SOME REFLECTIONS
ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF
THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MALAYSIA

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Introduction

The National Library of Malaysia is now nearly eighteen years old. It is in its “teens”. How far have we come? Where are we going? Are we moving too fast or too slow? Have we made any real impact on libraries in particular and on society in general? There is much need for reflection and soul searching. This paper attempts to document some of the developments before the facts become clouded in the cobwebs of time. It is in a sense complementary to earlier papers by the writer which are cited in the list of references.

Historical perspective

NLM traces its origin to the National Library Services Unit which was established within the National Archives in 1966. In 1971 NLM was formally established as an institutional component of the Federal Department of Archives and National Library.

In May 1972, The National Library Act was passed, in which was set out the objectives and functions of NLM.

In January, 1977 NLM was separated from the National Archives and established as an entirely separate Federal Department. This development was envisaged at the time NLM was established and was given further impetus by the writer in a working paper presented at the Conference on National and Academic Libraries in Malaysia and Singapore in 1974.

Phase IV 1976 — The National Library of Malaysia from the beginning of this period should be completely separated from the National Archives and accorded its own independent departmental status directly under the Ministry, ending thereby a ten-year period of tutelage spanning the First and Second Malaysia Plan Periods. 1

Ten years later, in January 1987 the National Library (Amendment) Act was passed in which the objectives and functions of NLM were completely revised. NLM has now been given a legislative framework broad enough to equip itself as it approaches the 21st Century. NLM was developed from scratch in every sense of the word. In its first six years, that is from 1966-1971, its modest collections consisted entirely of library material received under provisions of the Preservation of Books Act, 1966 now superseded by the Deposit of Library Material Act, 1986. Allocation for the purchase of library materials only began after 1972 and for many years provisions were very modest. NLM was not based on the amalgamation of previously established libraries nor did it inherit any collections previously built up. In this sense, it contrasted greatly with the national libraries of many of the ASEAN countries, most of whom developed from libraries and library collections that can be traced back to the early years of the Twentieth Century. This is particularly true of Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. Even the National Library of Indonesia, although only formally established in 1980, was the result of a merger of four institutions, one of which, namely the Central Museum Library can be traced back to the Eighteenth Century. NLM collections today stand at just over 600,000 (inclusive of nearly 570,000 monographs) with a growth rate of about 40,000 volumes per year.

Ministerial Portfolio

Over the last 20 years, NLM has been placed at various times, under a number of different Ministers portfolios, which is possibly reflective of the environment in which NLM was developed. These Ministries included the Ministry of Technology, Research and Local Government, the Ministry of Local Government and Environment, the Ministry of Local Government and Federal Territory, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and more recently, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Although the name of the Ministry has changed over the years, Local Government has always been part of the Ministerial portfolio. It was only in 1982 that NLM was placed under the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport.

The placement of NLM under the Ministry of Culture seems to have been a logical one and much has been

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achieved as a result, despite the constant need to adjust to new Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries, Secretary-Generals and other Ministry officials. It must be pointed out at this juncture that NLM’s placement under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism now means that NLM has moved from the social to the economic sector. Whether this is significant and whether this will improve overall provisions, it is difficult to say. Agencies in the economic sector are normally expected to contribute to the national coffers, in other words, to be income-generating. NLM on the other hand is likely to be more resource-demanding at the present time although it does have some potential for revenue earning.

While the frequent changes of Ministry under which NLM has been emplaced and the even more frequent changes of Minister\(^2\) has resulted in some loss of continuity, they have, on the whole, not adversely affected the development of NLM or public libraries within the States of Malaysia although most of the Ministries have been burdened by pressing issues which have taken up much of their attention — for example ‘housing’, ‘local government’, ‘national culture’, ‘sports’ or ‘tourism’.

Ministerial portfolios which comprise the Subjects or Departments falling under the purview of a particular Minister are provided for under the Ministerial Functions Act (Act 2 of 1969) and the Ministers of the Federal Government Order (P.U. (A) 186), the latter having been revised on numerous occasions — in fact nearly a dozen times since 1979. In P.U. (A) 462 of 1986, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport was charged with the responsibility among others, for the subject ‘library matters’, ‘National Library Act 1972’ and ‘Preservation of Books Act, 1966’. In P.U. (A) 317 of 1987, the Minister of Culture and Tourism (under whose portfolio NLM is currently emplaced) was charged with the responsibility, among others, for ‘library matters’, ‘National Library Act 1972’ and ‘Deposit of Library Material Act, 1986’.

Since the National Library Act, 1972 and the National Library (Amendment) Act, 1987 have vested the National Library with a national remit, it would be logical to assume that the Minister has overall responsibility for libraries at least in the context of the functions of NLM as specified in the Act. In doing so however, it is necessary to bear in mind that the Minister of Education has a portfolio responsibility for the subject ‘Education’ which covers educational institutions such as Universities, Colleges and Schools and the facilities within them such as Libraries. It is also necessary to bear in mind that Public Library services are a ‘State matter’ and therefore do not fall under the direct purview of a Federal Minister although NLM does have a responsibility under the provisions of the Act to promote and facilitate their development.

Consequent upon all this, NLM in exercising its functions has to tread delicately and has to act with sensitivity in dealing with issues or in promoting the development of libraries within the country.

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2 Over the period 1982—1987, there have been six different individuals who have served as Ministers of Culture.

3 The Act came into force on 15 April, 1987 by notification in the Federal Government Gazette, Jtd. 31 No. 7, 2 April 87 (P.U. (B) 183).

Organizational structure

Changes in the organizational structure of NLM, reflective of its growth and development are best illustrated by the following organization charts. Organization charts for the year 1974, 1977, 1978, 1981, 1985 and 1987 have been shown in order to illustrate significant changes in the structure. These changes have been precipitated by a number of considerations including lines of authority, effectiveness of supervision, programme and performance budgeting as well as the upgrading and creation of new promotional posts.

Whether the current organization structure as reflected by the 1987 chart is any superior to the structure in 1985 remains to be seen. The creation of new promotional posts necessitated the splitting of some divisions. However the placement of all twelve divisions directly under the control of two directors seems to be somewhat ill advised as it tends to isolate the Director General and Deputy Director General from all operational aspects. Although this it is argued will free the Director General and Deputy Director General to concentrate on broader matters of policy, the argument wears a little thin. Some review of the structure may be necessary.

Legislative provisions

In January 1987, the National Library (Amendment) Act, 1987\(^3\) (Act 667) was passed by Parliament. The Act amended, among others, the sections on the objectives and functions of the National Library as provided for under the National Library Act, 1972, which continued to remain in force as the principal Act.

The objectives of NLM under the National Library (Amendment) Act were simply stated as follows:

(i) to make available for the use of present and future generations a national collection of library resources;

(ii) to facilitate nation-wide access to library resources available within the country and abroad; and

(iii) to provide leadership on matters pertaining to libraries.

Based on these objectives, the functions of NLM were drawn up and were specified in the Act as the functions of the Director General. These are listed in full below:

(i) to advise the Minister on national policy on all matters pertaining to libraries and all other matters relating to libraries;

(ii) to advise and assist in the national planning and development of libraries;

(iii) to acquire and maintain a comprehensive national collection of library resources reflecting the intellectual, literary and cultural heritage of the nation as well as a representative national collec-
National Library of Malaysia

Director General

Deputy Director General

Assistant Director (Technical Services)

Acquisitions
Catalog
Bibliography and Index
Administration
Training
Planning and Development
Reference

Assistant Director (Library Services)

Lending
Malay Manuscripts
tion reflecting the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of mankind;

(iv) to establish within the library —

(i) the National Depository for the storage and conservation of library resources received;

(ii) the National Bibliographic Centre for the maintenance of the national bibliographic network, the national bibliographic data base and the provision of national bibliographic and documentation services;

(iii) the National Centre for Malay manuscripts for the acquisition, documentation and use of Malay manuscripts;

(v) to provide reference, information, referral, re-

prographic and lending services;

(vi) to provide facilities within the Library to enable it to function as —

(i) the national focal point for the national information system;

(ii) the national centre for the lending and exchange of library resources in order to promote the national and universal availability of publications;

(vii) to promote and co-ordinate the development and use of the library resources of the nation;

(viii) to promote and facilitate the establishment of a nation-wide system of public libraries in keeping with national standards of provision;

(ix) to promote the establishment of a network of special libraries in keeping with national standards of provision;

(x) to promote and facilitate national and international co-operation and resource sharing among libraries;

(xi) to undertake and facilitate research on matters concerning libraries;

(xii) to provide training in order to upgrade professionalism in library matters;

(xiii) to promote and facilitate the inculcation of the reading habit;

(xiv) to co-operate with the relevant agencies in order to promote and upgrade the use and development of Bahasa Malaysia;

(xv) to co-operate with professional and other bodies at national and international level for the development of libraries;

(xvi) to lend, to sell or otherwise dispose of library resources forming part of the library;

(xvii) to do such other things as may be deemed necessary to give effect to the objectives referred to in section 3.

Clearly, in terms of functions, NLM has been assigned a wide ranging, if onerous national remit. An implementation plan is being drawn up with emphasis on priority areas and the resources required to realize plan targets.

In December, 1986 the Deposit of Library Material Act, 1966\(^4\) (Act 331) was also passed by Parliament which repealed the Preservation of Books Act, 1966. The new Act designated NLM as the sole Legal Depository for the country and terminated deposit privileges to 8 other Demand Depositories established under the provisions of the earlier Act. The new Act also provided for the deposit of 5 copies of printed library material as well as the deposit for the very first time, of 2 copies of non-printed library material, ie, tape, film etc., although publishers could request compensation for the latter. NLM also has, by provisions in the Act formed Agreements with 2 institutions, namely Universiti Sains Malaysia and the Sabah Central Library to act as Distributed Depositories of NLM in order to ensure that 2 of the 5 copies of library materials deposited will be deposited at centers distant from NLM as a precaution should any calamity befall NLM in the Federal Capital Territory. Since the present storage capacity for legal deposit materials in the Distributed Depositories is limited, there is a possibility that other Distributed Depositories may be designated for the deposit of certain forms of materials only, such as newspapers or serials. The Act places no limitations on the number of Distributed Depositories that may be so designated.

Another important feature of the Act is that it provided for the very first time for the conservation and use of library material deposited, for the creation of the standard bibliographic record and for the publication of the national bibliography. Legislative provisions alone however are insufficient and in order to provide for the effective implementation of the Act, the Legal Deposit Unit was upgraded into a full Division headed by a Senior Officer on Superscale Grade. The Gifts and Exchange Units were also absorbed into the new Division thereby leaving the Acquisitions Division as a strictly purchasing Division. Greater staffing support for the new Division however will be necessary, particularly field officers. Should this not be possible, State Public Libraries may have to be designated to collect legal deposit material published within the State on behalf of NLM, subject to such conditions as may be mutually agreed between both parties.

**National Policy**

The concept of National Information Systems (NATIS) was first propounded by UNESCO in 1974 and member countries were invited to consider and implement a number of objectives, one of which called for the formulation of national information policy which reflected the needs of all sectors of the community in order to guide the establishment of a national information plan. Although subsequent reorganization in UNESCO led to the demise of the NATIS programme, some of the ideas it generated continued to be actively considered by member countries.

In a paper by the writer presented at the Fifth Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians, Kuala Lumpur, 25-29 May,
1981, (CONSAL V) the feasibility of formulating national information policy as postulated by UNESCO was called into question.

... up to the present time, few countries appear to have specifically formulated a national information policy. Perhaps it is time we laid to rest the myth of a national information policy. The concept is far too wide for any meaningful formulation in policy terms. The political realities in developing countries at any given time require only a qualified access to information and not the universal concept as often understood by UN bodies. There are primary considerations of national unity, stability, security that are not always best served by permitting complete access to information. Hence in the developing countries especially, it is best to concern ourselves with the national policy for libraries, rather than with national information policy as understood by Unesco. Freedom of access to information, the free flow of information are laudable precepts indeed and while they provide us with some guidance, they should not be allowed to compromise national interests, which must come first, last and always. (3)

Although CONSAL V recommended that member countries give higher priority to improving access to information to all sectors of the community by placing special emphasis on formulating national policies for library and information services, no concrete action appeared to have been taken in member countries on this matter. In Malaysia, the MARA School of Library and Information Science must be credited for taking the initiative in obtaining the services of UNESCO consultant John Gray to carry out a survey to identify major inputs for the proposed national policy and subsequently organizing a Seminar on National Policy on Library and Information Services in October, 1984 jointly with NLM and UUM (Universiti Utara Malaysia).

The Seminar passed no resolutions as it was organized purely for the purpose of obtaining possible policy inputs. The Report by John Gray as well as the papers presented at the Seminar were useful in this respect. A Task Force to formulate the National Policy for Library and Information Services was subsequently set up with the approval of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport with the writer as Chairman. The Task Force completed its task in two years and submitted the proposed National Policy for the Library and Information Services for the consideration of the Government.

The proposed National Policy for Library and Information Services is a tersely worded document which aims at the provision and progressive improvement of library and information resources, facilities and services in order to contribute effectively towards overall national development. Specifically, the proposed National Policy provides for effective support for various sectoral and interest levels; for the provision of appropriate services; for the exploitation of national sources of information and for the provision of the required manpower support. Although financial provisions are not directly alluded to, the implementation of the policy will have major financial implications. While the need for a mechanism for policy implementation was discussed by the Task Force, it was deemed that provision in the National Library Act would be adequate for the time being and could be reviewed if necessary.

Computerization and Networking

NLM has moved into computerization cautiously and has avoided heavy capitalization on hardware. Instead steps were taken, particularly in the eighties to upgrade staff capability in automated systems, gradually stepping up from micro to mini-computer systems. General computer literacy was also promoted and a considerable number of staff were given the opportunity of attending short term courses as well as talks and demonstrations.

NLM involvement in computerized systems began in 1978 with a Pilot Project for a shared cataloguing system, following on the Study on the feasibility of using MARC tapes for cooperative processing undertaken by Stephen W. Massil under a UNESCO consultancy mission to Malaysia in 1977. Under the Pilot Project partially funded by UNESCO, all the university libraries and NLM participated in the project with Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) as the coordinating center. This decision was made in order to take advantage of the computer facilities already available at the University. NLM and other participating institutions has no direct exposure to the computer system at USM and only submitted data input sheets. The MALMARC (Malaysian Machine Readable Catalogue) System which became an operational system by 1979 has since been functioning at USM but will be taken over by NLM by 1990. The MALMARC database now includes over 360,000 records from 6 participating institutions with an annual growth rate of about 70,000 records.

It was only in 1982 that NLM purchased its first microcomputer, a TRS-80 with a customized programme by the vendor for the indexing of newspapers. The Malaysian Newspaper Index published by NLM every quarter is produced on the TRS-80 although this will be phased out as soon as NLM migrates to its own mainframe to be supplied under a tender exercise currently underway.

In 1984 NLM moved into minicomputers as well, but still avoiding any heavy capitalization in hardware. H.P. terminals donated to NLM were hooked on to a HP 3000 computer located at Hewlett Packard Sales (M) Sdn Bhd. While NLM paid for modems and line linkages, computer access time at HP was provided free of charge under a 5 years assistance programme. Appropriate software namely MINISIS was obtained free from IDRC (International Development Research Center) and the

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System was used to produce NLM’s Malaysian Periodicals Index which is published every six months.

The use of MINISIS on HP 3000 was partly the result of a UNESCO consultant Mission to NLM undertaken by Michael Sherwood from 14 November to 13 December, 1983. The Sherwood Report - Automation of the National Library (Paris, UNESCO, 1984) was officially made available early in 1984. Sherwood’s terms of reference were to:

(a) Study, within the total framework of library development in the country, the various activities, processes and services of the National Library and define those that merit computerization.

(b) Recommend the various options to the National Library in effecting the above, specifying hardware and software systems and costs, these options to include:

(i) the use of host main-frame/Minicomputers installed in the public sector;

(ii) its installation within the National Library itself.

(c) Examine the technological requirements for the National Library to take over the role of co-ordinating center for the MALMARC System with reference to hardware/software implications.

In November, 1985 at the Third International Conference of Directors of National Libraries in Asia and Oceania, held in Colombo Sri Lanka, the writer discussed with the UNESCO PGI, (General Information Programme) representative at the Conference the possibility of a further follow up UNESCO consultancy mission on the automation of NLM. This resulted in a consultancy mission to NLM from 12 November to 13 December, 1986 undertaken by Kerry Webb from the National Library of Australia. Kerry Webb’s Report — National Library of Malaysia: Planning for in-house computer facilities was made available in 1987. The main objectives of the mission was to advise NLM on the setting up of its in-house computer facilities to support essential housekeeping operations. With this in view the consultant’s terms of reference were:

(a) to assess the computing needs of the National Library at the present time and in the foreseeable future in relation to hardware configuration.

(b) to prepare detailed specifications and tender documents in order to facilitate the selection and phased installation of computer facilities within the National Library.

(c) to prepare detailed staffing requirements in respect of professional, technical and support personnel over the next five years.

(d) to advise on training provisions.

While the Webb report did address itself to (a), (c) and (d) of the terms of reference above, it failed to touch upon (b). Instead in the summary of recommendations it is stated that

The National Library should as soon as possible draw up a specification to assist in calling tenders for the supply of an in-house library management system.

NLM subsequently set up a Technical Committee of Senior staff to prepare detailed specifications. In November, 1987 the Specification for Turnkey Integrated Library Computer System (Kuala Lumpur, Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, 1987) was completed and released under tender in January, 1988. Tender evaluation was completed by June and tender award was made in July, 1988, after which system installation and testing will follow. The in-house computer should be operational, at least in specific modules by the end of 1988.

While provision has been made in the National Library (Amendment) Act 1987 for NLM to establish the national, bibliographic network its implementation has been deferred to phase two. However in preparation for this, the Specification for Turnkey Integrated Library Computer System states very clearly that the system must be capable of modular expansion and have the capacity to meet future networking requirements of NLM. The specifications also require that the System be able to support OSI (open system interconnection) architecture. While OSI developments at the international level have been most encouraging, it has been predicted that OSI will only become a reality within one or two years. OSI however without appropriate telecommunications infrastructure support would be of little use. In Malaysia vast improvements have been made in this respect. The networking possibilities for libraries have improved and contrast greatly from the position depicted in a paper presented at the 48th IFLA General Conference in Montreal and subsequently published in the Majalah Perpustakaan Malaysia. While NLM has very rightly given a higher priority to its in-house computing, it will have to take effective measures from now if the national bibliographic network and the national bibliographic database are to become a reality by 1990. This task however is an extremely complex one and an individual with the necessary background and experience may have to be commissioned to undertake the task. It is unlikely that a UNESCO consultancy mission, normally confined to periods of less than a month, will be adequate for the task. Much more than just a consultancy report will be required. Adequate budgetary provision will have to be made for this purpose.

Document delivery

Provision has been made in the National Library (Amendment) Act, 1987 for NLM to function as:

(i) the national focal point for the national information system

(ii) the national center for the lending and exchange of library resources in order to promote the national and universal availability of publications.

Provision for the former will be partly effected with

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the development of the national bibliographic network, the provision for electronic mail, telefacsimile and other facilities, some of which such as telefax will be provided during the course of the year. Provision for the latter is largely envisaged in terms of document delivery and is based on the system of interlibrary lending long practised within the country on an informal basis of cooperation.

The inter-library lending system within the country however is beset with many problems although the collective resources of printed and other material in the nation’s libraries are not inconsiderable. Clearly the mechanisms for document delivery within the country need to be upgraded. In a study6 undertaken for UNESCO in 1986, the situation within Malaysia was also assessed and subsequently published.8 Based on some of the recommendations made in the study, NLM organized a national seminar on the National Availability of Publications (NAP) in July, 1987. As a result of the Seminar, a Publications Delivery System for the country has now been formalised and approved by the relevant authorities. Central to the new system is a Memorandum of Understanding to be signed by NLM with all institutions within the country wishing to participate in the system. Formal signing of the Memorandum was effected during Library Month in June 1988. Although institutions sign the Memorandum with NLM, the Memorandum stipulates that all signatories in effect sign the Memorandum with one another as well. The introduction of the Memorandum of Understanding is designed primarily to institutionalise the publications delivery system and to minimise its dependence on individuals and their relationships with one another. A coupon system has also been approved by the authorities as well as a standard request form designed to facilitate the loan of publications wherever possible or their supply in micro or photocopy. The Memorandum of Understanding however will not solve all problems. The System will have to be closely monitored and a regular dialog instituted between participating institutions in order to make the system work for all.

National Library Building

Planning for the National Library building began as early as 1971 with the purchase of a 6 acre site adjacent to the National Museum in Kuala Lumpur. The idea then was to create a cultural enclave comprising of the National Museum, the National Library and the National Archives. These plans however never came to fruition as the sites reserved for the National Archives and the National Library were taken over for a road interchange under the Kuala Lumpur master plan.

It was only in 1978 that an alternative site in the city was assigned to the National Library to replace the earlier site which has been taken over. The new site covering an area of 5 acres was well located in the city center on the fringe of the central business district. In 1979 a team of private consultants comprising of architects, quantity surveyors, civil, structural, mechanical and electrical engineers were appointed by the Implementation Coordination Unit (ICU) of the Prime Minister’s Department to undertake the National Library project. This was a very significant development considering that prior to this, all planning for the National Library had been undertaken by the Public Works Department. The total built-up area approved for the National Library building was 238,000 sq. ft. (22,039 sq. meters). Although the architectural brief was prepared by the writer, the interpretation of the brief in design terms was largely conceived by the architects.

Since the National Library is a national institution placed at the apex of the nation’s infrastructure of libraries, the building was designed to be imposing as well as totally functional and which reflected at the same time traditional cultural characteristics of the nation. The building was accordingly designed to reflect particularly in its external facade the traditional head-dress of the Malays, namely the ‘tengkolok’ which dates back to the Malacca Sultanate and the Johore-Riau Empire. The ‘tengkolok’ as both a covering for the head and a symbol of social status was felt to be an apt representation in cultural terms of the National Library, which contained library material reflecting the intellectual, literary and cultural heritage of the nation as well as the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of mankind.

The design inspiration derived from the ‘tengkolok’ is symbolically represented in 3 such head gears clustered together to partially enclose a landscaped courtyard and pool. The split-level arrangement of the three blocks, each capped with a ‘tengkolok’ of varying size and level, creates a sense of progressive cultural identity and is further symbolic of the three major objectives of the National Library as well as the three main races of the country. Each ‘tengkolok’ is boldly characterized by sweeping roofs adorned with traditional ‘songket’ motifs executed in mosaic and is further capped with a pyramidal glass crystal which will be illuminated at night to symbolically represent a glowing, pulsating expression - a throbbing brain.

The building plans provided for maximum flexibility in the utilization of space in order to facilitate changing use and needs. This has been accommodated in structural terms through the provisions of:

(i) uniform load-bearing of 150 lb. p.s.f. on all floors above ground level
(ii) a standard module of 28 ft. throughout the building

The building is also fully airconditioned - further enhancing the concept of flexibility - with provisions for 24 hours air-conditioning in special areas such as the closed stacks, the Malay Manuscripts collection, the maps collection and the computer and audio-visual facility. The building is also equipped with smoke and heat detectors and a central system for monitoring and control. The


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building has seven floor levels and is serviced by five lifts - 2 service lifts for staff and for the movement of library materials; 2 lifts for the use of the public and 1 lift servicing the main auditorium which is also meant for the use of physically handicapped users. The building has a capacity of about 1 million volumes in static and compactus stacking; a staff capacity of 400 and seating for 1500 readers.

In addition, the main auditorium has a seating capacity for 400 persons while the children's theatre has a further seating capacity of 100. At full capacity, with all facilities fully utilized, the building would accommodate over 1500 persons.

Further expansion has been planned in such a way as to minimise the disruption of facilities and services. Initially, expansion is envisaged with the decentralization of the lending facility including the children's library to branch libraries within the Federal Territory. Notwithstanding this however, expansion of the building on the same site has been envisaged with provision for an adjacent block at the rear to be connected to the main building through enclosed passageways at one or more levels. Construction of the block may have to be effected well before the end of the century. This is because the existing resources of NLM at the present time alone will take up nearly 60% of the space provided for in the new building.

With the completion of the building, the collections are likely to grow at an even more accelerated pace. Construction of the new building has now commenced with completion targeted for mid-1990. A physical focus for NLM in terms of its own building has long been considered crucial and will give NLM that added credibility in carrying out its functions more effectively.

Public Library Development

Much has been achieved. All States in Malaysia provide public library services. In Peninsular Malaysia, public library services are provided by State Public Library Corporations which were established over the period 1969-1982 under the provisions of State Public Library Corporation Enactments as recommended in the Blueprint. In Sabah public library services are provided by the Sabah State Library which functions as a Department of the State Government as well as Local Government authorities.

Within NLM, the promotion and development of state public library services undertaken by the writer throughout the seventies saw fruition in the passing of public library legislation and the setting up of State Public Library Corporations in all States except Johore* by 1979. In the eighties, promotional work for state public library development was undertaken by NLM's Division for Planning and Development with senior officers designated to represent NLM on State Public Library Corporations. As State Public Library Systems grow into maturity, NLM's role may further change. Recent changes to the Legislative Lists in the Federal Constitution which have placed the subject “Libraries” in the “State List” underscore even further the independence of State Public Library systems. NLM will have to rationalize this new development in relation to provisions in the National Library (Amendment) Act, 1987 which specifies the following among the functions of the Director General:

- to promote and facilitate the establishment of a nationwide system of public libraries in keeping with national standards of provision

Notwithstanding all this, there is still much to be done and much can be achieved through cooperation and a mutual appreciation of roles.

The Future

NLM must change and adapt to the demands of the future. It may have to divest itself of some of its existing functions and concentrate on others. In this respect it may be timely to relegate the provision of public library services within the Federal Territory to City Hall. This will enable NLM to concentrate on its legal deposit, preservation, document delivery and bibliographic functions. Crucial to all this will be the calibre of leadership at NLM in the years ahead. There must be vision but there must also be pragmatism. Above all there must be a strong sense of mission.

REFERENCES

WIJASUIYA, D.E.K.


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* The Johore Public Library Corporation Enactment was passed in 1982, 4 years after the draft enactment was first submitted by NLM.