The psychology unit required me to read at least two textbooks. However, I had great difficulty in securing the textbooks. After liaising with Australia for some time, I finally managed to obtain the books on the seventh and eighth weeks of the semester.

Studying in Monash University was really tough and very frustrating. No consideration of extension time was given me for certain assignments. Sometimes I felt such tremendous stress that I could not help bursting into tears. But the crying made me feel better and then I resolved to remain patient and to persevere. I told myself that I should not allow the physical constraints of blindness to overwhelm me if I wanted to see my dream of success come true.

Sadly, I found many of the students in Monash University to be rather selfish and unwilling to lend a helping hand. I was cut to the heart when one of them remarked, "come here not to help you but to study." Their pride, selfishness and aloofness hurt me a great deal and made me feel depressed. At times like this I would turn to Jesus, my true friend, and I did feel consolation, comfort and relief. Then I put it down to the idea that these sighted students did not understand me because they had never faced such difficulties in life. I prayed for God to bring about a change in their hearts.

I felt great relief when the mid-semester break came at last in September 2013 and I could go back home to Kuching, Sarawak. I took a taxi to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and I arrived a little too early. However, the taxi driver just left me alone and I felt very unsafe in the unfamiliar place. I was afraid to ask help from the strangers and tears again came to my eyes. As I phoned up my father, I prayed to God to grant me the courage and boldness to seek for help. God must have sent the kind lady who saw me in trouble and she gave me assistance.

However, the airport ground staff were reluctant to give assistance. I was charged RM20 for the service but the person assisting me did not offer to help carry my heavy luggage. Oh, I felt such a burden with the luggage but, in the end, I managed.

I had to travel back to Kuala Lumpur all alone after the one-week break. I did not have a pleasant flight as the airplane crew members were an unfriendly lot. Even the stranger who sat beside me did not respond when I tried to speak to him. Tears welled up in my eyes once again and I really cried so badly but nobody cared.

When I landed at the KLIA airport, one of the ground staff was concerned enough to ask me, "Are you okay?" When I replied, "I have my own problems," he did not know what to do to help me. At last he asked if I felt a little better. This did help somewhat to put me at ease.

Sometimes, on reflection, I would wonder why someone in tears would not evoke sympathy and care from others. Eventually, I found the answer in my own mind. One cannot expect everybody to be good and understanding . perhaps they were caught up in their own troubles. Then, I knew that, in actual fact, I am never alone because God is always with me wherever I am and wherever I go. In whatever I do, He is watching over me.

As I reflected, I began to realise that God had, in fact, sent many a kind soul to help me. With the assistance rendered by friends and with the grace of God, I have been able to complete one semester of my studies at Monash University. I have managed to acquire credits for the units that I had to undertake in the first semester. I believe I have done my best and I will leave the rest to the Lord.

I thank God for His wisdom and protection and I am grateful both to friends and volunteers and to those in authority who have given me assistance and comfort.

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## 1. NCBM Tun Hussein Onn Award for Distinguished Services to Blind and Vision-Impaired Persons

Nominations for the NCBM Tun Hussein Onn Award are again opened to the public. Please refer to the Rules and Criteria for Selection (which have been published in the April . June 2014 issue of %The NCBM Outreach+.

All nominations should be sent to NCBM at the given address (please see the front page of the magazine).

## 2. Payment Increase for Publication of Articles

Small increases have been made for the payment of articles contributed to %The NCBM Outreach+ (Please see %Earn Some Extra Cash+for the new rates.

## 3. Research Grant for Blindness Prevention and Employment for the Blind

Application can be made for a Research Grant ranging from RM3,000.00 to RM5,000.00 to carry out research in the fields of blindness prevention and employment for the blind. An allocation of RM10,000.00 has been made available under the NCBM Committee on Employment and Empowerment. Those interested should contact the NCBM Secretariat at 03 2272 4959.

## 4. NCBM Job Pioneering Scheme

The NCBM Job Pioneering Scheme was launched at the NCBM Brain-Storming Workshop on Job Placement and Support Services which was held from November 28 . 29, 2012. Under this scheme, NCBM will partner with prospective employers in providing employment opportunities for the blind. The blind person will work for a period of three to six months and will be paid a monthly allowance of RM 1,200.00 by NCBM. At the end of the period, it is hoped that the employer will have been convinced of the blind person's capabilities and give him permanent employment.

Blind persons wishing to take advantage of this programme can request for the application form from NCBM. Please contact the Secretariat at 03 2272 4959.

## **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

Readers are reminded that their contribution of articles, suggestions and jokes are most welcome for inclusion in %The NCBM Outreach+. However, please note that it would be very helpful to the Editor if such contributions could be submitted either on diskette or on single-sided Braille pages to facilitate editing.

Also please note that if the article is accompanied by at least two relevant photographs and if they are accepted for publication, you will be paid an additional RM25.00 fee.

You should include your address, telephone number and bank account number so that the money can be sent to you easily.

For details of payment, please see the last page.

## **SUPPORT OUR CAUSE**

The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) provides a vital link between the organisations serving the blind in this country by acting as the national coordinating body. Through NCBM, the organisations for and of the blind have a channel to discuss and formulate national policies and plans and to pioneer new programmes for the benefit of the blind.

Your financial support will, therefore, go a long way in helping to bring about new developments and progress for the blind. All contributions are deeply appreciated.

Donations should be made in the name of :

**NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, MALAYSIA**

Address:

94-B Jalan Tun Sambanthan, Brickfields

50470 Kuala Lumpur

Tel: 03-2272 4959

Fax: 03-2272 4960

## **NEWS FROM THE MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND**

### **The MAB Training Centre (Rawang) Graduation Day 2013/14**

Y.Bhg. Datuk Dr. Rebecca Fatima Maria, Secretary-General, Ministry of International Trade and Industry, presented certificates to 31 graduates of the MAB Rawang Training Centre on April 22, 2014 (Wednesday). The Centre had been established in 2013 as an APEC I.T. opportunity initiative of the Taiwan Commission in collaboration with the MAB. The main objective of the project is to bridge the digital divide between the blind and the sighted.

Malaysia joined as a partner member of the APEC Digital Opportunity Centre (or ADOC) in 2010. The ADOC Programme was established in Malaysia in 2012 in order to conduct market research activities. The mission of ADOC is to narrow the digital divide among the APEC member-economies, bring about development in these economies and enable them to cope with the challenges of globalisation.

Seven ADOC centres have been established in Malaysia through collaborative effort with the Rural and Regional Development Ministry, the Malaysian Association for the Blind, and the Universiti Utara Malaysia. The MAB Training Centre is ADOC's first training centre for the blind in South-East Asia.

Mr Jeffrey Kau, Deputy Head of Mission of the Taipei Economics and Cultural Office of Malaysia said, "We are proud to announce and acknowledge the fine work of MAB on this project. This acknowledge indicates a promising future in our efforts to empower the blind and visually impaired to work in the contact centre industry."

He thanked En. Silatul Rahim, Manager of the I.T. department of MAB, for his assistance and cooperation in establishing the ADOC Centre for the blind and it was the most outstanding model in 2013 for the country.

The training programme is offered free of charge to all the visually handicapped who have graduated from MAB's Gurney Training Centre as well as other blind persons interested in pursuing a career in telemarketing. About 80 % of the graduates have found employment with the Government and in the private sector. Some are working in the Ministry of Trade and Industry or in companies such as Tan Chong Motors, the Lotus Food Industry and the Ramsay Sime Darby Health Care Centre (formerly the Subang Medical Centre).

MAB is in the process of setting up a Contact Live Centre which will operate like other commercial contact centres. It will be able to provide employment opportunities for MAB trainees and other blind persons as well as help in generating revenue for the Association.

The Chief Executive Officer of MAB, Datoq Ganesan Supayah, said that through the CSR projects in the private sector, many job opportunities were being created for the blind. He also hinted at the possibility of the establishment of a national university of rehabilitation in Malaysia.

## MAB Sight-Savers Day

The Sight-Savers Day programme was a collaborative project of the MAB Library and the students of UITM, Shah Alam. The programme was held on May 21, 2014 (Wednesday) and the activities included an exhibition on blindness prevention and eye care, indoor games, a talentime and a talk on "Sharing is Caring".

Ten blind persons took part in the talentime. The first prize of RM100 went to Lim Ah Pen with the song, "Anak Kampung". The second of RM80 went to Yahya Ahmad with the song, "Tiada Maaf Darimu". The third prize of RM60 went to Shirley Lou with the song, "Send Me the Pillow".

# GOING PLACES ON FOOT – THE BOTANICAL GARDEN

By Dr. Tan Tok Shiong

The Botanical Garden (formerly known as the Lake Garden) is about two kilometres from the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. It is not easily accessible to the blind because of the heavy traffic flow in the city. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the Elderly Blind Club of MAB from organising a walk to the Botanical Garden recently on a Saturday morning.

There were altogether twenty persons in the group; eleven of them blind persons while nine were students from a nearby secondary school and who were also members of the Leo Club in Kuala Lumpur. Most of the blind participants were senior citizens and for some of them, the walk was a major challenge which they were happy and willing to undertake. As for the young students, they were full of vigour, eager to serve as guides to the blind and ready to go.

When everybody had turned up at Kompleks MAB, the leader of the group, Mr. K.K. Goh (himself blind), assigned the guides to the blind persons. He paired off the Chinese-speaking guides with the Chinese-speaking blind persons and the English-speaking guides with the English-speaking blind persons.

After the Chairman of the Elderly Blind Club, En. Taslim Kosni, had given his welcoming speech, the group started walking by taking the Masjid Negara route towards the Botanical Garden. It was a slow and relaxing walk and those who could walk fast had to stop frequently in order to wait for those who could not walk so quickly. As we walked, there was a photographer from the Star newspaper who took many pictures to be used for an article on blind travellers.

When we came to the old railway station, we decided to take a break and adjourned to a cafeteria for breakfast. Being refreshed, we then continued on our walk. In fact, this part of the walk was quite difficult as the road was very steep. One of the senior citizens, Charles De Silva, thought of giving

up and he sought assistance to charter a taxi to bring him back home. In the end, we managed to persuade him to go on walking.

The first place in the Botanical Garden was the Planetarium. After such a long and exhaustive walk in the hot morning sun, it was a marvellous and enjoyable feeling as we entered the cool air-conditioned place.

We had a great surprise when the officer-in-charge showed us some items with Braille labels on them and there were even written explanations in Braille. Then we were so delighted when the officer-in-charge announced that we would be given a generous discount for the half-hour movie to be screened in the cinema.

After the movie, the group proceeded to another cafeteria in the Tun Razak Memorial not far from the Planetarium for lunch. We could feel from the surroundings of the cafeteria that it was of quite high standard and we were, therefore, pleasantly surprised when we found that the charges for food and drinks were the same as in an ordinary coffee-shop.

The group then ascended the long staircase behind the memorial and went into a hut which was near the lake. In the hut, both the blind and sighted volunteers sang many popular songs together. Then the Chairman, En. Taslim Kosni, gave a brief closing speech. He thanked the students for having been so helpful and he hoped that more of such events will be organised in the future.

Walking back from the Botanical Garden, we took the K.L. Sentral route to Brickfields which was much easier so nobody had any complaints.

Another pleasant surprise for us was that the total expenses for the excursion came up to only RM178 which was shared out among the eleven blind walkers. The programme was wonderful and very affordable.

Similar walks have been conducted for the blind to other places such as the Mid-Valley Megamall, the Petronas Twin Towers, and the K.L. Tower. Blind persons interested to participate and sighted persons interested to serve as volunteer guides can contact the leader, K.K. Goh, at his handphone 013-3520732 or his house tel. 92219490.

# LETTER FROM THE EX-NICOLITES TO THE BISHOP OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE, MALAYSIA

From the Ex-Nicolites and Concerned Blind Individuals

April 26, 2014

Dear Bishop,

Re : St. NicholasqProperty

We have heard from reliable sources that a decision will soon be made with regards to the sale of the property on which St. NicholasqHome stands presently. This reminds us of the report in The Star of October 13 2012 in which the Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Malaysia did disclose that several proposals had been received to develop the land and to relocate St. Nicholasqto another site.

It was of some comfort to us then to know that %6 and when a proposal is accepted by the Diocese, it will make absolutely sure that the new site of St. NicholasqHome will have the best facilities obtainable, not only for current needs but also for its future expansion.+We, nevertheless, have our concerns and we, therefore, would like to urge that due consideration be given to various factors before the final decision is taken on whether or not to sell the property.

## 1. Visibility and Conspicuousness of the Place

On the current site, St. NicholasqHome has been continually visible and conspicuous to the general public not only in Penang but to the international community as well. In fact, St. Nicholasqused to be a popular tourist attraction both locally and internationally when the school was in existence and the blind children could be seen to be participating in the life and activity of the place. But even today with the rehabilitation, vocational and elderly blind services still functioning, St. Nicholasqcontinues to attract the attention of the community at large because of the visibility and conspicuousness of the place.

## 2. Strategic Position

St. NicholasqHome is presently located in a very strategic position as it is situated right in the centre among several schools in the area, i.e. the Pulau Tikus Convent, Phor Tay High-school, the Penang Chinese GirlsqSchool (Primary and Secondary), St. Xavierq Primary School and a school for Indian children.

With its central location, integration of the blind and voluntarism from the sighted community are easily fostered through St. NicholasqHome. Sighted children see the blind almost every day of their lives and they may get involved in providing assistance to them either personally or through some voluntary programmes in the home. Such exposure to the blind has an important bearing on influencing and creating a positive mindset among the sighted which would bode well for the future of the blind when they have to go out into the world of work eventually.

## 3. Public Support and Funding

In view of its central location and visibility, St. NicholasqHome is able to attract support and funds quite easily in terms of cash, kind and services. Thus, if money is the real and main issue for selling the land, then it would apparently make more sense for fund-raising efforts to be stepped up for the consolidation of programmes and services on the current site. After all, there is no guarantee that money derived from the property sale will last; on the other hand, the land is a much more tangible asset that is not so easily depleted and can be perpetually used for the long-term good of the blind.

Moreover, while St. NicholasqHome has the licence to raise funds, why not take advantage and make full use of this opportunity rather than selling the land? While the argument may be proffered that funds will be raised when St. Nicholasqmoves to the new property, no such guarantee can be given. Now with St. Nicholasqbeing so visible and yet so little attention is given to fund-raising, can we expect that much more effort will be put into the exercise of raising money when St. NicholasqHome will not be so visible and is therefore more easily hidden away from the public eye?

As the saying goes, %Better a chicken today than an egg tomorrow+.

#### 4. Accessibility of Infrastructure

Indeed, much money has been spent by the Government in creating a barrier-free environment for the disabled (including the blind) with the introduction of tactile guiding blocks, covered drains, ramps and modified traffic lights. With the accessible features in the built environment, the areas to and from St. Nicholas can be easily accessed by blind commuters and travellers with minimal risk from hazards and obstacles. Moving to a new site would mean having to create a new accessible environment which will again require the tedious processes and procedures of gaining Government support for accessible infrastructure.

#### 5. Staff and Parents

The distance and remoteness of the new place would mean having to incur extra time needed to travel or commute to and from St. Nicholas. Furthermore, additional money will have to be incurred in paying staff allowances to compensate for the longer travel time and additional transport. This notwithstanding, many staff (including the dedicated ones), are likely to resign and leave the institution in want of adequate human resources to run the place effectively.

Moreover, many parents will be reluctant to send their blind children to the programmes of St. Nicholas Home. This will have an adverse impact on the Home, especially as St. Nicholas is now embarking on new services, i.e. the Early Intervention Programme and the Kindergarten for the Blind. From experience, it has been proven that the distance factor does tend to discourage parents from sending their children to a programme even if it can be of benefit to them. The only way to overcome such a problem would be to provide a service of a residential nature . but this would be much more costly!

In conclusion, we would like to make a concerted appeal to the Synod to give very careful and serious consideration before making the final decision on whether or not to sell the existing property of St. NicholasqHome. We sincerely hope that the factors we have cited will loom large in your deliberations before the fatal step is taken and the final plunge is made.

We thank you for your kind and understanding consideration.

Most sincerely,  
Ex-Nicolites and Concerned Blind Individuals for the Betterment of St.  
NicholasqHome

# FAREWELL TO FRANCIS CHAN CHEN

By Anthony Thanasayan

Photo Captions of Francis Chan Chen & Cecilia Oui Kee Heok

## 1. Their Wedding



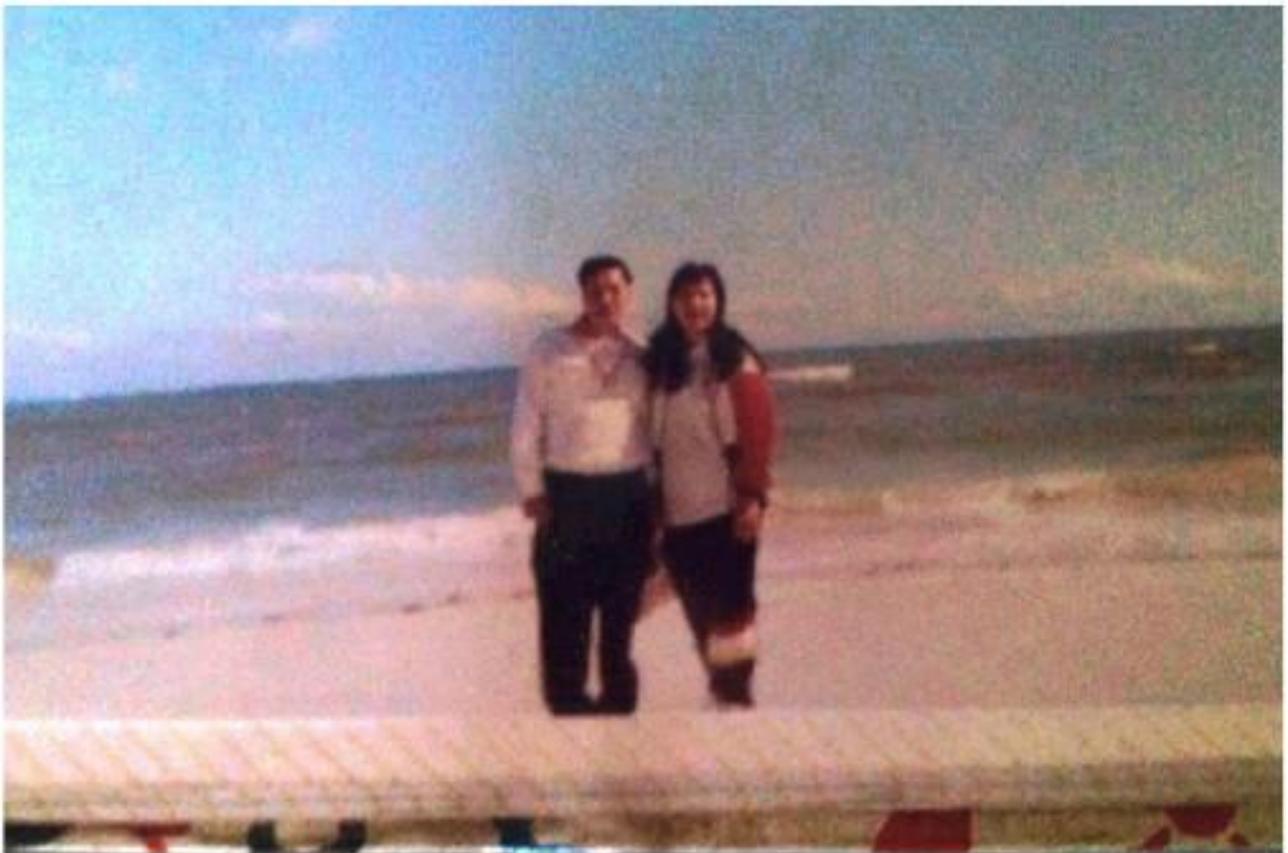
2. Celebrating baby Patricia's birthday



3. Family Dinner together



#### 4. Holiday in Hanoi



Francis Chan was loved by one and all. His cheerfulness and readiness to help others will long be remembered.

Indeed, the blind community lost a dear, dear friend when Francis Chan Chen, 64, passed away on August 6, 2012 while having a short afternoon rest. He had touched many hearts throughout his life.

A close friend, Yam Tong Woo, recalls how Francis had helped him to accept his blindness when the former lost his sight four years earlier.

Adapting to the world of the blind was not easy as I had to struggle to find my way around. I had to learn how to read Braille and to adapt to my new life,+said Yam, 58. I first met Francis at a nearby coffee-shop during a training session teabreak. Francis's favourite drink was Kopi Or Kowq (extra strong black coffee). He was a good talker and was always cheerful. I could talk to him about virtually anything under the sun.+

Yam went on to say that Francis had been blind most of his life but this had not stopped him from reaching out to others who needed help.

His unselfish, caring attitude inspired my wife and I to become actively involved in helping the blind community,+said Yam.

Francis would often visit the blind to see how they were coping with life. He was always ready with advice and suggestions on how the blind could overcome obstacles and live with their disability. He loved to introduce the blind to one another because he believed they could learn from each other's personal experiences with blindness.

The ever versatile Francis could speak a number of languages and dialects such as English, Malay, Mandarin, Hokkien, Cantonese and even Tamil and Japanese. He drew people to him with his jovial nature and jokes.

The blind community loved his hand-made Braille calendars. He took pains to include important dates for the blind, including the school-term breaks, the religious festivals and state holidays.

He used to give me Braille lessons. In turn, I taught him to use the computer and he learned to read e-books and to use his laptop to play his favourite CDs and DVDs,+said Yam.

Upon his retirement from the MAB some years back, Francis became a part-time massage therapist. You would never forget his fantastic massage on the ears with his rapid finger drumming movements.

His love for travelling took him to Australia and Vietnam. Indeed, he enjoyed talking about his travels, especially about the unforgettable experience of standing on the ridge of a cliff in Hanoi looking out to Hainan island across the sea.

During a trip to Australia, an officer at the immigration counter remarked, %You come to Australia to dieq(today)?+

Francis quipped, %No, I come here for a holiday!+Well, that's Francis for you.

He leaves behind his wife, Cecilia, and his daughter, Patricia. They fondly remember his messages of love and advice.

He often quoted this saying for them, %The past is history, the present is a blessing, and the future is a mystery. Therefore, always appreciate the present and accept what comes to you, no matter good or bad.+

They will never forget how he greeted some visitors one evening. %Good evening,+he said. %Time has gone pretty fast. When I was small, I wept because time crept. As I grew, time flew; then when I became a man, time ran; suddenly, when I'm old, I realise that time is passing me by. And now it's going to be another year gone. So here I wish you all a very happy new year!+

# THE INSPIRATIONAL FRANCIS CHAN CHEN

By Joan Marie Wong

Editor's note: Francis Chan Chen had been a very active member of the Elderly Blind Club of MAB and was serving on the Elderly Blind Committee until his death on August 6, 2012. Indeed, the unexpected passing away of Francis Chan Chen came as a shock to many as he had been a great source of inspiration both to blind and sighted persons alike. He empathised and was very helpful to those in need while his words of joviality and encouragement always uplifted one's spirit.

The following article by Joan Marie Wong is a reflection on how much friends appreciate the life of Francis and how he will be sorely missed. Here it is:

The late Francis Chan Chen comes to mind as one who is truly inspirational. Born sighted, his eyesight deteriorated from the age of ten. As the darkness closed in around him, so did the fears, insecurity and loneliness set in.

He felt isolated and matters were made worse when one particular family singled him out and called him, 'Mang Kwai' (or 'Blind Devil'). Poverty and ignorance were compounded by the neglect of medical treatment until he became totally blind.

Francis had admitted that he was at the lowest ebb of his life. Fortunately, the life-line came to him in the person of Brother Augustus. He was in desperate need when Bro. Augustus came to him as a friend and mentor.

From then on, the life of Francis made a turn around and he began to learn how to see life positively. He took an interest in languages and became conversant in Mandarin, English and Malay. He even acquired a Scottish accent when speaking English at certain times!

Not only did Bro. Augustus encourage and nurture Francis but he also showed him how to look into himself in order to discover his special talents. Francis found that the Dizi (or the Chinese flute) had an attraction for him. Completely self-taught, he was astonished and pleasantly surprised when he was asked to play before the royalty. He did not mention it but he must have achieved a level of expertise to have been thus invited.

Soon after, this was followed by an invitation to perform in Japan. This was his first time travelling abroad and he discovered the joys of travelling, especially when he was invited by the hosts to their homes. The experience helped to broaden his vision and to change his attitude towards other people.

Eventually, an opportunity presented itself to Francis and it proved to be a test of his maturity. The family which had called him ~~M~~Mang Kwai in his desperate hour was now in need of help. Francis responded positively and helped them to secure their citizenship papers in a relatively short space of time. In fact, Francis had been approached for assistance as he was the only educated person in the village at the time.

For Francis, this was the sign-post pointing the way forward. He discovered that by converting a hurt that had been done to him into a blessing for someone else, this, in fact, freed him from resentment. Subsequently, he coined his own saying, ~~R~~Regret of the past and fear of the future equals an inability to enjoy the present.+

Thus, he lived this experience of wholeness from then on. He came to believe that three things stood in opposition to humility, i.e. ego, jealousy and greed. He saw as obvious that it was ego which made a person think too highly of himself with no regard whatsoever of another person's qualities.

Jealousy followed closely on the heels of ego and one is inclined not to give credit to others where it is due and to think that only oneself is deserving of all the recognition. Hence, one becomes greedy and wants to accumulate beyond necessity; in truth, it is simplicity, or not hoarding, that is the antidote. Indeed, from the depths of personal suffering, Francis had emerged with such nuggets of wisdom on how to overcome adversity.

The entire life of Francis had been permeated by the influence of Bro. Augustus. This had been whole-heartedly acknowledged by Francis Chan himself. From his experience, he was convinced that every person was in need of a mentor to guide him towards right living. This was what drove him to make himself available as a motivational speaker. He truly put to good use the facility with the spoken word which he deployed with a good sense of humour: %go about with my eyes closed but with my mouth open!+

Francis had refused to wallow in self-pity. He had successfully converted the dross in his life into pure gold.

Although Francis has gone from this earth one and a half years ago, writing about him gives the good vibes. He is survived by his wife Cecilia and an only daughter, Patricia.

# THE VOICE OF THE DISABLED

By Mohd. Yasin bin Abdul Kadir

Editor's note: En. Mohd. Yasin bin Abdul Kadir is a low vision person and he is working as a Director in the National Anti-drugs Agency, Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia.

He would like to share his views on how to meet the needs of the disabled, especially by the Government. Here is what he says:

Recently, we have observed that many politicians are showing a keen interest in highlighting and giving their views concerning the needs of the disabled. Although this apparently comes mainly from the opposition, I believe this is something good that is happening and we are very happy that disabled people's issues are being brought to the fore.

Currently, the population in Malaysia is about 28 million. If 10 % of the population is disabled (based on the estimate of the United Nations), this would mean that there are about 2.8 million people who are disabled. Thus, although they may not be the majority population, yet they do constitute a significant minority. They may be small in number, yet they could help to bring about change through concerted action.

The time has come for all politicians, whether from the ruling Barisan Nasional or from the opposition, to go down to the grassroots in their respective constituencies to find out the needs of the people. Motivational programmes are needed in order to encourage the children to go to school so that they can benefit from education. Training programmes should be organised in order to equip the people with skills for employment. So many jobs are being taken up by foreigners. If greater effort is made to initiate training programmes, then more opportunities will be available and they could be extended to the disabled population. By reducing the number of foreigners taking up jobs in our country, this would also help to stem the flow of wealth out of the country.

Having a disabled person as Senator to represent the disabled population in the senate house may be a good thing but it is certainly not enough to meet the needs of the disabled. What we need is a %Wakil Rakyat+who would be a more effective voice for the disabled because he is elected by the people.

A special task force should then be set up. It should include representatives from the relevant ministries, departments and Government agencies as well as from the Government-linked companies, Private Sector and the Non-Governmental Organisations. The objective of this task force is to get things moving.

I am very happy to note that in many countries, the issues of the disabled have come to the fore. The ruling authorities are, in fact, involved in formulating plans of action aimed at the welfare of the disabled. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, there are many blind persons holding good positions. The former Mufti of Saudi Arabia was a blind person and he was well respected not only by the Muslim countries but by the Non-Muslim countries as well.

New infrastructure have been provided in Mecca and Medinah, thereby making it easier for the disabled to perform the Haj. The fast train has been introduced, thereby facilitating faster communication between Riyadh, the capital city, with other towns and cities in the country. The Metro Train has also been introduced with many accessible features for the disabled. Indeed, the credit goes to the King of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah Ibnu Abdul Aziz Al-Saud and his Government for their understanding consideration of the disabled. Truly, Saudi Arabia is to be praised for having set the good example of obedience to the voice of God in the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

The example of Saudi Arabia is certainly worthy of emulation in Malaysia. The Special Task Force mentioned earlier should be placed in the Prime Minister's Department as is being done in Saudi Arabia. It can be headed by a minister in order to ensure that things are well done.

While Malaysia is not a welfare state, it can still provide assistance not as a matter of charity but as a matter of need. It's within a certain range. We understand that such assistance is being given as a temporary measure until the persons affected rise above the poverty line.

At present, there are quite a number of NGOs representing the disabled. However, many of them are drifting without any clear direction. The initiative should be taken by the Government to get all the NGOs together in order to work out a more effective coordinating mechanism.

If there is an elected *Wakil Rakyat*, he would be the best person to call for a dialogue between the Government and the NGOs. The purpose is to provide the opportunity for problems and issues to be ironed out and for the real challenges to be identified. Plans and policies can then be formulated in meeting the needs of the disabled.

# TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: THE EBOOK READER

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

For those who enjoy carrying around the ebook reader, here is the good news that HIMS has just announced the coming of a new generation ebook reader which will replace the Braille Sense.

The specifications of this new ebook reader are as follows:

Product name: EZ

Model name: T70EZ

Flash memory: 16GB

Interface: 1 Micro USB, 1 SD Slot, Bluetooth 3.0, Wifi 802.11b/g/n

CD Rom: Supported . audio; OCR Capture, Save and Read

Applications: Daisy player 2.0, 2.02, XML Daisy, ansi/niso, Z39.86 (Daisy 3.0); Nimas 1.1, NLS, learning Ally, Bookshare.org, Countek (Samnet); Open Library

Media player: MP3, MP4, WAV, WMA, WMV, OGG, ASF, AAC, AVI, FLAC, 3GP, MPG, M4A

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

Online services: Web radio, Daisy Online, Podcast,

FM radio: Supported

Clock: Supported

recorder: MP\_?, WAV

Battery life: More than 12 hours; comes with a free spare battery

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

Weight: 138 G or 0.30 lbs.

There you are, this is indeed a reader in every way. By the time you read this article, the price should have been announced. However, if the price is still not out, then I expect it will be in the region of between RM2,000 to RM2,500.

## A POINT TO PONDER: A GOOD SAMARITAN

By Wong Kow

Thanks to the great invention of the aeroplane, travelling in our modern times is comfortable and, more often than not, safe and punctual. If the journey is not too long, say from Kuala Lumpur to Hong Kong or to Guangzhou in China, one could even take the morning flight to the destination and then come back home to Kuala Lumpur in time for dinner with loved ones and family members in the evening of the same day.

This was not so, however, for my friend, Yu Chee Eng, who is totally blind. He had left Malaysia for Hong Kong in 1965 to look for greener pastures. After training in piano-tuning, he managed to secure a job as a piano-tuner. He got married to a telephonist, Margaret, who is also totally blind, in the mid-1970s.

Indeed, life had been tough for Chee Eng in the 1970s and 1980s. They had two children and when both the children were still small, the couple seldom travelled back to Malaysia. Both the children managed to complete their tertiary education and they were able to find suitable employment. Their eldest son found employment with an airlines company. Thus, having a son with the airlines, Chee Eng and his wife could enjoy the privilege of travelling on special reduced airfares. In recent years, they have been taking the opportunity to travel to Kuala Lumpur twice annually.

However, the concessionary airfares were being provided on the condition that priority would always be given to other passengers who were paying for the full fare. Thus, Chee Eng and his wife had to be on the waiting list for the vacant seats. To make things easier for them, their son would normally help to check on the website and advise them on the possible dates of travel.

In actual fact, they would face no problem at all during the off-peak season. However, the problems often arose during the peak seasons such as the Chinese New Year, Christmas and the school holidays. At such times, a huge group of holiday-makers could turn up at the last moment to occupy all

the seats. When this occurred, Chee Eng would be told that he had to wait for the next flight; but even this was by no means certain and he may have to wait for an available flight on the following days.

One day in August 2012, Chee Eng and Margaret were ready to travel back to Hong Kong after the usual one month's stay in Kuala Lumpur. With assistance from Chee Eng's brother and sister-in-law, they were able to arrive at the KLIA a few hours before the actual time for checking in. But when it was almost time for their turn to check in, they were told that there were no vacancies in the plane. So they had to return to Kuala Lumpur and go back to the airport the following day to wait for the afternoon flight. Again there were the last-minute travellers who filled up the seats and only one vacant seat was available. Margaret boarded the plane for Hong Kong while Chee Eng had to make the third attempt the next day. This meant that Chee Eng's sister and brother-in-law had to accompany him to the airport for the third time to wait for the K.L.-Hong Kong flight.

Thank goodness, things went smoothly this time and Chee Eng managed to secure a seat at long last! He was able to check in and the airport ground staff were available to assist him with some of the necessary procedures for boarding. After making sure that Chee Eng was in good hands, his sister and brother-in-law left the airport.

When it was time for boarding, however, Chee Eng was informed that there was a delay. Hours later, the plane was still not ready to fly. Subsequently, the announcement came and said that due to technical problems, the flight had to be cancelled and arrangements would be made for passengers to stay overnight in a hotel which was not too far from the airport.

Chee Eng was led by the ground staff to the departure hall exit. There he was told to board the chartered bus which would bring him to the hotel for his one-night stay. The same bus would then take the passengers to the airport for the flight the next day.

Imagine the hassle being faced by Chee Eng as around 300 passengers were rushing for the buses. Chee Eng felt terrible; he was confused, puzzled and fearful. Fortunately, it was at this moment of despair when a good samaritan suddenly appeared. He introduced himself as Mr. Soon and offered Chee Eng a helping hand in boarding the bus and later to check into the hotel. Mr. Soon made a request from the person-in-charge to allow him to stay with Chee Eng in the same room in order to take care of him.

Chee Eng found out that Mr. Soon was in his early twenties and that he was studying in a university in the Province of Hebei, China. Not only did he take care of my needs in the hotel but he also accompanied me to the airport. In fact, he helped me all the way until I met up with my family members who had come to fetch me from the Hong Kong International Airport.+Chee Eng told me with deep appreciation in his voice. It was a very touching story indeed!

Before parting, Chee Eng and Mr. Soon exchanged telephone numbers and then promised to keep in touch with each other. Chee Eng told Mr. Soon that he and Margaret will be spending the next month-long summer holiday in Kuala Lumpur. Mr. Soon took the trouble to make the journey from Hebei to Kuala Lumpur in order to meet up with Chee Eng and Margaret there. Together they enjoyed an extended holiday trip in Thailand.

We who are blind do certainly appreciate that heartfelt gratitude the assistance and services rendered by the good samaritans. On the other hand, are we ourselves ready to act as good samaritans by offering assistance to someone who is in needy circumstance?

We have two choices . either we excuse ourselves for not lending a helping hand because of our disability or we could extend assistance to someone in need in spite of our blindness. We should play our part in society if we want to be treated as equals.

# WHY ASIA REJECTS WESTERN DISABILITY ADVICE

By Mike Miles,  
Director of the Mental Health Centre,  
Mission Hospital Peshawar,  
North-west Pakistan

Editor's note: This article was published in the International Rehabilitation Review, fourth quarter, 1982. Mr. Miles worked for four years in the Development of Disability Programmes in Pakistan. His analysis of the situation concerning rehabilitation in Asia is still relevant today.

Here is what he says:

Many western disability experts and international organisations advise Asian governments to base their disability policies on prevention and community-based rehabilitation in order to avoid the painful historical mistakes of western rehabilitation services. Most Asian governments are, in fact, doing exactly what they are advised not to do: building prestige handicap palaces, large residential institutions and imitations of western high-tech specialist facilities. The reasons are not hard to find.

## Psycho-social Factors

The majority of disabled persons in the world now live in communities where life is a daily and often losing struggle to meet physical needs. When the average able-bodied person barely satisfies his own needs for food and shelter, loving care, purpose and personal recognition, it is unrealistic to expect much attention to the needs of the disabled.

Rural development programmes try to foster community decision-making and implementation. All families benefit when by their own labour or participation they get clean water on tap, roads, electricity and improved crops. However, the average person with a minimal standard of living cannot be expected to raise much enthusiasm for participating in the rehabilitation of the disabled, which is a weak, low-status and practically voiceless minority, whose upliftment brings little visible general benefit and no immediate gain to the family without a disabled member.

For millions of families in absolute poverty, the birth of a disabled child (or an illness or accident producing serious impairment) places them in a slightly worse position than their neighbours. It may affect adversely the marriage opportunities of the rest of the families. There will be additional expenses. There is no hope that this new child might bring any upswing in the family's fortunes. Therefore, even the best planned and executed rehabilitation programme will do little more than restore them to hovering between hunger and starvation, with chronic illness, depression and debt as their normal condition. To participate in a rehabilitation programme will have only one certain effect. The rest of the village or neighbourhood will know for sure that this family has a disabled member, a fact which they may have been at great pains to conceal.

## Religious Factors

Religions of the world exhort their followers to act for the benefit of the weak and needy, sick and disabled. However, exhortations to do good are rarely heeded unless the circumstances are conducive. One inducement is to build credit towards an after-life by dropping coins into the blind beggar's bowl now and thereby avoiding after-life punishment. Disabled beggars in Asia do not hesitate to remind the public of the latter possibility, nor do they thank the donor since they are aware that the intention is merely to acquire credit.

The disabled beggar asks for justice. Since fate, karma or deity has deprived him, begging becomes his rightful duty and occupation: Justice demands that his bowl be filled. If the unseen forces present a poor family with a deformed baby, it is the family's duty to exploit the deformity for financial gain. To straighten and untwist the crippled child would be to fly in the face of providence.

## Prestige and Visibility

The prestige disability project is a highly visible demonstration of compassion and charity. A huge building filled with gleaming gadgets is evidence of something being done about disability. It can be shown to foreign visitors as evidence of good intent, and a manifestation of the modernness.

of a developing country. It draws public attention to a neglected field. Rehabilitation professionals approve because their status is related directly to the amount of money splashed about. It is also more news-worthy to report that a ten-million Dollar "handicap palace" has been inaugurated by the president than that ten thousand disabled children have begun attending normal schools at no cost other than a change of attitude on the part of the teachers.

## Empire and Ego Building

Disabled persons are rarely consulted about plans for their own welfare for to do so would imply their near-equality with the planners. Instead, it is common to find rehabilitation professionals and social workers feverishly setting up little empires, cornering a part of the rehabilitation market and defending it against all comers, regardless of the welfare of their clients.

Not everyone aspires to rule, but many desire the status of the ruler's court. Given a choice between working in a large city-based "handicap palace", visibly earning merit by benevolence, or slogging away at poly-immunisation and home-based rehabilitation schemes in obscurity, there is little doubt which the average rehabilitation professional will find more gratifying to his ego.

## Political Inequalities

The rich and powerful in every country ensure that high-quality facilities are built first for their own use before anything is done about inexpensive and widespread facilities for the masses. The once-favoured practice for going abroad for treatment is becoming increasingly expensive. If Governments propose to put resources into rehabilitation facilities at home, the rich and powerful require a good imitation of what they would find in western capitals. Unfortunately, it will be available only to a privileged few. The same resources could perhaps have created a national network of modest local rehabilitation centres.

## Inappropriate Training

Shortage of appropriate rehabilitation skills is the greatest single problem in developing facilities for disabled persons and will take many years to overcome. Two remedies have typically been tried and found wanting:

- (a) Nationals are sent abroad for training. However, often they do not return or they are unable to relate the new skills they have learnt to the local situation.
- (b) Expatriates are recruited to give training courses within the country. However, problems include inappropriate course material, inappropriate training, etc.
- (c) Rehabilitation professionals who have been trained and worked abroad decide to return to their country and they may ultimately be the ones who make the system run. However, they suffer the disadvantage of being geared to sophisticated systems, and many will naturally prefer to work in western-style handicap palaces.
- (d) A sharp division is maintained between locally trained professionals who devise the programmes and the hands-on workers. However, the latter are few and poorly paid.

## Lack of Credible Schemes

Many advisers urge the adoption of low-cost rural community-based schemes at a very modest level of professional skill. The difficulties are illustrated by the problems of providing primary health care:

- (a) Opposition from professionals and inertia of the status quo;
- (b) Opposition from local communities who know that if they accept the low-cost scheme, they will never get a hospital;
- (c) Difficulty of finding and retaining suitable front-line personnel, maintaining enthusiasm, providing adequate support and supervision, encouragement and some sort of career structure.

- (d) Transport and communication problems;
- (e) Preference for curative medicine to the near-exclusion of preventive and education measures.
- (f) Much greater stigma attached to disability as compared with illness;
- (g) The modest level of skills being disseminated means that positive results will be slow and the dropout rate will be higher than in curative medicine;
- (h) Even in the west there is little experience with involving the community and the family of the disabled person in rehabilitation. Thus, lack of information and expertise puts community rehabilitation further behind primary health care;
- (i) Misinformation from qualified doctors is quite common in the disability field and will be believed in preference to any other opinion.

### A Tentative Alternative

It appears that what is needed is a via media (or middle way) between the big-city institution and the rural primary-level scheme. In order to achieve some visible results over a wide area in the shortest time using local resources, certain priorities could be adopted as in north-west Pakistan:

1. Towns before villages;
2. Children before adults;
3. Locally perceived needs before theoretical strategy;
4. Small scale before large scale
5. Visible centres before invisible periphery;
6. Well motivated parents before indifferent ones;
7. Day centres before residential work.

The plan is to discover well motivated parents of disabled children living in towns (starting with population of 50,000 and above), learn how they perceive their problems and what they would like to do about them, and steer the action towards small local day-centres, run by committees of parents and local professionals. All over the world the evidence is that, once mobilised, parents or close relatives of disabled children have the greatest motivation and stamina for the battle to establish and monitor appropriate services.

This is a resource at present virtually untapped in Asia.

## HUMOROUS TIDBITS

An Audience with God

Gorbachev, Bush and a disabled person had an audience with God.

Gorbachev asked whether he will see Perestroika happening in his lifetime.

God thought for a while and said, %an sorry this will not happen in your lifetime.+

Gorbachev wept and exited.

Bush asked if he will see the U.S. winning over Japan in Economic supremacy and the balancing of trade.

God thought and answered, %his will not happen during your term of presidency.+Bush wept and made his exit.

Then the disabled person asked whether he will see legislation for the disabled all over the world in his lifetime.

Suddenly God wept.

%Why are you weeping? [ The disabled person asked.

God answered, %Because I won't see this happening in my lifetime.+

## The Courier Boy

The chief director of a company in South Korea was on an inspection tour of a very big factory with thousands of workers. He observe a young man walking to and fro and leaning on a post with his eyes wandering all around.

He asked the young man, "What's your name and how old are you? How much do you earn?"+

"I'm nineteen,+the perplexed young man replied. Hesitantly he said, "I earn one thousand five hundred.+

"You are very young,+the chief director said. "I'll pay you double. You can take this cheque and leave. I don't like to see people loitering around doing nothing.+

"Yes sir, yes sir, I'll go,+the young man said eagerly, took the cheque, and left.

The workers stared in amazement. The chief director said to them, "You will all be treated the same if you don't work." +

Then he noticed the finance administrator walking down the stairs, his eyes wandering around, , carrying a book and counting money.

"You too. What are you doing loitering around and fiddling with money?"+

"Oh sir, I'm looking for the pizza delivery boy to pay him the money.+

## Peanuts:

I'm tired working for peanuts. Successful men must think big. So now I'm going to work for coconuts.

## Missing leaf

A mischievous boy tore off the last page of the priest's long sermon. When the priest came to the last page, he said, "And Adam said to Eve ...+He repeated this three times while looking for the last page.

Not being able to find it, he said, "The leaf is missing!+"

## Cut the sermon

The congregation noticed that the priest had a big plaster on his face. At the entrance after the service, a woman asked the priest why he had the plaster.

The priest said that he was concentrating so hard on the sermon that he cut his face because he forgot about the razor.

The woman said, "Next time please be careful not to cut your face but you can cut the sermon.+"

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For articles published, payments are as follows:-

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