Promoting university libraries

by M.S. ISLAM

This is a short description of my study on University Library Development in the United Kingdom. In carried out my study between February and May 1991, during my attachment to Southampton University Library. Prior to this attachment I was in Cambridge, between October 1990 and January 1991 for my orientation and during that period I was able to visit libraries in Oxford and University of Cambridge.

My study was of University Library Development in the United Kingdom were made possible by the scholarship awarded by the British Council under the British Technical Fellowships programmes 1990-1991, subject to the approval of the University of Dhaka and the Government of Bangladesh.

The main intention was to study how the University Libraries of the United Kingdom are providing library services using modern systems including the computer-based control of the cataloguing, circulation and other sections of the library. The second consideration was to review how such systems could be applicable to Dhaka University Library, which has its own Computer Centre with an IBM Mainframe, and all other libraries in Bangladesh may be benefited following the similar systems as suggested for the Dhaka University Library.

The importance of a University Library in the process of higher learning and promotion of research has long been established. The real phenomenon of twentieth century higher education had been the development of University Libraries, though their roots in the Western World go back to medieval times. Very recently Richard W Lyman, President of

Stanford University said - "The library is the heart of the University; a healthy University cannot be without a healthy library". While emphasising the importance of a University Library Dr Sloman, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Essex, remarked: "A library is the University heart. Weaken it and ther the health of the whole University is affected".

In order to perform the role of the library effectively a University Library is concerned with the organization of its resources and one of the foremost objectives of a University Library is to extend such services to its readers which would promote their academic pursuits. These objectives will be achieved provided the library is well organized and well managed. Now-a-days in the world the growth of literature has been increasing tremendously with the growth of modern technology and the traditional library techniques and old technologies have failed to cope with this proliferation of literature. Side by side with the development of modern technology a tremendous change has also taken place in the field of library and information services particularly in the developed countries of the world. Computer-based library systems facilitate greatly the tackling of library problems such as maintaining a providing access to the catalogu of items in the collection, the acquisition of library materials, controlling the issuing and returning of reading items,

and managing the periodicals collection. There has also been an important development in Online Searching Services by which a large number of information seekers' needs are being satisfied. Furthermore many libraries are now acquiring their own micro-computers and using them for a variety of library applications such as word processing and detailed financial control. The costs of hardware, and software to support such services are decreasing day by day with their capability also becoming increasingly sophisticated.

Southampton University has a student population of about 7,000 and some 1,500 academic and related staff. The Library has a total of 120. The Library has a bookstock of around 900,000 volumes. It currently adds about 17,000 books and pamphlets each year, and subscribes to 6,500 journals.

The total number of loan transactions in around 256,000 each year. Reservations number 30,000, the total borrower file is approximately 20,000.

The Library uses a 3M book theft detection system. At present the library has automated procedures for acquisitions, circulation, cataloguing: OPAC and binding control.

The Library is a member of the SWALCAP Shared Cataloguing System; all the other systems are in-house. Acquisition, circulation

and binding control are run on an ITL 8046, housed in the Library's computer room. The OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) has been mounted on the University's IBM 3090 and made available over the campus network.

The University is connected to the Joint Academic Network (JANET) and currently the Library offers it OPAC Services through this network to other academic institutions.

The Library has just purchased a new integrated system called URICA to handle acquisitions, cataloguing, circulation, serials control and OPAC. This system is expected to go live in Summer 1991.

Among the various and complex changes Bangladesh has had to face since its independence, educational regeneration and library development were two of the most immediate and important. Though there was consensus among Educationists, Scholars, Teachers, Officers and others about the importance of University Libraries, in reality the condition of the libraries was far from satisfactory in comparison with libraries that use modern systems.

Dhaka University has a student population of over 20,000 and population with the large University population with the old convention methods. The four conventional divisions of the Library, cataloguing, circulation, acquisitions and reference services, require some immediate changes to

All of the University activities, including the main library and its Science Section (in a separate building) are centred on the University Campus. There are more than 36 departments which belong to 9 faculties of the University. All the departments having their departmental libraries are partly controlled by the Dhaka University Library. In addition to this, there are at present 7 institutes having their own libraries undermost of the Dhaka University having their prestigious libraries.

Dhaka University Library, the Central Library of the University of Dhaka, was established in 1921. It has now over 500,000 volumes including bound volumes of periodicals, excluding 40,000 valuable manuscripts and a Reprography Section. It currently adds 8,000 books annually and subscribes to 500 journals.

The Library's normal opening hours are from 08.00 to 21.00 on all weekdays except Fridays, (Fridays closed).

The total number of loan transactions is around 200,000 each year, the total borrower file is approximately 10,000.

The number of volumes in the Library has now doubled in comparison with the 1970's. Correspondingly the University Library is also facing great difficulty in coping with the large University

improve the library services of the University.

However, after having my experiences not only from the Southampton University Library, but visiting some other important libraries including University Libraries and the British Library, I have observed that a noticeable change has taken place in tackling the problems of the University Library services. The introduction of computer-based library systems in all University Libraries is providing better library services to users. I have drawn the conclusion, that the time is ripe for the Dhaka University to adopt the Library A tomation for its library to cope with the present voluminous work of the circulation control and cataloguing sections and for avoiding danger of wasteful duplication and human error.

In this context I may also suggest that, if possible, the Dhaka University Library should introduce modernized library systems in a phase basis - that is in

(i) short-term plan and in

(ii) long-term plan.

In the short-term plan, for which two-years' should be allowed, priorities should be given to the circulation control and to introducing small micro-computer based administrative systems. This initial project will prove extremely useful as a means of familiarising the University staff with the basic techniques involved in mechanization. The second long-term plan should lead to an integrated system covering all the major functions required by libraries, similar to the one now being installed at Southampton University Library. The University should aim to have an integrated system in place by the mid-1990's.