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Blind Musicians in the World of Entertainment

By Zahari Hashim

Blind persons such as Ray Charles, Jose Feliciano and Stevie Wonder are among the big names in the entertainment world of the west and they have successfully demonstrated their talents and abilities. In our country, we have a disabled entertainer who is still popular today and his name is S. Jibing. He has been recognised in the entertainment field as far back as the 1960's. He had the opportunity to record several albums and he still has a following of fans even in the 1990S. In fact, he has produced some recordings together with the late M. Sharif and Zurah. He still appears on TV and various functions all over the country.

This prompts me to ask the question — is S. Jibing the only successful blind entertainer in this country? Why haven't other blind singers received the same attention as S. Jibing? I believe there are many more blind persons who could emulate S. Jibing's good example. What

is preventing these people from emerging into the limelight?

Among the blind artistes who have recorded albums and appeared on TV include A. Kadir Jailani, Alfred Ho, Abu Zarin Maarof, Zalina Hassan, Azila Abdul Samad, Ramlah Mohamad and Ramlah Rahmat. Other blind persons too have appeared on TV but never had the opportunity to produce an album such as Godfrey Ooi, Rohani Zawawi, Adam Lee Soon Kiat and Abdul Rahman Albaladi.

Concerning pop groups, The Braille Boys and The Mini Braille Dots are among the bands of blind musicians who have recorded albums. Meanwhile, a nashid group from the Setapak Special Secondary School for the Blind has carved a name for themselves towards the end of the 1970's and they sometimes appear on TV or they are heard over the radio network. This group reached the peak of success when they were

given the honour of making a presentation in conjunction with the International Tilawah Also-Quran Reading Competition at the Merdeka Stadium in Kuala Lumpur during the 1970's. It's a pity that's the end for them because they did not draw the attention of any recording companies.

Every year talentimes are organised for the blind by various organisations serving the blind. The objective is to hunt for talented artistes among the blind. Some of them emerged as champions year after year but they have always been awarded cash prizes only. So far none of them have received the offer to produce an album. And so their opportunities to make a break ultimately vanish into thin air.

Now an important step has been taken by the Malaysian Association for the Blind with the setting up of a fully equipped music room to promote the formation of bands among the blind, especially in the Klang Valley.

MAB has taken the lead and other similar organisations should emulate MAB's good example. The facilities provided by MAB has led to the mushrooming of many bands of blind musicians.

The emergence of these bands has opened up new opportunities for the blind to develop their musical talents. Some of the blind are also able to derive a source of income by playing with the bands. On the other hand, no constructive efforts are being made to develop the talents of these musicians and they are just allowed to drift as they will. The musical instruments are still very conventional and they are exactly the same as those of 20 or 30 years ago—three guitars, one keyboard and a drum set. Other string or brass instruments have yet to be introduced. The blind still sing the old songs although there is some interest in performing rock music. We have yet to hear blind persons giving their rendition of R & B or rap. The new songs in English are hardly heard among the blind these days.

In my view, something must be done to bring about a much clearer focus in developing and promoting music among the blind if they are to have the chance of making it in today's

entertainment world. I strongly feel that the organisations serving the blind can play an important role in this direction. Otherwise the blind will merely remain as street musicians in the eyes of the public. Music as a rewarding career is well known among the sighted, especially those who are involved in the production of music albums or in composition and music arrangement. Recently, a blind music composer has suddenly emerged in our country and his name is Harun Ahmad. All of a sudden, the song recorded by Jasnita is being whistled here and there. I am sure Harun could easily compose many more songs that are catchy and interesting and they may have the potential of bringing greatness to some of our local blind musicians.

Ultimately, we must all think and work together in making a paradigm shift concerning the development and promotion of music so that opportunities will be made available for the capable blind musicians to discover their talents. We need to give them a hand if such talents are to emerge and to be able to make it not only in Malaysia but on the international scene as well.

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

NCBM

Tel: 03-2272 4959

03-2272 1442

MAB

Tel: 03-2272 2673

03-2272 2677

Penglibatan OKU dalam Dunia Hiburan

Oleh: Zahari Hashim, Kuala Lumpur.

Ray Charles, Hose Feliciano dan Stevie Wonder adalah antara nama-nama besar OKU penglihatan yang telah berjaya menyerlahkan bakat dan kebolehan mereka dalam dunia hiburan khususnya di barat. Di negara kita, satu-satunya penghibur kurang upaya yang masih bertahan sehingga hari ini ialah S. Jibing. Beliau telah berkecimpung dalam dunia hiburan tempatan sejak dari tahun-tahun enam puluhan lagi. Beliau telah diberi peluang untuk merakamkan beberapa album. Dalam tahun-tahun sembilan puluhan pun beliau masih lagi diminati. Beliau ada merakam beberapa buah album lagi bersama dengan Allahyarham M. Sharif dan Zurah 2. Beliau masih diundang untuk muncul di kaca tv dan membuat persembahan di berbagai majlis di seluruh negara ini.

Persoalannya, S. Jibing seorang sajakah penghibur kurang upaya penglihatan yang berbakat besar dalam nyanyian di negara kita ini? Kenapa orang kurang upaya penglihatan yang lain tidak mendapat perhatian sama

seperti S. Jibing? Saya percaya, ramai lagi yang mampu menurut jejak S. Jibing dalam negara kita ini. Di mana silapnya hingga kebolehan dan bakat mereka ini tidak dapat ditonjolkan?

Antara nama-nama insan seni kurang upaya penglihatan yang pernah mendapat peluang untuk merakamkan suara ke dalam album dan muncul di kaca tv ialah A. Kadir Jailani, Alfred Ho, Abu Zarin Maarof, Zalina Hassan, Azila Abd. Samad, Ramlah Mohamad dan Ramlah Rahmat. Selain daripada mereka, ada beberapa orang lagi yang pernah muncul di kaca tv tetapi tidak berpeluang merakamkan suara ke dalam album seperti Godfrey Ooi, Rohani Zawawi, Lee Soon Kiat (Adam) dan Abd. Rahman Albaladi.

Secara berkumpulan pula, The Braille Boys and The Mini Braille Dots adalah antara band oku penglihatan yang pernah merakamkan lagu dalam album. Sementara kumpulan nasyid daripada Sek. Men. Pen. Khas Setapak pchla telah mengukir

namanya yang tersendiri di sekitar penghujung tahun-tahun tujuh puluhan. Mereka kerap muncul di kaca tv dan sering berkumandang menerusi corong-corong radio. Kemuncak kegemilangan kumpulan ini ialah apabila mereka diberi penghormatan membuat persembahan sempena pertandingan tilawah membaca Also-Quran peringkat antarabangsa di Stadium Merdeka, Kuala Lumpur pada penghujung tahun-tahun tujuh puluhan. Sayangnya mereka tidak mendapat perhatian daripada syarikat-syarikat rakaman untuk membuat album. Bakat seni besar yang ada pada ahli-ahli kumpulan tersebut terbiar begitu sahaja. Akhirnya, kumpulan nasyid ini berkubur begitu sahaja tanpa batu nesan.

Saban tahun, pertandingan-pertandingan bakat suara dianjurkan oleh berbagai badan/persatuan untuk oku penglihatan di negara. Tujuan dan objektifnya sudah tentulah ingin mencari oku penglihatan yang paling berbakat dalam

bidang nyanyian. Di akhir pertandingan, para pemenang mendapat hadiah. Tahun berikutnya, mereka menyertai satu lagi pertandingan bakat. Ada yang menang berkali-kali. Bentuk hadiah yang diterima pun lebih kurang sama seperti yang pernah mereka terima sebelumnya. Namun, tawaran untuk membuat album tiada juga. Ibarat menanti buah yang tak gugur.

Langkah MAB menyediakan sebuah studio yang lengkap dengan peralatan muzik untuk kegunaan oku penglihatan khususnya di Lembah Klang adalah satu langkah yang tepat pada masanya dan wajar dicontohi oleh persatuan-persatuan oku penglihatan yang lain. Sejak adanya studio tersebut, band-band oku penglihatan mula bangkit semula sebagai cendawan yang tumbuh selepas hujan.

Pada satu segi, kebangkitan band-band ini membolehkan oku penglihatan mengasah bakat seni mereka. Mereka juga berupaya memperolehi pendapatan sampingan daripada penglibatan mereka dalam band itu. Pada segi yang lain, band-band yang tumbuh itu kelihatan seperti terbiar dan tiada arah hala tuju yang tertentu. Alat-alat muzik yang dimainkan masih sama seperti

duapuluh atau tigapuluh tahun yang lalu - tiga gitar, keyboard dan drum. Belum ada usaha untuk memperkenalkan alat-alat muzik yang lain seperti alat-alat tiupan atau yang bertali. Para penyanyi oku penglihatan pun masih menyanyikan lagu-lagu lama. Ada yang minat membawa lagu-lagu Rock. Tetapi belum ada lagi rasanya yang mampu menyanyikan lagu-lagu irama Rnb atau Rep. Yang mampu membawa lagu-lagu Inggeris juga sukar ditemui.

Pada pandangan saya, sesuatu harus dilakukan agar kecenderungan dan minat golongan oku penglihatan dalam dunia hiburan di negara ini khususnya lebih terurus dan berfokus. Rasanya, menjadi tanggungjawab badan/persatuan oku penglihatan untuk menaikkan imej golongan tersebut dalam dunia hiburan agar mereka tidak hanya dilihat sebagai penghibur jalanan semata-mata oleh masyarakat.

Muzik mampu menghasilkan pendapatan yang lumayan kepada para pemuzik celik khususnya mereka yang bekerja di belakang penerbitan sesebuah album seperti para pencipta dan penggubah. Salah seorang pencipta lagu oku penglihatan yang tiba-tiba muncul di tengah-tengah para

pencipta lagu di tanah air kita ini ialah Harun Ahmad. Secara tiba-tiba, lagu *Jasnita* menjadi siulan di sana sini. Mudah-mudahan, saudara Harun akan terus menghasilkan lagu-lagu yang sedap serta diminati dan seterusnya mengangkat martabat para pemuzik oku penglihatan di negara ini agar mereka juga mendapat tempat yang selayaknya sama seperti apa yang dinikmati oleh penyanyi-penyanyi oku penglihatan dari Barat itu.

Akhir kata, sama-samalah kita fikirkan apa yang patut dilakukan untuk membuat satch anjakan paradigma dalam bidang seni untuk golongan oku penglihatan agar mereka mampu mendapat tempat dalam dunia hiburan di negara kita dan seterusnya di peringkat antarabangsa. edp

**Some are born
great, some
achieve
greatness and
some hire
public relations
writers.**

(Daniel J. Boorstin)

Announcements

1. Job Vacancy at MAB Library

The post of computer braille clerk is required at the MAB library. The minimum qualification is SPM. Braille and embossing skills are essential.

For more information, please contact Puan Lee Lee Goh at tel. 22722677 ext. 29.

2. National Braille Carnival

This will be on Saturday, June 25, 2005 at the MAB hall. The categories include:

- English reading and brailleing;
- Malay reading and brailleing;
- English reading and wordprocessing;
- Malay reading and wordprocessing.

Three prizes and trophies for each of the categories are:

- RM300 for first prize;
- RM200 for second prize;
- RM100 for third prize.

Member organisations of NCBM are invited to send representatives to take part.

3. What is “Picture in a Flash”?

PIAF—a tactile image maker is a simple and fast way to prepare tactile graphics. PIAF produces high-quality tactile graphics using heat sensitive capsule paper. It is ideal for people who are blind and visually impaired. PIAF’s controlled heat source causes any black lines, letters or shapes that are drawn, printed or copied on to the capsule paper to swell. The result is an instant tactile graphic. PIAF is being used in a variety of educational, employment and personal settings.

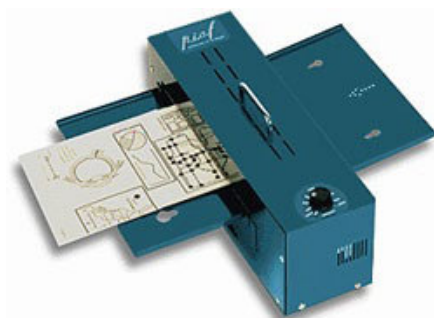
In early education, PIAF can be used to introduce simple shapes and basic concepts as blind children take their first tentative steps to express themselves graphically. This would facilitate the learning of handwriting and signature writing.

In secondary and tertiary education, PIAF could be used to access graphical information in nearly all subject areas, especially

science and mathematics. With PIAF, reasonably good-quality localised area maps and building structures can be produced for use by the new blind students in orientation and mobility training around the campus.

According to En. Moses Choo, “the NCBM is not a reseller nor are we acting on behalf of the manufacturers. However, we are interested in promoting anything that would help the blind see the world better.”

Anyone interested to know more or to help a blind friend understand graphics, please contact Moses Choo at tel. 22721442.



Resolution of the Asia-Pacific Blind Summit Conference 2002

By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

This resolution was presented on October 20, 2002 during the Asia-Pacific Blind Summit Conference at the Osaka International Convention Centre in Osaka, Japan.

The resolution is as follows:

Recognising that the first decade for disabled persons declared by the U.N. and the second decade declared by UNESCAP will soon end with little positive impact upon the lives of blind people;

Realising that all issues concerning blindness and blind people are barely understood by the service-providers, GO's and NGO's and even organisations of other disability groups who often claim to represent us;

Understanding that the next decade for this region is going to be declared and implemented through the Biwako Millennium Framework as the Decade of Inclusive, Barrier-Free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities;

Therefore, be it resolved by participants of the Asia-Pacific Blind Summit Conference assembled in Osaka City, Japan on 20th October 2002 that we, who are blind, together with other sighted colleagues with true understanding of our needs, will give our full support to the adoption of the Biwako Millennium Framework;

And that we, through the World Blind Union (WBU), the only international organisation representing blind people, and its national affiliates, especially self-help movements of the blind, will actively participate in the implementation of the framework to ensure that the rights and interests of blind people will be truly understood and respected;

And be it further resolved that the attached document to this resolution be seriously recognised as the reflection of our immediate needs to be met.

Attached document:

1. In order to secure the fundamental rights and human dignity of blind people and partially sighted people (hereinafter referred to as blind people) and governments in the Asian and Pacific region (hereinafter referred to as ESCAP Region), in close collaboration with the national affiliates of WBU, should take action as follows:

1.1 Enact comprehensive anti-discriminatory legislation for the blind (or otherwise disabled people) and set up an effective mechanism to promote and protect their rights from being violated.

1.2 Support the on-going efforts to develop and finally ratify the appropriate international convention to protect the rights of PWD's by encouraging collaborative networking activities among concerned GO's and NGO's both nationally and internationally by doing the following:

2. In order to guarantee the equal rights and opportunities of blind people in education of all levels, we call upon all governments and GO's/ NGO's in the ESCAP region to take these following measures seriously:

2.1 To ensure that blind children can choose the best educational system in accordance with their special needs by establishing/ strengthening schools for the blind and/or by improving regular schools towards inclusive school system with the provision of adequate specialised services and equipment.

2.2 To ensure that effective and increasing number of teachers/ resource personnel for blind students are well-trained and properly assigned to serve the target group.

2.3 To provide financial support to parents and/or guardians of blind children to reduce their economic burden and, therefore, to enhance their educational opportunity.

2.4 To provide needed support services and/or facilities to blind people so that they can participate actively in all forms of educational activities in the community and enjoy their life-long learning experience

regardless of their sex, age, creed and socio-economic status.

3. In order to ensure the rights of blind people to work, both to secure their livelihood and to contribute to the well-being of the society, governments in the ESCAP region, in close collaboration with WBU national affiliates, should

3.1 Prohibit all forms of discrimination which prevent people from work because of their blindness or visual impairment.

3.2 Provide comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services which conforms to each individual needs, traits and abilities of blind people to make them competitive in the labour market.

3.3 Take the leadership role to widen the employment opportunity for blind people both in public and private sectors by employing them, giving various incentives to private sector and/or by establishing subsidised factories/ workshops.

3.4 Make all efforts to uplift the professional standard for blind people, including massage therapy, recognising the richness and diversity of many traditional practices by supporting comprehensive

study programmes, such as the JICA's initiative in Okinawa.

4. In order to ensure the rights of blind people to have equal access to information and communications which will enhance their equal participation in the richness of cultures and knowledge of the rapidly changing society, all governments and all concerned GO's/ NGO's including WBU and its affiliates should individually and collectively

4.1 Recognise the importance of braille as the most effective writing and reading system for the blind and, therefore, should promote braille literacy through the development, production and distribution of braille materials, giving special preference to the unified braille coding system of each language.

4.2 Support the preservation of existing recorded audio materials and, governments in particular, should provide funding for the conversion from analog to digital format, making use of the most currently accessible and internationally standardised system, such as DAISY.

4.3 Include the rights of blind people to have access to information and

communications in the international convention to protect the rights of PWD's and national civil rights laws for PWD's.

4.4 Work in partnership with WBU to remove all restrictive measures within the international copyright laws which prevent blind people from having access to information and communications and implement such action at the national level.

4.5 Ensure that blind people can fully participate in any scheme set up to promote ICT literacy among all citizens including but not limited to the computer and the internet.

5. In order to promote the independent and safe mobility/travel of blind people, governments in the ESCAP region, in close consultation with national affiliates of WBU, should design and develop the barrier-free environment in the area of public transportation system and all buildings/facilities opened to the public.

6. In order to improve the overall services to meet special needs of blind people, we call upon WBU to develop international comprehensive guidelines for governments and concerned GO's/ NGO's

to follow. National affiliates of WBU should be actively involved in all aspects of development and implementation of such guidelines.

7. In order to improve the physical and mental health of blind people through sports and recreational activities, we call upon all governments in this region to encourage and fund such activities organised by any GO's/ NGO's including affiliates of WBU.

8. In order to ensure the rights to self-determination and full participation of blind people in all aspects of their lives, we call upon all sides to support the establishment and strengthening of self-help movements of blind people especially which conform to the WBU constitution and policies and with special attention to more active involvement of women, children, youth, aged and other minority groups.

9. In order to ensure that blind people in many war-torn countries, such as Afghanistan and East Timor, can receive assistance and services in accordance with their real needs, we call upon all concerned GO's and NGO's to provide assistance and services to them, regarding them as a special target group

instead of engaging in the so-called "one-size-fits-all" policies for all disability groups.

**The attempt
to silent a
man is the
greatest
honour you
can bestow on
him. It means
that you
recognise his
superiority to
yourself.**

(Joseph Sobran,
Universal Press
Sydicate)

What is the World Blind Union and Why We Should Support It

By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy, Executive Director, National Council for the Blind, Malaysia

1. How WBU Came to Be Formed

The World Blind Union (WBU) is a merger of two international organisations whose goals were to promote the interests and well-being of blind and partially sighted people. This merger took place in 1984, in Riyadh, when the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind (WCWB) and the International Federation of the Blind (IFB) agreed to sink their differences and to work together for the common objectives.

WCWB was founded around 1952 and its membership consisted of agencies set up to help the blind and partially sighted people. Most of the officials and representatives were sighted people who, in the minds of the blind and partially sighted people, portrayed themselves as spokesmen and guardians of the blind. Attempts by the blind and partially sighted to have their collective voice heard were ignored. And, even if they

were included in the delegations, these appointed blind representatives reflected the views of their agencies which were controlled by sighted officials who had no grass-root contacts with the blind nor understood their real needs and feelings.

In an attempt to address this imbalance of representation and to give blind and partially sighted people a respected voice in all matters concerning them, a handful of organisations managed by blind people got together in New York, in 1964, to form the IFB. One of its immediate goals was to encourage and help blind people all over the world to form their own self-help movements. The Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) is the result of this initiative. By the time of its third General Assembly in 1979, IFB had grown into a sizeable organisation with over 100 affiliates whose representatives were elected by the grass-root members.

Around this time, 1980, some agencies were beginning to accept the idea of having elected representation in the formulation and implementation of their policies and programmes for the blind. At the same time, the elected blind representatives realised that by working together, more could be achieved through partnership to have a stronger voice on the national and international levels. Hence, moves for the merger began and the words “for the blind” and “of the blind” took on less significance but the conviction that only the blind and partially sighted people can effectively represent themselves still remains. For this reason, the WBU constitution stipulates that at least 50 percent of a national delegation must consist of elected blind and partially sighted representatives. It was under this environment that the idea for forming the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) was conceived (1983) and brought to its realisation a year later.

2. What Are the Objectives of WBU and Its Six Regional Branches

The purposes of ERBU and its regional branches are to work in accordance with the constitution and by-laws of WBU and the resolutions of its General Assembly; to work towards the advancement of the well-being of blind and partially sighted people with the goal of equalisation of opportunities and full participation in society; to strengthen the self-awareness of blind people; to develop their self-respect and sense of responsibility and to provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of blindness.

The functions of WBU include the following:

(a) The progressive improvement and modernisation throughout the region of public policies and practices governing the education, health, welfare, social security, rehabilitation, employment, sports and recreation of blind people.

(b) The promotion of, and the creation and development of national organisations of blind people and organisations providing services to blind people.

(c) The provision and encouragement for the exchange of information and experience between all organisations whose activities relate to the goals of WBU.

(d) The dissemination of relevant information and the promotion of enlightened attitudes on the part of the public towards blind individuals.

(e) The encouragement, co-ordination, and conduct of research and studies in all fields of blindness.

(f) The provision, promotion and co-ordination of technical and material assistance in furtherance of the aims of WBU in areas where such help is required.

(g) To solicit the support of national governments, national and international organisations to support programmes and policies of WBU.

If one takes a close look at the functions given above, they are very identical to those of NCBM. In reality, all organisations formed to help the blind have the same objectives; the difference is how they are managed and to what extent the actions of the elected blind representatives are being accepted and their voice heard.

3. Why We Should Support WBU

As an organisation with over 160 member countries, WBU works for the prevention of blindness and towards the advancement of the well-being of the 180 million blind and partially sighted it represents. It is the sole body with the authority to express collectively the views of all blind and partially sighted persons globally. WBU has consultative status with the United Nations and its related agencies—ILO, WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF and ESCAP. And it has much dealings with other international bodies, such as the International Postal Union, World Intellectual Property Organisation, the DAISY Consortium, International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, International Council for the Education of Visually Handicapped Persons, International Blind Sports Association, etc.

In this age of globalisation, we in Malaysia cannot stay isolated from the events and happenings that are taking place around the world. Policies and decisions made by these international bodies will inevitably affect us, for instance, the issues of copyrights, postal concessions, discriminatory

restrictions on blind travellers by IATA, etc, etc. Yet we realise that in order to be actively involved in all these international issues and developments, we need to have the necessary expertise and financial resources which we do not have. This is one of the reasons why WBU, or as a matter of fact, most international organisations, are represented by people from countries with big and rich organisations, like AFTERB, ONCE, CNIB and RNIB. It is said that RNIB has over 350 staff with an annual budget topping 60 million pounds. In the light of this situation, we need to strategise our support and involvement; in other words, doing a careful balance.

As recently as 15 years back, we were appealing to the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind (now Sight Savers International) and the Christoffel Blindenmission to support that our cause. It is time we should willingly come forward to give something in return. Some of the ways in which we can make our presence felt and to contribute positively are:

(a) In order to strengthen WBU, by playing an active role in the affairs of WBUAP by supporting it to set up its secretariat.

(b) To pay the expenses for the Secretary-general to attend regional meetings which are in line with its development. These would include attending Board and Policy Council meetings (roughly once or twice a year), for planning projects for the region.

(c) To pay the expenses of delegates and other representatives (youth and women participants) to attend the Mid-Term Regional General Assembly (RGA) held once within the quadrennium, 2006.

(d) Allocate an amount to assist blind people in the less developed countries of this region. This could take the form of donating essential items to help the blind children with their educational needs, adults who need certain assistance in acquiring certain equipment or training for employment or, paying the airfares for key personnel (instructors or teachers) to come to Malaysia for attending training courses.

(e) To invite potential youth or women leaders to Malaysia when we are conducting leadership training courses, motivational camps or even to attend local conferences relevant to their line of work.

(f) To organise workshops, such as for the repair of Perkins brailers, orientation and mobility, under-study good programmes in the country, etc.

4. What Can We Get in Return

By being in contact with, and actively involved in WBUAP we, too, would reap tremendous rewards. As more organisations—Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the Nordic countries—are coming forward to help each other through WBUAP, we will get such benefits as:

(a) The recognition that the leaders in Malaysia, both blind and sighted, are willing to build up WBUAP to help its poorer neighbours. We want to be seen helping in the planting of an orchard and not merely waiting to enjoy the fruits!

(b) That people in this region will look to Malaysia for training and exchange programmes, thereby indirectly compelling us to upgrade our expertise and services. The recent example is the selection of NCBM as the DAISY Focal Point.

(c) To ensure that when there

are specialised training courses for trainers, participants from Malaysia are given high consideration. In recent cases, people from here have been selected to attend advanced massage training programmes—Puan Norimah attending the Okinawa massage course for instructors, Cik Noraini Azlin attending a diploma course in massage, Mr. Moses Choo and Cik Roslina Lah attending the DAISY Course for Trainers, and staff of MAB have been to courses in Japan for employment and administrative training.

(d) The Perkins Braille Repair Course funded by WBUAP in 2000 greatly benefitted two teachers from Sabah and Sarawak.

(e) When WBUAP organised the Asian Employment Seminar for the Blind in Brunei in 2001, two Malaysian participants were paid to attend it.

(f) At least four of our blind youth attended the WBUAP Youth Leadership Seminar held in Johor in 2002. This resulted in the formation of the WBUAP Youth Committee.

(g) Two of our representatives were sponsored to attend the Asia Pacific Blind Summit Conference held in Japan in

conjunction with the Osaka Forum, 2002.

(h) Not to forget, that through our connections with WBU, the Japan Braille Library selected Malaysia to conduct a series of ten International Training Workshops on Computerised Braille Production. These workshops benefitted at least 50 persons from the five Member Organisations, Department of Special Education and even some state libraries. The staff of MBP were trained at these workshops, and some of the software, embossers and computers were donated to help start the Malaysian Braille Press.

5. The Contributions of NCBM

I am most grateful to NCBM for supporting me in the post of the Secretary General of WBUAP since being elected at Melbourne in 2000. And for donating materials and equipment (walking sticks, writing slates, braille paper and software) to six countries—Myanmar, Brunei, Cambodia, Vietnam, Mongolia and Sri Lanka. The Board wanted to implement many activities and projects but, due to lack of funds, most of the proposals have remained on paper. Despite

this discouraging state of affairs, it did manage to organise the following:

(a) The RGA in Bangkok and hosted the meeting of the WBU Officers' Meeting in 2001.

(b) The Youth Leadership Training Seminar in Johor in 2002.

(c) The Mid-Term RGA, the Youth and Women's Forra held in Singapore last November.

(d) The Conference on Access to barrier-free environments for the blind, held in conjunction with the 2003 Mid-Term RGA.

6. Conclusion

I hope the Council will make a firm commitment, based on the above information, to continue supporting the work of WBUAP so that it may go beyond just organising meetings and assemblies. While WBU is dealing with major issues, such as the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons, Equalisation of Opportunities for the Blind, etc, WBUAP should concentrate on helping its member countries with the training of leaders and administrative personnel, the

development and improvement of services as outlined under Item 3 of this document.

Prepared by:

Ivan Ho Tuck Choy
Executive Director,
National Council for the Blind,
Malaysia.

An Impressive Parents-Group

By Mrs. Janet Ng

I was invited by Mr. Maniam, the former Executive Director of St. Nicholas Home to attend a Children's Camp that was held during the school holidays in Penang. The camp started on 23 August 2004 and finished on 27 August 2004.

Parents with young blind children were aware that I would be there. They asked if I could conduct a class to introduce braille to the parents while I was there. These parents wanted to help their children who will be using braille when they start schooling. They wanted to learn braille so that they can assist their children in the early educational years. They also wanted to build a better relationship with their children who will depend on braille to study.

I agreed to help them but they had to organise the programme by themselves. I would only conduct the classes. One parent, Mr. Alvin Teoh handled all the arrangements required at St. Nicholas. He gathered the

parents who truly had the heart to learn braille. Ten parents took part in the evening classes that were held throughout the five evenings I was there.

Being sighted, these parents were taught to sight-read braille, the most appropriate method of learning braille for a sighted person. I introduced braille to these parents using the proper system of learning braille. There were, of course, little gestures that were added here and there to make it easier for busy parents to remember the braille dot-formation.

From experience, sighted people can learn braille faster using a method meant for people who see. In this case, I designed my own system so that sighted parents can learn faster. This method proved to be effective.

It was a wonderful time that everyone had. Within the week, all the parents were able to write braille from A to Z on their own. They were able

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PERSON NEEDING
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to write simple sentences in Grade 1 Braille. They could also write simple mathematics! After they had learnt to sight-read, these parents were introduced to the braille.

The beauty I found in this group of parents was that they had one common goal. They wanted to be responsible parents to help their blind children as best they can. These parents came from all walks of life. It did not matter whether the parent was a businessman or a lorry driver. They were not bothered if one was less educated than the other. Some parents spoke English, others understood Bahasa Malaysia and another understood Mandarin. The unity in these parents, their motivation to help each other when they found problems in the assignments given, made me feel good. It was worth spending time with them.

Children were strictly not allowed to be in the classes so that the parents attending the course could concentrate on their work. These parents arranged to have their children taken care of so no child was there to interrupt the classes. The enthusiasm of these parents was tested on Thursday evening, 26 August 2004.

There was a party for the

students who had attended the Children's Camp that night. The parents were asked to be at St. Nicholas early so that their class for that evening would end early. They could then join the party.

The parents arrived early and class started early, as planned. As the class proceeded, we were told that the class had to stop as the children needed the hall we were using to hold a short concert. The parents were reluctant to stop their class. Instead of packing up, they went to the canteen to continue their braille writing. After about an hour, we saw children marching into the canteen.

It was then about 8.30 pm. These parents were only too happy to return to their "classroom" where they could continue their class. After about an hour, Mr. Maniam had to knock on the door and reminded everyone that the food in the canteen was turning cold.

Finishing whatever they were given that evening, they then packed their books and headed to the canteen to have their dinner! Instead of holding a shorter class that evening, the braille class became the longest we had in the five days!

I am very happy for these dedicated parents. For the first time, I see parents of blind children actually doing something that would benefit both their children and their whole family structure. I hope that these parents will continue to grow with their children and be a blessing not only to their own family but to others. They can be the future facilitators for other parents. This, I understand, is what some of the parents hope to achieve. I hope that such parents will continue in the effort and remain united to help others even after their children have become independent. A parents-group that works positively for the good of their children and that of others is what I would like to see in the near future.

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(Daniel J. Boorstin)

Opportunities for the Disabled in Job Promotions

By Mohd. Yasin bin Abdul Kadir

Editor's Note: Mohd. Yasin bin Abdul Kadir is a low-visioned person and he has been working in the Department of Welfare for many years. Some years ago, he was promoted to the post of Assistant Director in the Welfare Department of Kuala Lumpur.

Since March 1, 2005, En. Yasin has been promoted to the position of Ketua Penolong Pengarah of the Agensi Antidadah Kebangsaan in the Ministry of Internal Security and Home Affairs.

Here is his article regarding job promotions for the disabled:

At this present moment, many disabled persons, especially the blind, have been given the opportunity to work in the public sector. This includes those working in management or in professions or as support personnel on the first and second level.

Indeed, we are most grateful to the Government for

having provided these job opportunities. In fact, the authorities are inclined to favour disabled persons who show good performance and are dedicated to their work, particularly those who never go on medical leave unless absolutely necessary.

However, the time has now come for the Government to consider promotional opportunities for the disabled, especially for those in responsible positions. In the advanced countries of Europe and even some countries in the east, the disabled have the opportunity to take up important positions, especially in the area related to policy formulation. The blind, for example, should be promoted to positions where they can make a contribution on matters affecting the blind because they have a better understanding of the needs and challenges facing blind people.

It is also hoped that the time has come when disabled persons will no longer be neglected with regards to the

bestowing of government awards. Indeed, the question of recognising those who provide excellent service has been a hot issue among the civil servants. Moreover, the ability of an officer is closely related to the question of efficiency in the government machinery. It is also hoped that those dealing with the civil examinations will not discriminate against the blind.

In addition, up-to-date equipment should be made available to the blind so that they will be able to function more effectively in their jobs. Personally, my own work requires me to go beyond the time of duty which could be from 6.45 a.m. to 5 p.m. In spite of working for more than eight hours, I am happy because I have job satisfaction. Of course, recognition from the relevant authorities with regards to one's commitment would be most encouraging.

Unfortunately, we need to overcome the assumptions of bosses that the blind are incapable. This challenge

must also be dealt with by the voluntary organisations and the self-help organisations by creating public awareness through dialogues, workshops and seminars.

I am certainly in agreement with the suggestion made by YB Datuk Seri Sharizat bt. Abdul Jalil when she called for a department of the disabled to be included in the ministry for the development of women, family and society.

We must all support the efforts of our government and our leaders who had recently made pronouncements regarding the need of Malaysia's citizens to bring about social harmony, prosperity and understanding among the races; all efforts undertaken must result in benefits for everyone, including the disabled.

Peluang Kenaikan Pangkat untuk Orang Kurang Upaya

Kini telah ramai di kalangan orang kurang upaya khususnya orang kurang upaya penglihatan telah diberi peluang untuk bekerja di sektor awam. Ini termasuklah mereka yang bekerja dalam pengurusan dan profesional, Kumpulan Sokongan I dan Kumpulan

Sokongan II.

Dalam hal ini, kita seharusnya berterima kasih kepada kerajaan yang memerintah kerana telah diberi peluang untuk diterima berkhidmat dalam Perkhidmatan Awam. Namun begitu, peluang yang lebih haruslah diberikan kepada orang kurang upaya yang telah menunjukkan prestasi yang baik seperti berdedikasi kepada kerja. Ini termasuklah tidak pernah mengambil cuti sakit sewenang-wenangnya kecuali betul-betul sakit terutamanya terlantar di hospital, menjalani pembedahan mata dan sebagainya.

Selain daripada itu, sudah sampai masanya pihak kerajaan menimbangkan peluang khas untuk orang kurang upaya penglihatan diberi peluang kenaikan pangkat dan memegang tanggungjawab yang penting. Ini memandangkan ramai di kalangan orang kurang upaya penglihatan di negara-negara maju seperti di Europah dan juga di beberapa buah negara timur tengah yang telah diberi kesempatan oleh pihak kerajaan untuk menjadi orang penting dalam kerajaan terutama dalam perkara-perkara yang berkaitan dengan pembuat dasar. Dalam hal ini, orang kurang upaya penglihatan sendiri yang memahami dan mengerti masalah yang dihadapi oleh

orang kurang upaya itu sendiri.

Adalah diharapkan di masa-masa akan datang orang kurang upaya tidak tersisih dalam pemberian anugerah oleh kerajaan. Ini terutamanya yang berkaitan dengan khidmat cemerlang yang telah menjadi satu isu yang begitu hangat diperbincangkan oleh kakitangan awam. Selain daripada itu, penilaian tahap kecekapan yang telah dilaksanakan oleh kerajaan didapati satu langkah yang amat penting untuk menilai tahap kebolehan seseorang pegawai kerajaan itu. Namun begitu, adalah diharapkan semoga orang yang membuat transkripsi kertas dan juga orang yang memeriksa kertas tidak menganiaya orang kurang upaya penglihatan yang berkenaan.

Selain daripada itu, peralatan yang lebih baik dan "up-to-date" haruslah disediakan oleh pihak-pihak yang berkenaan bagi memastikan orang kurang upaya penglihatan dapat berfungsi dengan lebih baik sebagai kakitangan awam yang diamanahkan untuk menjalankan kerja-kerja yang telah diamanahkan. Saya sebagai penulis teks ini akan sedaya upaya bekerja dengan lebih kuat lagi dengan tidak mengira masa yakni datang awal di sekitar jam 6.45 pagi dan pulang lebih kurang 5.00

petang. Walaupun bekerja lebih masa, iaitu lebih daripada 8 jam dapat memberi kepuasan pada diri sendiri. Atas usaha-usaha ini, pengiktirafan haruslah diberikan sebagai penggalakan bagi memastikan kami sebagai penjawat awam “committed” kepada kerja-kerja yang diamanahkan itu.

Walau bagaimanapun, kita harus mencuba menghindarkan tanggapan bos yang memandang rendah kepada orang kurang upaya penglihatan itu sendiri. Dalam hal ini, adalah menjadi tugas dan tanggungjawab pertubuhan-pertubuhan kebajikan sukarela yang memberi perkhidmatan kepada orang kurang upaya penglihatan dan juga pertubuhan-pertubuhan sukarela yang mewakili orang kurang upaya itu sendiri mengadakan berbagai program sama ada dalam bentuk penerangan, dialog, bengkel dan seminar khususnya mengenai perkara ini. Ini adalah merupakan landasan yang terbaik supaya orang kurang upaya penglihatan sentiasa dipandang tinggi oleh masyarakat dan golongan-golongan yang tidak mengerti dan golongan yang sentiasa pandang rendah kepada orang kurang upaya terutamanya orang kurang upaya

penglihatan.

Dalam hal ini, saya amat bersetuju saranan yang telah dibuat oleh Yang Berhormat Datuk Seri Shahrizat bt. Abdul Jalil yang menyarankan supaya Bahagian Perkhidmatan Orang Kurang Upaya diwujudkan di Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat. Selama ini perkhidmatan orang kurang upaya telah dicampur-adukkan dengan perkhidmatan-perkhidmatan yang lain.

Dalam hal ini, kita harus menyokong usaha-usaha yang telah dibuat oleh kerajaan dan kepimpinan negara yang baru yang ingin melihat rakyatnya berada dalam suasana

cemerlang, gemilang dan terbilang supaya segala usaha-usaha yang dijalankan dapat memberi manfaat kepada semua pihak dengan tidak mengira latarbelakang.

Disediakan oleh: Mohd Yasin bin Abdul Kadir

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(Daniel J. Boorstin)



News from the Malaysian Association for the Blind

Contributed by Wong Yoon Loong and Zainuddin Jasmi

Preparatory Course for Higher Education

In January 2005, a new course was introduced to the Gurney Training Centre. It is known as the preparatory course for entering institutions of higher learning.

This programme is aimed at preparing students who have completed the SPM examination and have the potential to gain entry to an institution of higher learning. They will be equipped with skills in ICT, English language and independent living, thereby giving them a good headstart before launching into the pursuit of higher education.

A maximum of ten students will be selected to take part in this initial programme which will last for a duration of five months from January to May 2005. The modules will include:

Module 1—Information and Communication Technology;

Module 2—English language

proficiency

Module 3—Self-confidence and responsibilities

Module 4—Daily living skills.

The first and fourth modules will be taught by the GTC instructors. An external English language teacher will take charge of the second module while the third module will be in the form of talks delivered by invited speakers.

A similar programme tailored to the needs of form five and form six school leavers who intend to enter the world of work was introduced to the GTC in January 2004.

Accreditation Courses for the Blind

The MAB education and training master plan was disclosed by the Association's Executive Director, En. George Thomas, at a meeting of the GTC standing committee on June 30, 2004. The five-year blueprint charts the way

forward in MAB's efforts to complement the role of the Government in realising the concept of "education for all" by the year 2010, including the disabled.

Specifically, the role of the GTC will be as follows:

To provide certified courses for the blind in order to improve their employment prospects;

—To support blind students who are interested in pursuing higher education;

—To run short-term courses for blind persons who would like to upgrade their skills;

—To provide local and international trainers with skills relating to rehabilitation and vocational programmes for the blind.

In order to realise this vision, measures to be undertaken will include the upgrading of facilities and equipment, human resource development, introduction of new courses, and working towards the accreditation or

certification of courses. Feedback will be obtained from blind individuals, the relevant staff, and government agencies so that the blueprint can be refined and then presented to the MAB Council for adoption.

Job Placements for the Blind in 2004

According to the job Placement Officer of MAB, En. Zainuddin Jasmi, job placements secured for the blind in 2004 were as follows:

Teachers: 6
Telephone Operators: 7
Telemarketers: 7
Masseurs: 11
Administrators: 1
Total: 32

Meanwhile, 65 blind persons are still on the waiting list and the majority of them are looking for telephony jobs. While waiting, a number of them have been placed at the MAB shoppe outlets of the Association where they are gaining experience in selling products made by the blind. Currently, MAB is running two such outlets—the first one was started at the Mid-Velley mall in 2002 and the second outlet at Time Square in Kuala Lumpur which was introduced in January 2005. The two salesgirls are Mageswari dsto Rajasaigaran (low-visioned) and Tay Szu Faye respectively. Both of them are receiving a

monthly allowance of RM600.

MAB Executive Trainee Scheme

The MAB Executive Trainee Scheme was revamped in 2002 and now Khoo Chee Tiong is the fourth post-graduate to take part in the programme. He spent the first month in July 2004 orientating himself by going round all the units and sections of MAB in order to gain an insight into the workings of the Association.

He was then given the option to decide which particular unit he wanted to go to in order to gain an in-depth knowledge of the services being provided by MAB in that unit. He chose the Gurney Training Centre where he spent the next five months from August to December doing practical teaching and administrative work. Through his experience, Khoo had helped the GTC to realise that there was the need to run proper Bahasa Malaysia classes for the illiterate Chinese-speaking trainees under the guidance of a trained teacher. In fact, his recommendation will be given serious consideration.

Having completed his training experience with MAB, he has gone on to a

private company called UC Mas in Sri Rampai, Setapak. There he will spend another six months for on-the-job training experience. During all the twelve months of his training, the allowance of RM600 per month is being provided by MAB.

The other three executive trainees before him were Mohamad Nor bin Don, Pua Ming Hui and Mohd. Hafiz bin Halim respectively.

MAB Education Awards, Grants and Scholarships

On January 8, 2005, MAB presented awards, grants and scholarships to 16 blind students. The function should have been held in 2004 but, due to unavoidable circumstances, it had to be postponed to 2005. The recipients included the six best blind students for the 2003 public examinations from standard six to university graduate level plus five grants for research projects by post-graduate students, and five scholarships for five undergraduates at institutions of higher learning.

In particular, we would like to highlight two of the best blind students. They were Colin Ng Soon Beng and Pua Ming Hui. Colin was a student at the University College

Sedaya International in Kuala Lumpur where he proved to be an excellent student in spite of his blindness and additional disabilities. He obtained a diploma in music with five A's and three B's for his final year results. Much of the credit also goes to Mrs. Janet Ng, mother of Colin, who put in a lot of effort and struggled against many odds and prejudices in order to help ensure her son's success.

Pua Ming Hui obtained a B.A. (Hons.) First-class Degree in Languages and Linguistics. Currently, she is working as an administrator in To-Day Global Network dealing with communications equipment. However, she actually aspires for a career as interpreter or translator. She scored 9 A's for the SPM examination in 1997.

The educational assistance scheme for blind students is backed up by the MAB Golden Jubilee Education Fund which was launched on November 9, 2001 in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Malaysian Association for the Blind. It was originally known as the MAB Scholarship Fund which had been started in 1971 with a sum of only RM10'000. During that period, only four blind students benefitted from the fund.

We would like to say a special word of thanks to the Institute of Engineers, Malaysia (IEM) for having so kindly been the sponsor of the Tun Hussein Onn Memorial Scholarship Scheme which was initiated in 1988 as part of the MAB Scholarship Fund. This scheme was established in honour of the then President of MAB, the late YAB Tun Hussein Onn. It provides a free scholarship of RM6'000 per year. The other loan scholarships from MAB could also be converted either to free or partial sponsorships upon request but this must be based on the performance of the blind student.

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(Daniel J. Boorstin)

Inclusion and Integration: What is the Difference?

Part III

By Wong Huey Siew

Editor's Note: *The second part of this article appeared in the January-March 2005 issue of "The NCBM Outreach".*

Definition of Integration

Integration Programmes for students with special needs take many forms. All of them, however, have the common goal of giving students with special needs maximum social and academic experiences with their peers. Some programmes make use of resource teachers while other programmes make use of itinerant teachers. A combination of these two ideas can now be found in the integrated programmes of some Asian countries. In fact, some of these countries have adopted national integrated education plans which seek to include the best of every kind of service needed by blind students and to keep this in harmony with the idea of an individualised school placement system.

According to the Warnock Report, the idea of Integration has to do with the philosophical belief that exceptional children and adults should live, learn and work in an environment that is as normal as possible. However, the provision of special educational services to exceptional children has been historically a topic of debate. At this time the debate centres on the integration of special and regular education programmes.

In fact, there is a tendency to use the two terms, Integration and Inclusion, synonymously. Fortunately, three ways of describing the Integration of children with special needs have been given in the Warnock Report as follows:

1. Locational Integration

In this system, the integrated programmes are located on the same site as the mainstream schools and the disabled and non-disabled have the opportunity of familiarising themselves with

each other. However, the term, Integration, may be seen as a misnomer in such cases as it does not suggest that the pupils would be in any way educated alongside their sighted peers or, indeed, that there would necessarily be any social contact.

2. Social Integration

In this kind of programme, the children with special needs attend special classes or units but they socialise with sighted children in the playground, at lunch and during assembly. Social integration was thought to be more difficult to achieve than locational integration because of the demands upon teachers, parents and students to adopt or develop positive attitudes. Warnock perceived that at this stage of Integration, the disabled and non-disabled students would engage in social activity, possibly on the playground, or they would consort with their peers in a variety of non-academic settings.

3. Functional Integration

In this system, there is joint participation in the educational programmes and can be more readily equated with the definition of Inclusion discussed earlier. This was viewed by Warnock as the ultimate goal—pupils would work together throughout the school day and engage in all academic and social activities. However, Warnock acknowledged that functional integration would be achieved only with time and after provision has been made for the re-education of teachers and the community at large.

In order to clear the confusion that exists with regards to integration and mainstreaming, a summary of the characteristics of Integration is given as follows:

1. All children are educated in regular school buildings and follow the regular activities and programmes to the maximum extent possible.
2. Children are placed in the same school which they would attend if they did not have special needs.
3. An individualised programme appropriate to needs and age is provided.
4. The programme is

provided in the least restrictive environment.

5. A programme is provided for the most exceptional children in a regular classroom.
6. Special education is provided on the basis of educational needs rather than on clinical or diagnostic labels.
7. Special help and opportunities are provided to exceptional children in the mainstream setting.
8. Out-of-regular class programmes are provided only as necessary to control learning variables critical to the achievement of specified learning goals.
9. Emphasis is given to activities in which exceptional children can participate.
10. Access to the environment and freedom of choice in opportunities are made available.
11. The same schedule is provided for exceptional and regular students.
12. Programme alternatives are provided to help general educators who have students with learning and adjustment problems in the regular settings.

13. Learning in the non-school environment is provided when appropriate.

14. Continued support is provided to these programmes and schools by consultants, special educators and other specialists.

15. Special and regular education skills are combined so that all the children will have equal opportunities.

16. Children are taught to understand and accept individual differences.

17. Parental concerns are taken seriously.

18. Integrated programmes can be adapted to a variety of settings.

(to be continued)



Campaign for the Disability Act in Malaysia

By Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye

Editor's Note: The first part of this article appeared in the January-March 2005 issue of "The NCBM Outreach".

In addressing problems faced by the disabled, it is important to remember that a holistic approach should be adopted. For instance, when providing jobs for the disabled, they should not be discriminatory. The salaries offered should be commensurate with their abilities and qualifications. The disabled should not be relegated to low-paying jobs or taken advantage of simply on the grounds of their disability.

The place of employment should have disabled-friendly facilities and social support systems. There should be accessible transportation to and from the work-place. The employers and fellow employees should undergo some training programme so that they will know how to be supportive to their disabled colleagues but at the same time not to be over-protective towards them.

While no studies have been done in Malaysia, research work carried out in other countries show that it is more cost effective to enable as many disabled persons as possible to become independent members of society rather than keeping them institutionalised and dependent upon state support; they will then be able to make positive contributions to the nation-building process. We must, therefore, tap the capabilities and talents of disabled people because they, like other citizens, have much to contribute to society.

Nonetheless, this is not the most important reason why the disabled should be given equal opportunities and rights to full participation in society. The most important reason is that disabled people are human beings first and foremost and they are, therefore, entitled to all the basic human rights as everyone else. They have the same basic needs to live with their families; to have adequate food and clothing;

to have opportunities for education and employment; to marry, own their own homes, raise their families and take care of their children's needs; and to take part in community affairs and decision-making. Indeed, they have the same rights as other citizens to happiness and a meaningful life.

In 1975 the UN General Assembly at its plenary meeting proclaimed the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons and called for international action to ensure that it would be used as a common basis and frame of reference for the protection of those rights.

In accordance with the Declaration, the disabled have the inherent right to respect for their human dignity and they are entitled to the measures designed to enable them to become as self-reliant as possible.

Furthermore, the disabled are to be protected against exploitation, discriminatory regulations, and treatment of an abusive or degrading nature.

In this context, Article 8 of the Federal Constitution needs to be reviewed and amended to provide that there be no discrimination against any citizen on the grounds not only of religion, race, descent and place of birth but also to include any kind of disability. In addition, legislative reforms in many other spheres such as education, employment, access, housing and accommodation, and the provision of goods and services are also required.

It is truly commendable for the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development to have initiated the drafting of such a holistic piece of legislation for the disabled, covering most of the areas that affect their lives. Its stated aims are to provide the basis for the equalisation of opportunities for the disabled, the elimination of discrimination against them, and the promotion of their full participation as equal citizens of this country.

The proposed act provides for the relevant authorities to take action to prevent and detect the causes of disabilities and provide the disabled with equal access to quality education, employment, rehabilitation services and social security.

It requires the local

authorities to provide access to buildings, transport and information for the disabled. It prohibits discrimination against the disabled in all areas of life and provides for the establishment of a commission for the disabled.

Since last year (in 2002), it has been reported that the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development will table the proposed legislation in parliament in 2003. Today's launching of the signature campaign is just a gentle but strong reminder that the whole community of disabled persons nationwide along with members of their families, the care providers and concerned citizens of the country are anxiously waiting for the passing of this major piece of legislation; we earnestly hope that this can be done before the end of 2003.

It will help to bring change to the lives of millions of people; this is because the legislation will benefit not only the disabled but also their families, the senior citizens, children, pregnant mothers as well as those who are injured temporarily or otherwise.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the passing of the legislation, when it does take place, will only be the first step. Further measures are necessary to ensure that the

Act is implemented and the machinery and structures are set up to carry out and enforce the Act. Adequate budgeting is required in all the ministries and at all levels to enable the Act to be implemented meaningfully.

Even then, laws and money alone will not be sufficient to change the lives of the disabled if the general citizenry remains ignorant and prejudiced towards the disabled. We need the cooperation of the media to bring about greater public awareness concerning the rights of the disabled and why they should be treated with respect. It is a fact that the hearing impaired may be deaf but they are not "dumb".

When talking to someone in a wheelchair, address that person directly, not the person pushing the wheelchair. When trying to help a blind person cross the road, ask first instead of grabbing his hand or cane.

Parents must be encouraged to develop their disabled children to the fullest extent, thereby enabling them to maximise their potential. Parents should not be over-protective, or be ashamed of their disabled children, or discriminate against them.

I would like to congratulate

the organisers of this campaign which include disabled persons of different categories, parents' support groups, and concerned individuals.

I urge the Government and law-makers to listen and respond positively. I fully support the proposed act and call upon the legislature in parliament to pass the Act as soon as possible, hopefully within this year as originally planned. I also call upon everyone here and throughout the country to support this campaign.

Finally, it gives me great pleasure in declaring the launching of this signature campaign for the Malaysians With Disabilities Act.

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(Daniel J. Boorstin)

Achieving Full Participation and Equality for the Disabled Through Special Legislation

By Mah Hassan bin Hj Omar

Editor's Note: Mah Hassan bin Hj Omar is the Chairman of the Technical Working Committee on Legislation which was set up by the National Advisory and Consultative Council for the Disabled (NACC). He is also the President of the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM).

Mah Hassan presented this paper at a forum of the workshop on policy aspects concerning the disabled. The workshop was held at the Crown Princess Hotel, Kuala Lumpur on August 28, 2003. The event was organised and hosted by the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development.

The speech is as follows:

1. Background

1.1 At the meeting of 28th February 1998, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the establishment of the Majlis

Penasihat and Perundingan Kebangsaan bagi Orang-orang Cacat (National Advisory and Consultative Council for the Disabled or NACC).

1.2 The NACC is chaired by the Minister of National Unity and Social Development and is responsible for formulating policies and plans of action, and to review and coordinate programmes relating to the welfare of the disabled in the country.

1.3 The NACC then formed technical working groups for 12 areas of concern as follows:

- National coordination;
- Legislation;
- Information;
- Public awareness;
- Accessibility and communication;
- Education;
- Training and employment;
- Prevention of the causes of disabilities;
- Rehabilitation;
- Assistive devices;

- Self-help organisations;
- Regional cooperation.

1.4 At its second meeting on 24th November 1998, the NACC formed the technical working group on legislation and appointed the chairman and other members.

1.5 The terms of reference for the TWG are:

—To carry out research and review existing laws and codes of practice relating to accessibility and ensure that such provisions are implemented effectively by the state and local authorities.

—To carry out research and review all existing laws for the purpose of removing any discriminatory elements or provisions which may have the effect of creating barriers and obstacles for the equalisation of opportunities and full participation of the disabled.

—To carry out monitoring purposes in order to facilitate the effective implementation and development of relevant programmes and activities.

2. Full Participation and Equalisation of Opportunities

2.1 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by

the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 states that all are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. Article 25 recognises that everyone has the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

2.2 The disabled are members of society and have the right to remain within their local communities. They should receive the support they need within the ordinary structures of education, health, employment and social services. Accordingly, the equalisation of opportunities for the disabled describes the process through which the various systems of society and the environment (such as services, activities, information and documentation) are made available and accessible to them.

2.3 As the disabled achieve equal rights, they should also have equal obligations. Provisions should therefore be made to assist them to assume their full responsibilities as members of society.

2.4 The UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, 1995 identifies legislation as one of the key implementation measures to create equal opportunities for the disabled. It also suggests that it is the responsibility of the government to create the necessary legal basis for measures to achieve the objectives of full participation and equality for the disabled.

3. Legislative Protection of the Rights of the Disabled

3.1 The UN Consultative Expert Meeting on National Disability Legislation for the Asian and Pacific Region held in Kuala Lumpur on 8th December 1993 focussed on the need for national disability legislation to be introduced by member countries. The meeting declared that the main purpose of national disability legislation lies in the adaptation of internationally accepted standards on the equalisation of opportunities at the national level and the elaboration of a comprehensive legal basis for the full participation of the disabled.

3.2 National disability legislation is regarded as a prerequisite for an effective national disability policy. It

should protect not only the human rights of the disabled but also provide for the true implementation of those rights, aiming at their full integration in society. National disability legislation therefore serves two main functions:

—To provide the basis for the equalisation of opportunities for the disabled;

—To prevent discrimination and harrassment of the disabled.

3.3 Rule 15 of the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, 1995 provides that:

“National legislation concerning persons with disabilities may appear in two different forms. The rights and obligations may be incorporated in general legislation or contained in special legislation. Special legislation for the disabled may be established in several ways:

“(a) By enacting separate legislation, dealing exclusively with disability matters;

“(but) By including disability matters within legislation on particular topics;

“(can) By mentioning persons

with disabilities specifically in the texts that serve to interpret existing legislation.”

4. Promotion of a Rights-based Approach to Disability Issues

4.1 The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action (Otsu City, Japan, October 2002) provides policy recommendations for action by governments in Asia and the Pacific region to achieve an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for the disabled in the 21st century. An “inclusive” society means a society for all; a “barrier-free” society means a society free from physical and attitudinal barriers as well as social, economic and cultural barriers; a “rights-based” society means a society based on the concept of human rights, including the right to development.

4.2 Relevant governments are called to actively implement the paradigm shift from a charity-based approach to a rights-based approach in the development of persons with disabilities and to move towards the human rights perspective, especially with regards to the right to development.

4.3 Two relevant policy directions are:

—To enact or enforce legislation and policies related to equal opportunities and treatment of the disabled treatment opportunities and treatment of the disabled and their rights to equity in education, health, information and communications, training and employment, social services and other areas of life. Such legislation and policies should include persons with all types of disabilities, women and men, and people in the rural and urban areas.

—To include disability dimensions in all new and existing laws, policies, plans, programmes and schemes.

4.4 Judicial attitude towards the issue of basic rights for the disabled in Malaysia seems to be encouraging. In one High Court case concerning the Renner V. International School of Kuala Lumpur (1999), after citing relevant authorities from the United Kingdom, Dato’ Justice Low Hop Bing held that a disabled child should not ipso facto but denied his basic rights (as in this case) to education. Financial considerations are to take a back seat and given way to disabled children’s basic rights to education.

(to be continued)

Rehabilitation and Training for the Blind in Hong Kong, Australia and America

Part I

By Wong Huey Siew

Editor's Note: In this article, Wong Huey Siew is taking a very brief look at the educational and training programmes available to the blind in three countries. The purpose is to disseminate information on what others are doing in work for the blind so that the organisations serving the blind in Malaysia could learn and hopefully plan and implement more effective services in this country.

1. Hong Kong Society for the Blind

1.1 Deaf-blind Rehabilitation Training Programme

This programme was established in 1995 with funding support from the Community Chest of Hong Kong to employ a case-manager. The target clientele are visually impaired adults with hearing impairments regardless of their intellectual abilities.

The main objective of the

programme is to provide independent living skills to the deaf-blind according to ability and needs.

The services include a morning glory day acthignity centre-cum-hostel and a rehabilitation and training centre for two groups of deaf-blind persons, i.e. those with low functioning skills and those possessing normal intellectual abilities.

The programme provides training in the following:

(a) Communication Skills

These include body language, inbject recognition, tactual sign language, and use of speech.

(b) Mobility Skills

These include orientation and mobility, and physical education.

(c) Home Skills

These include techniques of daily living and cookery.

(d) Community Education

Referral sources include government departments, voluntary agencies, special schools, and self-referrals.

1.2 Parents' Resource Centre for Visually Impaired Children

The Hong Kong Society started operating the first Parents' Resource Centre on August 13, 1998. The establishment of the Centre was made possible through the generous support of Mrs. Helen Kwok and Master Edward Kwok, Sunnywide Club, and the Rotary Club of Peninsula.

The main objective of this service is to provide on-going support to parents with visual impaired children by making available various resources in order to facilitate the rehabilitation process and development of their blind children.

The target group includes the visually impaired children, their parents and other

immediate family members.

The services provided include:

- A hotline enquiry service;
- Training programme;
- Educational talks;
- A resource library;
- Group activities;
- Counselling and consultation;
- Community education.

Facilities include the following:

(a) Play Area

A variety of toys with different learning and training functions are provided to help blind children develop and strengthen their motor, sensory and cognitive skills. The activities also help to foster and maintain intimate relationships between parents and children.

(b) Reading Area

A variety of reference books, talking books, videos and cassettes are made available to both parents and their blind children. They can listen, read or borrow these materials. Advanced learning equipment and tools such as the cctv are also provided. All these facilities are aimed at encouraging blind children to develop their reading abilities and habits.

(c) Computer Area

A computer with special software is provided to enable the blind children to engage in age-appropriate learning activities which are both fun and challenging.

(d) Counselling Room

Parents of blind children are able to share their difficulties with regards to the educational, psychological and social aspects of upbringing with a social worker who can provide professional counselling and recommend referral services.

(to be continued)

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OF ANY BLIND
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Identity, Power and Loyalty

By Oh Coatsel

***Editor's Note:** As the writer was listening to the presentations delivered by the speakers at the social service convention organised by the Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, Malaysia from December 15-16, 2003 at the Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur, some thoughts came to mind and he would like to share with us his reflections concerning the ideas of identity, power and loyalty.*

To my mind, the three values of identity, power and loyalty are very closely linked to one another. However, the most basic of these is the feeling of a sense of identity and this can only be inculcated if one has the feeling of the sense of power in dealing with one's life and environment. This sense of identity and power can then be translated to the feeling of a sense of loyalty. And in my opinion, the neighbourhood should be the level at which efforts are made by the

government to inculcate the sense of identity, power and loyalty among the people.

From my own experience, there is little sense of identity and power among the people in many neighbourhoods. For instance, when I was staying in Brickfields from 1998-2000, I did not have any experiences of a united and harmonious neighbourhood. The Rukun Tetaingga was supposed to be one of the channels whereby such values of neighbourliness could be instilled in the people. Unfortunately, the R.T. was not an effective instrument at all—it met only once a year and the people in Brickfields were hardly involved in the meeting. No other neighbourhood activities were organised at all.

When I moved to Bandar Kinrara in Puchong, I thought things would improve since people were not caught up in frenzied business activities as in Brickfields. I tried to develop relationships with a number of neighbours but after a while, I gave up as there were no activities or programmes to keep our relationships going.

In the first few months after moving into Bandar Kinrara, we and some neighbours discovered many

faults in our houses such as peeling walls and leaking roofs. One conscientious neighbour decided to get everyone together to draw up a memorandum of protest to the company responsible for the building of the houses. However, most of the neighbours did not attend the meeting either because they were simply not bothered or perhaps they were scared. Eventually, when the company finally responded after the small group of neighbours threatened to take the matter to court, all the neighbours benefited and every house had their walls re-cemented and painted and their roofs re-tiled. I think my family was among the very few neighbours who bothered to thank the leader, without whose efforts we have had to pay from our own pockets in order to rectify the shoddy work on the houses. The surprising fact was that this neighbour or leader was not even staying in our neighbourhood; he only had a house here rented out to tenants while he was staying in Ipoh, Perak—but he cared!

Even for very small things, the neighbours in Bandar Kinrara are not able to come together to solve the problem. For example, I had heard many people grumbling that the authorities have left the humps along the main road

leading to Bandar Kinrara unpainted. This is a bit hazardous, especially at night, when drivers cannot see the humps in order to slow down and avoid sudden jolts.

Neighbours have experienced robberies but no one is able to do anything about it. One day a Malay family got robbed and the father told us that he had suggested a scheme to several neighbours in order to prevent further robberies. However, nobody was interested.

Why is there this lack of a sense of identity, power and loyalty among neighbours? My feeling is that this is because little effort has been made to provide or support structures that can help in the development of such values. The R.T. seems to have become irrelevant for many years but nothing is done about it.

I understand that the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development is thinking of introducing the information referral centre as a temporary measure. The ministry does not want this to be on a long-term basis for fear that the people will become dependent upon them. But I think this is exactly what will happen.

I am wondering whether it would not make more sense to make the housing residents' association into an effective instrument of welfare and unity among the people. So far as I can see, the government is doing very little to support the development of housing residents' association so.

Furthermore, in order for a neighbourhood to function effectively, there must be adequate infrastructure that will facilitate the development of programmes and the holding of activities. We all know that Kuala Lumpur is a city of traffic jams because of the many narrow streets. Sad to say, however, we have not learnt from this living example and the error has simply been transferred to Putrajaya where I am told the roads too are rather narrow. I believe this will definitely have a negative impact on the development of new neighbourhoods in Putrajaya. I hope the mistake can be rectified before it is too late.

**It's time for
the
blind to
help the
blind**

A Point to Ponder: Is It Necessary to Get Angry or Disappointed?

By Wong Kow

If you were to encounter the following incidents, you would be upset. But, would you be angry or disappointed? Or, would you consider to have learnt a lesson?

In the first incident, Johnny went to a finance company as he needed to withdraw eight thousand ringgit to settle an urgent payment. He was sure that he had deposited sufficient money for the withdrawal.

However, it was only after a long wait before his turn for the transaction came. Then he was told by the finance officer that he could withdraw only a maximum of five thousand ringgit at any one time within a day. For any amount more than that he would have to go to the "home branch" where he had first opened the account or he could go to the headquarters of the same finance company.

The second incident occurred on a Friday when Josephine went to a

government office for a certain application. She managed to reach the right department at around 11 a.m. but there was already a long queue and she was informed that she was too late for the morning session. Being a Friday, the afternoon session would open only at 2.45 p.m.

In the third incident, Ah Chong was recommended by a medical officer to see a well known specialist to treat his ailment. Having a proper recommendation, Ah Chong thought he should not have any problem meeting the specialist.

After travelling for a few hours and with so much difficulty, he was told that the specialist was on leave for a week.

There are so many more incidents just like the above examples I have given. They may waste your precious time, upset your schedule or even deprive you of early medical attention. It is natural, of

course, to get angry or disappointed. But, perhaps we need to ask ourselves whether it would be helpful in solving our problems whenever we are faced with such difficulties.

On reflection, we would probably realise that there is no point in blaming somebody else. We would then be calmer and perhaps even a little happier in accepting the fact that one has something to learn when facing such a situation and perhaps we would be wiser and more prepared in dealing with another similar incident in the future. Yes, truly, the key words are, in fact, “be prepared” and “be well informed”.

Well, Johnny could have just rung up the finance company to enquire about the banking or financial regulations. Josephine could have chosen not to go to the government office on Fridays if she knew that she could not be there early enough. And of course, Ah Chong should have made a special appointment to consult the specialist. And, to be doubly sure, he should phone the clinic at least one day beforehand to reconfirm the appointment.

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