

NCBM OUTREACH



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Dato' S. Kulasegaran

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A FATHER'S BLIND LOVE

By Meeda Murugesan

Editor's Note: This article appeared in the Weekend Mail of December 29 – 30, 2007 after the appointment of Prof. Datuk Dr Ismail Md. Salleh as Senator. The focus is on his personal struggle leading to his achievements and accomplishments.

Here is the story:

Raising a child with a disability is challenging enough today; imagine having to do it 60 years ago in a small, isolated paddy-farming village without electricity or running water.

This was the task that faced the parents of Prof. Datuk Dr. Ismail Md. Salleh, the country's first blind senator, when he was born in 1947 as the second of their nine children. But it was a challenge they stood up to admirably, given how far their son has come today.

Growing up in the village of Kampung Dua in Pasir Mas, Kelantan, Ismail was treated just the same as his other siblings from young. He had chores to do at home and, like many other village boys, he helped out in the paddy fields and enjoyed swimming and fishing in the river.

"I had a normal childhood despite my disability. I was never made to feel different and this was primarily due to my father," said Ismail, who was born with low vision but became totally blind when he was thirteen. His paddy-

farmer father, Md. Salleh Yusof, was a far-sighted man despite having studied only up to standard two in a "sekolah agama" or religious school.

Ismail's father was always interested in moving forward and doing new things. In fact, he was the first to install a tube-well and later to be the first to open a sundry shop. "He also doubled up as the village imam," Ismail said. "And when Quran reading classes were held, he made sure that I too would sit in although there was no way I could learn to read the holy book. He felt that even if I could not read, I would still gain something by listening to the others reading aloud."

When the time came for Ismail to attend school, his father faced a dilemma. There were no schools for the blind in Kelantan and the regular schools could not accommodate him in those days. Thus, there was no choice but for Ismail to stay at home. However, his elder brother, Zakaria, who was a year older, had already started schooling. Every time Zakaria came home, Ismail would ask him what he had been taught in order to gain something from his brother's knowledge.

"My brother and I were playmates. So when he started going to school, I felt lonely at home and my father sense it," Ismail remembered.

Things changed when Ismail was eight and an exhibition was held in

a school near his village. Officials from the Welfare Department had brought several blind people to the exhibition and Ismail's father was taken aback when he saw how talented some of the blind were at sewing, weaving baskets and making other crafts.

"I think my father saw for the first time that blind people could be trained to develop certain skills and be independent. That started my father's search for a school that would take me in."

There were then only two schools for the blind in the whole country – in Penang and Johor. His father, after contacting the Welfare Department, managed to secure a place for Ismail in the Johor school.

"Johor was like a world away from our kampung," Ismail said. "It was like going overseas. Nearly everyone in the village and within my own family told my father what a bad idea it was to send me away."

He said that some of the villagers even accused his father of trying to wash his hands off his son by packing the boy off to a boarding school. Some of them approached his father and volunteered to care for Ismail themselves if his father could not do the job.

"It was tough facing opposition from everyone," Ismail reminisced, "but my father was so determined to give me an education that he never backed down."

Ismail eventually enrolled as a Standard One pupil at the Princess Elizabeth School for the Blind in Johor Bahru. At the time there

were only basic facilities but the students learned to play musical instruments and had access to Braille books. The teachers would spend hours reading from various story-books to the blind children in class.

"Many of the pupils were musically talented and the school used to draw a crowd during performances. Some students were so good that they were given the opportunity to cut records. I myself was not musically inclined."

Therefore, in order to compensate, Ismail put in more effort into his schoolwork and was soon topping his class. His teachers noticed that he had a flair for mathematics.

He also became more independent as the children at the school were expected to take care of their own needs at the hostel, from making their own beds and washing their own clothes, to laying the table for meals. Every time he returned to his kampung, Ismail would bring one or two Braille books along and his proud father would gather the villagers together and his son would read to them.

"I think because of the opposition earlier, my father wanted to show them that he had made the right decision in sending me away to school. As for me, I enjoyed learning, but I also missed my family very much because I was just a young boy so far away from everything familiar."

But after completing Standard Six, Ismail faced another dilemma. The natural path would have been for him to enrol in one of the skills training centres for the blind but

he had other bigger plans. He wanted to continue his schooling but the possibility seemed remote because of his blindness. Fortunately for him, there was a teacher who has gone to the United States to observe education for the blind there. When he returned, he recommended the concept of integrated education for the blind to the local education authorities whereby blind children would be placed in normal schools to study alongside sighted children.

The proposal was accepted by the government and Ismail was one of the two blind students to be placed in a secondary boarding school in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. Initially, he was nervous and apprehensive about coping in an environment where he had to mingle with and compete alongside sighted children.

"I did not feel comfortable at first because I stood out due to my blindness and I could sense that they were whispering about me. But I soon realised that once again, by proving myself academically, I would be able to gain acceptance."

Ismail spent hours after school reading his Braille books and getting assistance from people to read to him when Braille books were not available in any particular subject.

"Being blind meant that I could read at any time, even after lights-out at the hostel. So I guess I had an advantage compared with the other students," Ismail said with a smile.

He said that his teachers, like his father, had played a very crucial

role in helping him to overcome his disability. When one of his teachers, Ong Theam Lye, found out that Ismail's ambition was to be a lawyer, he bought a book on the Malaysian Constitution and read aloud the contents on tape so that Ismail could listen at his leisure.

During the weekends, Ong would take Ismail to the beach. He would flip through the newspapers and read aloud the reports on court cases so that Ismail would have an idea of what it meant to be a lawyer.

Although Ismail did not become a lawyer but chose economics because of his flair for maths, he still cherishes the fact that his teachers had always been willing to go the extra mile for him.

When the time came for him to enter form six, another teacher, Raymond Hall, wrote to the Education Ministry and suggested that the government open up a form six class for the blind. As a result, Ismail was accepted into St. John's Institution in Kuala Lumpur.

This pattern of people coming forward to extend opportunities was repeated often throughout his life. When applying for a MARA scholarship to pursue his degree in the United States, one of those on the selection panel, Wahab Alwi, fought to convince the others that Ismail would be a worthy candidate for sponsorship.

"I found out that Wahab had studied under a blind professor in Australia so that this made him confident of my abilities. However, he still had to convince

the others."

Ismail eventually obtained a bachelor's degree in economics and political science from the New York University in 1973, and a master's degree in economics from the University of Illinois a year later. He was conferred a doctorate by the same university in 1977.

When he applied for a lecturer's position at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), the faculty of economics dean managed to persuade his colleagues that Ismail was the best man for the job despite misgivings concerning his capabilities by some of them. Thus, Ismail joined UKM in June 1977.

"I have been blessed because of the faith people have had in me. Because of that, I never missed out on the opportunities that came my way. Likewise, this is all that I am asking for other disabled people."

He said that the lack of employment opportunities is the biggest hurdle facing the disabled in Malaysia today. Worse still is the fact that when the disabled are given employment, there is no accessible transport to enable them to get to the workplace. Thus, as a voice of the disabled, Ismail plans to meet all the disabled groups in order to take stock of the key areas which need to be addressed.

However, he also hopes that the public will not view him only as a representative of the disabled but also as a full-fledged parliamentarian who can contribute meaningfully in all other areas as well.

"It is about giving my best just like anyone else in my position, and that is what I hope for all other disabled people, especially with regards to employment and life in general."

Meanwhile, the Women, Family and Community Development Minister, Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, said, "Although Dr. Ismail's appointment is something to be proud of, we still have a very long way to go where the rights of the disabled are concerned."

Genius is born--

not paid.

Oscar Wilde

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 the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia. Address:

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50470 KUALA LUMPUR
Tel: 03-22724959
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SPECIAL ANNOUNCE- MENT

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.

For details of payments, please see the last page.

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ANNOUNCE- MENTS

1. 2ND MCR NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON REHABILITATION

This conference has been scheduled for November 8 – 12, 2008 (Sunday to Wednesday). The venue will be the Crown Princess Hotel in Kuala Lumpur. Datin Jeanne Abdullah has been invited to be the patron of the event.

2. 7TH WBU ASSEMBLY

The assembly will be held in Geneva from August 18–22, 2008. Four delegates from Malaysia will be attending the event.

The WBUAP Quadrennial General Assembly will be held on the sidelines of the WBU Assembly.

3. ACCESS CARD SYSTEM AT MAB

This system was introduced at the MAB Headquarters at the beginning of May 2008. Blind clients who want to meet MAB staff or who have scheduled appointments are advised to make prior arrangements or they may contact the staff concerned by telephone or through the receptionist at the counter.

The main purpose of this system is to ensure that security is maintained at Kompleks MAB by preventing theft or undesirable elements misusing the place.

+

4. MAB FAMILY CLINIC

Besides Dr. Vasoo, there will now be an additional doctor who will be in attendance on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. every week. The new doctor is Dr. Vasentha.

The services of the clinic are provided free of charge to all the blind and their immediate family.

5. GOVERNMENT MEDICAL ASSISTANCE FUND

According to the New Straits Times, this medical scheme is available from the Ministry of Health. Financial assistance can be obtained for health and medical treatment and for surgical operations (including long-term and chronic diseases, special medicines, cochlea transplants and orthopaedic equipment).

An annual allocation of RM25 million has been channelled to this fund.

Applications for assistance must be backed up by a referral letter from the general physician or cardiologist in a government hospital or clinic. For further details, please contact the Ministry of Health at 03 – 2617 8844.

6. INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY CONVENTION

On April 8, 2008, Malaysia was among the twenty countries that had signed the International Convention on Disabilities. The twentieth country to sign the document was Tunisia.

However, the document still needs to be ratified by all countries. By May 15, 2008, only 26 countries had ratified the convention.

Malaysia is considering to ratify the document in 2009.

Character is higher
than intellect... A
great soul will be
strong to live, as well
as to think.
Ralph Waldo
Emerson

Our greatest glory is
not in never falling,
but in getting up
every time we do.
Confucius

NEWS FROM THE MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

MAB ELDERLY BLIND CLUB

At the Annual General Meeting of the MAB Elderly Blind Club on March 29, 2008, elections were held for the new committee which will hold office for a three-year term from 2008 to 2011. Kathan Pillai was re-elected as Chairman at the age of 88 while Taslim Kosni was re-elected as Vice Chairman. Two women were elected into the committee and they are Kwong Mee Yoke and Halimah Ismail. The other committee members who were elected were K. K. Goh, S'ng Ei Kheng and James Mong Ah Sang.

The next election will be held in the year of 2011.

BATTLE OF THE BANDS

The Battle of the Bands was organised by the MAB Recreation Club on April 5, 2008. It was a tough struggle for the eight bands which took part. D'Embosser, a young band of students from the Setapak Secondary School for the Blind, made its debut appearance in the battle and put on a courageous fight.

However, the band by the name of Sarhad held on as champion as in previous years and they were awarded the prize of RM1,000. The runners-up were RockZ with RM600 and Reunion with RM400.

FAREWELL TO THREE STAFF OF MAB

April 15, 2008 was the last day of service at MAB for Arbaiah bt. Hassan, Joseph Yong Sia Long, and Mohd. Razak bin Awang.

Arbaiah has served the Association for a period of 36 (thirty-six) years since July 1972. She was first appointed as Clerk at the Gurney Training Centre and was later promoted to the position of Administrative Assistant in January 1996.

Joseph Yong Sia Long has served the Association for a period of 37 (thirty-seven) years since September 1971 when he was taken on as the Woodwork Instructor for the Gurney Training Centre.

In the 1990's, a number of blind persons had been identified who were in need of sheltered employment. Mr. Yong responded to the need by helping to revive the idea of the sheltered workshop on a small scale. The products of the workshop included small reading tables for print texts, nylon-woven stools and occasional furniture.

Mr. Yong is best remembered for the Malaysian ping pong table for the blind for which he set the standard. The last table was produced for the blind children of the Jalan Batu Primary School in Kuala Lumpur. The ping pong table was donated by MAB to the school in March 2008 under the

MAB School Adoption Scheme.

Mohd. Razak has served the Association for a period of 27 (twenty-seven) years since 1981 when he was taken on as Sales Assistant in the MAB sales organisation. He provided assistance not only to the blind caneworkers but also to the manager of the sales organisation, who was a totally blind man. Together they would drive all over the country in an old, rickety lorry to solicit for orders from government agencies and private companies or to deliver the goods which included waste-paper baskets, laundry baskets and soiled-linen baskets.

ASSISTANCE TO BLIND CHILDREN PROGRAMME (ABC)

The education and rehabilitation programme under the ABC service was recently granted recognition as a "Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti" (PDK) programme by the National Welfare Department. Thus, the ABC service will now be able to enjoy the benefits given to all PDK programmes under the government scheme. This also means that the service can now serve not only blind children but also those who become blind later in life (including the adult blind).

The year 2008 saw an enrolment of 26 children (15 boys and 11 girls). The latest client to be recruited was Tang Kah Hung aged 17

(seventeen) from Desa Petaling. His blindness was caused by a brain tumour for which he had to undergo surgery in December 2007 before he could continue his education in Form Five. It is hoped that after a three-month rehabilitation programme as a PDK student in the ABC service of MAB, he will be able to return to his education at the Setapak Special Secondary School for the Blind.

STUDENTS BID GOODBYE TO BLIND TEACHER

Thavasothy s/o S.M. Pillai retired from the government teaching service on April 25, 2008 after having served for a period of 25 (twenty-five) years. He had been teaching history and English at the Sekolah Menengah Perempuan Taman Petaling.

As a sign of deep appreciation for his contributions to the school, the principal and students organised a very grand ceremony in order to bid him farewell during the school assembly. Tears glistened and smiles shone on the faces of the students as they said goodbye to a much loved and dedicated blind teacher.

ICT DEVELOPMENTS

A number of courses had been held by the MAB ICT Centre during the months of March and April 2008. They included the sound forge audio recording and editing software, MS Office applications, Duxbury Braille Translation and the internet-related services.

The Linux certification course,

an open source operating system developed by the Open Source Development Community, was introduced for a six-month period from May to October 2008.

Two courses were held in order to meet the needs of MAB staff – PowerPoint for blind Unit heads and PC maintenance for the MAB management staff.

Finally, a face-to-face two-week workshop from June 1 – 8, 2008 was held for ten participants in the ASEAN countries. This was actually an online web accessibility programme which was conducted from Washington D.C.

KRM TALENTIME 2008

The MAB Recreation Club held its talentime this year on May 10. The winners were Rosmaria and Fariz for the first prize of RM400 with the song, “Kita Insan Biasa”. Mohd. Zaki Ismail won the second prize of RM300 while Samsuri Hitam came third for the prize of RM200.

SPORTS WORKSHOP FOR THE DISABLED

MAB was among 30 NGO’s which attended the sports workshop organised by the Minority Sports Unit of the Ministry of Youth and Sports from March 13 – 15, 2008. The venue of the workshop was at the De Rhu Hotel in Pantai Balok, Kuantan, Pahang. The objective of the workshop was for the Ministry to find out what were the real needs of the disabled concerning sports and recreation and to understand what impact it was having on the target group.

Tuan Haji Kamaruzaman Hassan, the Director of Minority Sports, was present to give a briefing and to listen to their views.

MAB WOMEN’S GOALBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The first ever women’s goalball championship in Malaysia was organised by MAB from April 19 – 20, 2008. Five teams took part (including two teams from the SMK Setapak Special Secondary School for the Blind). Dato’ L. Krishnan, MAB Sports Chairman, officiated at the closing ceremony and gave away the cash prizes and medals. The winning teams were the NS7, the Power Shots from SMK Setapak, and the Gurney Training Centre respectively.

In his closing speech, the MAB Executive Director, En. George Thomas, has promised that the women’s goalball championship will be held every year and it will be incorporated into the national open goalball championship tournament.

PARALYMPIAD 2008

The event was held from May 3 – 9, 2008 and it was organised by the Majlis Paralimpik Malaysia (MPM) in collaboration with the Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM). Sarawak performed very well as in past years and was again the champion state with 126 gold, 61 silver and 40 bronze medals. The runners-up were Penang and Johor while Kuala Lumpur and Selangor claimed fourth and fifth positions.

ELDERLY BLIND TRIP TO MELAKA

The elderly blind excursion to Melaka was from May 12 – 13, 2008. Some of the interesting experiences included the opportunity for the blind to touch and make friends with a three-year old female orang utan. The orang utan was a pillion rider with her two arms around the shoulders of the motor-cyclist; she was very tame – you could shake hands with her and feel the cloak of stiff hairs all over her body. And of course, everyone enjoyed the train ride round the Melaka zoo.

The other unforgettable experience was the delectable durian chendol – anyone going to Melaka should never miss this beautiful treat for the tongue!

GTC CERTIFICATE PRESENTATION CEREMONY

The Gurney Training Centre held its certificate presentation ceremony on May 29, 2008 at the MAB hall. Twenty of the trainees received their graduation certificates for the skills in which they were trained as follows:

Five graduated in massage and reflexology (which included a number of theory courses for the first time);

Seven graduated in the administrative assistants’ course (also for the first time and it was replacing the telephony course);

Eight were given certificates for the pre-university course.

Zarina bt Aziz was presented with the “Best Blind Trainee” award for the first half or semester of 2008.

Try not to become a

man of success but

rather to become a

man of value.

Albert Einstein

All human
situations have their
inconveniences.
We feel those of the
present but neither
see nor feel those
of the future; and
hence we often make
troublesome changes
without amendment,
and frequently for the
worse.

Benjamin Franklin

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, MALAYSIA (NCBM)

VISIT TO THE INDONESIAN COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WELFARE

This was organised by the National Council on Social Welfare (MAKPEM) from October 28 – 31, 2007. Thirty representatives from member organisations took part. The objective of the visit was to provide the opportunity for the delegation from Malaysia to learn and share experiences with their Indonesian counterparts.

Indonesia is the third country to have been visited. The two earlier countries visited were Singapore in 2005 and Thailand in 2006.

THE ABILYMPICS

The Third National Abilympics was organised by the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR) in 2007. Eight events had been selected for the programme and they were basket-weaving, water colouring, wood-carving, pc assembly, floral arrangement, English word processing, webpage designing, and poster design.

The first winners for each of the eight events were chosen to take part in the International Abilympics 2007 which was held in Tokyo, Japan towards the end of the year. Only two bronze medals were won by our participants – Lim Anwar for water colouring and Mazri for wood-carving.

Malaysia is lobbying to host the ninth International Abilympics which will be held in 2015.

He who has
injured thee was
either stronger or
weaker than thee. If
weaker, spare him;
if stronger, spare
thyself.

William

Shakespeare

In the attitude of
silence the soul finds
the path in a clearer
light, and what is
elusive and deceptive
resolves itself into
crystal clearness.

Our life is a long and
arduous quest after

Truth.

Mahatma Gandhi

THE DEAF-BLIND IN AUSTRALIA

By Louis Prem Kumar

Editor's Note: Louis Prem Kumar is totally blind and almost totally deaf and he needs to use a good-quality hearing-aid. Louis and a few other deaf-blind friends came together in 2004 to form the deaf-blind group in MAB. Through this group they have been organising some activities for the deaf-blind. In 2008 they hope to gain formal recognition from MAB by setting up the Deaf-blind Club within the organisation.

Some years ago, Louis made a trip to Australia in order to see how the deaf-blind are coping in that country. He is very impressed with the work that is being done there and would like to share his ideas with readers.

His article is as follows:

While I was on a visit to Melbourne, Australia in the year of 2002, I found it to be the most interesting compared to the three previous visits I had made to Australia. It was winter time and the weather was very cold.

Fortunately, there was a very efficient and effective transport system in Melbourne; it was very easy to get onto the public transport and one did not have to walk too far or even to cross the main highway in order to take the next bus. One just had to purchase a ticket for seven Australian dollars and it would be valid for 24 hours;

the ticket could be used for a bus or train going anywhere in the capital city for that one day.

It took me almost two hours to get to the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind – first by train from the Footscray station to the Flinders Street station and then by bus to the Institute. There was a young lady at the main counter who told me I would be meeting Mr. David Boyd, who turned out to be a very kind gentleman. I asked him about the deaf-blind in his country. So he took me to see a deaf-blind computer officer by the name of Miss Michelle Stevens. She gave me a lot of information about the deaf-blind in the school of the Institute.

I learned that the deaf-blind in the school communicated with one another by using a special international sign language. I tried to learn how to use some of the signs.

They had a deaf-blind club with a section and office within the Institute where all the deaf-blind could meet, learn and socialise. The place was equipped with computers, embossers and printers so that the deaf-blind could print their own documents or carry out other personal work. Special devices for the deaf-blind were available and they were sponsored by the Australian government. For example, the computers had Braille displays and large-print screens while the embossers and

printers were linked to special telephone systems which could be controlled by volume adjusters plus Braille and large print adaptive devices.

The deaf-blind organise monthly gatherings as well as educational and holiday excursions. Many sighted people in the general public are familiar with the sign language of the deaf-blind so that this makes it easy for the deaf-blind to get help while travelling.

I was then introduced to a deaf-blind friend, Mr. Richard Haul. He communicated with me for a very long time through the deaf-blind sign language. Actually, one of the sighted teachers there explained the signs to me.

I was told that the deaf-blind are taught the sign language and Braille. They then were able to take up courses such as massage, handicrafts and computer literacy. Mr. Haul himself could make very beautiful cabinets which were displayed at furniture exhibitions.

Some of the deaf-blind depended on each other in order to travel around while others depended on sighted travelling companions. In fact, there were 1,200 volunteers at the Institute to help the deaf-blind. Travelling by bus or train is free for the deaf-blind.

All the blind and deaf-blind who are unemployed can receive an allowance of AU\$500 per month

plus a personal pension of about AU\$250 each month. They can use the email or website to order food, groceries or other personal items which will be delivered right to their doorstep for just an extra charge of AU\$10.

All buses and trains are fitted with an announcement system to keep the passengers informed of destinations. All the traffic lights have sound signals to indicate red or green so that the blind can cross the streets very easily.

I found that all the people in Melbourne were very kind and helpful to the blind and other disabled persons. The people in Australia really demonstrate true love for the disabled and the less fortunate.

I feel that MAB and other bodies in Malaysia can also do something and, in fact, much more for the deaf-blind in our country. The deaf-blind need help to organise club activities, outdoor excursions, and help with travelling, banking and shopping.

I hope MAB would consider setting up a deaf-blind club office equipped with such necessary items as Braille note displays, computers with large point screens, embossers and printers with special telephone and Braille connections, and so on. Some employment opportunities could be created for the deaf-blind by providing them with training to run the deaf-blind office or to acquire other skills such as massage to run a deaf-blind massage centre in Kompleks MAB.

The government could help the deaf-blind by providing them

with a higher monthly allowance if they are unemployed. The Welfare Department could also provide an annual grant for the deaf-blind centre in MAB.

The deaf-blind club in MAB should become a channel for discussions and meetings regarding solutions for deaf-blind persons and for organising various activities. Our club could also get in touch with deaf-blind persons in other parts of the world by using the email and website.

Truly, I hope that the MAB Deaf-blind Club will become a very popular club one day by reaching out to all the deaf-blind and by fulfilling its goals and meeting their needs.

IF YOU KNOW
OF ANY BLIND
PERSON NEEDING
REGISTRATION FOR
EDUCATION OR
REHABILITATION,
PLEASE CONTACT US
IMMEDIATELY

NCBM

Te: 03-2272 4959

MAB

Te; 03-2272 2673

03-2272 2677

You earn the right to
expect recognition by

giving it!

It's that simple.

Eric Harvey

COMPLEMENTING EFFORTS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN REALISING THE GOALS OF THE MALAYSIAN EDUCATION POLICY

Part III

By Sen. Prof. Datuk Dr Ismail Md Salleh

Editor's Note: The second part of this article appeared in the January – March 2008 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". The third part continues as follows:

4.5 IMPORTANCE OF BRAILLE

Indeed, Braille is a very important tool for the blind in the development of reading and writing skills. We, therefore, strongly urge that official recognition should be given to Braille by the Jabatan Pendidikan Khas as a compulsory subject with properly administered tests for blind children in pre-school programmes and primary education.

The reasons are as follows:

- (a) By recognising Braille as an essential tool for the blind to acquire reading and writing skills, the schools will be encouraged to maintain proper standards in functional literacy through Braille among the blind students, particularly at the primary school level which is the best time to learn and acquire Braille skills.
- (b) With Braille literacy skills, the blind will be able to pursue their education more

effectively.

- (c) Ultimately, these literacy skills will be most useful to the blind when they enter the world of work as they will be able to carry out their job functions effectively or to seek better job prospects.
- (d) In fact, Braille skills will be very useful to the blind in many aspects of living besides education and employment.

4.6 FUNCTIONAL NUMERACY

This is yet another important aspect of education for the blind that merits serious attention. Many blind students apparently have difficulty in grasping mathematical concepts. Much more effort is, therefore, needed to train teachers who will be qualified to help in equipping blind students with numeracy skills. For instance, there is still the continuing debate concerning the method by which blind students should be introduced to arithmetic. Are we to rely solely on old methods such as the taylor frame or on the newer methods such as the cubarithm set or the abacus? A serious study should be made to find out what other countries are doing so that the most appropriate system could

be introduced to the blind in this country.

4.7 TERTIARY EDUCATION

An effective support system is needed to provide assistance to the blind in tertiary education in order to help them achieve their goals. Areas of need include availability of textbooks and reference materials. It is also hoped that besides the University of Malaya, other universities will also open up their doors to the blind such as the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), MARA University (UITM), and so on.

The idea of "learning support assistants" is being practised in the United Kingdom in order to help blind students in higher education to cope with assignments, class work and collating of reference materials. We would like to recommend that this idea be initiated by the Ministry of Higher Education in collaboration with NGO's such as MAB. "Learning support assistants" should be engaged as part-timers or as full-time staff who will act like resource teachers or rather as resource assistants in providing support to the blind students in tertiary education.

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5. CONCLUSION

Indeed, we look forward to the target year of 2015 and we hope that by that time, Malaysia will be among the proud nations that could say that it has fulfilled the pledge of providing “education for all” in the country.

In life's battles,

confidence is the true

strength

Marcus Garvey

THE JKM NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE DISABLED Part IV

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Editor's Note: The third part of this article appeared in the April – June 2008 issue of “The NCBM Outreach”. The writer continues on the discussion concerning the issues that were raised at the workshop.

He continues:

5.11 SPORTS FOR THE DISABLED

Sports and games for the disabled (including recreational activities and Physical Education) should be incorporated into the school curriculum for the blind and other disabled persons right from the level of standard one. On the other end of the scale, there is also the tendency to neglect sports and games for the disabled, especially for the blind, at the level of tertiary education. This too needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

The view was expressed that a distinction should be made between recreational activities and Physical Education on the one hand which should not be confused with competitive sports on the other. The former is necessary in order to promote good health and the well-being of disabled individuals while the latter are solely aimed at building up champions. Both, of course, have their role to play in developing and inspiring the disabled to become useful citizens

of the country.

In order to build a healthy attitude among the disabled towards sports and games, it was felt that they should first be instilled with the love for sports and start to be grounded in the skills from a young age. Where it is impractical for the disabled to take part in the normal sports and games curriculum for the able-bodied, then concrete actions must be taken to provide an alternative curriculum as well as facilities for the disabled. This may even necessitate an adapted programme which would run concurrently with the normal programme for the able-bodied, as in the case of physical education for the blind. In the past, the blind who attended integrated programmes in sighted schools were usually excluded from the physical education programmes and they had no part at all in sports and games.

For the blind, therefore, it may be necessary for a separate curriculum and programme to be set up for them in sports and games and the provision of adapted equipment and facilities. This may also be true for the other disabled categories, particularly for the persons with learning difficulties who have their own Special Olympics.

5.12 THE ABILYMPICS

This international event had been started by Japan since the IYDP of 1981. In Malaysia the national abilympics had been held twice by the Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR) before 2006. The purpose of this event is to promote occupational skills among the disabled, thereby helping to develop their potential for employment and careers.

As MCR was coordinating the abilympics for all the NGO's on the national level, it took the initiative to request budget allocations from the Government in order to organise the national event. While the JKM had been very supportive of the event by providing the budget for the first and second national abilympics, the same positive response was not forthcoming from the Ministry of Human Resources when it was approached for the third event on the national level. For some time, it had been felt that support for events organised for the disabled should come from different ministries rather than relying solely on JKM. It was for this reason that the Ministry of Human Resources had been approached. Unfortunately, the response was negative and it may be necessary to revert to JKM for such support.

5.13 VERY SPECIAL ARTS OF THE DISABLED

MCR also took the initiative to develop and promote "Very Special Arts" of the disabled when the original founder organisation for VSA was disbanded in the 1990's. Positive support had also been received from JKM

in organising events to promote VSA of the disabled. However, it was decided to explore the possibility of obtaining a budget allocation from the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage for the VSA competition planned for 2007. Unfortunately, the response was negative and it may also be necessary to revert to JKM for the necessary financial support.

The ultimate goal of MCR is to bring about the formation of a Malaysian cultural troupe of the disabled. This would enable the disabled to take part in international cultural and arts events, thereby making a significant contribution in promoting the image of Malaysia on the international stage.

This means that like sports and games, similar efforts need to be made in developing and promoting VSA of the disabled right from the basic primary school level and through to the tertiary education level. Such a move, of course, would require strong support not only from the NGO's but also from the government, in particular from the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage.

6. THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN OF ACTION

Based on the plans that had been drafted by each of the participating groups in the workshop, JKM will be coming up with the final national plan or blueprint. According to the JKM Director of Rehabilitation Development and Programmes, Cik NORani bt. Mohd. Hanim, the decision had been taken by JKM to lead in the formulation of the plan with full

support from the director general, En. Rafek Reshidullah. Once the plan has been put together, the draft document will be circulated to all the participants for study before it is finally handed over to the Prime Minister's cabinet for adoption.

7. CONCLUSION

We are indeed very grateful and appreciative of the efforts that had been spearheaded by JKM in initiating the idea to organise the workshop. This has certainly been a very good example of collaborative action at work between the government, NGO's, self-help groups of the disabled and even the private sector.

Personally, I found the exercise to be a very useful and wonderful learning experience. Not only did I profit from the new ideas with regards to the techniques of planning but I also gained a much better understanding of what was really meant by "inter-sectoral collaboration", which had been the theme of the first Malaysian conference on rehabilitation in September 2006.

On behalf of MAB and MCR, I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to JKM for having made available this golden opportunity for so many of us to learn and share with one another. We all look forward with keen interest and great anticipation to the formulation and implementation of the first National Five-year Plan of Action for the disabled in this country.

THE DISABILITY ACT OF MALAYSIA FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Part III

By Sen. Prof. Datuk Dr Ismail Md Salleh

Editor's Note: the second part of this article appeared in the April – June 2008 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". The third part continues:

7. ACCESS TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

7.1 Central to the concept of an inclusive society is the need for a barrier-free environment for the disabled. Studies have shown that discrimination in the workplace is often the result of physical barriers that exist in housing schemes, the transportation system and the workplace; these barriers prevent the PWD's from realising realistic job opportunities. For instance, it would be futile if equality of work is upheld but transport is not accessible to the PWD's, thereby impeding their ability of getting to work. The failure to break down such barriers will continue to perpetuate discriminatory treatment against the PWD's.

7.2 It has been proven that a universal/inclusive design can benefit not only the disabled but also older persons, pregnant women and parents with young children.

Such a design reduces the rate of accidents and at the same time removes the physical barriers that impede the full participation of the disabled, thereby enhancing the economic and social output of the PWD's.

7.3 TRANSPORTATION

One of the aims of the Disability Act is to ensure that the PWD's will be able to enjoy the use of all means of transportation. In both public and private transportation, there is the need to bring about the elimination of physical barriers and obstacles, by stages if necessary, so that they will not affect the free movement of the PWD's.

7.4 THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

With regards to accessibility to the built environment, the proposed act should impose an obligation not only on government agencies but also on private business owners and service-providers to make reasonable adjustments for the PWD's such as ramps at the entrances, wide changing rooms, and signage that is legible as well as embossed or in Braille to meet the needs of the blind and low-visioned persons.

8. ACCESS TO INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Access to information and communication is a basic human right and it should, therefore, be adequately reflected in the proposed act. Consideration should be given to the idea of disseminating information in whatever form that would make it accessible to the disabled, be it visual, auditory, Braille or tactile in form.

Accessibility to information and communication necessitates the right to use language suitable to the particular characteristic of each disability, the right to use special assistance, the right to use one's own form of communication, and the right to receive knowledge, information and services in alternative communication codes (including Braille and sign language).

9. HEALTH

9.1 HEALTH CARE

The provision of health care, resource allocation and treatment must be based on the principle of equality and non-discrimination. The PWD's should be able to enjoy equal access to health care as the general population.

Equal access in this instance means that the disabled should be able to have physical access to hospitals, information and communication. This, therefore, requires hospitals and medical institutions to take steps to modify their policies, regulations, operation systems and premises.

9.2 PREVENTION, DETECTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Measures relating to prevention, detection and early intervention are an integral part of health care. Primary prevention includes preventing the occurrence of physical, intellectual, psychiatric or sensory impairments; secondary prevention means preventing impairments from causing a permanent functional limitation or disability.

Therefore, preventive actions in primary health care should include pre-natal and post-natal care, education in nutrition, immunisation campaigns against communicable diseases, measures to control endemic diseases, safety regulations, programmes for the prevention of accidents in different environments (including adaptation of workplaces to prevent occupational disabilities and diseases), prevention of disability resulting from pollution of the environment or armed conflict, mental health promotion, neuro-psychiatry, and bio-ethical hazards and restrictions.

10. EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

10.1 COMMITMENT

An important aspect of the proposed act is the commitment towards equality and non-discrimination. As highlighted earlier, the concept of equality includes not only formal equality but it also encompasses ideas such as equal access, equal opportunities and equal results. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that whilst non-discrimination prohibits differentiation in treatment, the principle of equality embodies a larger concept – a concept which acknowledges the difference and recognises that this difference can, at the onset, place disabled persons in a less equal position.

10.2 WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION

The equality and non-discrimination provisions in the proposed act should be guided by the World Programme of Action in which it is proposed that “the needs of each and every individual are of equal importance, that these needs must be made the basis for the planning of societies, and that all resources must be employed in such a way as to ensure, for every individual, equal opportunity for participation. Disability policies should ensure the access of persons with disabilities to all community resources”.

This means ultimately that the PWD’s should be included in the decision-making process as well as in the implementation of policies and programmes in the ministries, agencies and other levels of the community.

CONCLUSION

The adoption and implementation of the Disability Act of Malaysia will certainly mark a significant milestone in the long journey of the disabled for “full participation and equality” in this country. This was the theme of the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) in 1981 when the call was made by the United Nations on the international level to look into the situation of the disabled. This provided the boost needed in propelling the disabled forward in their struggle and their quest for a meaningful life with equality, dignity, opportunities and productivity.

Knowledge is
the best eraser
in the world for
disharmony, distrust,
despair, and the
endless deficiencies
of man.

Orlando Battista

SHELTERED WORKSHOPS FOR THE BLIND IN MALAYSIA

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

I am of the view that the sheltered workshop is a very workable and viable proposition that could help in meeting some of the most urgent needs of the blind for employment in this country. My assumption is based not only on the idea of living examples in countries such as Britain but also on examples that have existed or which continue to exist in Malaysia.

The late Tom J. Parker had been an outstanding and famous blind leader in Britain and, in his paper which he presented at a conference of the blind in Singapore in 1983, he had put forth very convincing arguments to prove that such workshops are viable ventures by providing instances of successes and achievements attained through such enterprises in Britain for more than 200 years. Furthermore, Mr. Parker had laid out a very clear and detailed plan on how the British example could be emulated by other countries.

THE QUESTION OF BLIND BEGGARS

The issue concerning blind beggars in this country has been raised now and again both by government authorities and by organisations serving the blind such as NCBM and MAB. Unfortunately, no solution seems to be in sight for the immediate or even medium term. Therefore, I feel very strongly that urgent steps and measures need to be taken to

revive the sheltered workshop in Malaysia. I am very convinced that the sheltered workshop can go a very long way in helping to create employment opportunities for a large bulk of the blind population in this country. In fact, I would support the idea that not just one but several sheltered workshops for the blind should be established in different parts of the country and by different organisations and agencies that are working with or for the blind.

Indeed, a sheltered workshop has the potential of providing employment opportunities for quite a large number of blind persons. I have no doubt that many of the blind would be willing to find employment in such workshops if they could earn an adequate income. Some of them may even consider building their lives and careers around such a workshop if, by participating in the scheme, they could develop a meaningful relationship with the workshop by feeling a strong sense of belonging, pride and dignity in what they are doing. Opportunities for promotions, management and leadership would be a very important factor to consider.

Nevertheless, this could only be possible if real effort is made to ensure that the essential ingredients are available – proper infrastructure and adaptive equipment, formulation of positive policies, clear guidelines

for promotional opportunities, and a dynamic policy body or committee that understands their needs by organising programmes that are positive, encouraging and motivating.

In the current situation of Malaysia, it is not surprising at all why so many of the blind have chosen the easy way out, i.e. to beg in the streets of Kuala Lumpur and other towns. They are able to obtain much more money from begging than by working in the factories or even in corporations which offer meagre wages and comparatively low salaries. And there are hardly any other alternative employment options available to the blind besides massage. Of course, it may be too late to win over the present batch of blind persons who have found begging to be reasonably lucrative. Nevertheless, it is still not too late to stem the tide by doing something concrete to meet the needs of the coming generations of blind persons. In fact, current records of new blind persons seeking vocational training with MAB, St. Nicholas Home and other organisations serving the blind prove that there are many more blind persons in the future who would be seeking employment.

SUCCESSFUL VENTURES

In Malaysia, it has been proved that sheltered workshops can be run as successful ventures

for the blind. The immediate example that comes to mind is the Kinta Valley Workshop² in Ipoh, Perak. Unfortunately, this workshop existed for only a very brief period of time. It had been established by MAB in 1959 and it did provide employment for about 30 blind persons. However, some unfavourable circumstances (which I believe could have been avoided) led to its ultimate decline and it was finally closed down in 1974.

In the meantime (just some years before the closure of the Kinta Valley Workshop), another successful venture had been introduced at the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur. This was in 1969 which saw the establishment of the light engineering section at the GTC. Indeed, this enterprise had a very promising start because it had suitably qualified and well motivated instructors together with the installation of proper equipment. The trainees were even allowed to use modern gadgets even though they were dangerous to handle; this was because the instructors were capable of providing proper guidance to the blind trainees which enabled them to manufacture metal and steel products such as screws, nuts and bolts; chisels and hammers; plus white canes used by the blind. The project had created such a good impression that trainers from as far as Japan and Philippines as well as Singapore came to Kuala Lumpur to learn from our engineering project.

Unfortunately, after the funding from the American Foundation for the Overseas Blind (AFOB) ceased in the 1970s, the project

also began to be given inadequate attention. Consequently, the instructors started leaving in order to look for more prospective jobs outside. With no proper care, the equipment was allowed to run down or it was gradually sold off piece by piece.

The proof, however, that this venture had the potential for development lay in the fact that those blind persons who had taken part in the project were able to find jobs in the open market, i.e. in the industrial factories. One of those blind persons who had been placed in a car assembly plant was M. K. Baskaran – he had a successful career with the company putting car parts together until his retirement 30 years later in 1998. Because of the proper training received, Baskaran was able to carry out his job effectively even though he was totally blind.

THE GTC SHELTERED WORKSHOP

In the late 1990's, an attempt was made to revive the idea of the sheltered workshop by starting a basic workshop at the GTC. This workshop still exists and it produces nylon-woven stools, Quran bookstands and some other miscellaneous articles. The blind workers in this workshop are provided with board and lodgings and they pay RM80 per month from the incentive allowance they receive from the Government Welfare Department.

However, the number of blind workers employed in this workshop is very small – only five at the most. The morale among the blind workers is low because

they have no prospects for career development. This is in view of the fact that there are no plans to expand this workshop since the long-held goal is to move it to Taman Harapan in Temerloh, Pahang ultimately. Currently, it is sharing premises with the rehabilitation carpentry workshop of the GTC.

REASONS FOR UNSUCCESSFUL SHELTERED WORKSHOPS

From the foregoing, the factors for unsuccessful sheltered workshops in Malaysia are quite obvious. They include the following:

1. LACK OF BELIEF AND CONFIDENCE IN THE BLIND

While the administrators and personnel working for the blind had good and well-intentioned ideas for the benefit and welfare of the blind, they had at the same time often given the impression or even openly expressed by their words and actions that the blind were not really capable workers. For example, according to a former blind employee at the Kinta Valley Workshop, the blind workers were at first highly motivated by Mr Cheah, the first manager of the Workshop, because of his ability to secure lucrative production contracts. However, because he often talked to the blind workers in a condescending and disparaging manner, they gradually lost confidence in him and ultimately gave him little cooperation. This led to many troubles for the workshop so that it was eventually closed down.

Some examples in the foregoing illustrate clearly that because of the lack of resolve or commitment to a long-term plan, golden opportunities were lost to develop certain ventures or take advantage of existing infrastructure for further expansion. If a project has potential for expansion or development, then lack of funding should not be the inhibiting factor. If millions can be deployed to develop and promote sports for the disabled and often in the form of heavy subsidies, equal emphasis should be given to creating employment opportunities for the blind through such ventures as sheltered workshops.

3. LACK OF QUALIFIED MANPOWER

The Kinta Valley Workshop owed its initial success to Mr. Cheah, because he had competent managerial experience and proper engineering skills. But when the workshop was taken over by unqualified personnel, particularly the appointment of a clerk as manager, the project ended in failure ultimately.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. STUDY AND EXPLORATION

Serious attention should be paid to the excellent ideas that had been presented by the late Tom J. Parker in his paper. At the same time, a study team should be set up in order to explore possibilities by visiting and studying workshops which have been successful ventures, particularly those in

Great Britain. We should also look at how sheltered workshops are being run in countries such as the U.S.A., Japan, China, India, Thailand and Singapore.

2. PLANNING TEAM

As recommended by Mr. Parker, this team should be set up as soon as possible. The chairman of this team should be someone who is enthusiastic so that he can inspire the team and coordinate matters effectively.

However, the chairman must be assisted by a technical officer with suitable skills so that he would be able to be effective in leading the skills section to explore for products that can be made at the workshop.

3. SITING OF WORKSHOP

In the immediate term, I feel that top priority should be given for the establishment of a workshop in Kuala Lumpur or Selangor. This is in view of the fact that it is in the Klang Valley where we are faced with the most pressing problem of blind beggars. It would, therefore, be easier to attract these blind persons if the workshop is sited in K.L. or in one of the surrounding areas rather than elsewhere. Eventually, more workshops should be set up in other states throughout Malaysia. Britain, of course, is a very good example of a country which has several workshops for the blind.

CONCLUSION

It is more fashionable to call such

ventures as production workshop nowadays. Whatever the name, however, a lot of money would certainly be required to start and maintain such workshops. They may become profitable ultimately if other disabled categories as well as sighted persons are included as partners with the blind in these projects.

Nevertheless, even if these workshops need to be subsidised, I feel that they are worth considering as avenues of employment for the blind. If well planned and implemented, I believe that the production workshop would be a very good way to solve some of the employment difficulties being faced by the blind.

- 1 Sheltered employment for the blind by Tom J. Parker, Parts I, II and III from "The NCBM Outreach" of July – September 2006, October – December 2006, and January – March 2007 respectively.
- 2 Interview with Lai Kok Keong: Life at the Kinta Valley Workshop by Godfrey Ooi Goat See, Parts I, II and III from "The NCBM Outreach" of April – June 2007, July – September 2007, and October – December 2007 respectively.

SUDDENLY HE IS GONE!

By Zahari Hashim

Editor's Note: Zahari Hashim is totally blind and he is currently serving as an officer at the Examination Syndicate. In fact, he was among the 40 or so blind persons who were first accepted for teacher training in 1998 when the Ministry of Education opened its doors to the blind for training in colleges and universities.

In the article, Zahari remembers how his father has played an important role in his life as he reflects on the inspiration and aspirations of his beloved father for him and his totally blind sister.

Zahari's story is most apt for the celebration of Father's Day which falls on Sunday, June 15th 2008. Here it is:

At around 6 p.m. of Thursday, February 19, 2004, I received a telephone call from my sister, Shimah, all the way from Kedah. She informed me that father had been admitted to the Alor Setar General Hospital.

Upon receiving the news, I tried to get bus tickets to Alor Setar. Unfortunately, the Trans-Nasional express bus counter was closed; so I went along with my sister, Nor, in her car.

Many well-wishers had congregated at father's house in Pendang. I felt very anxious as we were the last to arrive. Much to my relief, I was able to join the

congregation as they paid their last respects to father.

At about 10.00 a.m., father's body was taken away for the final bath. An hour later, the body (now inside a coffin) was brought to the mosque for the final prayers and then taken to the graveyard.

Later, I learned from another sister of mine, Azian, that father had died from liver complications. He was almost 70 years old when he passed away. As I thought of father, memories came flooding back to me – father was very caring and did not neglect Shimah and me even though we were both blind. When we were at the St. Nicholas Primary School in Penang, he would always be the one to send us to school and to come and fetch us home for the holidays. When I was in standard five, I was allowed to travel on the train with the other blind students who were going back to Alor Setar. At the Alor Setar train station father would be waiting for me.

Later on, when I had my own family, he would make it a priority to call at my house first whenever he came to Kuala Lumpur. After that, he would make his rounds to visit my other siblings or relatives.

And when I took my family for a vacation in Kedah, he was sure to offer his services as our chauffeur.

In fact, he was the chauffeur and postman for my blind sister, Shimah! He would drive her to and from the Sekolah Menengah Sultan Abdul Malek where she was teaching in the integrated programme for the blind. He would also collect letters, Braille books and talking-books from the house of our grandparents in Simpang Empat which was Shimah's postal address.

The aidilfitri of 2003 was the last celebration that we had with father. We did not suspect anything then but we did sense that there was some sort of change in him. He wanted to be with us as much as he could. He borrowed a car and chauffeured us around to see our relatives. Finally, he drove us to the train station and we were just in time. We made a dash for the train so that there was no time at all to bid father a last farewell.

Little did I realise then that those would be my last moments with father; I was looking forward to the next holiday when I could be in Kedah again to be with him.

But, suddenly, he is gone! I thank Allah for all the loving memories of father. He was truly an inspiration to me and Shimah, his two blind children.

May his soul rest in peace.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: WEB ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE BLIND AND DISABLED IN MALAYSIA

By Moses Choo Siew Cheong

The Web Accessibility Conference was held by the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) at the hall of the Tun Hussein Onn National Eye Hospital (THONEH) in Petaling Jaya from April 3 – 4, 2008. We were really privileged to have Miss Shawn Henry, who was in Malaysia to facilitate the conference on behalf of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

WHAT IS WEB ACCESSIBILITY?

The term, Web accessibility, actually refers to the practice of making websites useable to everyone, including the disabled. When websites are correctly designed, developed and edited, all the users can have equal access to information and functionality.

For example, when a site is coded with semantically meaningful HTML, i.e. the textual equivalents are made available for images and the links are appropriately named, blind users will be able to use text-to-speech software and/or the text-to-Braille hardware. When the text and the images are large and/or enlargeable, it would be easier for users with poor sight to read and understand the contents of the text. When links are underlined (or otherwise differentiated) as well as coloured, it would ensure that the colour-blind users will be able to notice them. When

clickable links and areas are large, it would enable users who cannot control the mouse to move and manipulate the keys with precision. When pages are coded, the users can navigate by means of the keyboard alone or even with a single switch access device alone; this would be particularly useful to those who cannot use even the standard keyboard, let alone the mouse.

When videos are closed captioned or provided with a sign language version of the text, the users who are deaf or hard of hearing will be able to understand what is being shown on the screen. When flashing effects are avoided or made optional, the users who are prone to seizures caused by these effects will not be put at risk.

When the contents are written in plain language and illustrated with instructional diagrams and animations, users with dyslexia or learning difficulties would be better able to understand the text or contents on display.

Thus, when websites are correctly built and properly maintained, all of these users can be accommodated without impacting on the useability of the site by the non-disabled users.

WEB ACCESSIBILITY AND NEEDS

The needs that Web accessibility aims to address include:

1. Those with visual impairments, including the totally blind, persons with various types of low vision and poor eyesight, and various types of colour blindness.
2. Persons with motor or mobility impairments, including those who have difficulty or inability to use their hands such as those with tremours, muscle slowness, and loss of fine muscle control; and those who are suffering from conditions such as Parkinson's disease, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy and stroke.
3. Persons with auditory impairments such as those who are totally deaf and individuals who are hard of hearing.
4. Those with seizures caused by visible stroke and those who suffer from Photoepileptic seizures or flashing effects.
5. Those who have cognitive or intellectual impairments, including persons with developmental disabilities and learning difficulties such as inability to memorise

or focus attention, lack of skills in problem-solving or logicising, and lack of developmental maturity.

For further information, readers can log on to:
<http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/accessibility.php>

Indeed, the two-days conference provided an excellent opportunity for the participants to understand and realise the importance and practicality of having web pages meet the required standards so that websites can become accessible not only to the blind but to all disabled persons and the senior citizens. One of the highlights of the conference was a demonstration on how the blind can “see” without the use of their Eyes.

Following the conference, arrangements are being made to place all our materials on the NCBM web site. Readers will be kept informed once the website is ready. In the meantime, readers can log on to <http://www.uiaccess.com/accessucd/about.html>, this will put you into contact with Shawn Henry’s book, “Just Ask: Integrating Accessibility Throughout Design”.

Those who prefer holding the book in their hands, please contact NCBM to buy a copy or you could place your order directly from Amazon.com.

Finally, we look forward to the day when the blind would be totally independent and able to freely move on the digital super highway. However, before the blind can reach that level, all web designers and web owners will

need to play their role in meeting the standards.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to place on record our gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the following:

Miss Shawn Henry Lawton, for her leading role in facilitating the whole conference,

En. Khairil Yusof of Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU) for his presentation “Using the Open Source CMS and Frameworks to deploy accessible websites”

Mr Lee Da Qing of Aristotle Training & Mentoring Centre Sdn Bhd (ATMC) for his presentation “Accessibility Features of Dream weaver” & “Designing Accessible Flash”

Mr Silatul Rahim of the Malaysian Association for the Blind for his presentation on “Seeing Without Eyes”.

Mr Ben Wong for talking on the leadership role as the Chairman of the organising committee.

The future belongs

to those who believe

in the beauty of their

dreams.

Eleanor Roosevelt

WORK FOR THE BLIND IN THE SOUTH-EAST ASIAN REGION

By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

Visits were made by Dato' S. Kulasegaran, Chairman of the WBUAP/SEARC, and En. Ivan Ho Tuck Choy, the Secretary, to ten countries in the South-East Asia region – Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, Timor Leste, Philippines, Brunei, Singapore and Thailand – over a period of seven months from September 23, 2007 to March 21, 2008. Meetings were held with the national organisations of the blind, departments of special education, schools for the blind and other bodies providing services to the blind in those countries. Some of the countries, particularly Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam, had excellent programmes and their organisations were making good progress in providing support services to the blind. Quite a number of countries, however, were in need of assistance and encouragement.

1. OBJECTIVES

Three main objectives of the visits were:

- 1.1 To strengthen the organisations in the South-East Asian countries through information exchange, encouragement and support.
- 1.2 To set up national task forces in those countries that have not done so in order to lobby their governments to implement the ICEVI initiative, “education

for all visually impaired children” by the year 2015.

- 1.3 To encourage the more developed organisations to assume more responsibilities in making WBUAP a stronger and more resilient regional body that could speak and act on issues affecting blind people.

2. ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

2.1 Myanmar

The organisations in Myanmar were persuaded to work together under the banner of the Myanmar National Association of the Blind (MNAB). This has resulted in their being reinstated as a full member of WBU.

They also agreed to form the national task force on education.

2.2 Laos

The Lao Association for the blind was assisted in applying for membership of WBU and they were advised to set up a computer training unit. They have started holding meetings with the stakeholders to form the national task force on “Education For All Visually Impaired Children (EFAVIC).

2.3 Cambodia and Vietnam

It was encouraging to note that despite the problems faced by governmental and non-governmental bodies in these two countries, they had agreed to exchange information and to help each other, especially in massage training and micro-credit projects.

2.4 East Timor

The East Timor Blind Union (ETBU) was given assistance in their application for membership of WBU. Australia was kept informed as they had a special interest in providing help to East Timor.

2.5 Brunei Darulssalam

A meeting was convened which involved the Brunei National Association of the Blind (BDNAB) and three government ministries. The Association was given due recognition by their government and, if they build on it, BDNAB will become an active partner with their government in dealing with blindness issues.

2.6 Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia

These three countries gave assurances that they would assist their neighbours – Indonesia with

Timor Leste, Vietnam with Laos, and Thailand with Cambodia.

Thailand seems to be the only country in this region with an active Association of Blind Women. There is much that we can learn from them in this area of development.

2.7 EQUIPMENT ASSISTANCE

Some of the countries had requested for assistance in the supply of special equipment to the blind. NCBM has responded by providing them with basic items such as Braille slates, Braille paper, white canes, chess sets, and so on.

CONCLUSION

Recommendations were adopted at the end of the visit to each of the ten countries. Follow-up actions will be taken in the months ahead.

There's always room
for improvement –
it's the biggest room
in the house.

Louise Heath Leber

THE WBUAP QUADRENNIUM PLAN OF ACTION

Editor's Note: NCBM is a member of the World Blind Union (WBU) which has been divided into a number of regions. The region to which NCBM belongs is known as the World Blind Union Asia-Pacific Region (WBUAP). En. Ivan Ho has been serving as secretary-general of WBUAP for more than ten years.

His report on the WBUAP quadrennium plan of action is as follows:

The WBUAP policy council meeting was held in Bangkok on May 16, 2008 for implementation by the incoming WBUAP Council for the next quadrennium from 2008 to 2012. In accordance with the plan, the actions to be taken are:

1. APPOINTMENT OF A LIAISON OFFICER

In order to respond speedily to correspondence and to act on decisions taken by WBUAP, every affiliate should appoint a liaison officer to deal directly with the WBUAP secretariat. Some form of incentive should be considered for those affiliates which cooperate such as awarding of places for training, payment of membership dues, and other financial assistance.

2. ADOPTION OF AN ORGANISATION

The more developed organisations should be encouraged to adopt one or two weaker ones in order to give them special attention by way of tracking their progress, sharing ideas and expertise, and assisting them in whatever way possible.

3. MAKING FUND-RAISING A PRIORITY

As funds are the lifeline of any organisation and most organisations of the blind are poorly funded, special attention should be paid to this aspect of work by sourcing for assistance and expertise from WBU and its affiliates. The weak organisations should be given training in the writing of proposals, planning of projects, and the different methods of fund-raising, both on a small and large scale.

4. ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For an organisation to develop and continue to grow, the leaders need to be trained in various aspects of management and supervision. Experts should be sought both within and outside WBU to help in leadership training, developing advocacy skills, and creating public awareness in support of its work.

+ +

5. EDUCATION FOR ALL VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN

We need to follow up with the work of national task forces where they exist and help those countries in their formation, where they do not exist. Organisations of the blind have to be persuaded to be partners with other organisations in carrying out the programme.

6. BASIC EQUIPMENT

Every effort should be made to help blind children in the weaker countries with such basic items as Braille paper, writing slates, white canes and recreational game sets. In countries where they can read English or Malay story-books, donations of this kind could also be promoted actively.

7. PROGRAMME EXCHANGE

Opportunities should be made available for blind trainees to attend capacity-building courses in neighbouring or other countries. Courses could include computer literacy, vocational rehabilitation, and blindness-specific skills.

8. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Every effort should be made to encourage blind people to go into economic ventures such as micro-credit schemes for self-employment and running of cooperatives. To do this, WBU should make it a priority to set up an employment committee. One of the tasks of this committee should be to gather information

from successful organisations for replication and dissemination. Bulk purchasing is another aspect that needs to be explored with the view to making it a profitable venture.

9. SETTING UP A FINANCE COMMITTEE

For any organisation to progress, there must be sufficient funds. For this reason, WBUAP should appoint a finance committee and one of its main tasks would be to source for funding.

10. PLANNING REGIONAL CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS

In the course of the next four years, the following seminars and workshops should be considered – employment (particularly massage), education, ICT, living skills, economic empowerment and fund-raising. These seminars and workshops should be undertaken in different countries for the benefit of the others in the WBUAP region.

11. STRENGTHENING THE SECRETARIAT

Attention must be given to the strengthening of the secretariat so that it can act effectively as the central coordinating base for WBUAP.

You cannot push
anyone up a ladder
unless he is willing
to climb it himself.

Andrew Carnegie

A POINT TO PONDER: SUSIE, WE ARE WITH YOU

By Wong Kow

When the way to the front has been closed, make a turn and find a new way!

Susie (not her real name) had developed some eye problems at the age of fifty. She was formerly a fully sighted person, married, and with two grown-up children. Like many housewives, Susie had devoted all her time in the home in order to care for the two children and for her husband since her early twenties.

She experienced some of the happiest moments in her life when she was forty plus and the realisation had dawned upon her that her two children would be launching out into their careers and would be living their own independent lives. She felt a great sense of accomplishment and success. Her feeling of happiness and satisfaction was enhanced by the fact that her husband was engaged in a very steady career.

“Now I can spend much more time on myself,” she thought to herself.

She took up the advice of a close friend and joined a well established direct sales company as a sales representative. She put in a lot of time and effort in order to study the range of products available and to understand the special knowledge and facts about them. She made it a point to use as many of the products as possible in order to convince herself of their potential

so that she would, in turn, be able to convince her partners in the sales team that she had set up. Soon she was doing very well leading a group which had quite a number of “down-lines”; they all worked together, shared the same dreams, and they strived as a team for financial independence, freedom and success. Thus, her days were occupied in organising meetings and newly recruited members, rushing here and there to demonstrate new products, and ensuring that goods were delivered on time.

However, in the midst of her busy life, she began to be aware of some eye problems. She thought she was just too tired and that the problem would go away if she slowed down for a few days. Despite the long rests and on-the-counter medications for a few weeks, the eye problems persisted. She began to experience difficulties in reading and in driving the car.

At last she felt compelled to seek professional attention. First she visited the eye departments of the General Hospital and the University Hospital, and then the private eye specialists. Nevertheless, not only did her eyesight not improve but, in fact, it continued to deteriorate over the years. Still unwilling to give up hope, she turned to Chinese medicine; she even went to China and stayed there for a few months with the hope of a cure. Nothing dramatic happened and her

eyesight worsened.

She began to have lucid visions even with her eyes closed. However, she was roused from her state of depression by the love, care and trust from her family and friends which deeply touched the inner core of her being. This enabled her to sit back, to reflect and to count her blessings.

“I must make myself into a new person so that I can live life again,” she promised herself.

All this I learned from Susie when I first met her in August 2007 at the Elderly Blind Centre in Kompleks MAB. At the time when I met her, she was almost totally blind and only had the perception of shadow movements. I could share common experiences with her as both of us had gone through the experience of becoming blind in adulthood. We talked about the difficulties faced mentally and physically and the new challenges that we had to deal with. This brought Susie exceeding cheer.

She was very glad to have met so many blind people in Brickfields and at MAB. She enjoyed the weekly harmonica classes at MAB and was an active member of the senior citizens’ Mandarin choir.

I was delighted to learn that Susie had been admitted to the Gurney Training Centre as a day trainee in January 2008. Being an elderly blind person, she found that she

had to work extra hard in order to acquire new skills in massage, Braille, orientation and mobility, Bahasa Malaysia and English.

Before I conclude, here is a story that I would like to share with Susie and other readers of this magazine. If I were to catch a bird which flies directly in the blue sky and put it in a cage, it would struggle in all directions in an attempt to find a way out. The moment it perceives any small opening, it would squeeze itself out from the cage and fly away to freedom once more.

Thus, when the way to the front has been closed, make a turn and find a new way.

Opportunities

multiply as they are
seized

Sun Tzu, Chinese

General

Men occasionally
stumble over the
truth, but most of
them pick themselves
up and hurry off
as if nothing ever
happened.

Sir Winston

Churchill

IF YOU KNOW
OF ANY BLIND
PERSON NEEDING
REGISTRATION FOR
EDUCATION OR
REHABILITATION,
PLEASE CONTACT US
IMMEDIATELY

NCBM

Tel: 03-2272 4959

MAB

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World Blind Union
Dato' S. Kulasegaran and Mr. Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

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EARN SOME EXTRA CASH

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

1. Original articles on the achievements of blind people or of an inspirational nature (about 500 words) - RM75.00
2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words) - RM75.00
3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250 - 500 words) - RM35.00 - RM75.00
4. Interesting articles taken from magazines or documents of limited circulation - RM10.00.

(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.)

NOTES