LIBRARY AUTOMATION PAPERS-AN OBSERVATION

It is natural that librarians of the day think in terms of automation, or to be precise, in terms of using computers for various work processes in the library. The Department of Library and Information Science of the University of Dhaka as one of the important academic centres for the study of libraranship and information science is a natural source for obtaining information on this aspect of librarianship. That the Department is producing a special issue on this subject is an expected effort which should prove to be useful.

Six out of a total ten articles in this issue deal with the present situation of library automation with some historical insight in some libraries in Bangladesh. In them, survey research design, data collection and analysis, and presentation of the research findings have become very prominent.

S.M. Mannan has attempted to produce the picture in as much details as possible. His technique is that of a social researcher with a sample of 25 Academic and Special Libraries, and several variables. Naturally, he has known these libraries well and collected 'measurable' units of data for analysis. He has covered aspects of Information Technology (IT) in the libraries surveyed, such as Internet and telecommunication facilities. It is not surprising that he found "the status of computerization in libraries and information centres of the country is not satisfactory". Despite proving this common knowledge among the librarians and the library users, Mannan has produced a successful article.

S.M. Zabed Ahmed has stressed the same views as S.M. Mannan, but he has kept his sample names untold by grouping the libraries in five categories, universities (public), universities (private), national, public (government) and special. In this way, he could include the situation of 224 libraries of Bangladesh in his study. His survey findings are interesting. He also describes the problems of library automation in Bangladesh. However, Zabed Ahmed has also produced some useful suggestions to overcome some of the problems at the end.

Md. Saiful Alam has chosen to write on special libraries, and included two university libraries as well in his sample of thirteen libraries. These two

academic libraries being those of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, and Bangladesh Agricultural University Library do vie for inclusion as 'special' libraries being more subject oriented, but a statement of scope would have helped to overcome any academic objection. His research findings may be described as a sum total of the two earlier articles by Mannan and Zabed Ahmed in that he has described (like Mannan) as well as prescribed (like Zabed). His final statement about the situation 'not satisfactory' echoes what we already know.

Three libraries have been chosen by Md. Hanif Uddin in his paper. Unlike the ones reviewed above, he has used the objectives of these three libraries and attempted them to equate with the realities. Naturally, he too has summarized that there are "several problems which create obstacles in the gradual development of automation" in the three libraries. Consequently, he has prescribed courses for remedying them.

M. Nasiruddin Munshi has prepared a list of libraries and information centres "using computers". He has not made it clear whether the "use" is towards library automation or simply using computers for word processing. He himself noted "In fact, the application of computers in most of these libraries and information centres is so limited than the optimal needs of the users". Like others, he has also offered "suggestions" towards constructing a real library automation environment.

Faizur Rahman writing about the automation situation in the Rajshahi University Library knew from the beginning that the situation is far from satisfactory. So, he chose to write on "considerations for the future". In this, he has attempted to detail what the authority of the university can do to establish 'automation' therein. This he does with his own views without attempting to borrow ideas from other practitioners.

There are four papers presented with different approach. Of them, Salma Chowdhury has written on digitised information system in which information can be retrived through any computers. The 'information' would be used in Just in Time Learning (JITL) concept. It is not clear whether JITL can be used as the source of 'knowledge', or for just 'information' only. The paper could have enlightened us of the difference between the two. However, inclusion of this article is a welcome relief from the descriptive

picture of poor situation of library automation reviewed earlier in that the JITL seems to be still so far that we can become 'dreamers'.

Veena Saraf's (India) paper is another exception in that it tells us what should be the responsibility of the library schools to prepare its students for the future. Any progressive library school should benefit from this paper.

B.K. Sen and Wee Siu Hiang from Malaysia have jointly presented a paper with a completely different theme of Journal Preference of Computer Scientists. Admittedly, this kind of research is needed in Bangladesh for making the best use of international resources of journals used in R & D.

A.S. Chandel from India, and Suraiya Begum have presented a comprehensive paper on strategic planning for IT application with special reference to Bangladesh. This paper is more to state what we really need to know towards library automation. In it, the prescriptive part is very much practical and well tested in different libraries (of other countries too). This is the only paper which deals with the CD-ROM database, and database online for converting manual catalogue into MARC format. Experienced librarians would know the problems, but with the kind of current environment, some may call it far-fetched, but it is not so. These are the avenues which we must explore if we are serious about library automation.

The papers described above are well worth collection mainly because they reflect what the library academics are doing. The practising librarians have many other problems which though stated in some papers, are not well presented here. In the descriptive parts of some papers, BANSDOC's BANSLINK project has been studied and stressed. That BANSLINK is a library project towards establishing a network of information (later to be used for document exchanges), and that it is not a library automation project in the participating libraries is not always understood. This needs to be stated because some participating libraries regarded that BANSDOC should come forward to "automate" their catalogue, which is not the reality. BANSDOC is to supply the logistics for data input on science and technology and storing them in a central database while having the facility to have access to the latter when needed; the manpower and local support are the responsibility of the participating libraries. Each of the participating libraries should have used the ligistics supplied by BANSDOC as the first

step for developing an environment of library automation, but they still needed their own automation programme. In most cases, this has not happened. The net result is that many of the papers while describing the automation situation in some libraries failed to note the difference.

For example, Dhaka University Library is not using CDS-ISIS for its automation though this library is a partner in the BANSDOC. It has maintained that BANSDOC project and the logistics are separate from its own requirements of a total integrated library automation plan. After all, CDS-ISIS cannot offer the integrated automation system. If in the future, BANSDOC's software could be adopted to a standard internationally compatible one, the exchange of information and better use of the BANSDOC would ensue. Until then, a distorted picture of library automation would be confronted by the researchers on library automation.

Computers in the library have many functions. These functions can be grouped in two, one is *internal* and the other is *external*. Two major internal functions can be as follows: it can help to develop a library system more service oriented than it is in a manual system, and secondly, it can be used towards the development of a Management Information System (MIS) that would make internal decision-taking and action-formulation easier and participatory. The major external functions of the computers in the library is to ease the burdens of manual communication and exchange of information between different libraries. Any computerisation plan needs to use at least these two parameters when planning for automation. It could be worthwhile for the Department of Library and Information Science of Dhaka University to prepare for another Seminar with the exacting tasks of what a librarian would need to know towards his/her library automation, and what support could be expected from the department.

Fazlul Alam[*]

M A (DU), M S c (UK), Ph D (UK)
Chartered Librarian

---

[*] Dr. Fazlul Alam is the Librarian, Planning and Development, Dhaka University Library, and Project Director, Dhaka University Library Automation Project (DULAP)