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9th CDNLAO Meeting: Singapore Country Report

Update on the National Library of Singapore

By Mr R. Ramachandran, Director

Library Organisational Structure

There are more than 500 libraries in Singapore. Excluding school libraries, there are 145 libraries with at least one permanent staff as listed in the Directory of Libraries in Singapore 2000 published by the Library Association of Singapore. Two new public libraries and two community children's libraries (CCLs) were opened in 2000 and another 2 CCLs in 2001, bringing the total number of libraries to 151.

Type of Library	Number
National and public libraries	20
Community children's libraries	45
Academic Libraries – polytechnic and university	12
Academic libraries – junior college and others	14
Special libraries – private	24
Special libraries – government	36
Total	151

Besides building new libraries, the [National Library Board](#) (NLB) also upgrades existing libraries to cater to the changing needs of users. The newly upgraded Marine Parade Community Library was reopened in May 2000. It is co-located at the Marine Parade Community Building with two other community groups (a community club and an arts group) and a coffee club. The co-location of libraries with community-related groups and lifestyle services such as coffee clubs and bookstores are new features that will be incorporated into upgraded or new libraries.

Reading, visiting and using public libraries is evolving into a national lifestyle. According to a survey conducted by the National University of Singapore Business School, reading ranks third on Singaporeans' list of top leisure activities after watching television and listening to music. Fourth on the list is shopping. Although statistics have shown that the number of visits to and usage of libraries have increased tremendously in the last few years, the findings of the survey will be useful to the NLB in its ongoing efforts to attract non-readers to visit the libraries, increase the number of active members and expand its services.

Collection Profile

Total book collection of the libraries is estimated at more than 15m (million) volumes. The size of collection varies from library to library with the public libraries accounting for more than half of the total national collection, and the academic libraries one third.

Type of Library	No. of volumes of Books per library
National and public libraries	100,000–380,000
Community children's libraries	6,000–10,000
Academic Libraries – polytechnic and university	(Titles) 60,000–526,000
Academic libraries – junior college and others	16,000–50,000
Special libraries – private	1,000–53,000
Special libraries – government	2,000–158,000

Source: *Directory of Libraries in Singapore 2000*

Information on the holdings of the major libraries is available from the libraries' [Web Homepage](#). The information is also available on national database services such as [TiARA](#) (Timely information for All, Relevant and Affordable).

The [National Library Board](#) as the depository of locally published materials publishes the Singapore National Bibliography. It also publishes the Singapore Periodicals Index. The [National University of Singapore](#) produces [PERIND](#) (an index to articles relating to Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and ASEAN).

Infrastructure

Singapore ONE (One Network for Everyone) is the nation-wide multimedia broadband infrastructure that allows users access to high-speed, interactive, multimedia broadband applications and services. Commercially launched in 1999 and accessible through the two broadband providers, Singapore Telecom and Singapore Cable Vision, Singapore's broadband network provides more than 200 applications to some 274,000 users at the end of 2000.

In the public libraries, broadband enabled PCs are fast becoming a standard feature. Users are able to access the Internet, and online databases, view videos as well as participate in IT training programs using the broadband connection.

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Application in the Tracking and Monitoring of books.

NLB and ST LogiTrack were jointly awarded the international Certificate of Grant of Patent on 19 Dec 2000 for the invention of the Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) application in the tracking and monitoring of books.

Services

The lending services and reference services in the public libraries continued to be well used in 2000. The number of visits increased to 21.1m from 19.7m the previous year, while library membership increased from 1.76m to 1.86m. Increases were also recorded for total loans, from 24.7m to 25m, as well as enquiries, from 0.46m to 0.65m, and logins to [NLB's website](#), National Library Line, from 3.06m to 3.44m.

As part of a national effort to help all Singaporeans become computer-literate, several government agencies, including the National Library Board, have formed a group headed by the Ministry of Manpower to draw up plans for a [National IT Literacy Programme](#). In August, the NLB launched the Basic Information Literacy Training programme to help Singaporeans to prepare for the knowledge-based economy. Participants in the programme learn to be info-savvy – navigate the Internet more efficiently and use its resources more effectively.

In May 2000, the NLB launched e-library, a fully electronic library located in the heart of the city. A joint venture with e-station, a commercial online educational and entertainment centre, e-library offers a range of services which include electronic databases and e-books.

The [National University of Singapore](#) has started tagging its collection of books and periodicals in its libraries with radio-frequency identification tags in preparation for the installation of the 3M Digital Identification System to be installed in all of its libraries by end 2001. With this system, students will be able to check out or return books using automated machines.

Plans by the NLB to extend the Electronic Library Management System introduced in 1998 and currently in use in six of the NLB 20 libraries, to all its branches over the next two years were announced in Aug 2000. The System makes use of radio-frequency technology to identify, categorize and track the loan and returning of books and will cut queuing times to borrow or return books to less than five minutes.

The National University of Singapore has started a new service whereby students will be able to receive alerts on overdue books through their mobile phones with SMS capability. Students with WAP or Internet-enabled phones will also be able to browse the library's database.

Training

According to the [Directory of Libraries in Singapore 2000](#), more than 1711 persons are employed in libraries in Singapore. This includes 313 librarians with professional qualifications and 325 paraprofessionals. The professional training of librarians and information professionals is undertaken by the Division of Information Studies at [Nanyang Technological University](#), which runs a Master of Science (Information Studies) program. This program, launched in July 1993, is a two-year part-time course with an annual intake of about 85 students. In July 2000, the Division started the full-time M Sc (Information Studies) program with 24 students.

The training of paraprofessionals is conducted by the Division of Information Studies, [Temasek Polytechnic](#). In March 2000, the first batch of 37 part-time students graduated with a Diploma in Library Studies awarded by the Division.

Intellectual Property / Copyright

A society the Copyright Licensing and Administration Society of Singapore was formed by book publishers and authors to collect licensing fees for duplication of its members' works. Initially, it will focus on tertiary educational institutions, junior colleges and schools. After that, it will focus on photocopying establishments.

New NLB Building

The schematic design for the New NLB Building was completed in June 2000. NLB has now moved on to the develop-and-construct phase of the project. The groundbreaking event will be in the third quarter of 2001.

Major Events

In conjunction with the Library Association of Singapore, the NLB successfully organised the **11th Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL XI)** from 26 to 28 April 2000. The theme of the conference was "Stepping into the New Millennium: Challenges for Librarians and Information Professionals". Over 500 delegates from more than 20 countries participated in the 3 day event.

To promote reading and awareness of Asia among Asian children, the NLB and the [National Book Development Council of Singapore](#) organized the first Asian Children Festival from 27 Nov - 3 Dec 2000. Constituting the weeklong festival were the Asian Storytelling Carnival, Asian Children's Writers and Illustrators Conference 2000 and Asian Children's Expo.

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