

... 000014

Thoughts On National Information System

Dr. K. M. Karim

THE national information system of a country primarily includes information institution and services—libraries, archives, documentation and information centres and services including information policy formulation, infrastructure building, application of new technologies and library and information man-power development. These institutions are basically reservoirs of information materials lying in documentary form. They are the custodians of the documentary heritage of a nation. It is only on grounds of difference in texture of materials that have resulted in the development of these institutions on diverse patterns in modern times. Hence their functional differences often remain confusing to the general people.

Information in the present day world is not only a national resource vital for scientific, economic, educational and cultural progress, but also the medium of social communication. It is, therefore, necessary to plan the national information system systematically to ensure, through the coordination of the various

individual elements, maximum use of the available resources and facilities. In the absence of proper coordination the management of information is bound to be handled in an incoherent manner which will result in duplication of efforts.

The national information system in its modern sense that constitutes the library—archive network of information storage retrieval and dissemination was not in existence during the British days in the sub-continent. The All-India conference of librarians for the first time met at Lahore in 1918 from January 4—8 and discussed matters relating to reciprocity among libraries, compilation of catalogues, books and manuscripts and training needs, etc. Local public libraries, however, grew mostly out of private enthusiasm and patronage and were managed locally. Information materials such as books, journals and periodicals were procured not so much on local needs of the users, but mostly for adding the existing collections.

The academic libraries started

coming up as the appendages of the institutions but were not developed proportionately in line with them. The establishment of the Imperial Library of Calcutta was however a great step in the field of library development in the British India.

Under the Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867, copies of publications within the then British Indian Empire were sent to the India Office (Office of the Secretary of State for India—now India Office Library and Records which is a part of the British Library) for preservation.

In archival field the concept of modern records management particularly for meeting national requirement regarding appraisal selection and retention of records, their conservation and scientific documentation was absent. In those days the creator of records was the selector and custodian and conservation practices were old-fashioned and archaic. During the imperial rule the central storage of records came into existence which became the Imperial Records Department. (See Page 9)

Information System

(From Page 7)

partment in Delhi (later on National Archives of India). Further the record rooms remained attached to the administrative agencies of the provincial and local governments.

During the Pakistan period, attempts were made at the provincial level to establish public libraries under government initiative. The central government being located far away the then eastern wing (present Bangladesh) was mostly deprived of the growth of the archive-library infrastructure that took place at the national level during the period. The Copy Right Ordinance under the Pakistan regime was a step taken towards the establishment of a national library in the western part. Since then it was concerned only with book deposit, the powers and responsibilities of a national library in its real sense remained absent.

After the independence of Bangladesh, there is obviously the gradual flowering of the national institutions in the wake of the growing national awareness. The country is already blessed with a national museum established under an ordinance and a national library and a national archives which are yet to operate fully. The National Archive Ordinance of 1983 is undoubtedly a meaningful step taken for proper archival management within the country. The merger of old Bangladesh Parishad libraries with the Public Library system of the country has extended the public library functions of the newly established Department of Public Libraries in the country. The Directorate of Archives and Libraries is responsible for the development of National Archives and National Library of the country. The National Book Centre is basically responsible for the promotion of book production in the country. In spite of all these developments in the post-independence period a national information system worthy of its name, is yet to be accomplished.

WEAKNESS IN INFORMATION SYSTEM

At present the library system in Bangladesh is a multidimensional concern and there are weaknesses in our information system. There is no agency to coordinate the activities of the various institutions that constitute the library system. The function of the central coordinating body will include development of information agencies having central coordinating the library infrastructure, developing body will include development of information agencies having central documentation and central data bank, central conservation, gradual automation for retrieval and storage purposes, resource sharing both internally and externally, training for information personnel, holding of seminars and exhibitions and promotion of book production. In other words, the national library services will include the functions and are to be recognised on legal basis. From the point of view of Bangladesh's requirement, it is necessary to have a national library with its authority to coordinate, assist and develop the library facilities within the country. The library legislation, as pointed out earlier, will have several components such as legal deposit regulation, functions of the national library as a central coordinating agency in library matters and the management of public libraries.

Bangladesh has made an achievement in having its national library building within a short time. Although the enforcement of the National Archives Ordinance of 1983 is a significant move in the field of archive administration, yet the central storage facility is still to be developed. Hence there is obvious difficulty of permanent preservation of archival heritage in our

laboratory having modern equipment for massive deacidification and facilities for conserving non-traditional records (c) use of permanent paper and ink for permanent records and documents, (d) gradual automation and introduction of computers for storage, documentation and retrieval purposes, (e) central microphotographic laboratory, (f) effective bibliographic control and central data bank, bibliographical programme as means to an access to information, (g) introduction of standardised records management manual for proper management of current and dormant national and local records, (h) training facilities for archivists, librarians and documentalists and (i) cooperation in information exchange programme in all branches of human knowledge.

The present century has seen a tremendous 'knowledge explosion' and side by side with it the growth of technology for quicker information retrieval and dissemination. As for example, in the field of international sharing of resources, the system of cooperative microfilming has already been instituted. New technologies such as optical disk and mass book deacidification have been devised in many countries.

Further it should be pointed out that the National Library in developing countries have a crucial role to play in overall national development in library fields. However, they will face difficulty if they function on strictly traditional lines. For national library there is no international norm that needs to be adhered to.