

# Central Library For Science And Technology

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It is very much encouraging to know that the Government prepared a plan of Taka 700 crore for the next five years for education and research in the field of science and technology. We have several government organizations engaged in research in their respective fields. There are also specialists in the universities who guide research works in various departments. They can cooperate with government organizations which can assist them as is the case in the advanced countries.

We are happy that the present government is laying proper emphasis on research, on utilization of local resources so as to make Bangladesh a prosperous country. But research in the universities is suffering because of lack of required number of current journals which cannot be regularly supplied to the research workers due to paucity of funds and abnormally high price.

In the decade from 1961-70, we have been subscribing at the rate of 800 foreign journals per annum i.e. about 30 titles per department. But now it has come down to 300 titles and the most essential journals like Chemical abstracts, Physics abstracts, Nuclear science abstracts, Biological abstracts, Mycological abstracts, Zoological record etc. had to be discontinued due to high price. In the last decade, the annual subscription for Chemical abstracts was about 5000 rupees but the present price is above Taka 60,000 per annum including academic concession. Our allotment for current periodicals was 1.50 lakhs but it has not increased since then though exchange rate has doubled and price of journals increased 4 to 5 times. As a result the researchers are deprived of current information in their fields.

Time has come for us to have a rethinking about the whole affair. In 1973 the then Chairman of the University Grants Commission formed a committee of University Librarians and it was decided that it would be a standing committee to hold regular meetings. He also assured us that U.G.C. had a plan to build up a library which would collect large number of periodicals and it would have a duplicating service and loan facilities.

Now, with the passage of time, it has become clear that something has to be done about it by the Government at the national level. Out of this research fund or from elsewhere, provision should be made for a Central Lending Library for Science and technology. The Research Organizations and the Universities will collect bare minimum of the items urgently required and the Central Library will procure a comprehensive collection from which loans will be granted to the institutions and there will be ample facilities for cheap photocopies. This will be economic and efficient. There is no point in buying little used items in every institution. They can be borrowed as and when necessary. I am confident handsome donations will be forthcoming from various organizations for this purpose.

Some of us have ideas that if we have to start something it should be very big and prestigious. But let us be modest and start essential organizations which should have started long ago. (National Library is one of them) in a modest way as far as our resources permit. As for Library, we must admit that it grows—it cannot be built overnight. On priority basis we should start this national organization in a

hired house with skeleton staff. Immediately we should prepare a Union Catalogue of Periodicals held in various Libraries of the country. This will facilitate interlending which is very essential in a country like ours.

In Great Britain, the British Museum was the only national library till the end of the 19th century. It is an eighteenth century foundation. It used to serve mainly humanities and social sciences. Needs for the Scientists and technologists were not being served adequately. Hence in the sixties, National Lending Library for Science and Technology was created. It has extensive lending and photocopying services. It is connected by telex with all the major Libraries of Britain and the continent of Europe. After a few years, to cope with the growing demands of the scientists and technologists, a Central Reference Library for Science and Invention was started at Southbank, London. 'National Central Library' which had been serving as the Headquarter for Library co-operation, was also brought within the folds of National Library. The entire system is called the British Library.

The American librarians perhaps realized earlier that it was not possible to store the entire human knowledge under one roof. They rather decentralized from the very start. Though the 'Library of Congress' is the National Library for U.S.A. there is also a 'National Medical Library' for Medicine and allied fields and the Library of the Department of Agriculture serves as National Library for Agricultural Sciences. They have several co-operative schemes for collecting local and foreign material. (The author is Librarian, Rajshahi University Library).