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UNFORGETTABLE MEMORIES, PART IV

By Nicholas Lam Yew Khay

Editor's note: The third part of this article appeared in the January – March 2010 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". The fourth part continues:

During those early days at St. Nicholas when our means of writing was just a writing frame and stylus, a common punishment meted out to us blind students was the writing of lines in Braille. If someone forgot to do his homework, the teacher would say, "Write one hundred lines – 'I will not forget to do my homework'".

Some of us hit upon the idea of cheating by brailleing on two sheets of paper at the same time, knowing full well that the teacher would be unlikely to check or count every line. At other times, the offender would be asked to stand in the corner for a period of time.

Mr Ma, the blind teacher, was famous for his "Special Tuition" as punishment. If he caught a naughty boy, he would say in his gruff voice, "All right! You

come to my house on Saturday morning for Special Tuition.”

In addition to this punishment as a form of detention class, Mr Ma would also try to make sure that the offender lost out on some special or unique activity. For instance, it would be “Shopping Hour” for the blind students every Saturday morning beginning at ten o’clock. If a boy had to go for Mr Ma’s Special Tuition, then he would be forced to miss the “Shopping Hour”. Every blind child would be given a few cents to spend at the tuck-shop which was operated by one of the staff.

In fact, Mr Ma was very strict and feared for his punishments among the blind students. One of the low-vision students, therefore, decided to make fun of Mr Ma. While Mr Ma was sitting at his desk, this student would creep up silently and tickle his nose with a piece of string. As usual, Mr Ma would call upon this low-vision student to see what was disturbing him.

The student would emerge from his desk and pretend to look around. “Oh, it’s just a fly, Mr Ma. I have chased it away.”

Then he went back to his desk and almost gave himself away as he tried to stifle his giggles. His class-mates, of course, had a good laugh when he told them what had actually occurred.

Mr Ma was a very fastidious teacher when it came to silence. One day, so I was told, the blind students of standard six were in our class-room which was a few doors away for the Bahasa Malaysia class. As the Bahasa Malaysia teacher, who was a Malay volunteer, babbled on in a boring monotone, some of the students fell asleep while others began talking. Mr Ma was getting angrier and angrier as he failed to get the students to “Keep Quiet!”

Suddenly, amidst the noise, there appeared The Christmas Turkey; it was a male and it was strutting all over the class-room and emitting a clucking noise. Every time The Turkey made the noise, Mr Ma would order, “Keep Quiet!”

When the students returned to their standard six class-room, the turkey also followed them and continued its strutting and clucking noise. However, Mr

Ma just would not believe it was The Turkey and first he blamed one of the girls, then one of the boys, and ultimately the blame landed on Godfrey. As Godfrey was denying that he was making the noise, The Turkey walked out and only when it was quite far away from the class-room did it give out its first “Gobble Gobble!”

Mr Ma then went to Godfrey’s desk, grabbed his arm and landed three hard smacks. He then shouted in a shaky voice, “Do you want to come to my house for Special Tuition?” Of course, Godfrey had no choice but to go.

Another incident involved Benjamin Ampulardon, a Kadazan boy from Sabah, who loved to play with magnets. During one of the lessons, Mr Ma heard a clacking noise from Benjamin’s desk and walked up to feel what Benjamin was doing.

“All right!” Mr Ma said seriously. “I am going to confiscate your toy.”

Benjamin tutted and said, “This is not a toy!”

As Mr Ma walked back to his desk, he said sarcastically, “Don’t tut! You’re too old to be sucking milk.”

Suddenly, to our surprise, Mr Ma burst out laughing. “All right! Do you know what Benjamin was playing with? He is playing with magnets, not toys! Who knows, he may become a scientist one day. You can have back your magnets, Benjamin.”

But Benjamin replied, “You can keep them. I don’t want the magnets.”

And so the magnets were not returned to Benjamin.

Punishments were also often meted out by the housemothers. Perhaps, many of these punishments could be justified because we were up to quite a lot of mischief. Nevertheless, I felt that sometimes the boys were punished for certain actions that were beyond their control. For example, if a child wet his bed at night, he would be made to stand for a couple of hours or even more, thus depriving him of sleep. At other times, the boy may be scolded

and pinched or even threatened with a burning match to his sensitive part.

Of course, quarrelling and bickering among the boys were regular occurrences. One of the boys, Liong Hong Fatt, was rather timid and he stammered all the time. This made him an easy target and so he was bullied by one of the senior boys. I often found myself and my school-mate, Godfrey Ooi Goat See, trying to defend him.

On one occasion, this bullying took on a serious turn. The bully challenged us to a fight and we decided to take up the challenge. The time and place was agreed upon and we went to the venue which was behind the boys' cottage. On the way there, I grabbed the wooden hammer Godfrey was holding.

When we arrived, the bully was there. However, he had recruited somebody else to do the fighting for him. I cannot remember how the fight started except that the bully and another friend of his were urging the recruit to go for it. In the midst of the fighting, I took out the wooden hammer and banged the fighter on the head. We created such a commotion that it attracted the attention of the housemother. She came out to see what was happening and then screamed, "Si leow lah, his head is bleeding!"

We were taken to the office and made to stand for a while. After some questioning, Mr Brohier, who was the principal at the time, gave each of us a few strokes of the rotan.

Later, someone told me that after punishment from the "High Court", I would be receiving further punishment from the "Lower Court", which implied Miss Catherine Cheong, who was then the senior teacher at the school.

I vividly remember the picture of the fighter with a piece of plaster on his head. However, I do not remember what happened to the hammer – I guess it just got lost!

SUPPORT OUR CAUSE

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

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

Donations should be made in the name of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia. Address:

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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Also please remember to include your name, address and telephone number.

For details of payment, please see the last page.

THE 8TH IBSA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In Antalya, Turkey

(April 1 – 5, 2009)

By Moses Choo Siew Chong

Assistant Director

National Council For The Blind, Malaysia

It was my first time stepping into a European country – half European it may be – but the food, culture, language, and currency were all fully European. It was certainly an event that I will not forget easily.

Prior to this event which had been planned for April 2009, all nomination papers had to be submitted by 31 December 2008. Thus, NCBM submitted its papers nominating (Dr) Radha Krishnan as the Asia Continent Delegate in good time.

On the sideline of the IBSA General Assembly, members of the Asia chapter used the opportunity to call for a meeting. The members present were Iraq, Chinese Taipei, Iran, South Korea, India, Japan, Philippines and Malaysia. Nomination of (Dr) Radha Krishnan as Asia Continental Delegate received unanimous support from the members.

We took advantage of this meeting to get to know one another better. Many expressed their interest to participate in regional games and hoped that more of such activities will be organised, thereby building up a greater level of participation among the blind and visually impaired in the Asian region.

As there were many Asian countries that were still outside IBSA, all the participating countries were asked to convince and invite neighbouring countries to become members of IBSA. After all, sports is not only a game but it goes a long way in helping the blind to build their confidence and maintain a healthy life-style.

While most of us who arrived early used the first day to get over our jet-lag, the IBSA exco spent almost the whole day meeting to finalise details for the General Assembly. The Assembly then began on the second day with the technical conference. Topics discussed included the following:

1. The Classification Process
by Dr Bayazit Ilhan
2. The Anti-doping Code
by Andrei Sukhov.

After the presentations, the Assembly was divided into two workshops. One of the workshops was hosted by Ms Jane Blaine focussing on swimming while the other workshop was hosted by Mr. Michael Berthezine focussing on athletics and other sports.

I joined the workshop on swimming in which the discussion mainly revolved around the idea concerning the present method of classification which disadvantaged many swimmers who were classified as B2. This interested me greatly as I had been classified under the B2 category.

The range covered by this category of B2 is from being able to recognise the shape of a hand from a given distance to being able to see most of the things in the surrounding area. Many were of the view that those on the lower end of the scale would certainly be at a disadvantage. Thus, it was recommended that those categorised under B2 should be divided into sub-categories. The ultimate decision will be made by the Medical Classification Committee.

After lunch there were two more presentations:

1. The Development of Blind Sports over the past five years in Turkey
By Ferhat Esat Beyoglu
2. Report on Judo
By Jean-Claude Prieur.

The day ended with video presentations from Sweden and Turkey regarding the hosting of the next IBSA World Games.

The 8th IBSA General Assembly proper began on 3 April with all the welcome notes and reports. An interesting point to note was that although the treasurer, Ms Silvia Aldini was not around to present her report, she was still nominated and she was elected uncontested. She will, therefore, be in office for another four years.

Twelve widely ranging motions were passed which include the following:

1. Quorum:

To ensure that there would be a quorum, 24 of the member-countries who had not been paying their dues for a couple of years were termed as “Inactive”. Thus, with only 78 countries as members, the 38 member-countries who were present could provide the quorum needed.

2. Motions Submitted By Canada:

2.1 That the Executive Committee explore and pursue the securing of a permanent office and staff for IBSA, including seeking funding and support for the office and seeking bids from IBSA members for the location of the permanent office.

2.2 That IBSA work with all parties involved to ensure on-going appropriate and quality opportunities for athletes who are totally blind, in particular athletes who are congenitally totally blind or who acquired their total blindness early in life.

2.3 That IBSA create an Athlete’s Council made up of athlete representatives for each sport who are elected by athletes competing in that sport at IBSA Championships in that sport. Athlete rep nominees will be required to be nominated by their IBSA member-nation and the Athlete’s Council will elect their chairperson from within.

3. Motion From Ireland:

The title “Technical Director” be replaced by “Sports Director” and the “Continental Delegate” by “Continental Chairman”.

4. Motions From Iran:

4.1 Inclusion of Braille Chess in IBSA Sports.

4.2 Awards To Be Given For Athletics and Tandem-cycling Guides.

The 8th General Assembly ended with the election of a new Executive Committee. The four main positions were:

President : Mr Michael Barredo – Philippines

Vice President : Mr Gary Steve – Canada

General Secretary: Mr Mesut – Turkey

Treasurer : Ms Silvia Aldini – Italy.

Personal Observations:

In summing up, I would like to present some of my personal observations. While everyone will agree that sports will always be an expensive event, sending teams to compete in international events can help to gauge the level of development in sports for the blind in our country. Such events also foster interaction, sharing and learning, particularly among the blind from different countries.

In fact, the process of preparing for such sporting events necessitates the inculcation of discipline among the blind participants, encourages information exchange, and provides opportunities to learn from the invaluable experiences of life.

While the escorts accompanying our athletes have become a normal practice, I feel that providing too many accompanying persons may result in depriving the blind of their independence.

Finally, the trip to Turkey has given me an excellent opportunity to network with most of the leaders of IBSA. I believe this will certainly enhance the working relationship between NCBM and IBSA when it comes to dealing with sports for the blind.

My disappointment, however, was in noting that in most of the countries, the membership to IBSA is being held by cross-disability organisations rather than blindness-specific organisations. This could imply that organisations serving the blind are not capable of handling sports for the blind.

Or perhaps the cross-disability organisations may have realised that while sports for the blind is expensive, the funds are available and they have grabbed the opportunity before the rest. The answer will show as and when more of such organisations are formed.

THE ADVANCEMENT OF BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED WOMEN

By Clarice Irene Benedict Moiji

Editor's note: When Clarice Moiji wrote this report, she is the first chairperson of the NCBM Committee on the Advancement of Blind and Visually Impaired Women. Here is her report on the initial activities implemented by the Committee.

The NCBM Committee on the Advancement of Blind and Visually Impaired Women is doing well. Two Committee meetings have been held – one in Kota Kinabalu and one in Kuala Lumpur.

The Committee successfully organised a seminar on Legal Rights Awareness and Family Life Management of Blind and Visually Impaired Women. The seminar was held in Kota Kinabalu on 16 July, 2009. A total number of 50 blind women from all over the state of Sabah took part and we are most grateful to NCBM for having sponsored the seminar. Similar seminars will be held in Sarawak and Penang in the near future followed by one major event in Kuala Lumpur. This event will include some competitive events such as cooking, cake making, basket weaving and floral arrangement.

The vision and mission of the CAW unit clearly states that this Committee will carry out activities to ensure that no blind or visually impaired woman is left out in our fast developing society. It will advocate for all blind and visually impaired women in Malaysia to be given their just rights and proper place in society.

Indeed, the Committee is serious in pursuing its objectives and a Plan of Action has been drawn up for implementation in the next one year or so. With the support of NCBM and member-organisations, I believe we will succeed in bringing about a better deal for blind and visually impaired women in this country.

WBUAP REPORT

*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy
Secretary-general
World Blind Union – Asia Pacific*

1. The WBUAP quadrennial Plan Of Action:

The QPA was presented by Dato' S. Kulasegaran at the WBUAP Board meeting for adoption. The Plan will now be pursued at the Central Level and by the sub-regional chairpersons at every possible opportunity.

2. The SEARC Meeting:

While attending the WBUAP – DAB (Danish Association of the Blind) visionary conference in Laos from 4 – 8 May, 2009, the SEARC chairman, Dato' S. Kulasegaran, convened a meeting on the morning of 4 May in which seven countries from this sub-region of South-East Asia were present (With representatives from Japan as observers). This provided an excellent opportunity for the members to exchange information and views concerning activities and programmes in the respective countries.

In order to bring about more effective networking among members and countries, it was agreed to adopt a Quadrennial Plan of Action for SEARC (based on the WBUAP QPA). Each country would appoint a coordinator to liaise with the WBU and WBUAP secretariats, and they will help to implement the other provisions of the QPA when and where possible.

It was also agreed that the chairman and secretary-general would lobby strongly for the new WBUAP-DAB project to involve Myanmar, Indonesia and Vietnam in the order of priority, and to include Philippines, Timor Leste and Brunei if funds permitted.

3. The WBUAP – DAB Visionary Conference:

This Conference was held in Vientiane, Laos from 4 – 8 May and it was attended by nine countries seeking assistance. Two countries benefiting from the current project are Laos and Mongolia.

The purpose of the Conference was to assess the initial progress of the

current capacity-building project (Which will end in 2009) in order to determine which of the SEARC countries will be the next project partners. Recommendations were also to be made for a new project proposal to source funding from the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA).

For this purpose, the participants adopted the Vientiane Visionary Statement which sets out in broad outlines the aspirations and determination of the WBUAP Board and DAB to achieve the points contained therein.

An evaluation conference was subsequently held in Mongolia from 16 – 18 September 2009 to assess the progress made by Laos and Mongolia during the period between 2006 and 2009. Based on the findings, it was decided that assistance to these countries could be continued.

4. WBUAP Board Meeting:

This was held in Seoul, South Korea from July 10 – 13 2009 at the Hilton hotel. Issues discussed included the following:

4.1 To Approve New Board Members from Japan And Malaysia

Prof. Yoshikawa and myself were elected to be the new Board Members, thereby replacing Chuji Sashida and Norimah respectively.

4.2 10th WBUAP Massage Seminar:

This will be held in May 2010 in Seoul. Registration fee will be RM300 with accommodation at RM100 per day.

The theme will be “New Challenges Through Exchange And Self-Esteem In Promoting Massage”. Experts will be invited from Europe or U.S.A. with demonstrations by massage experts from China, Korea and Thailand.

4.3 Training For Blind Trainers In Massage:

This Programme will be hosted by China in Changsa, Hunan province and sponsorships will be provided by China for blind massage trainers to attend. The course will be held over a period of two months.

Conclusion:

On the whole, 2009 has been a good and productive year in terms of learning and sharing. We are hopeful that the activities and programmes that have been put in place will yield positive results for the betterment of the blind in the WBUAP region.

WBUAP REPORT

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Deputy Executive Director

Malaysian Association For The Blind

(For the seminar on Special Education Needs organised by Universiti Malaya July 20 – 22nd, 2009)

Editor's note: The first part of this article appeared in the January – March 2010 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". Here is the second part of the article.

The Potential Of Learning By Touch:

In spite of the experiences I have had as a blind child, I believe much more can be done to expose blind children to the process of Learning by Touch. In the 1960s, St. Nicholas had a principal who was very keen to have a secondary school programme for the blind to be established on the premises of St. Nicholas. In anticipation of such a possibility, he had set up a Science laboratory which was well equipped with all kinds of models that could be touched by the blind students. I was told that among the models were the male and female reproductive organs made of plastic or stone. In fact, I harboured a secret wish to be able to touch these models and I felt excited that I would have a chance to enter secondary education at St. Nicholas. But that was not to be, unfortunately, because the plan for such a programme at St. Nicholas had been rejected by the Ministry of Education.

Perhaps if the plan had gone ahead, the excellent Science laboratory might have offered opportunities for blind students to carry out Science experiments by touch, something they were not allowed to do in the integrated school setting because the teachers assumed that all of such experiments were dangerous for the blind. Had the blind been able to gain such exposure in

the St. Nicholas Science laboratory, they might have become the pioneers in blazing the trail in Science education and related careers as they have done in various other fields in this country.

This possibility is not inconceivable because we know that today in our modern age of advanced Science and rapid technological developments, there are an increasing number of blind persons, particularly in America, who have graduated with Science degrees. Blind students in the U.S.A. are even being encouraged to be involved in Rocket Science which had previously been assumed to be impossible for the blind. In fact, these blind graduates have taken up careers as scientists, Science researchers, and even doctors and nurses.

Recently, in 2009, the science students at Monash University in Kuala Lumpur initiated a project at the Malaysian Association for the Blind. The objective was to come up with some hygiene standard guidelines for the running of massage centres by blind entrepreneurs. At the discussion with the Monash students, I asked this question: “Can the blind take up Science at university level?”

Indeed, their answer was most revealing – they said that they were intrigued in seeing how the blind trainees at MAB’s vocational institution, The Gurney Training Centre, were able to study anatomy by touching human models in order to learn the techniques in massage and reflexology. The Monash students were of the view that Science education could be applied in the same way for the blind in tertiary education. Truly, this was an eye-opener, even for me!

In 2007 MAB was also involved in a pilot project to introduce the abacus and Mental Arithmetic to the blind children at the Jalan Batu Primary School in Kuala Lumpur. This was actually a collaborative project between MAB and UC Mas, a private educational institution. Proof of the project’s success was evident at the closing ceremony held on 28 March, 2009. By using a modified form of the abacus for the blind, three of the blind students from the Jalan Batu School were able to demonstrate the calculation skills that they had learnt. The ultimate objective of Mental Arithmetic (as taught by UC Mas is to enable one to do quick calculations by just simply referring to

the imaginative abacus in the mind. I believe this programme would be very beneficial to the blind because it can help them to develop their visualisation skills by touch; dealing with the abacus would help to bring about great improvements in performance of the blind in Mathematics. Traditionally, it has been assumed that the blind people are naturally weak in Maths and so nothing can be done about it.

However, the abacus demo had proved that the blind can be trained to acquire visualisation skills which can be useful not only for Maths but also for Science. The Director for Special Education was at the closing ceremony and he was very impressed with the performance put up by the three blind students. He promised that he would do his best to support future efforts to introduce Mental Arithmetic to the blind in government education programmes throughout the country.

How To Implement Learning By Touch:

In 2007 MAB was running a Braille Reading Programme for blind children in the Klang valley. In the process of teaching the blind children some tactile skills, we became keenly aware that there was a need for a systematic programme in the formal education system in order to help the blind develop their tactile abilities to a much greater extent; and it would be better if this could be done right from the early years of childhood. In fact, it should begin from the level of pre-school and primary education; at the same time, this programme should also be introduced to the rehabilitation and vocational training programmes for the adult blind.

At this juncture, I must point out that it was Moktar Soon, a partner in the Braille Reading Programme for Blind Children, who had made me aware and helped me to gain a deeper understanding about the learning process by touch. During the 1970s he was in an Australian teacher-training college for a number of years. It was during this time that he had picked up some essential knowledge on this learning process. Unfortunately, he did not have the opportunity to share this idea with anyone earlier on.

While it is true that in past years, tactile and embossed materials were already in use for the blind in education, such resources were very limited. In spite of this, nevertheless, these materials did play quite a significant role

in meeting the educational needs of the blind for maps in Geography as well as diagrams, charts and models in Maths and Science. Important as they were, however, tactile materials were actually rather scarce because they were quite costly in terms of time and money to produce them.

Nowadays, with advanced Science and Technology, there are much easier and less time-consuming methods of producing such tactile materials. While some of the machines for production of tactile materials may still be quite expensive, some of the tools available in the market are now also quite affordable.

Moreover, there is the growing awareness today that learning and acquiring information by touch is a very important skill for the blind. Many more people in the blindness field are beginning to realise that in order for the blind person to gain maximum advantage from the sense of touch, he must be able to develop his tactile skills from an early age.

In rehabilitation, there is also an increasing awareness that maps, diagrams and models can be very useful tools not only for education but especially for the purpose of orientation and mobility as well. In particular, mobility maps can serve as very important aids for the deaf-blind in identifying cues and in orientating themselves to their environment. For the blind in general, mobility maps could be very useful in enabling them to know or understand the location of areas and situation of housing estates, to comprehend how these areas and housing estates are positioned one to another, and thereby to work out their travel routes either on foot, by bus, train or taxi.

Indeed, I am hopeful that this growing awareness will be turned into immediate action to meet the urgent need to bring about the development of proper expertise and adequate infrastructure or amenities to introduce learning by touch and the acquisition of tactile skills by the blind. I believe these are important factors that will help to ensure that the potential and talents of today's blind children are not wasted as they mature and become the blind leaders, planners and entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

For the immediate term, there should be a plan to send personnel every year to undergo short-term courses in the development of tactile skills among blind

children in education and in the production of tactile materials. I believe such a development training programme is available in the Philippines and a start could at least be made. In the longer term, other possible avenues and more advanced training programmes should be explored in such countries as the USA. The long term objective should be to build up a pool of expertise in tactile education and the production of tactile materials. Such expertise must be made available in the schools, rehabilitation centres, and vocational institutions for the blind.

More important, however, is the need for the special education division to be convinced that a policy should be initiated to support and promote tactile education and production of tactile materials for the blind. BPK after all is in the best position to select and assign teachers for training in this important field of work for the blind. With appropriate training, these teachers would be able to play the crucial role in implementing the idea of learning by touch, especially in primary education.

Ultimately, therefore, a definite policy and a systematic plan should be formulated for the benefit of the blind in this country. With the policy and proper plan in place, effective programmes could be introduced throughout Malaysia.

Conclusion:

In view of the fact that learning by touch can make a great impact on the learning process of a blind child and enable him to develop his potential more fully, concerted effort should be made to introduce such programmes. This should be done not only at the pre-school and primary school level but also in the rehabilitation and vocational training services for the blind. I believe this will make a significant difference in the future well-being of the blind with regards to equal opportunities in education, employment, and meaningful participation in the affairs of society.

NEWS FROM THE SARAWAK SOCIETY FOR THE BLIND

MESSAGE FOR THE BLIND IN SARAWAK

Several measures have been taken to improve blind massage services in Sarawak. Firstly, a code of ethics for practising blind masseurs has been drawn up. Soon after this, Dato' Dr Hsiung Kwo Yeun, President of SKSB, had a dialogue with nearly 60 blind masseurs on 26 March 2009. Some very useful recommendations were made at the dialogue.

Realising that the massage industry can offer opportunities of employment to the blind, the Kuching branch of SKSB took steps to upgrade its massage course to a more professional level. A six-month course was conducted by a Japanese volunteer instructor, Miss Akemi Hashimoto from November 2008 to April 2009. The course was sponsored by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and ten blind persons benefited from the course.

Recently, the Kuching Centre received a further donation of RM170,400 from the Japanese government for the purchase of some essential equipment and a vehicle.

ICT Literacy Course:

In order to equip the blind in Sarawak with ICT skills, several courses were organised for their benefit. These included the ICT course for adults held from 9 – 12 December 2008 and a basic computer course for beginners from 16 – 18 December 2009.

Free State-wide Cataract Operations:

This project was carried out in collaboration with the medical department as has been done for about 20 years since the inception of the project in 1990.

In 2009 four operations were conducted and benefited a total of 88 patients. The operations took place in the Miri hospital, Daro hospital, Tong hospital, and the Lawas hospital.

Community-Based Rehabilitation:

In line with the objective of CBR to bring about improvements in the quality of life of disabled people, SKSB extended its CBR services to at least 227 blind clients who were not able to be admitted to any one of the three centres for training or for employment. These clients received monthly food parcels from SKSB.

In the Kuching branch, there are 75 blind persons receiving the food parcels at the rate of RM50 per head amounting to RM45,000 per year.

In the Sibul branch, there are 95 blind persons receiving the parcels at RM75 per head amounting to RM85,000 per year.

In the Miri branch there are 57 blind persons in the northern region receiving the food parcels at RM100 per head amounting to RM68,400 per year.

20th Blind Week Celebration:

This celebration was organised by the Sibul Centre of SKSB at the end of August 2009 with elaborate programmes. This event had been introduced in 1990 and has received overwhelming response from the blind since its inception.

Borneo Cultural Festival:

The Sibul Centre took part in the Borneo Cultural Festival at the invitation of the Sibul Municipal Council. The event took place at the town square from 3 – 11 July, 2009.

As usual, a stall measuring 20 by 20 feet was allocated to the centre free of charge. This provided the opportunity for the Sibul Centre to create greater public awareness of their activities for the benefit of the blind.

On the average, a sum of RM1,500 could be collected every year from the sale of handicraft, massage services and donations.

Mushroom Cultivation Project:

After much consideration and effort, the Kuching branch of SKSB has at long last been able to establish an indoor farm for the cultivation of mushrooms. With the completion of the fabricated indoor farm house, a considerable number of packs on the racks are expected to produce a reasonable quantity of fresh mushrooms. If this project is successful, it would provide the means for increasing employment opportunities among the blind.

The Sibü Centre is also contemplating to follow suit by setting up its own mushroom project for the blind.

Setting Up The New Bintulu Branch:

A verbal request has been received from well-wishers for a new SKSB branch to be established in the Bintulu division of Sarawak. A pro-tem committee has been set up to proceed with the necessary procedures in accordance with the rules and conditions as laid down in the SKSB constitution.

THE CASE OF BLIND LEADING THE BLIND: A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

By Daud Mohd. Amin

Editor's note: Daud bin Mohd. Amin is totally blind and has retired from the government service some years ago. He has also been actively involved in the work of the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM), St. Nicholas Home in Penang and the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM). He has made important contributions in the work for the blind, particularly in the development of sports and games.

In the following article, Daud shares with readers his personal experience in dealing with a fire emergency.

The night of Wednesday, 10 June, 2009 was warm and humid but peaceful. The traffic noise was significantly reduced as the satellite town approached midnight. Even the barking dogs were silent.

However, our two grandchildren were still wide awake even though it was long past their bedtime hour. They pestered their grandma to read them stories and peppered me with so many questions of how and why.

Then my wife, who was exhausted, suddenly announced that we would be visiting my brother in Kota Bharu the coming Saturday. She warned the children that they would miss the trip if they did not wake up early. This worked like tranquilizers and, before long, the children were fast asleep.

With the fans and aircon running at full speed, it seemed like a perfect night of repose. However, a nagging feeling made me go downstairs to make a quick check of the doors and windows.

Then I was about to drift into sleep when a series of deafening explosions broke the silence. We jolted out of bed and my wife, who is a low-vision person, saw the bright sparks and smoke like fireworks looming across the night sky. Then she saw that the flames were above our porch awning – We had to act quickly!

My wife was still in pain from a recent major surgery while two of our children were working outstation. Thus, we had to rely on our remaining son for assistance. While I called for the 999 emergency service, I instructed my son to switch off all the mains, and, if it was not too risky, to remove one of the vehicles which was parked near the gate; I feared that the car may become a fire hazard. The rest of us would try and escape through the back door.

All this while, the fire was continuing to spit sparks and flames so that the homes of neighbours were also coming under the threat of destruction. I told my wife to cling to me as we made for the back door. I carried our younger grandchild and our elder grandchild followed behind. I kept on speaking to make sure everyone was following me in the darkness of the night. I would mention the obstacles ahead such as furniture, posts, and so on. I even counted the steps loudly as we went down the staircase.

Finally, we reached the back door. I hoped I would find the bunch of keys where they were supposed to be. What a relief – they were there! Without turning on the porch-light, I quickly fitted the key in the lock, opened the door, and we were out within seconds. Then we heard some men rushing into the house to grab the gas cylinder and bring it out of the kitchen.

Clad in pyjamas and barefooted, we walked through the dark back lane and made for the front of the house in order to assess the extent of the damage. My wife saw the flames creeping on the ground as they made their way to the front entrance and missed our Waja by a few inches.

I prayed silently to almighty Allah to spare our two-storey house which had cost us our lifetime savings. Among the curious on-lookers were some neighbours were armed with fire-extinguishers and rubber hoses. Then, from the distance, we heard the welcome sound of the siren – the fire rescue squad was arriving.

Within minutes, the raging fire had been extinguished. After inspection, the house was declared safe for occupation. Only part of the porch roof had been destroyed and along with it went a few pairs of shoes, slippers, wooden racks, garden chairs, some wind-breakers, and umbrellas. We thanked Allah

for having spared our lives, our house and most of our belongings.

One of the neighbours kindly offered us temporarily accommodation. We appreciated such true friendship in our hour of need.

The cause of the fire was ultimately traced to the damaged TNB cable leading to our house. Truly, it was a narrow escape for me and my family – what a night to remember!

Before ending, I would like to share some tips with the blind in case they come face to face with a similar danger.

1. Don't panic when disaster strikes.
2. Place all important things and documents close at hand before going to bed each night – keys, wallets, mobiles, torch-light, medicines, important documents and certificates, etc.
3. Make sure window grills can be opened easily.
4. Use only fire extinguishers (not water) to douse electrical flames.
5. Switch off all mains.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: A POCKETFUL OF SOUND AND THE 3GS IPHONE

*By Moses Choo Siew Chong
Assistant Director
National Council For The Blind, Malaysia*

A Pocketful of Sound:

This is a quick-start and buyer's guide to accessible book and music players.

Have you ever wished you could carry a whole library of CDs or audio books with you to college, or your commune, or on vacation? It is possible now with a device that fits into your pocket. However, there are so many choices it can be hard to know which one of these cute little gadgets you should buy.

A Pocketful of Sound will help you decide.

Anna Dresner describes and compares many of the most accessible players, including the Zen Stone; I-Pods; Players Running Rockbox, Olympus DS-30, DS-40, and DS-50; The Victor Stream; The Icon; and many others. She uses the same checklist for each product, so you can quickly compare their features. With detailed descriptions you will learn how to get the most out of your player, including basic instructions and tips for power users. Anna has given each of these products a good workout and shares her personal opinions on each in a would-I-use-it section of the book.

Also included are brief sections on the media-playing capabilities of note-takers and cell-phones, information about how players organise music, links to tutorials and other resources, and services for downloading music and books.

Thus, whether you already own a player or you may be considering your first one, this book will help you rock and read the way you want to.

This guide by Anna Dresner in Braille and PortaBook costs US\$14 only. Please see the website <http://www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/pocket.html> (from Braille Monitor, May 2008 Part 2 page 143, Braille edition)

The 3GS iPhone – An Eye On The Phone

Who would have guessed that the blind and visually impaired are also eyeing the I-Phone? Now with the voice-enabled I-Phone 3GS, the blind are excited at the prospect of a device that will allow them to make calls, read emails, browse webpages, plan music, and run applications on a single device.

When the I-Phone is turned on, a screen-reader known as Voice-Over kicks in and the phone starts talking. It will describe every item on the screen (including battery level, cellular network and whatever is on the home screen).

For the normal I-Phone, a single tap is enough to get things done. In accessibility mode for the blind, it requires two or three taps to execute the same command.

Scrolling through a page requires flicking with three fingers as opposed to just one finger with the normal mode.

In spite of these inconveniences, nonetheless, it is still much more convenient for the blind than having to memorise hundreds of keyboard commands or endlessly pressing tiny arrow keys in order to find what one is looking for.

There is also an option for white text over black, plus screen zooming for people with other types of visual impairment.

Regarding voice control, this should not be confused with VoiceOver which is a screen-reader. Voice Control allows the user to perform tasks such as making calls and playing songs on the iPhone using just voice.

What makes it an even bigger deal is that Apple includes accessibility on the I-Phone Free Of Charge. Before the I-Phone came along, blind mobile phone users had to purchase screen reader software such as Mobile Speak or

Talks Nuance at about RM1,000 per licence. The only other way was for the blind to rely on friends to act as their “Screen-Readers” which meant they lost their privacy.

The iPhone screen is large and is thus very useful for people with low vision. In addition, the clicking sound helps – when you type a character, it does not click until you tap it.

A little known fact even among sighted users is that the voices used on electronic devices are assigned names. The voice on iPhone 3GS is called Samantha while on Apple’s MacBook Pro it is called Alex.

There is also a Speak Auto-Text feature that suggests a word before the user finishes typing it or correcting a mis-spelled word.

However, money is still a factor. The current price of the iPhone 3GS is just below RM2,000.

PAK LAH'S LEGACY FOR THE POOR AND DISABLED: A HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

By Ooi Hock Tiam

Editor's Note: Ooi Hock Tiam is totally blind and he is a lecturer in International Relations at the Universiti Sains, Malaysia in Penang. He presented the paper on Pak Lah's Legacy at the Seventh International Conference on Literacy which was held in Penang from October 7 – 9 2009.

Here is his presentation:

Introduction:

The purpose of this paper is to discuss and analyse Pak Lah's Policy towards the poor and the disabled during the second half of his period in power, i.e. from 2007 till his retirement from the post of prime minister on 3 April, 2009. Concerning the policies during the first half of his administration from 1 November, 2003 until 2008, they have been dealt with in my paper entitled "Pak Lah's Policies Towards The Disabled: A Need For Effective Implementation". That paper was presented at the Fifth International Conference on Literacy also held in Penang in the year 2007.

In this paper, I shall be focusing on the 2008 and 2009 budgets, which will be followed by some comments and analyses based on news reports from the year 2007 till April 2009.

Part 1: The 2008 Budget

This Budget was tabled in parliament on 8 September 2007 by the former prime minister, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. On that occasion, the allocation for the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development was increased from RM739 million to RM780 million. In spite of this, nonetheless, the allocation actually constituted only about %0.1 of the national total budget of RM176.9 billion.

Compare this with the total number of disabled persons in the country which is conservatively estimated to be around %1 (or 250,000) of the total population of about 25 million people. Even by using this conservative estimate it can be seen that the allocation for the disabled is still far below what could be considered as adequate. I am of the view that the disabled have the right to ask for a bigger allocation.

I was able to identify 9 measures in the 2008 National Budget which might be of interest or of direct benefit to the disabled. They are as follows:

1. Low-cost Housing:

Syarikat Perumahan Negara Bhd (SPNB) has plans to build 36,000 low-cost housing units. An allocation of RM381 million has been made available by the government for this purpose. Based on the policy of providing a 20% discount to disabled buyers of such units (In accordance with the provision in the 2004 budget), this would imply that the disabled should have a much better opportunity of obtaining such low-cost dwellings.

2. Housing Loans:

The disabled were provided a further advantage with the government's decision to set aside RM50 million for housing loans to disabled purchasers of low-cost housing. The loans are available from Bank Simpanan Nasional or Bank Islam.

3. Allowance For Special Education Teachers:

This allowance was increased from RM100 to RM250 per month with effect from 1 January 2008. This special Allowance will definitely be of benefit to those teachers who are blind as they can use this money to pay their volunteer assistants.

4. Abolition Of School Fees:

With this abolition, a disabled student can save RM50 to RM100 each year. Consequently, the Ministry of Education has promised to provide free textbooks to all school students. Hence, the Special Education Division has also taken the responsibility to produce Braille textbooks free of charge for blind students.

5. Allowance For The Elderly:

This Special Allowance for those aged 60 years and above has been increased from RM200 to RM300 per month. This provision will definitely be of benefit not only to the disabled but to the elderly as well.

6. Incentive Allowance For Disabled Workers:

This Special Allowance was also increased from RM200 to RM300 per month with effect from 1 January, 2008. This increase has, of course, been long overdue as the disabled had been making this request since 2005.

7. Allowance For Carers Of The Severely Disabled:

A new monthly allowance has been made available to carers of the severely disabled, i.e. to those who are caring for the terminally ill or the bedridden. We may assume that those caring for blind persons with multiple disabilities would also qualify for this allowance.

8. RM25 Million For The NGO's:

This allocation is meant to benefit the 148 NGOs existing in the country. Presumably, some of this money would also be going to the organisations serving the blind such as MAB and St. Nicholas in the form of the usual annual grant from the Welfare Department. This grant normally constitutes between 10 to 20 percent of the annual budget of such organisations. The increased grant would certainly be very helpful to the organisations in running their programmes for the disabled.

9. RM50 Million For Public Listed And Government-linked Companies:

This money is to help commercial companies carry out their corporate social responsibilities, e.g. employing more disabled persons, providing better facilities for the disabled in the workplace, or even running programmes or services which would be of direct benefit to the disabled. This fund will be run like a “joint venture” project between the government and the private sector in providing assistance to the poor and the disabled.

(To be continued)

THE STORY OF A BLIND STENOGRAPHER

By Dr Tan Tok Shiong

Editor's note: Dr Tan Tok Shiong is a low-vision person and was lecturing in Economics for many years at Universiti Malaya before retiring in 2008. A favourite pastime of his is to write about the inspirational experiences or adventures of blind people. The following is the story of a blind stenographer:

My name is Lee Ah Kau. I was born on 3 June, 1939 in Burma Road, Penang. I received my primary and secondary education in the national-type schools but, during that time, the medium of instruction was English.

I used to be good in Mathematics at school and I loved to play football. I sat for the Senior Cambridge School Certificate examination after completing form 5. After passing the examination, like other students in those days, I had to sit for the entrance examination before being chosen to study in form six at St. Xavier's Institution. During that time, the only two schools that offered pre-university education were St. Xavier's Institution and the Penang Free School and only four classes were available on the island. The famous lawyer, Mr Karpal Singh, was my class-mate, in form six.

When I was in upper six, my eyes started giving me some minor problems. Sometimes I saw rainbows but this did not bother me very much at first – I would just close my eyes and rest for a short while and the vision would return to normal. One morning, however, I woke up and felt a strong headache. Everything was in darkness although dawn had already broken.

My family members rushed me to the emergency unit of the hospital. The doctors immediately carried out an operation on my eyes. They told me I had glaucoma and that the blood vessels in my eyes had burst. The doctors had to prevent the bleeding so that my brain would not be affected which could lead to other complications.

Unfortunately, after the operation, I was never able to see light again. I was advised that since there was no cure for glaucoma, there would be no point

in searching for further treatment. Therefore, I applied to enter the Gurney Training Centre for the Blind in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur.

I was in the Centre for a period of four years during which I learnt Braille and received training in stenography. After completing my courses at the GTC, the Malaysian Association for the Blind (or MAB) found me a job in Penang. However, I rejected this job offer. Later, the Ministry of Labour helped me to secure a job interview at the Jabatan Peguam Negara (or the Attorney-general's Chamber). I had to sit for a test and compete with two other sighted candidates. I beat the two candidates and was employed as the stenographer in that government department until I took my optional retirement at the age of fifty-two.

When I was a trainee at the GTC, many of the blind were working in the Kinta Valley Workshop in Ipoh, Perak. However, they were not happy and were complaining about the harsh treatment they received from the management. This made me realise that the blind were in need of a group of their own in order to fight for their rights.

When MAB heard that I was interested in forming a Society of the Blind, they were very unhappy as they did not want to have a blind group competing with them for public donations. Thus, the executive director went to the registrar to protest as well as to block my attempt to register our Society.

An officer was sent by the registrar to interview us. Fortunately, I had already drawn up a constitution for the Society and I explained that as clearly stated in the constitution, our Society was meant to be a voice of the blind and not a charity organisation to collect public donations. The officer agreed with me and strongly supported my case in his report.

Later, I went to see the registrar and had our Society formally registered in 1964. I became its first founding president and subsequently I was twice elected as president. The Organisation grew and developed and is today known as the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (or SBM).

The principles behind SBM are similar to those of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the United States. The formation of our Society

prompted the American government to sponsor me for a two-month study tour in the United States.

Recently, my blind house-mate went to a leading bank to open an account. However, she was rejected on the grounds that she did not have someone who could serve as a witness every time she was in the bank. Eventually, she managed to open an account in another bank but she was unable to obtain an ATM card due to her blindness. Not long after this, I received a letter from a bank offering me its credit card facilities. When I went to the bank, the officer realised I was blind and promptly rejected my application. It is my firm belief and conviction that these are the kind of issues of prejudice and discrimination that the Society of the Blind should stand up against and challenge the status quo, thereby enabling the blind to exercise their rights and win their freedom.

After I left SBM, its members had rewritten the constitution and had converted the Organisation into a donation-based Society. As its founding president, I strongly believe that SBM should not busy itself with distributing public donations. It is my belief that SBM can do much more for the blind by reverting to a non-donation-based society; It should retain its original role as an Organisation to protect the rights of blind people in Malaysia; It should fight all discriminatory practices arising from lack of understanding concerning blind people such as cases as I have mentioned above.

Currently, SBM is neither an advocacy group nor a charity organisation. It should be more properly known as a mutual benefit society, i.e. it provides assistance only to those who are registered as members of the Organisation.

It is my earnest hope that SBM will go back to its original role as an advocacy Organisation. It is my wish that SBM will be able to become a dynamic and vibrant voice of the Blind.

HOW THE BLIND ARE BEING ASSISTED BY TECHNOLOGY

By Dr Tan Tok Shiong

Editor's note: Dr Tan Tok Shiong is a low-vision person and has been quite a regular writer for "The NCBM Outreach". He was a lecturer in Economics at Universiti Malaya for many years, a clear testament to the fact that the blind can be successful in this field with regards to education and career development.

He would now like to share with readers how the blind are benefiting from technology today. Here is his article:

Many people would agree that the most useful tools for the blind are the white cane and the computer. Other useful equipment include the braille, scanner, talking watch, talking handphone, and even the radio and television.

Of course, the blind person cannot be separated from his white cane. Is there any magic inside the white cane? None at all. It is just simply a long and light metal stick or cane. However, by using the white cane, the blind are able to travel anywhere, even along the busy streets of a city. With the help of the white cane as a guide, some of the totally blind are even able to go from door to door in a business area or in a housing scheme such as in Kuala Lumpur (without assistance from any sighted person) in order to sell their wares.

How are the blind able to do this? The secret is very simple. When a blind person walks, the white cane is always in front of him to enable him to detect obstacles or hazards in the path before him. By tapping the ground with his cane from left to right, he is able to determine whether there is a step or a hole in front of him.

Nevertheless, before a blind person is able to move freely in a new place, he does need to spend some time getting to know or getting used to the area. He must become familiar with the place in order to gain sufficient confidence to walk by himself.

Nonetheless, the white cane is no foolproof guarantee for the blind if they should encounter certain hazards such as the lorry parked in an unlikely location. Fortunately, there are some techniques that they can use to help them eliminate such hazards. For the totally blind, for example, they can use the head protection technique, i.e. putting one arm across the forehead while maneuvering with the white cane in the other hand. As for the low-vision person, he would prefer to wear a cap and sun-glasses in order to protect himself from such injuries.

The computer is another wonderful gadget which can help the blind overcome their loss of vision. By equipping the computer with special software such as JAWS or the OpenBook, the blind will be able to master their computer skills just like learning how to ride a bicycle. By manipulating the arrow keys on the keyboard, the JAWS programme will read out whatever information that appears on the monitor screen. Reading with the help of JAWS is clearly much more advantageous than relying upon the eyesight of a human volunteer reader because you can call upon the service of the software programme any time you need it. With JAWS, therefore, the blind person is able to function on an equal footing with sighted persons when it comes to using email, Microsoft-Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Windows Media Player, and even the Yahoo or Google Search. The blind are able to deal with such processes as reformatting, downloading, virus cleansing, telemarketing and online newspaper reading.

With the help of OpenBook or any other scanner, the blind can have equal access to printed materials. For instance, if I were to borrow a book on Economics, I would be able to read it by simply scanning it into the computer.

The blind can also have access to other facilities through the computer. These include the internet radio, skype for chit-chatting with friends, and so on.

Like the sighted, the blind are just as fascinated with handphones. With special software such as Talks, the blind today have very easy access to the handphone. Talks can be installed by simply downloading from the internet or it can be purchased from the open market. With the help of Talks, the blind person can receive or make calls, write and read SMS, send or receive files by

using BlueTooth, store new telephone numbers by using the AddressBook, copy CD music from the computer, and install any programmes required.

In spite of the many sophisticated gadgets made available by technological advancements, braille, just like the white cane, cannot be taken for granted by the blind. The invention of braille was derived from the system of communication by dots used at night by the French soldiers during the Napoleonic wars without the need to use light or sound. The system was later modified for the use of the blind.

Louis Braille came up with the basic system of merely six tiny raised dots which became known as the braille cell. From this basic six-dot cell, Louis Braille was able to devise the braille alphabet and this ultimately gave rise to the complex system of numbers, contractions and signs which we now know as the braille code.

Initially, just a simple nail and frame was used by Louis Braille to create the braille dots. This was gradually replaced by other more efficient hand tools such as the braille writing-board and the braille slate. In fact, the braille slate may be considered as an equivalent to the pen or pencil used by the sighted. It is relatively cheap and it is very portable and light.

Eventually, this led to the invention of mechanical machines such as the braille typewriter, better known as the brailler. Then came the braille embosser which has made it possible to produce multiple braille copies much more quickly and efficiently.

However, with rapid advancements in audio technology for the blind, this has given rise to the view among many sighted educators that braille may become obsolete in the future. Fortunately, this view is being countered by many blind advocates who have given sound arguments that braille should be maintained as an important educational tool for the blind – without braille, the blind will lose the opportunity to learn or to gain functional literacy, i.e. the ability to read and write.

With regards to entertainment, the radio is undoubtedly one of the best companions for a blind person. In fact, many blind persons spend much of

their time listening to the radio. Besides the local stations, they also tune in to the overseas stations such as the BBC, Voice of America, as well as the Australian and Singapore broadcasting corporations. Some of the blind even possess the TV-radio so that they can tune in to the local TV stations without disturbing their sighted friends.

Another popular device used by the blind is the talking watch, which costs only RM25. This watch has many useful features such as hourly reporting, multiple alarms, stop-watch, and a date reminder.

Many pedestrian walkways in Brickfields have been laid with special tactile guides. The blind are able to tap or trail along these guides as they commute from place to place. The long vertical lines indicate that the blind person should walk straight on. The tiles with round dots indicate that the blind person should pause or stop because he has come to a junction or crossing point along the road.

To date, the most sophisticated piece of equipment that has been invented for the blind is the pacmate, a small portable computer which uses a braille keyboard or speech synthesiser to provide braille or voice output for the blind user. The pacmate can be connected to the internet, thereby enabling the blind person to gain access to website information. Unfortunately, because of its high cost, the pacmate cannot compete with the laptop which is much cheaper for the blind in Malaysia.

Other less popular adaptive devices available to the blind today include the talking housephone, the cash-tech card which makes use of embossed dots or lines to indicate the value of a currency note, and the braille calendar.

Indeed, with the myriad adaptive devices made possible by rapid technological advancements, the blind in Malaysia and in other countries all over the world have been able to make great strides towards a more hopeful and brighter future ahead.

PENGGUNAAN BRAILLE DI MALAYSIA: SATU TINJAUAN

*Oleh Zahari Hashim
Penolong Pengarah Peperiksaan
Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia*

Sistem tulisan Braille telah bertapak di Malaysia sejak sebelum negara kita mencapai kemerdekaan lagi. Ia diperkenalkan oleh para mubaligh Kristian apabila mereka membuka sebuah sekolah khas untuk kanak-kanak bermasalah penglihatan – Sekolah St. Nicholas. Sekolah tersebut yang dibuka di Melaka pada tahun 1926 telah berpindah ke Pulau Pinang enam tahun kemudiannya. Sejak itu, ramai bekas pelajarinya telah berjaya mendapat pendidikan formal dan seterusnya memperoleh pekerjaan yang setaraf dengan kelulusan akademik mereka.

Institut Perguruan Ilmu Khas di Cheras adalah antara institusi yang dipertanggungjawabkan untuk melatih bakal guru pendidikan khas untuk pelajar-pelajar bermasalah penglihatan. Pada masa ini, selain dari institut berkenaan, terdapat beberapa lagi institusi pengajian tinggi yang turut menyediakan latihan kepada bakal guru untuk ditempatkan di sekolah-sekolah pendidikan khas untuk pelajar-pelajar bermasalah penglihatan seperti Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) dan Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSI).

Dari segi penghasilan bahan Braille pula, Persatuan Bagi Orang Buta Malaysia (MAB) merupakan satu-satunya badan yang mengusahakan pengeluaran buku-buku Braille khusus untuk bacaan umum pada satu ketika. Sekolah St. Nicholas di Pulau Pinang dan Sekolah Puteri Elizabeth di Johor Bahru juga ada menghasilkan bahan-bahan dalam tulisan Braille tetapi hanyalah untuk kegunaan murid-murid mereka sahaja.

Awal dekad lapan puluhan menyaksikan Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia menubuhkan Unit Percetakan Braille sendiri. Unit ini yang pada ketika itu beroperasi di premis Sekolah Menengah Pendidikan Khas Setapak, Kuala Lumpur, telah mengambil alih percetakan buku-buku teks Braille yang selama ini diusahakan oleh MAB.

Pada pengamatan saya, bertitik-tolak dari penubuhan unit inilah yang telah membawa kepada beberapa kekeliruan dan kecelaruan dalam penggunaan Braille di negara ini. Unit ini seperti seolah-olah ingin lari daripada amalan-amalan konvensional selama ini. Antara contoh pembaharuan yang agak ketara adalah pengenalan baris kosong pada baris kedua setiap halaman buku Braille.

Jumlah baris pada satu-satu halaman Braille ialah 25. Pada ketika itu, buku Braille dicetak menggunakan kertas Braillon. Baris pertama ialah baris yang mengandungi maklumat mengenai nombor halaman cetak, nombor halaman Braille dan tajuk bab atau pelajaran. Amalan selama ini ialah menggunakan 24 baris yang selebihnya semaksima mungkin untuk menulis kandungan sesebuah buku itu. Apabila baris kosong diperkenalkan pada baris kedua setiap halaman, jumlah baris yang boleh digunakan untuk halaman tersebut menjadi 23. Ini bererti, jumlah baris pada satu-satu halaman sudah berkurangan dan buku Braille itu pun menjadi lebih tebal.

Dari segi penyelarasan pun, seperti tiada kata sepakat antara badan-badan yang terlibat dalam menghasilkan bahan-bahan Braille. Badan Kerajaan dan Badan Bukan Kerajaan menggunakan format masing-masing dalam menghasilkan bahan Braille.

Di pihak kerajaan, setelah Unit Braille Kementerian Pelajaran dibubarkan sekitar pertengahan tahun sembilan puluhan, penerbitan buku teks Braille menjadi seperti tidak terurus. Pada satu ketika, Jabatan Pendidikan Khas, Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia terpaksa menganjurkan bengkel-bengkel untuk membraille buku teks yang melibatkan para guru pendidikan khas untuk pelajar-pelajar bermasalah penglihatan.

Dari segi penyediaan kertas soalan untuk peperiksaan awam pula, Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia (LPM) dan Majlis Peperiksaan Malaysia (MPM) telah dipertanggungjawabkan untuk menyempurnakan tugas ini. Setelah menyertai LPM pada bulan Oktober, 2005, saya dapati para pegawainya agak ketinggalan dalam penggunaan Braille masa kini. Bila saya cuba menegur kesalahan mereka dalam penggunaan Braille, salah seorang daripada mereka telah mempersoalkan sama ada terdapat arahan dalam pekeliling atau memo

yang memperincikan perubahan pada penggunaan Braille seperti yang saya sarankan itu.

Sebaliknya, di pihak Badan Bukan Kerajaan pula, MAB tetap berperanan menerbitkan buku-buku Braille untuk bacaan umum. Sekitar tahun sembilan puluhan, Majlis Kebangsaan bagi orang buta Malaysia (NCBM) telah menubuhkan Percetakan Brailinya sendiri. Kedua-dua Badan Bukan Kerajaan ini sentiasa mengikuti perkembangan penggunaan Braille yang terkini khususnya tentang penambah-baikannya yang dilakukan di Britain.

Pengenalan teknologi maklumat khususnya teknologi Braille menggunakan komputer telah membawa perubahan yang sungguh drastik dalam penerbitan bahan Braille di negara ini. Malangnya, semua usaha ini banyak dipelopori oleh Badan-badan Bukan Kerajaan. Mereka telah mengambil daya usaha yang pro-aktif di dalam membawa masuk dan memperkenalkan perisian-perisian yang khusus yang berkaitan dengan penghasilan bahan Braille menggunakan komputer seperti Malay Braille Translator dan Duxbury. Di atas inisiatif mereka juga, pencetak Braille yang dikenali sebagai embosser telah dibawa masuk.

Meskipun demikian, penggunaan Braille menerusi komputer ini juga telah sedikit sebanyak menambah kepada kecelaruan yang ada. Dalam Kod Braille Bahasa Melayu misalnya, huruf besar digunakan hanya pada nama khas. Tetapi apabila dihasilkan menerusi komputer, penggunaan huruf besar itu sudah sama seperti penggunaan dalam tulisan cetak. Dalam Edisi Pindaan Kod Braille Bahasa Melayu yang telah diterbitkan pada tahun 2004, tidak pun dinyatakan tentang perubahan peraturan penggunaan tanda huruf besar itu.

Braille Authority Of United Kingdom (BAUK) di Britain, adalah sebuah badan yang bertanggungjawab terhadap semua perkara yang berkaitan dengan penggunaan braille khususnya braille bahasa Inggeris. Badan ini telah beberapa kali merombak dan meminda sistem tulisan braille bahasa Inggeris itu. Bukan setakat kod singkatannya sahaja tapi juga terdapat penambahan tanda/symbol braille yang baru. Malangnya badan sedemikian tidak terdapat di negara ini. Ini menyebabkan kita tidak ada tempat untuk merujuk tentang penggunaan braille baik braille bahasa Melayu, bahasa

Inggeris, Jawi, Matematik, Sains dan sebagainya.

Sudah sampailah masanya untuk kita sama-sama fikirkan tentang keperluan mewujudkan badan seperti ini. Badan itu nanti hendaklah dianggotai oleh pakar-pakar braille yang datang dari agensi Kerajaan dan juga Badan Bukan Kerajaan. Mungkin Majlis Kebangsaan bagi Orang Buta Malaysia (NCBM) di pihak Bukan Kerajaan dan bahagian Pendidikan Khas Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia boleh mengambil daya usaha pro-aktif ke arah penubuhan badan ini di negara kita.

Antara objektif badan ini ialah:

1. Menjadi badan rujukan kebangsaan yang tunggal terhadap penggunaan braille di negara ini.
2. Menyeragamkan penggunaan braille di kalangan para pengguna braille baik di pihak Kerajaan mahupun Bukan Kerajaan.
3. Menjadi platform untuk para pakar braille berkumpul dan bertukar-tukar fikiran mengenai penggunaan braille di negara ini.
4. Mewakili negara dalam apa-apa persidangan, bengkel atau seminar mengenai penggunaan braille yang dianjurkan baik di peringkat kebangsaan mahupun antarabangsa.

Itulah antara idea yang dapat saya lontarkan pada masa ini. Adalah diharapkan, semoga penubuhan badan ini akan menjadi kenyataan suatu hari dan penggunaan braille di negara ini juga menjadi lebih seragam dan berkualiti.

USAGE OF BRAILLE IN MALAYSIA: AN ASSESSMENT

*By Zahari Hashim
Assistant Director Of Examinations
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Editor's note: Zahari Hashim is totally blind and he has served as a qualified teacher in a secondary school for a number of years. He is currently the assistant director of examinations at the Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia.

Zahari occasionally writes for "The NCBM Outreach" and he would now like to share with readers the findings of the survey on the usage of Braille in Malaysia.

The article is as follows:

The system of braille writing had made its mark in Malaysia long before the country achieved independence. Braille was introduced to Malaysia by some Anglican medical missionaries when they opened a school for the blind which became known as St. Nicholas School for the Blind. The school was first opened in Melaka in 1926 which was then moved to Penang six years later. Since then, many blind students have passed out of the school and have obtained employment in line with their academic qualifications.

The Specialist Teachers' Training Institute has been responsible for training teachers in the education of the blind. Currently, several other institutions of higher education are also involved in preparing teachers for the blind such as Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSI).

Concerning the production of braille materials, the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) is one of the organisations which used to run a braille book publishing service for the benefit of blind users. St. Nicholas school is in Penang and Princess Elizabeth School in Johor Baru continue to produce their own braille materials for the use of their clients only.

In the early 1980's the Ministry of Education established its own braille publishing unit which had its operations on the premises of the Setapak Special Secondary School for the Blind in Kuala Lumpur. Subsequently, the unit was closed down and the production of braille books reverted to MAB.

As I see it, this shifting and changing in braille production has caused much confusion and inconsistency with regards to the useage of braille in our country. There seems to have been the lack of proper regulations in running a braille production unit for the blind in Malaysia.

For example, during the early years of braille production, one of the rules was to leave one blank line at the top and to begin on the second line of every braille page. Although a maximum of 25 lines can actually be obtained for each braille page, the blank line at the top was necessary because braille production at the time depended on the heating of braillon paper for the duplication of books.

The first written line of every braille page would contain information regarding the print page, braille page and the chapter or lesson. By starting with the second line on every page, only 23 lines (instead of 24) could be used for the actual text. Consequently, the loss of one line for every braille page meant that braille books became thicker.

Unfortunately, there has been a lack of coordination among the bodies involved in braille production. Government Agencies and Non-governmental Organisations each had their own formats for braille production.

When the Braille Production Unit of the Ministry of Education was dissolved in the mid-1990's, the production of braille textbooks lost any clear direction. Thus, at one stage, the Special Education Department had to organise workshops on braille textbook production for special education teachers of the blind.

Concerning the preparation of question papers for public examinations, the Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia (LPM) and Majlis Peperiksaan Malaysia (MPM) were responsible for carrying out this task. After I had joined the LPM in October 2009, I had the feeling that the officers appeared to have

little knowledge regarding the current practices in braille usage. When I tried to point out their errors in braille usage, one of the officers wanted to know whether there had been any circular or memo for the changes to be made.

Among the NGO's, on the other hand, MAB has been playing that role of providing braille books for general reading. However, in the 1990's, the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) had also established its own braille publishing service. Both organisations have been following developments in braille usage, particularly with regards to changes being made in Britain.

The introduction of Information Technology, especially with regards to adaptive computer equipment and new methods of braille production, brought many drastic changes in braille production for the blind in this country. Unfortunately, all the efforts in keeping up to date with such changes had only occurred among the NGO's. They had been pro-active in introducing new measures, particularly with regards to Malay braille production, by creating software such as the Malay Braille Translator and Duxbury for use with the computer. In fact, they had taken the initiative to import the new braille printer known as the embosser, an adaptive computer device which has enabled braille materials to be produced more speedily and in quantity.

In spite of this, computer braille usage in Malaysia has not kept up with the times. In the Bahasa Melayu braille code, for instance, the capital letter is only used for proper names. However, with computer production, the use of capital letters is in accordance with the usage in the print version. This change was not mentioned at all in the amended edition of the Bahasa Melayu braille code published in 2004.

The Braille Authority of the United Kingdom (BAUK) in Britain is responsible for all matters pertaining to braille usage, particularly with regards to the English braille code. This body has always been involved in monitoring and introducing changes to the English Braille Code whenever necessary. Besides braille contractions, the body has also been looking at the need for new signs and symbols in braille. Unfortunately, a similar body does not exist in Malaysia. Thus, there is the lack of an official authority to which

reference could be made to deal with and bring about necessary amendments and changes in the use of braille not only for the Bahasa Melayu Braille Code but also for Mathematics, Science, Jawi and even English.

Thus, the time has now come for serious consideration to be made with regards to the establishment of such a braille authority in Malaysia. This authority should include braille experts both from the government agencies and the NGO's. Perhaps NCBM and the Special Education Division of the Ministry of Education could take the initiative in having such an authority established.

The objectives of this body should include:

1. Acting as the sole national reference body regarding braille usage in this country.
2. Standardising the usage of braille among the users of braille both in the government agencies and in the NGOs.
3. Providing a platform for braille experts and concerned individuals to gather for exchange of ideas regarding the usage of braille in this country.
4. Representing Malaysia in conferences, workshops or seminars regarding braille usage both on the national level and international level.

Indeed, it is my earnest hope that such a national braille authority will materialise one day. I believe this is crucial if the standard and quality of braille is to be maintained for the benefit of the blind in this country.

A POINT TO PONDER: MATHEMATICS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

By Wong Kow

If Mathematics is your dull subject, do not be frightened by the terms expressed in this article. As you read on, something may interest you and you could possibly find some useful tips.

As for me, Mathematics had been a favourite subject of mine during my school days. I derived much fun and pleasure from playing with number games, solving numerical problems, or drawing and studying geometric diagrams. Unfortunately, when I lost my eyesight, I failed to pick up the necessary skills by mastering the braille mathematical code and symbols.

However, life did appear to be “happy go lucky” as I took on the job of a telephone operator. There was no need for me to do any calculations at all and so my mathematical knowledge did not seem to be very useful to me.

Apparently, my salary at the time was only RM150 (after deducting for EPF). My room rental was RM50 while my food bill was around RM60 per month. This left the remainder of RM40 for miscellaneous expenses. Merely basic standard one or standard two skills in Mathematics would suffice and satisfy my needs at the time, or so I thought.

At this point, I have no doubt that many readers would be holding the opinion that mathematical knowledge is certainly much more useful than as in the case given above. Readers would further agree that this is true even if our jobs do not involve calculations.

True enough. Let us activate our brains and take a closer look at the following:

1. Do you ever wonder how at a durian stall one bunch of durians would be priced at RM25 for four and another bunch of durians at RM20 for three? To make the best buy, you would probably need a little more than just using the plus and minus method in order to get your money's worth of durians.

2. An important guest is going to visit you in two and a half hours' time. You have to do some household chores so that your house will be comfortable and presentable to your guest. You would have to estimate the time required to complete each task so that you will not be still in the bath-room half dressed when your guest arrives at your main door and rings your door-bell.

3. When you listen to the news reports, or to an article being read to you, or indulge in daily conversation with your friends, mathematical knowledge could be very useful in enabling you to digest the information more readily, thereby keeping yourself well informed.

4. Are you misled when something is priced at RM299? Instead of two hundred plus, put the price mentally at RM300. Then you will be in a better position to decide whether or not the item in question is worth buying.

5. When your investment faces an initial loss of %50, and when you use the remaining capital for continual investment and make a handsome profit of %60, then you may be misled by the percentage figure. By comparing the loss of %50 with the subsequent gain of %60, you may jump to the conclusion that you have made a gain of %10. In actual fact, however, you are running a loss. If you are puzzled, look at the following illustration:

Let us presume that the initial investment was one thousand Ringgit. A loss of %50 would mean losing RM500 while the remaining capital would also be RM500. This gives you a gain of only RM300. Thus, despite the gain as seen in percentages, your actual loss is RM200.

6. If you are using credit cards, be wise enough to look into the monthly annual interest rate calculations. For the monthly outstanding bill, the bank would normally advise that you could opt to pay just the minimum of %5 of the total outstanding sum or make a full settlement. In the event of you just paying the minimum %5, the outstanding balance would be charged at a monthly interest rate of one and a half to two percent only. However, do not forget that there are twelve months in a year, which means this percentage would be multiplied by 12 which means from 18 to 24 percent annually.

Probably, the bank would be more than happy that you do not know Maths,

or that you would not apply your mathematical knowledge in practice when it comes to such matters.

Terms such as inflation, interest rates, increase or decrease in percentages, and so on probably may not stir up or stimulate your interest. However, they do somehow “attack” our purses directly or indirectly.

I am therefore glad to learn that an increasing number of blind and visually impaired students are able to score better grades in Mathematics nowadays. Being literate in numeracy would certainly stand them in good stead and help them to be more successful in their careers and professions.

I have no doubt that an active brain and a quick mind in Mathematics will certainly enhance the lives of blind visually impaired persons in the future. Through Mathematics, life would be much more fun, interesting and satisfying.

SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY HAPPY PEOPLE

1. Be a part of something you believe in.
2. Share time with friends and family.
3. Appreciate and reflect on the good things of life.
4. Make the best use of the resources that are available to you.
5. Create happy endings whenever possible.
6. Use your personal strengths to get things done or achieved.
7. Savour the natural joy of simple pleasures.

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EARN SOME EXTRA CASH

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

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

(Note: Articles submitted by officials of NCBM or its member-organisations will not qualify for payment unless these submissions have nothing to do with their daily office duties.)