

# NCBM OUTREACH



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# VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT OF NCBM

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



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*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author/contributor and do not necessarily represent the views of NCBM.*



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

It costs NCBM RM30,000 a year to produce the magazine in print and in Braille.

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

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

## The 2025 International Day of Persons with Disabilities

The theme for the 2025 International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) is “Fostering Disability-Inclusive Societies for Advancing Social Progress”, emphasising the full participation of Persons with Disabilities”, which is crucial for sustainable development and human progress across all sectors of society.

This theme builds on commitments from world leaders at the Second World Summit of Social Development, highlighting the need to remove barriers in areas like work, health and social protection for Persons with Disabilities.

The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) celebrated this day by participating in the National Seminar on Health Care for Persons with Disabilities with the theme, “OKU Sihat Masyarakat Sejahtera”, organised by the Ministry of Health on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2025. NCBM put up a booth to exhibit reading and writing of Braille, tactile graphics, and use of the white cane.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2025, Mr. Wong Yoon Loong, Executive Director of NCBM, together with Datin Dr. Rozbizah Abdul Aziz, Senior Assistant Director of the Social Welfare Department, were interviewed on the talk shows of BERNAMA TV and BERNAMA Radio where they explained the significance of the celebration of International Day of Persons With Disabilities and on a variety of other programmes organised on 3<sup>rd</sup> December in Putrajaya.





On the morning of 3<sup>rd</sup> December, four staff members of NCBM, namely Ms. Wong, Ms. Roslina, Ms. Nurun Jamiah and Ms. Rosnita, participated in the three-kilometre Fun Walk in Putrajaya. Mr. Wong, Ms. Chin, Ms. Alfa and Ms. Christina participated in the ASEAN Disability Forum in the Royale Chulan Kuala Lumpur.



In the afternoon, Mr. Wong spoke at the Forum of Successful PWDs where he shared on his challenges and success with support from the Government, community, family and friends in his journey as a Person with Visual Impairment.

The day ended with a dinner hosted by YB Dato' Sri Hajah Nancy Shukri , Minister of Women, Family and Community Development. During the dinner, awards were presented to the employers who were employing Persons with Disabilities, the Local Councils providing accessibility, and the Community-Based Rehabilitation Centres providing services, and also to the achievers among the Persons with Disabilities.

On 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2025, Mr. Wong and Ms. Chin were humbled to be invited by YB Senator Isayah Tuan D. Jacob for a luncheon in the Parliament to celebrate the International Day for Persons with Disabilities.

NCBM hopes that all the stake-holders will truly include Persons with Disabilities in their programmes and activities in realising the theme, “Fostering Disability-Inclusive Societies for Advancing Social Progress”.

### **Bilateral Workshop to Enhance Cooperation between Malaysia and China in Advancing Work for Persons With Disabilities:**

The workshop was organised by the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) from November 25-26, 2025.



This bilateral workshop was organised in order to enhance Cooperation between Malaysia and China in Advancing the Work for Persons With Disabilities. The workshop was held at the Hotel Royal Bukit Bintang and it brought together the stake-holders from Malaysia and China to share insights and learn about the current situation of PWDs in both countries.

The workshop focused on four key areas – Rehabilitation, Vocational Training and Employment Services, ICT and Artificial Intelligence, and Massage Training.

The workshop provided a platform to explore opportunities for cross-country collaboration and to develop concrete actions to improve the lives of PWDs in both Malaysia and China. The insights from this Workshop will inform future initiatives and contribute towards strengthening inclusive policies and programmes for the PWDs in both countries.

The workshop was conducted to achieve the following objectives:

1. To understand the services provided for the PWDs in both countries.
2. To explore opportunities for collaboration.
3. To cope up with concrete actions which will improve the lives of PWDs in both countries.

Thirty participants attended this workshop, which included six delegates from the China Disabled Peoples' Federation (CDPF), four delegates from the Beijing Disabled Peoples' Federation, President and Council Members of NCBM, representatives from member-organisers of NCBM and staff of NCBM.

In her opening remarks, Datuk Rosalind Chew, President of NCBM, welcomed the delegates from the China Disabled People's Federation (CDPF) and the Beijing Disabled Peoples' Federation. She then highlighted the significance of the workshop, introduced the four thematic areas (Rehabilitation and Vocational Training, Employment Services, ICT and Artificial Intelligence, and Massage) and she emphasised the importance of strengthening collaboration to improve the lives of Persons With Disabilities in both countries.

Following her speech, Mr. Zhang Dongwang, (Head of Delegation), Deputy Director General of the Department of Rights Protection, CDPF, delivered his opening remarks, expressing appreciation for the opportunity to engage

with Malaysian counterparts and highlighting the long-standing cooperation between China, Malaysia and ASEAN in social development and disability inclusion.

He emphasised the shared priorities such as digitalisation, demographic change, inclusive policies, and the continued commitment of both countries to strengthen collaboration in rehabilitation, employment, information accessibility, and broader disability-related initiatives.

Following his remarks, the participants then proceeded for a photo session and a short coffee break.

**Session 1 on Vocational Training and Employment Services** was moderated by Mr. Wong Yoon Loong, Executive Director of NCBM. The session featured three speakers - Mr. Hanizan bin Che Mat, Senior Assistant Director of the Skills and Vocational Unit, Special Education Division, Ministry of Education, Mr. Tang Chun Mei, Director of the Research Office of the Beijing Disabled Peoples' Federation; and Dr. Mohd. Zulkifli bin Abdul Rahim, Head of the Disability Transformation Centre at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Kubang Kerian, Kelantan.

They presented Malaysia's and China's approach to vocational education, skills development and employment pathways for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Hanizan outlined the policies and pathways for students with disabilities in vocational training in the Malaysian education system while Ms. Tang elaborated on the policies framework in vocational training in China.

Dr. Mohd. Zulkifli presented a practical experience in providing vocational training for the Disabled in USM.

**Session 2 on Massage Training**, moderated by Mr. Roy Chai, Honorary Secretary of NCBM. The session was led by two speakers, Mr. He Chuan, Deputy Director-General of the China Visual Impairment Cultural Information Service Centre, and Ms. Carmen Chew, General Manager of St. Nicholas' Home, Penang.

Both speakers outlined the training system, certification processes and employment opportunities for blind massage practitioners in their respective countries. It was agreed that the therapeutic massage is a good employment opportunity for Persons with Visual Impairment and we need to do more to upscale their skills.

**Session 3 on Rehabilitation Services** was moderated by Ms. Carmen Chew, General Manager of St. Nicholas' Home, Penang. The first presentation was delivered by Mr. Wong Yoon Loong, Executive Director of NCBM, who discussed the fundamentals of blindness rehabilitation in Malaysia, emphasising emotional adjustment, Orientation and Mobility (O & M) skills, Braille literacy, daily living skills and the role of assistive technology in enabling independence.

This was followed by Ms. Gong Rui, Director of the Department of Rehabilitation at CDPF, who outlined China's legal foundations, national planning, and Government led frameworks that guide comprehensive rehabilitation services across the country.

**Session 4 on ICT and AI** was moderated by Mr. Roy Chai, Honorary Secretary of NCBM. The session featured presentations from Mr. Lim Yew Yi, ICT instructor at St. Nicholas' Home, Penang, Mr. He Chuan, Deputy Director- General of the China Visual Impairment Cultural Information Service Centre, and Mr. Yang Chao from the Beijing Demonstration Center of Service for Persons with Disabilities.

Together, they highlighted the ICT and AI training modules, assistive technologies, real-world applications of AI for Visually Impaired Persons, innovation in China's disability technology ecosystem, and advancements such as Smart Glasses, robotics and Smart assistive devices.

**Session 5 was moderated by Mr. Wong Yoon Loong, Executive Director of NCBM.** The first keynote address was delivered by Mr. Pathmanathan A/L Nalasamy, Director of the Department for the Development of Persons with Disabilities, who presented Malaysia's policy frameworks, services, legal structures and national coordination mechanisms for disability inclusion.



The second keynote address was delivered by Mr. Zhang Dongwang, (Head of Delegation), Deputy Director-General of the Department of Rights Protection (CDPP), who provided an overview of China's disability population, the CDPF system, legal protections, rehabilitation and social services, education and employment frameworks, and international cooperation initiatives.

Session 5 concluded at 4.30 p.m. with a lot of interest from all participants, keen to learn about the achievements and priorities in both countries to enhance the quality of life for Persons with Disabilities.

In his closing remarks, Mr. Wong recapped all sessions and expressed appreciation to the speakers and participants for their active participation and contributions.

The two-day bilateral meeting effectively facilitated the exchange between Malaysia and China, with the participants gaining meaningful insights across vocational training, massage training, rehabilitation and ICT/AI training.

The sharing sessions were informative and they helped the participants to have a better understanding of the similarities and differences in both countries' Disability Service systems.

Overall, the participants viewed the programme as impactful and timely. The meeting strengthened bilateral relationships and demonstrated a strong shared commitment to improving the lives of Persons with Disabilities through continued cooperation and mutual learning.

### **Recommendations from the Workshop include:**

1. Both countries agreed to explore further opportunities for collaboration in vocational training, including training modules, employment pathways, and shared expertise in skills development for Persons with Disabilities.
2. It is recommended that Malaysia enhance and upgrade its massage training programmes by learning from China's established training systems, standards and industry practices to strengthen skill development for blind massage practitioners.

3. Malaysia's representatives expressed interest in learning Chinese Braille due to the increasing demand for Chinese Braille literacy among the blind and low vision persons. Future cooperation may include training exchanges, shared learning resources and technical support from China.

4. Both Malaysia and China agreed to deepen collaboration in AI and ICT accessibility, particularly in exploring assistive technologies, digital skills training and practical applications of AI tools that can enhance independence and employability for Persons with Disabilities.

In conclusion, the two-day bilateral workshop between Malaysia and China provided a meaningful platform for exchanging knowledge, sharing practical experiences and strengthening cooperation in the key areas affecting Persons with Disabilities.

The participants gained valuable insights into vocational training, massage training, rehabilitation services and the use of ICT and AI,

Reflecting the commitment of both countries to advance disability inclusion.

The discussions and presentations demonstrated the strong potential for sustained collaboration, particularly in vocational skills development, massage training enhancement, Chinese Braille learning and digital accessibility. These areas highlighted the shared priorities and they offer opportunities for joint progress in the coming years.

NCBM extends its sincere appreciation to all the speakers, moderators, the China delegation and all the participants for their active engagement and contributions.

The positive spirit shown throughout the meeting reinforces the importance of continued partnerships. NCBM looks forward to working closely with CDPF in further advancing the well-being and empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in both countries.



### **MAB's New Entrepreneurial Development Programme:**

24<sup>th</sup> October 2025 (Friday) saw the launching of MAB's new entrepreneurial development programme for the blind in Kompleks MAB. It was a three-day training course from 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> October (Friday to Sunday). The course was taken up by sixteen blind and visually impaired persons – fifteen of them being massage therapists and one of them is a housewife.

In the course, the participants learned how to produce some herbal-based products. Four of the products that they learned to produce were:

1. The Sciatica Massage Herbal Oil;
2. The Massage Therapy Aroma Oil;
3. The Sciatica Herbal Balm; and
4. The Rose Herbal Milk Salt Aura.

Dr. Lim Tien Hong, who is blind and he is the Strategy and Job Placement Officer of MAB, he said: "This is the latest project of MAB to help in increasing employment opportunities for the blind and visually impaired."

### **Job Matching for the Blind:**

About fifty blind and visually impaired persons were in attendance at a job-matching session which was held in the MAB hall, Kompleks MAB on Friday, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2025 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

The programme was a joint project by MAB with the Pasar Tani in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya.

The objective of the programme was to match blind persons with jobs at the Pasar Tani in Selangor, Wilayah Persekutuan K.L. or Putrajaya.

The jobs available to the blind include massage, trading or busking.

Dr. Lim Tien Hong, who is blind and he is the Strategy and Job Placement

Manager of MAB, said, “Blind persons who are interested in doing massage, trading or busking for employment, they can contact him and he will help them to get employment. They can contact him at Malaysian Association For The Blind (MAB).

### **New Assistant Placement Officer for MAB:**

Ms. Nur Qurratu’Aini Anisah Rosli was recruited on September 2. 2025 (Tuesday) to join MAB as the Assistant Job Placement Officer.

“I’m so glad that I will be able to help some blind people to get employment so that they can live a normal and meaningful life,” said Nur Qurratu’Aini.

She will be working with Dr. Lim Tien Hong, who is the Strategy and Job Placement Manager of MAB.



# **INCLUSIVE CITIES FOR ALL- ADDRESSING THE STRUGGLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN THE URBAN CITIES OF MALAYSIA**

*By Dr. Wong Huey Siew*

(Editor's Note: Dr. Wong Huey Siew is a visually impaired lecturer in Open University Malaysia (OUM) and he is a Council Member in the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB). He is also a Presidential Council member in the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM).

## Introduction:

In Malaysia, the urban cities (including Kuala Lumpur, Georgetown, Alor Star, Johor Bahru, Petaling Jaya, Shah Alam, Subang Jaya, Melaka, Seremban, Ipoh, Kuantan, Kuala Terengganu, Kota Bharu, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu) are all symbols of economic opportunity and development.

These cities are thriving urban hubs that attract internal migration as they offer economic opportunities, better health care, education and vibrant lifestyles.

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), urbanisation is steadily increasing, with over 75% of the population residing in the urban areas as of 2023. The cities provide higher wages, greater job diversity, modern public facilities, and social mobility; these continue to attract both the able-bodied and the disabled who are seeking a better quality of life.

While these cities promise economic and social advancement for the people, such developments however do pose significant challenges, especially for Persons with Disabilities.

From the perspective of the blind and visually impaired these cities often present environments of hardship, partial exclusion, and inaccessibility. The rapid development of urban infrastructure, the cities frequently overlook the needs of Persons with Disabilities. As a result, they pose a daily life of difficulties, particularly for the blind and visually impaired.

According to the Department of Social Welfare (JKM), until 2023 there are approximately 640,000 Visually Impaired Persons registered with the Department. Indeed, in the scenario of today's modern lifestyle, many Malaysians (including the PWD's) have migrated from the *kampongs* to the urban centres such as Kuala Lumpur, Pulau Pinang, Johor Bahru, Petaling Jaya, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu in search of better economic opportunities, rehabilitation services, employment, health care, education, public transportation, housing and social inclusion. However, the rapid pace of development, urban congestion, and with the limited inclusive planning, these often lead to the barriers for the disabled, thereby restricting their mobility, safety and overall quality of life.

However, it is always assumed by society that the cities do offer more accessible services for the blind and visually impaired such as training centres, rehabilitation programmes, job placement services, higher education, peer support, and supportive government agencies.

It is often assumed that the urban towns will have greater access for the disabled to the NGO services, the advocacy networks and public facilities that can offer support for their daily survival.

In spite of these potential benefits, however, the major modern cities are still not easily navigable for the blind and visually impaired. The basic services such as housing, transportation, employment, digital access and other life-long learning supports are not adequately adapted to meet the needs of the disabled community. As a result, the disabled have very limited independence and participation in mainstream society.

Although Malaysia has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) many of the urban policies and infrastructure projects still do not comply with or they ignore the accessibility and inclusivity features for the PWDS.

### The Key Urban Challenges for the Visually Impaired:

The urban cities are often presumed to be offering better accessibility and facilities for the visually impaired. However, the reality is often the opposite. Despite the development plans and the smart city or digital initiatives, the modern infrastructure and policy design still neglect the

vital aspects of universal accessibility. Most of these cities are still not fully equipped to support independent and dignified living for visually impaired individuals. For instance, the high traffic volume, poorly marked pedestrian paths, uncovered drainage, and the lack of tactile and auditory signals in public spaces continue to pose the daily hazards for the blind and visually impaired.

Thus, from the visually impaired perspective, what are the key challenges of living in a major city in Malaysia?

They are:

### **1. High Cost of Living:**

Living in the major cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya, Subang, Penang and Johor Bahru do involve high rental rates, expensive food, and increased transport costs. Blind individuals often work as the support staff, or as masseurs, or are self-employed with small mobile businesses, and so on. They have low income levels due to low employment rates. They also have limited access to inclusive and up-to-date job training. This economic disadvantage makes it difficult for them to afford even just for basic living expenses. Therefore, this is pushing many of them into poverty or into the B40 category and making them very dependent on support from society. Besides, many of them also rely heavily on Government support for grants and allowances in order to cover high urban living costs.

### **2. Inaccessible and Unsafe Housing:**

Most of the urban housing development projects are not designed with universal accessibility for the disabled. The stairs with narrow corridors, inaccessible lifts and the lack of tactile indicators make independent living very challenging for the disabled. Even the affordable housing schemes rarely prioritise disability access in the major cities.

All this creates long-term housing insecurity and dependency, especially among the visually impaired adults. Moreover, many of them are from the B40 group, and they face difficulty in affording a house in a major city with nearby public transport. This situation ends up with the visually impaired continuing to rely on the rental of a room or house.

### **3. Inaccessible Urban Infrastructure:**

Despite the national accessibility guidelines as stated in Law, many of the city walkways still have no tactile pavings, audible traffic signals, covered drainage and there are pillars in the middle of walkways. Thus, the blind are exposed to disorientation and injury.

In fact, a study by the University Malaya in 2021 noted that only 18 percent of the pedestrian crossings in Kuala Lumpur are fully compliant with the Universal Design. Therefore, does this align with SDG as proposed?

### **4. Limited Access to Public Transport:**

Public transportation, particularly the public bus service in the cities like Kuching, Kota Kinabalu, Ipoh and Johor Bahru are still poorly equipped with facilities for the blind. For the bus transport service, such features as audible announcements, tactile maps or guide paths are still missing or inconsistent. The train stations may have incomplete tactile or audio systems, thereby resulting in confusion and hazards. Moreover, some LRT stations located in the city area still do not have full tactile flooring.

There is also a connectivity gap between the residential areas and the public transport routes. Such a scenario raises serious safety concerns, particularly with Monorail. Hence, the visually impaired are still exposed to great danger. This situation is causing the blind and visually impaired to be exposed to high transportation costs in order not to be left behind in social mobility.

### **5. Educational Inequality in the Mainstream Schools:**

While the inclusive education policies do exist, many of the mainstream schools still lack the necessary support to accommodate the visually impaired students. There are only a limited number of integrated or inclusive education programmes available in the local town areas.

Textbooks are not always available in Braille or audio format. Some of the integrated programmes face difficulty in getting Special Education teachers to support the needs of the visually impaired students.

Some of the teachers, either in Special Education or in the mainstream school, may not have been trained in Special Education pedagogy. As a result, the blind students still face academic challenges even in the Special Education setting.

Parents also face difficulties in enrolling their children in the local school due to the lack of Special Education support and facilities. In fact, this scenario also occurs in higher education.

## **6. Lack of Inclusive Lifelong Learning and Skills Training:**

While adult education and lifelong learning courses are available in the major cities or even in the suburban areas, the needs of the blind and visually impaired are still often overlooked in such development. For example, the mainstream training centres do not offer courses in accessible formats for the blind such as using the screen reader compatible reading materials or the accessible online learning system.

Thus, the visually impaired adults are denied the opportunity to upskill or retrain in order to remain employable in a fast-changing economy. In fact, the programmes under the HRD Corp or TVET remain inaccessible unless the NGO serving the blind takes on the responsibility to fill in the gap.

## **7. Poor Digital Inclusion and ICT Access:**

In today's digital age, the lack of digital literacy among the visually impaired can severely limit their opportunities, especially in employment and entrepreneurship. Many of the services in the city (including banking, local government, education, shopping, etc.) have shifted online.

However, many of the apps and websites are rarely designed for the screen reader. In this scenario, therefore, the visually impaired users do face challenges in navigating such poorly designed interfaces or apps without disabled-friendly accessibility features.

Digital training programmes that target the visually impaired community are sparse and under-funded in the urban areas. Therefore, the digital and ICT training opportunities for the blind and visually impaired are still quite limited and under-served.

Currently, the visually impaired can only depend on the basic training courses which are provided by the NGOs which are only located in the major cities.

## **8. Policy Gaps and poor Representation in Urban Planning:**

Although Malaysia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), implementation still remains fragmented. The disabled voices, especially from the visually impaired community, are not fully involved in policy-making at all the municipal and state levels. Urban planning decisions do not consistently undergo disability accessibility audits and so this leads to policies that exclude disabled individuals from full participation in city life. Thus, they continue to face difficulties in getting the inclusive supports and services from the local authorities.

Hence, this leads to policies that exclude the disabled from full participation in city life. This means that eventually, the disabled will still face difficulties in getting the inclusive supports and services from the local authorities.

## **9. Limited Inclusive Employment Opportunities:**

Although there are some employers who have hired visually impaired workers, many of the employers in the major cities still lack the awareness on inclusive hiring practices or the necessary accommodations. According to the DOSM (2022), the employment rate among the visually impaired was only 35% despite the urban areas offering more job opportunities.

The lack of awareness and the accessible digital platform remain as a key issue in accommodating the visually impaired.

## **10. Urban Poverty and Social Isolation:**

Without proper employment, housing or mobility, many of the visually impaired individuals fall into urban poverty. The majority of them have to struggle and work hard in order to earn sufficient amount to sustain their lives in the urban towns. Many of them work as masseurs or as mobile business sellers of small products.

Indeed, the social networks weaken when the visually impaired cannot participate in most of the life of the mainstream community or they have no access to the common local spaces. Mental health issues such as depression and anxiety are also prevalent due to the stressful life and isolation, particularly for those who have retired. Despite their citizenship, they remain invisible to the policy-makers at most of the city levels.

### **Suggestions to Improve Urban Living for the Visually Impaired:**

Ensuring inclusive cities requires not only the implementation of physical infrastructural changes but also a shift in the societal mindset and political will. This requires the coordinated efforts from the Government, the private sector and civil society.

It is hoped that the Madani Government will listen to the voices of the disabled and that it will act with urgency. This means that the Ministers and the Prime Minister himself must recognise the urgent need for inclusive development that does not sideline the minorities and the marginalised communities.

Furthermore, the leaders from the NGOS who work directly with the visually impaired should be empowered, supported and consulted in all matters relating to urban development, social protection, and lifelong learning.

Real progress requires political will, cross-sector collaboration, and a genuine commitment to justice and equity for all Malaysians.

The suggestion to improve the well-being of the visually impaired in the major cities are in line with the *Rancangan Malaysia 13* as follows:

#### **1. Increase the Accessibility Housing Quota:**

The local authorities should mandate that at least 10% of public housing units in all urban developments be designed with universal access, including tactile paths, audio signage and guide railings.

## **2. Expand Universal Design in Public Transport:**

The transport authorities and operators must ensure that all new buses, trains and terminals are equipped with audible announcements, tactile flooring, braille indicators, and properly trained staff.

## **3. Strengthen Inclusive Education:**

Assistive technologies such as braille printers or embossers, screen-readers, audio materials in all mainstream schools, special schools and higher education institutions should be made available with sufficient funding while trained teachers and lecturers should be assigned in such settings to meet the needs of the visually impaired students in such settings.

## **4. Inclusive lifelong learning should be Funded:**

The Government agencies and Local Councils should allocate special grants to offer TVET and ICT programmes tailored to the needs of the blind and visually impaired.

There should be accessible interfaces and mobility aids for the training staff and for the NGOS serving the blind and visually impaired.

## **5. Enforce Accessibility Standards in the Digital Services:**

All City Council websites, mobile apps, and e-government platforms must comply with the WCAG 2.1 standards, thereby ensuring full mobility for screen reader users.

## **6. Empower Disabled Representation:**

Advisory panels at the City and Municipal levels should be established that include visually impaired advocates to influence the development of infrastructure, education and transport planning.

## **7. Expand Urban Disability Cash Assistance:**

Adjust existing disability allowance schemes based on urban cost of living indices to cover housing, transport and assistive device expenses more adequately.

## **8. Launch Public Awareness Campaigns:**

Use the mass media and public signage to promote the rights and contributions of the visually impaired, thereby reducing the stigma of inability and encouraging community-level support and inclusiveness.

## **Conclusion:**

Living in a major city like Kuala Lumpur or Johor Bahru should bring opportunities, not barriers. Yet, for the visually impaired Malaysians, city life often presents compounded challenges from unaffordable housing and inaccessible transport to exclusion from education and digital spaces. These are not the isolated struggles of the visually impaired person but they are the reflections of systematic gaps in planning and policy-making.

Every Malaysian, regardless of their visual ability, deserves the opportunity to live, work and thrive in an environment that respects human dignity and supports their potential.

The Rights and Dignity of the visually impaired must not remain as a footnote in urban development. Inclusive policies, stronger enforcement, and active representation are essential in ensuring that every citizen can live independently and can contribute meaningfully to society.

Malaysia must move beyond the token gestures by building cities that truly reflect the promise of **“No One Left Behind”**. Every effort, every policy, and every action must recognise that the visually impaired persons are not just beneficiaries of development but they are also part of the Builders Community.

Malaysia can truly fulfil its commitment to the CRPD and the principle of **“No One Left Behind”**. We really need very strong support from the Madani Government in its commitment to help materialise this great dream of inclusive cities for all.



*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy*

(Editor's Note: Ivan Ho Tuck Choy has been blind from early childhood and he received his education at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang followed by rehabilitation and vocational training at the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

He got employment as telephonist at Kumpulan Guthrie where he worked for thirty years. While working, Ivan furthered his own education by taking up the correspondence course from Hadley School for the Blind in the USA.

Subsequently, Ivan was actively involved in advocating for inclusion of the blind in the work for the blind and in setting up the blind people's self-help organisation, the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM).

Ivan was also actively involved in establishing the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia and formation of the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled.

In the following, Ivan continues with the story of MCD's development.)

By early in the year of 2000 with the matter of the loan comfortably set aside, and with the committees now functioning effectively in carrying out the programmes in accordance with their Terms of Reference, it could be said that MCD had reached its adulthood.

At this stage of its development, MCD was able to concentrate more of its efforts and resources in strengthening the leadership aspect and pay more attention to the advocacy work.

Meanwhile, the Exco began to formulate policies and to coordinate the work of all the Committees and Working Groups. Funds were allocated for the operations of the Committees and Working Groups, thereby ensuring that the Rules and Standing Orders were being updated for transparent governance. Approval was given for the allocation of RM 10,000.00 to

Dignity and Services for the Intellectually Impaired, thereby enabling the United Voice group to carry out their activities for the slow learners.

The Society of Chinese Disabled Persons Malaysia (SCDPM) was given assistance with computers and the Malaysian Federation of the Deaf (MFD) was given assistance with their sign-language programme. MCD also made an appeal to the Government for the reduction of fees in the making of international passports for the disabled. Contributions of inputs were also made to the National Advisory Council on Disability and various other organisations.

With regards to the aspect of leadership training, Mr. Mohd. Sazali Shaari and Ms. Sia Siew Chin were selected to attend the DPI Asia-Pacific Regional Assembly and the Leadership Training Seminar in Laos in November 2000.

Ms. Hamidah Hassan was chosen to attend the six-week JICA Leadership Training Course in Japan from 10<sup>th</sup> October to 25<sup>th</sup> November in the same year of 2000 and it was sponsored by JICA while Mr. Yeap Ean Chuan attended the DPI Asia-Pacific Leadership Training Seminar in Cambodia. Opportunities were also made available for the members of the affiliate-organisations of MCD to attend each others' seminars and workshops.

Meanwhile, the Interaction and Leadership Training Committee, then under the chairmanship of Mr. Teh Soon Seng, also organised a number of activities. One of the activities was the Brainstorming Session on Computers and General IT Matters for the Disabled in March 2001.

The Access Monitoring Committee, then under the chairmanship of Mr. Wong Nam Sang, apart from their assigned duties, approached the Local Governments and the shopping malls to make available parking lots for the wheelchair-users. They also requested the authorities of places of worship to give attention to the accessibility aspects for the disabled in their premises.

After having sorted out the loan matter and feeling quite comfortable over the financial position of MCD, and being assured there would be a replacement for the treasurership, Mr. HRM Storey decided to step down as the Hon. Treasurer due to his failing health. And so at an Extraordinary General Meeting in July 2001, Mdm. Jasmine Khoo Khin Sheen from the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) was elected as the new Hon. Treasurer. As for Mr. HRM Storey, he was appointed to fill the vacant position on the Exco of the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled (MCD).



*By Ooi Hock Tiam*

(Editor's Note:

Ooi Hock Tiam has been totally blind from childhood and he received his education at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang.

Later, he obtained his Bachelor's Degree from University of Malaya. Then he went on to the University of Canterbury, England from 1988-89 and obtained his Master's Degree in International Relations. Subsequently, he lectured on History and International Relations at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in Penang.

In the following, he helps us in getting to know Nicholas Chen)

I had the opportunity to bump into a gentleman during the Friday Chapel Service at the St. Nicholas' Chapel in Penang. It was on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2024 when I had the privilege to meet this guy, Nicholas Chen, by chance, and to get his story.

Nicholas Chen was born in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur in the year of 1986. For his childhood education, he attended a Malay-medium school in Selangor. On completion of his secondary education in 2003, he took up a two-year course in Hotel Management at the College Damansara Utama (KDU) in Kuala Lumpur.

After chatting with him for a while, I discovered that he is actually a very familiar person in the blind world of Malaysia. He knew people like Moses Choo, Godfrey Ooi and Linda Kam through his attendance at the Agape Christian Service in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur every Saturday evening.

On completion of the Hotel Management Course at KDU in the year 2005, Nicholas Chen took up a job in Kuala Lumpur. It was here at this time when he met his sweetheart and they got married in 2012. His sweetheart was a sighted person. After getting married, they went on working in China for about fourteen years.

In 2019, Nicholas Chen was diagnosed with glaucoma and later on with diabetes. This was in the year of 2020, the beginning of the Covid-19 season, when Nicholas Chen lost his sight. It was during these very difficult moments of his life when his sweetheart decided to ask for a divorce due to his in-laws not being willing to accept his blindness.

Nicholas Chen remained jobless for a while. Then it was with some encouragement from Moses Choo and some other friends that made Nicholas Chen decided to get himself registered with the Information Technology Department at St. Nicholas' Home in Penang. And so he came to St. Nicholas' Home in July 2025 to take up the Information Technology Course and pick up some technology skills like using JAWS and operating the NVDA. In fact, he has learnt how to handle and use the iPhone very well.

When asked about looking for another true sweetheart, Nicholas Chen sounded very hopeful and positive. He said that hopefully he will be able to find someone who will be as sweet and as loving as his first sweetheart.



*By Loh Kong Ken*

I was drawn to write this article while travelling in a bus to the state of Pahang for a day trip. What prompted me to do so was when I recalled a statement made by a veteran leader among the blind community many, many years ago named Mr. Ivan Ho Tuck Choy. I really cannot remember where and when he made that profound statement to me. But I would like to paraphrase what he said to me on that day.

Ivan Ho said, “Kong Ken, you have a good job. You are economically independent. You think you do not need to rely on society, i.e. the NGOs serving the blind, but it does not mean that the society and your friends do not need you.”

To me, a day trip is very normal. Every year my wife and I would go for a day trip. Sometimes we even go to the same place again and again such as to Sekinchan in Selangor. However, after reflecting upon the statement made by Mr. Ivan Ho, it prompted me to write this story which is as follows:

It all started when my wife, Cheah Kam Lin, and I were invited by a friend for a lunch in Kuala Selangor on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2025 (Sunday). When we arrived, we met another friend who told us that she was finding people to go for a day trip to Jerantut on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2025 (Saturday). She asked whether we could get some blind friends to go along with their helpers. The cost was only RM148 (inclusive of a “dim sum” lunch at Jerantut and a seven-dish dinner at Bukit Tinggi. Kam Lin agreed with the suggestion. As a result, ten visually impaired persons plus four helpers and six sighted friends signed up for the trip.

After picking up the participants from four locations, namely Brickfields at MAB Complex, Pandan Indah, Setapak Jaya and Melawati respectively, we headed to the Bentong Wet Market for breakfast.

In fact, we arrived at the Bentong market round about 8.30 a.m. and we were given an hour to have our breakfast and do some shopping. My group included Dr. Lim Tien Hong, Kam Lin and I together with a helper. We had *wan tan mee* at the shop which was less crowded. The four bowls of noodles

together with four drinks came up to RM40 and Dr. Lim kindly paid up for all of us.

After breakfast, we went round shopping. A sighted friend from our bus who was eating in the same shop with us, volunteered to walk along with us. And so Kam Lin asked her to take Dr. Lim in order to split our group into two. Thus, apart from the usual stuff that you can find in the market, there were not many varieties on offer in comparison with the Sunday market. Because of this, Kam Lin bought the famous Bentong ginger.

Our next destination was Temerloh, which took us about two hours to reach there. We then headed straight for the Chinese temple, which was called the Thean Hou Temple. We were there for about half an hour – some went for the prayers, others went down to take photos, while a few of us opted to wait in the bus.

While waiting in the bus for the devotees to return, Kam Lin went down to look around. Across the road, she saw a Malay *pak cik* selling *petai* (stinky beans). She went across and bought two bunches consisting of six strips of *petai* each for RM10 per bunch. When she returned to the bus, the other ladies became interested and they started getting down to buy the *petai*, too. It ended up with the *pak cik* selling off all his stalk of *petai* in twenty minutes.

By then, it was time for lunch. Unfortunately, we all had to queue up for our tables as there were more than forty bus-loads of tourists waiting to be served. We were told that this was the normal scene during the week-ends. Usually, there would be forty to sixty bus-loads or tourists who would come to Temerloh just for the sake of eating the dim sum.

When our turn finally came, we were divided into groups of seven persons per table. We were then served seven types of *dim sum* (a Chinese meal or snack of small dishes including different foods fried or cooked in steam) including one monster *tai pao* (big Chinese steam bun) that weighed two kilograms each. The fillings consisted of ten types of ingredients. Each *Pao* cost RM58 and it was enough for eight persons to share.

The shop also sold a premium *monster pao* with additional fillings of abalone. This *pao* cost RM98 each. In fact, the attraction of this *dim sum* restaurant was the *monster pao*. On the whole, I would give a rating of 6.7 for the “dim sum” served.

After lunch we visited the Hanging Bridge in Temerloh. I went down with Dr. Lim and my helper while Kam Lin opted to stay in the bus. However, as my helper did not want to walk on the Hanging Bridge, Dr. Lim and I decided to go on our own with our white canes to guide us.

The length of the bridge was 86 metres across the river called Sungai Semantan and the height was 40.22 metres. For safety reasons, only six persons at a time were allowed to be on the bridge at any one time. We learnt that we had to buy an entry ticket of RM2 each in order to go on the bridge. However, when we approached the counter and told them that we were *Orang Kurang Upaya* (OKU), the girl told us that it was free for us.

Thus, guided by the white cane, we asked the public where to enter and one kind soul showed us the entrance. Dr. Lim led the way while I followed from behind in single file. The bridge kept on swinging from right to left, and I balanced myself by trailing the back of my palm on top of the guard-rail. We had to walk slowly as the guard-rail was covered with wire-mesh and very often we came across some sharp edges protruding upwards. Half way across the bridge, we came across a Malay man talking to his little boy and explaining the surroundings to him. We overtook them and walked ahead of them.

As our helper was not with us to explain the scenery, we reached the other side of the river very quickly. There were a few persons busy snapping photos. So we turned around and walked back. Then one kind lady showed us the staircase to get down from the bridge.

Our helper was supposed to wait for us at the bottom of the staircase. However, she was not to be found. So instead, a gentleman asked us, “Where do you want to go?”

I replied, “We’re looking for our lady helper. But we don’t know what she wears or what she looks like.”

So he took us to the side of the walkway to wait. Two minutes later, our helper appeared and she took us to take photos. Apparently, while waiting for us to come back, she had been busy snapping photos and so she did not notice that we were back.

In the midst of taking photos, Godfrey’s helper, Swee Len, approached us and asked whether we wanted to go for a river cruise. Their group, consisting of

Godfrey, Shew Chu and Swee Len, were looking for another three persons to join them as the boat could take six persons at the cost of RM7 per head. Sensing Swee Len's eagerness to go for the cruise, I whispered to Dr. Lim to join them.

And so our helpers together with another sighted friend named Jessie and the boatman assisted the four of us into the boat. The ride along the Semantan River took about fifteen minutes only. I tried to ask the boatman some questions concerning the Semantan River but the boatman seemed to be less talkative, and so we just sat inside the boat and enjoyed the ride silently. Half way through the ride, the boatman stopped the engine and he helped us to snap some photos. Then we returned to the jetty. For me, the ride lasted only ten minutes instead of fifteen minutes as advertised.

Once again, the boatman helped us to disembark. When we asked how much we needed to pay, he told us to pay to the owner of the boat. When the owner saw that there were four OKU persons in the group, he only asked for RM14 for the two helpers. Dr. Lim generously paid the fare for the helpers.

The last attraction for the day was the visit to a three-dimensional wall, which was about five minutes from the Hanging Bridge. We were told that if we stood in front of the wall to snap photos, our features would look or appear three-dimensional also.

Finally, we made our way to Bukit Tinggi where we had a seven-course dinner. The seven dishes were steamed *tilapia fish*, sweet sour prawn, steamed kampong chicken, stir fried baby French beans, omelette, tofu and seaweed soup. Although we were seated eleven persons per table, all of us had our fill.

After dinner, we headed home to Kuala Lumpur. The driver dropped us at the pick-up point in reverse order, namely from Melawati to Setapak Jaya, Pandan Indah and Brickfields respectively at around 10 p.m.



*By Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong*

My friend, Long Boon Huat, was born in 1955 in Shah Alam and he has two other brothers in the family. However, Long Boon Huat is the only one in the family who has suffered from the eye disease of Retinitis Pigmentosa. Fortunately for him, Long has been able to retain partial vision from a young age.

After completing his Form Three education, Long joined the Malaysian Airline where he received his training as a mechanical technician. He worked under the supervision of an engineer and his main task was to carry out maintenance service on the aircrafts belonging to the airline.

After working as a technician for about ten years, Long's vision began to deteriorate further, thereby rendering him as being unable to continue his work as technician. Fortunately for him, the company decided to send him to the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) in Kuala Lumpur for vocational training as a telephone operator. This enabled him to resume his work with the Malaysian Airline System (MAS) as one of the telephone operators there. So he carried on his work as telephone operator until the day when the Airline System had to down-size the company and Long Boon Huat was glad to take up the Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS), thereby becoming jobless at the age of fifty.

Being a friendly, outgoing and highly sociable personality, Long Boon Huat has been able to build up friendly ties with many blind people, including myself, ever since he gained admission to the GTC and when he subsequently worked as telephone operator with the Malaysian Airline System (MAS). In fact, we often get together carrying out fun activities or even travelling to far-away places.

As Long Boon Huat and I myself, the both of us, have partial vision, we often help one another by holding arms and walking together, especially while we are walking along the streets. In this way, Boon Huat was able to build up friendship with many blind people, including with myself.

However, when the blind lead the blind, near fatal incidents could occur. The following are two such incidents which were nearly fatal for me and Long Boon Huat.

It was in the 1980s when Long Boon Huat and I myself joined a three-day holiday trip to Pangkor which was organised by the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM). There was a whole bus-load of us, mostly either totally blind or partially sighted persons assisted by several sighted volunteers. Even though we stayed in the cheap wooden chalets, the blind participants had great fun doing things together, including swimming in the sea.

As I myself had partial vision, I could see that there was an island lying just opposite from us in our island; indeed, the island did not look to be very far away. I was told by the locals that they would often tie an empty plastic bottle to their body and swim across to the other island, which would take them forty-five minutes to reach there.

And so I became very interested in the adventure and I asked Long Boon Huat if he would join me. He readily agreed and so we each held on to an inflated tyre and we started swimming to the opposite island. In the beginning, we had such great fun swimming until one hour later when Boon Huat began to panic and he said that we did not seem to be moving towards the other island. As for me, I felt quite calm and I continued to swim hard and fervently.

Then, another fifteen minutes later, I screamed with joy to Boon Huat that my feet could touch land. As for Boon Huat, he sounded tired out as I helped to push his tyre and we finally reached the shore on the opposite island.

To our amazement, we saw a Caucasian lady lying there upon the beach having a sun-bath. Next to the beach, we saw a modern building where various sports activities were being carried out, such as squash.

After resting for about half an hour, Long Boon Huat said that he was ready for the journey of swimming back to the main Pangkor island. However, I told him that while we were swimming to the opposite island, I had suffered some serious sunburn and so I did not wish to swim back immediately. Thus, I asked the worker there whether we could hire a small boat to take us back to Pangkor.

We were told that there was a ferry service nearby and we gladly took the ferry. While we were on the ferry, we told the ferryman about our adventure and that our original intention was to swim back to Pangkor. Upon hearing this, the ferryman screamed at us saying, “You can’t do that!”

He then explained that in the afternoon, the tide would change direction and so no matter how hard one would swim, he will be swept away to the Melaka Straits. At that moment, it then dawned upon the two of us that our adventure was indeed that of playing with fire. We were so lucky that the small island opposite Pangkor was a well developed tourist attraction and so there was a ferry service available. Supposedly, if we had to make the journey back to Pangkor by swimming across, we would most probably have been swept into the Malacca straits and we would not have been alive today.

Then later, in the 2010s, both Long and myself had retired from our jobs. In order to pass the time away, we decided to organise a busking team and we went to various places in the city of Kuala Lumpur to carry out busking. Long was our strategist and he would often be the one to lead us to various places where we could maximise our daily collection through busking.

One day, Long and I myself decided to go to Berjaya Times Square in Bukit Bintang to explore the busking market. After some exploration, we then went on to the Monorail station in order to catch the train back to Brickfields.

While we were at the station, the train from the opposite side had just arrived. Although Long had good partial vision, it was still possible for him to make some dangerous errors. At this time, Long thought the train which was arriving was the train that we wanted and so we walked towards it, I myself following behind with my hand upon his shoulder. Suddenly, a young Malay lady stopped him by pulling his shirt. Indeed, it was very fortunate that the lady did so because had she not reacted immediately, the both of us would certainly have fallen into the Monorail track.

If that incident had occurred, it was certain that the both of us would have broken our legs or, worse still, we would most probably have been crushed to death by an in-coming train.

In conclusion, therefore, I must say that even though we may like to boost our ego by shouting that “*Malaysia Boleh*” and that the blind also certainly “*Boleh*”, at the same time we should also take note that when the blind lead the blind, we need to be extra vigilant and pray to God for extra protection.



*By Wong Kow*

Yu Chee Eng was popularly known as Chee Weng by his close friends, who also nicknamed him as “Yauyi”.

Liong Teck Yau and I in Malaysia, together with Fred Leung and Chee Weng in Hong Kong, used to be together in a Whatsapp group conveying well wishes, exchanging interesting messages, or keeping each other informed of activities taking place both in Hong Kong and Malaysia.

However, it was sometime in March 2025 when I began to realise that we had not been having news from Chee Weng for quite a long time. Then it was in April 2025 when some of our Brickfields friends had found out from Chee Weng’s sister in Kuala Lumpur that Chee Weng had been unwell and had been coming in and out of hospital in Hong Kong. Later, we regretted to learn that Chee Weng’s health was fast deteriorating and he subsequently passed away on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2025.

As Chee Weng had the roots of his family tree in Malaysia, the family decided to bring Chee Weng’s ashes back to his homeland in Malaysia to rest there in eternal peace.

As Chee Weng’s family members were in Kuala Lumpur, they took the opportunity to invite many of Chee Weng’s friends to get together in the YMCA restaurant in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur.

We all had mixed feelings at the restaurant on this occasion. Despite very tough challenges in life, Chee Weng had managed to bring up a happy and success family. We were very glad to meet Chee Weng’s wife, Margaret, as well as their two sons, a daughter-in-law and a granddaughter. Also present were Chee Weng’s sister’s family members as well as many of Chee Weng’s friends, both blind and sighted. On the other hand, we had the feeling of sadness that Chee Weng had left us for good.

Chee Weng was born in the then Malaya in the year of 1943. He sustained eye injuries at age ten, thus becoming blind in his early teens. At age seventeen, he was admitted to the Gurney Training Centre for the blind in

Kuala Lumpur where he underwent rehabilitation and vocational training. As there were very limited choices of vocational training in those years at the GTC, Chee Weng took up training in basket-weaving. Later, he was posted to the Kinta Valley Workshop for the blind in Ipoh, Perak. After working there for around five years, Chee Weng was not contented to be working in basketry for too long. Moreover, his passion in music continued and he learned many songs through listening to the radio.

While working in Ipoh, Chee Weng had been travelling to Kuala Lumpur quite often in order to meet up with as many friends as he could. Thus, I met Chee Weng in September 1967 when I myself was a new trainee in the Gurney Training Centre.

I found that Chee Weng had a great interest in the various topics on life. He shared with me his experience of training in the GTC as well as the working environment in Ipoh. Then when he discovered that I had received Chinese school education before losing my eyesight, he strongly encouraged me to pick up the knowledge in the Chinese Braille system. At that time, quite a number of our blind friends could already use the Taiwan Chinese Braille system to communicate.

Chee Weng also introduced a few words to me, thereby helping me to gain further interest in the Chinese Braille system. And so, although with some difficulties, I eventually managed to write a few letters by using the Taiwan Chinese Braille.

Chee Weng's golden opportunity came in July 1965 when he was accepted to join the choir group of the blind in Hong Kong. Thus, Chee Weng left Malaysia for Hong Kong on 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1965. Interestingly, Margaret, who became Chee Weng's wife in years to come, was among those who were sent to welcome Chee Weng at the Hong Kong airport.

With his talent and his perseverance in music, Chee Weng was selected to be given the opportunity to pursue the course in piano tuning. Thus, he qualified to become a piano tuner in the year of 1969 and he worked happily in this profession until his full retirement at an old age.

The romance between Chee Weng and Margaret went on very smoothly. When Chee Weng had secured his job and he was able to settle down in Hong Kong permanently, Chee Weng and Margaret got married in October 1972.

When I met the couple many years later after their marriage, I asked them jokingly, “Do you believe that your first meeting at the Hong Kong airport was love at first sight?”

Margaret responded to my question with a broad smile, saying, “I should think so.”

For many of us in the 1970s and 1980s, travelling was quite a luxury for us in view of financial constraints upon us. And so since Chee Weng’s migration to Hong Kong, we hardly met each other for a good number of years. Therefore, we really treasured any occasion when we could gather together in those days. When we missed each other, some of us would use the cassette-recording facilities in order to help us communicate and keep each other informed of happenings in Hong Kong and Malaysia.

Then as time changed for the better in the 1990s followed by the new 21<sup>st</sup> century, travelling became quite affordable. And so Chee Weng came back to Malaysia once or twice a year.

Thus, Chee Weng has left many of us with fond memories. Whenever Margaret and Chee Weng came back to Malaysia for their holidays, some of us would find time to go “*Cuti Cuti Malaysia*” with them. Similarly, when we, their close friends, visited them in Hong Kong, Chee Weng would surely accompany us to roam about here and there in Hong Kong. Even for the longer holidays, Chee Weng would request his sighted friends to help by travelling with us to the nearby China mainland cities for sight-seeing or for buying of souvenirs.

Chee Weng knew that many of us loved listening to the Cantonese stories produced by the Hong Kong radio stations. Therefore, he used to bring back many of those interesting recordings for us to copy. Undoubtedly, we really appreciated his caring and sharing.

Despite the tough challenges that came in their early married life, both Chee Weng and Margaret worked hard and persistently in order to achieve the higher goals in life. Indeed, it has been a great pleasure for us to see that their marriage has endured with fifty-three years of success. They have managed to bring up two well educated and well-mannered sons and their favourite friends are all over in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan.

Now that Chee Weng has gone, I am sure that most of his friends would like to join me in keeping in touch with the Yu family in order to enhance our long-lasting friendship.

My most sincere wishes to Chee Weng: “May your soul rest in eternal peace.”



# A POINT TO PONDER: LONGEVITY, GOOD HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

*By Wong Kow*

Over the past century or so, the life-span of human beings has improved tremendously. However, only living a long life, without the cooperation and harmonious support of family members as well as some great friends, may not be a real blessing after all.

Indeed, it was a rare and auspicious occasion on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 2025 when we were invited by Lai Kok Keong to celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Altogether there were eighty-one of us, including the birthday star of the day, Lai Kok Keong, together with his family members, relatives and friends, who were all packed in a restaurant in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur.

Some of us, especially the older ones, have seldom been to Brickfields. Therefore, many of us, especially the older friends, have not met each other for years or even decades. Thus, my wife, Mary, tried her best to bring me around to say “hello” to as many of our old friends as possible. However, the noise was overwhelming and so we had to talk as loudly as we could and I found it hard for me to recognise the voices of many of my friends.

Besides the sumptuous food for the dinner, we were being entertained with a great and wonderful variety show. The music was led by Liong Teck Yau, Godfrey Ooi, Samuel Khor and a large host of others performing an hour-long programme of non-stop music and songs. Some would probably agree with me that the highlights of the evening came from the birthday star himself, Lai Kok Keong, and his nine-year old relative. With their singing and music, we were given the opportunity to witness a superb birthday show of singers ranging from nine to ninety years of age.

Indeed, over the past ninety years, Kok Keong’s life journey has not been easy-going through all the ups and downs. Born in the year of 1935, Kok Keong’s schooling years were very much interrupted by the Second World War. Thus, he could only begin his education at a Chinese primary school in 1946 when he was already eleven years of age.

Then in 1949, Kok Keong moved with his parents to live in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur in the year of 1949. It was at this time when Kok Keong began to realise that he could not continue with his schooling because of his failing eyesight.

Fortunately, it was around this time in the 1950s when the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) had been established and the Gurney Training Centre had been set up a few years later. Thus, Kok Keong was one of the early birds to be admitted to the GTC for training. However, as Kok Keong had just received a few years of Chinese school education, he could only be given training as a basket weaver.

Fortunately, Kok Keong was, and still is, a very ambitious person. And so while working as a basket-maker, and later on as a factory worker, he would spend whatever leisure time he had to improve himself. For example, he would work diligently in order to widen his knowledge in the Chinese language and to pick up English lessons through whatever possible means. Kok Keong was certainly not satisfied with just spending his precious time in merely working as a hard labourer. He fervently believed that deprivation of the golden opportunity to receive formal education should not prevent him from making his dreams come true.

Kok Keong believed that as the saying goes, “where there’s a will, there is a way”. And so while still working as a basket-weaver or a factory worker, Kok Keong was still very open-minded

Kok Keong was still very open--minded in meeting and talking with other people. Thus, Kok Keong was able to widen his knowledge in all the aspects of living. Besides gaining the assistance of some friends, he also pursued his hobby of reading braille materials as well as listening to the radio for his favourite programmes, all of which enabled him to achieve his life goals.

Truly, Kok Keong realised that “Time waits for no man”. Therefore, he did not allow himself to lag behind. And so in the mid-1960s, he confidently took up conversation with anybody in English. Then he made an application to the Gurney Training Centre for retraining as a telephone operator. When his application was finally approved by the relevant authority, Kok Keong jumped for joy as he shared the good news of another milestone achievement in his life.

Kok Keong was duly rewarded for his great efforts. He managed to complete the telephony course in the speculated period of time. Then he was successful in gaining employment and he worked happily as a telephone operator in a large commercial organisation until his full retirement in 1990.

Being an old-timer living in Brickfields, Kok Keong is well known to almost every blind person staying there. Some of his close friends would nickname him as “*Chinaman*”. But don’t get me wrong – the word, “Chinaman”, here has no negative meaning for Kok Keong at all. In actual fact, he has been trying his best to master as many different Chinese Braille systems as possible commonly used by the blind in Malaysia. He knows that there are various Chinese Braille systems – namely the Taiwan Mandarin Braille, a few types of Mandarin Braille codes of mainland China, as well as the Hanyu Pinyin system. Thus, until today, many blind persons interested in learning Chinese Braille, can still become students of Mr. Lai Kok Keong.

Indeed, according to my observations, Lai Kok Keong still follows a very tight daily living schedule after his retirement. He normally wakes up before 6 a.m. in the morning. Then, after a cup of tea and a simple breakfast, he will do some physical exercises in order to maintain his good health.

He will then go to the nearby wet market to buy the necessities for his wife, Violet Kok, to prepare lunch and dinner for the family. Lunch is at 12 noon followed by an “almost compulsory” afternoon nap. Then dinner is fixed for 6 p.m. after which he will then prepare himself for a good night’s sleep and sweet dreams at 8 p.m.

From the above mentioned time-table, readers will probably notice that I have left out the two periods of time, i.e. before 12 noon and after the afternoon nap. In fact, these are actually the times - around 9 to 12 noon in the morning and 2 to 5 in the afternoon, when Kok Keong will utilise his time for some household chores, socialising, reading and listening to the radio.

If I were a good writer, I would probably continue writing hundreds of pages about Lai Kok Keong. Nevertheless, in this short account, I would just like to examine what we could learn from Lai Kok Keong through his true life story until today, his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

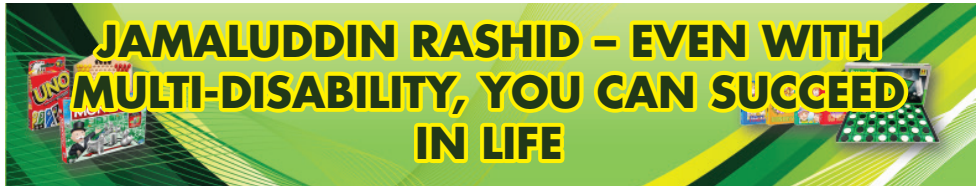
Here are the lessons to be learnt:

1. Lacking of formal education opportunities does not prevent one from living one's life to the fullest.
2. Blindness is just another challenge in life. It is most important after all to venture in the right direction in order to reach your destination.
3. One must always be optimistic despite the ups and downs in one's life journey.
4. One should value every minute of one's time by improving oneself through working, reading as well as helping others.
5. Life-long learning - they are the key words of Lai Kok Keong's philosophy.

Finally, I asked Kok Keong about his own feelings in his life-long journey until today. With a great sense of humour, he said, "Life is full of challenges. However, to be able to solve the problems one by one is interesting and satisfying. It's a real blessing after all."

In conclusion, I am sure that readers would like to join me in congratulating Lai Kok Keong for his happiness, good health and longevity in life and we would like to wish him many, many more of such years to come.

May all your beautiful dreams come true with God's blessings.



*By Godfrey Ooi Goat See*

Jamaluddin Rashid (popularly known as Jamal) was born on February 19 in the year of 1966. Unfortunately, Jamal was born with multi-disabilities. Besides being blind, his right-hand fingers were shorter than normal and he had no finger-nails on both hands and there were no toe-nails on his left leg.

Fortunately, in spite of his multi-disabilities, Jamal was able to receive his primary education at the Sekolah Rendah Jalan Batu in Kuala Lumpur. Later, he managed to receive his secondary education until form three at the Sekolah Menengah Pendidikan Khas in Setapak, Kuala Lumpur.

Jamal managed to carry out his studies with the help of a Perkins Braille. This braille machine enabled Jamal to use braille as his learning tool. This was indeed a great boost for Jamal and it greatly encouraged him to be actively involved in the co-curricular activities of the school. In fact, this enabled him to become a participant in the Nasyid Competition of Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) in the year of 1983 and he was able to emerge as the champion in the same year with the prize of RM 2,500 and a trophy.

Subsequently, Jamal was admitted to the Gurney Training Centre in KL in 1984 and it was here where he took up the telephony course. Then, after leaving the GTC however, it was an uphill struggle for Jamal in gaining employment with the help of the Job Placement Unit of MAB. Applications were made to some Government Departments and even to some banks and their response usually was, “No vacancy, he is blind”.

Jamal applied by himself three times to the Pantai Medical Centre (PMC) and he met with negative response for the first two applications. It was only on the third application when the Pantai Medical Centre called him for an interview.

When MAB heard of Jamal’s success, the Job Placement Officer of MAB visited Jamal at his work-site in PMC and he patted Jamal on the back, congratulated him and brought him the launching grant of RM360.

Thus, Jamal was able to work at the PMC as telephone operator for a period of about eighteen years – from 1986 to 2003. While working as telephone operator, Jamal was able to learn how to overcome various challenges.

Firstly, he had to learn how to cooperate with people from the other races – some Chinese and some colleagues Indians – who were his colleagues. Sometimes he had to work all alone in the afternoon because his colleagues were taking on the night shift. And so he learned how to be alone and how to work on his own. Sometimes he himself had to take on the night shift, thereby learning what it was like to be deprived of sleep and to work all night long.

On various occasions, Jamal had to make emergency calls to the doctors or to the nurses. He had to learn how to be tactful with these people while delivering his urgent messages

Then, in spite of his disability with his hands and fingers, Jamal was able to learn how to play the guitar. And so after leaving his telephony job at PMC in the year of 2003, Jamal was able to take up busking, i.e. singing on the streets, or he would be selling tissue paper. He would do either of these jobs in the morning or in the afternoon or even at night-time. Besides Kuala Lumpur, Jamal would also travel to other places like Seremban, Melaka, Johor Bahru or Penang in order to earn his living.

Fortunately for Jamal, he has a wife who is low vision and with her excellence in mobility, she can lead him anywhere and everywhere that he wants to go for busking or for selling tissue paper. Jamal's wife is Asmah bt. Haron, who was actually his schoolmate when he was at the Setapak Secondary School, and she is older than Jamal by just one year only. They have only one daughter who has got married to a sighted man. Jamal has two grandsons and they are all staying in Melaka.

Thus, Jamal has demonstrated that with assistance and support, he can take on the challenges of multi-disability - blindness and physical handicap – in order to live a normal, independent and fulfilling life.

Jamal's advice, especially to the young and youthful, is this: "Work hard to find a job or anything you want. Don't hope on just one place or just one company or just one thing or even just one person only. In the end, you, yourself will be recognised because of what you do for yourself."

Jamal's conclusion is: "Even with multi-disability, you can succeed in life."



# NEWS OF THE CENTURY – EX-TEACHER MARRIES EX-PUPIL AFTER FIFTY-SEVEN YEARS

*By Ooi Mee Lee*

(Editor’s Note: Ooi Mee Lee has been totally blind from childhood and she received her education at St. Nicholas’ School for the Blind in Penang. Subsequently, she went to the Gurney Training Centre in KL for telephony training.)

Shortly after training, Mee Lee got her job as telephone operator at Universiti Sains Malaysia and she worked there from 1981 to 2017. In the following, Mee Lee narrates an interesting story of how she, a blind ex-pupil, came together with an ex-teacher in marriage after fifty-seven years.)

Here is her story:

It all began with a phone call.

“Hello, are you Pastor Khoo Chock Tiong?”

“Yes I am,” came the reply from the other end of the line.

It was the 7<sup>th</sup> of August, 2024.

Mr. Khoo Chock Tiong worked in St. Nicholas’ School for the blind from 1966 to 1968 – first as a temporary teacher, then as a housefather.

I was Chock Tiong’s kindergarten pupil during the first two terms of 1967. He taught me singing, health education and a subject called Nature Study where all the pupils were taken out to the garden to touch and smell the flowers.

I did not like the smell of Frangipanis but I liked to touch the soft petals of the Hibiscus.

For health education, Chock Tiong would ask us to put our hands on the table and he would knock on the fingers of those whose nails were either long or dirty. I got my fingers knocked once and it was quite painful.

Chock Tiong was also a Scout Master. He taught us many sing-along Scout songs. Two of the popular ones I remember till this day. They are, “Sing Everyone Sing” and “Pack up Your Troubles in Your Old Kitbag and Smile”. How we really cherished those good old days.

We, Ex-Nicholites always remember those who have crossed our paths and have made an impact on our lives. Khoo Chock Tiong was one of them.

For many years we tried to track him down but in vain.

Then that long-awaited day finally came. It was on a fine Wednesday afternoon, the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 2024 when I managed to obtain his contact number from a pastor in a Baptist Church in Prai.

I learnt that Khoo Chock Tiong is now a pastor and that his beloved wife has departed to be with the Lord some years back.

Little did I know then that my phone call to Chock Tiong that day was to change my life forever.

“You’re just like my late husband - your temperament and all,” was what I said to him during our first phone conversation.

I cannot explain it. I just knew deep within me that I would be safe with this man, that he will never let me down.

It was days later when I discovered his birthday is the same as that of my late husband’s, Mr. Lim Kok Gee – the 30<sup>th</sup> of June. Chock Tiong was also born in the Year of the Pig according to the lunar calendar.

Chock Tiong has been asking the Lord for a help-mate. “Lord, if you want me to continue serving you, please give me a help-mate, one ordained by you,” was his humble prayer.

Two weeks before my phone call, something extraordinary happened. Out of the blues, the memory of St. Nicholas’ suddenly came flooding into his mind. Chock Tiong could not figure out why.

We clicked the moment we started talking to each other. We talked about St. Nicholas’, about old times, we sang and prayed together.

We met up a week later and we saw each other every other week. We’re quite a cheerful pair indeed. We laugh and smile a lot.

As Proverbs 17-22 says, “A Merry Heart Doeth Good Like A Medicine.” So the joy of the Lord keeps us going every day.

Recalling an incident at the bank when we were there to change new notes for the Chinese New Year, I got irritated with Chock Tiong for not letting me know earlier how much he wanted to change.

“You should have told me that just now,” I said.

Then he turned around and said to me in his usual, simple, quiet manner, “Sh-sh! This is a public place, lah!”

The way he said it sounded so funny that I started to laugh. What was more hilarious – the lady at the counter also laughed along with us. It was so good to lighten another heart.

I’m a little girl of eight again when Chock Tiong takes me round his small garden. Oh, how I welcome the melodious sound of chirping birds and the awesome fragrance of pandan and curry leaves.

Thankfully, there’s no frangipani this time.

I let out a little cry of pain when something pricks my finger.

“It’s the Bougainvillea,” says Chock Tiong.

Each time before a meal, Chock Tiong would ask me, “Have you washed your hands?” Oh dear me! He’s my Health Education Teacher all over again.

As the saying goes, “Nothing flies like time”. Indeed, time did fly for us.

Soon it will be our wedding day. Tomorrow Chock Tiong has to go shopping for new pants as he has outgrown all that were in his wardrobe.

We got married on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2025 in a small church in Simpang Empat. We wanted a very simple wedding reception just amongst close relatives and a few friends. But it turned out to be one we least expected.



Pneuma Church was jam-packed. Friends came from as far as KL to witness the happy occasion.

Chock Tiong and I were overjoyed. We couldn't have asked for more.

I do not see my husband's handsome face, but I know he's got perfect posture. He stands up straight and tall.

I do not see him smile, I do not see him frown. His voice speaks it all.

I do not see God's beautiful creation such as the pretty rainbow, or the clear blue sky, or the moon that shines at night.

But I can see and feel the beauty and splendour that human companionship can bring to a lonely heart.

At our golden age, it is real joy to have someone whom we can talk to, to laugh with, and to share tales of by-gone days.

We behold God's bountiful blessings in this area now that we have become one by his Amazing Grace and Miracle.

Praise Him from whom all blessings flow.



**Cesare Pavese:**

We do not remember days; we remember moments.

**Maria Runyan:**

Don't listen to negative influences. Believe in yourself and show others what you can do. Only you can find your potential.

**Robert A. Heinlein:**

Being a mother is an attitude. It is not necessarily a biological relation.

**Anonymous:**

Live simply; but don't simply live.

**Anonymous:**

A bend in the road is not the end of the road.

**Elbert Hubbard:**

No one ever gets far unless he accomplishes the possible at least once a day.

**John Galsworth:**

Idealism increases in direct proportion to one's distance from the problem.

**Anonymous:**

Wise men speak because they have something to say. Fools because they have to say something.

**Charlie Chaplain:**

A day without laughter is a day wasted.

**Political Philosophy:**

There are no permanent enemies and no permanent friends.

**Political Wisdom:**

A rumour is not true until it is denied.

**Anonymous:**

Be happy, not because everything is good, but because you can see the good side of everything.

**Mark A. Riccobono, President of National Federation of the Blind, USA:**

Dignity is inherent, but upholding it is a choice – a choice of self-determination and a choice of mutual respect.



**Confucius:**

The gentleman agrees with others without being an echo. The small man echoes without being in agreement.

The Junzi and the petty behave very differently – the Junzi enters into association but not cliques; the small man enters into cliques but not associations.

(Taken from Confucius From the Heart by Professor Yu Dan. Translated by Esther Tyldesley)

**John Lewis**, in his 2017 memoir- Across that Bridge, a Vision of Change and the Future of America:

You are a light; you are the light. Never let anyone – any person or any force – dampen, dim, or diminish your light.

Study the path of others to make your way easier and more abundant.

**Plato in the Republic:**

Forming character – With anything young and tender, the most important part of a task is the beginning of it. This is because that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken.

**Anonymous:**

Strength grows when we dare. Unity grows when we pair. Love grows when we share. And relationships grow when we care.

**Anonymous:**

A happy person is happy not because he is right in everything of his life but because his attitude towards everything of his life is right.

**Anonymous:**

The bad and good in life – bad things could happen any time in your life. As for good things to happen in your life, you have to work at them in order to make them happen.



Readers are invited to write for our publication, NCBM Outreach. For articles published, payments are as follows:

1. Original articles on the struggles and achievements of blind people or of an inspirational nature – (about 500 words or more) – RM80
2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words or more) – RM80
3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250/500 words or more) – RM40/RM80
4. Poems which are personal compositions depicting experiences of a blind person (about 50/100 words) – RM40/RM80
5. Interesting tidbits, jokes or other information taken from magazines or other documents of limited circulation – RM15

(Note: For all articles submitted and used for the magazine, other than news, payment will be made).



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