



IASLIC NEWSLETTER

Indian Association for Special
Libraries and Information Centres



April 2021

A Monthly Newsletter Published by IASLIC

Editor

Prof. Amitabha Chatterjee

Associate Editor:

Dr. Gurudas Ghosh

Assistant Editor:

Dr. Partha Sarathi Das

Editorial Board

Prof. K P Majumder

Prof. P K Panigrahi

Dr. Nitai Raychaudhury

Quote of the Month

*“Libraries are the wardrobes
of literature”*

— George Dyer (1755 - 1841),
English poet

Appeal to Readers

News from different regions / states are solicited from IASLIC members for inclusion in the newsletter. Send such news to the Editor.

Email: chatterjeeamitabha@yahoo.co.in

IASLIC ACTIVITIES

IASLIC Quality Improvement Programme: Image Building and Reputation Management of Library and Information Systems and Services (IBRM-LISaS) May 15 - 24, 2021

IASLIC is going to organize this intensive programme, the first such programme in LIS field, in online mode with a view to develop expertise among LIS professionals to go in for the task of building legitimate image and reputation of the library and its services by way of skillfully managing its activities. Experts in the field will serve as resource persons, who will make presentations on different facets of the topic, which will be followed by discussion and interaction. For more details and registration visit IASLIC website <http://www.iaslic1955.org.in/Default.aspx?PageID=62> or contact Honorary General Secretary, IASLIC (email ID: iaslic.india@gmail.com)

Nominations invited for IASLIC Awards

IASLIC invites nominations for the following awards for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020.

1. Prof. Prabir Roychoudhury and Mrs. Amita Roychoudhury - IASLIC Best LIS Teacher Award, sponsored by Prof. Prabir Roychoudhury and Mrs. Amita Roychoudhury Memorial Trust.
2. Smt. A Satyavathi and Prof. A A N Raju - IASLIC Best Young LIS Teacher Award, sponsored by Prof. A A N Raju.
3. S M Ganguli - IASLIC Award for the Librarian of the Year, sponsored by late S M Ganguli.

Six copies of application in prescribed format should reach Honorary General Secretary, IASLIC, P 291 CIT Scheme No. 6M, Kankurgachi, Kolkata 700054 on or before April 30, 2021.

For eligibility criteria and prescribed format of application visit IASLIC website.

IASLIC 29th National Seminar

The 29th National Seminar of IASLIC could not be held as scheduled during October 27 - 29, 2020 due to pandemic. The new dates and venue of the seminar will be announced in due course on IASLIC website and in the newsletter. Papers for the seminar are still being accepted. The last date of acceptance will also be announced in due course. For 'Call for Papers' detailing facets and sub-facets of the seminar theme and those of the themes of SIG meetings, please see *IASLIC Newsletter* April 2020 issue or visit IASLIC website.

List of New Members

Life Members

1. Shri Biswaranjan Manna, West Bengal
2. Dr. Archana Shukla, New Delhi
3. Dr. Pramod Kumar Singh, Jammu
4. Dr. Bindu Sharma, Jammu
5. Dr. Ravi Shukla, Varanasi
6. Dr. Reenu Arti Thakur, Jammu
7. Ms. Diksha Sharma, Jammu

Ordinary Member

1. Dr. Neelam Sharma, Jaipur

Institutional Members

1. National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities (NIEPMD), Muttukadu, Tamil Nadu
2. Pravabati College, Mayang Imphal, Manipur
3. Shimurali Sachinandan College of Education, Shimurali, West Bengal
4. Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur, Tamil Nadu
5. Raniganj Girls' College, Raniganj, West Bengal
6. St. Anthony's College, Shillong, Meghalaya

24th Ranganathan Lecture: A Brief Report

The 24th IASLIC - Ranganathan Lecture was held on March 13, 2021 at 3.30 pm through online mode. Dr. P R Goswami, former Director (Library & Information), Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi, delivered the lecture on the topic 'Why We Need More Public Libraries in India?' The programme was chaired by Prof. Amitabha Chatterjee, Editor, IASLIC Newsletter, and former Professor, DLIS, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Shri Abhijit Kumar, Hony. General Secretary, IASLIC, welcomed the Speaker, Chairperson and the participants who were linked with the programme through Google Meet. Shri Kumar narrated how IASLIC - Ranganathan Lecture was started in 1993 following a decision at IASLIC Council Meeting held at Annamalainagar in 1992. He also introduced the Speaker and the Chairperson.

In his introductory remarks, Prof. Chatterjee pointed out that though Ranganathan had never worked as librarian of any public library, he was convinced about its utility after having seen the public library system in UK and made all out efforts till his death to develop an effective public library system in this country. Thus the issue of public library development was very dear to him. In this context, he said, the topic chosen for the present lecture was very relevant.

Dr. P R Goswami commenced his lecture by paying homage to Dr. S R Ranganathan for his leadership role in the development of library and information profession in the country. The academic status and pay scales achieved by librarians of universities and institutes of higher learning were the result of tireless efforts of Ranganathan, he reminded. Speaking about the public libraries in India, he said that there should be more public libraries in proportionate to the population of the country. He said that no up-to-date data was available regarding the total number of public libraries in the country. Dr. Goswami

stressed that the need of public libraries must be perceived by the community. Public libraries could help in finding opportunities for the youth and job seekers and support women's self help groups. They could also be used as reading spaces for the youth and as skill development centres, he added. Referring to the National Education Policy 2020, Dr. Goswami said that a good collection of books in school libraries could provide opportunities to younger generation, particularly in villages, to serve the community during non-school hours. According to Dr. Goswami, the role of school teachers, persons running book clubs and religious trusts are very important in facilitating and promoting reading habit among younger generation who will be future leaders. He suggested that public libraries should think of online delivery of services and also emphasized on the need for creating small and smart public libraries, and a well-designed framework of new services and programmes with outcome statement. In a country like India with cultural and linguistic diversities, programme of activities should be suitably and specifically designed, he argued.

Since many senior professionals were attending the programme, the chairman wanted to have their comments and views with regard to public libraries, though in a memorial lecture there was no much scope of interaction. While thanking Dr. Goswami for his very informative lecture, Prof. Narendra Lahkar, President, IASLIC, wanted to know whether any action had been taken by the concerned authorities on the recommendations of the Working Group on Libraries of National Knowledge Commission (NKC). He also wanted to know about the extent of data collected through the survey of public libraries in India. In his reply, Dr. Goswami said that though the survey had been conducted under the aegis of National Mission on Libraries (NML), the survey report (unlike the previous one) did not provide any estimate of total number of public libraries in the country. He felt that the survey had not been done in a proper way. As regards other recommendation of the Working Group of Libraries of N K C relating to establishment of model public libraries, the progress was very slow, he said. Prof. K P Majumder, Vice-President, IASLIC, expressed his doubts regarding the future of public library services as a large number of public libraries remained closed due to want of staff.

In his concluding remarks, Prof. Amitabha Chatterjee said that according to the website of Ministry of Culture, Government of India, there were over 54,856 public libraries in the country. But this was certainly not sufficient for a vast country with around 134-crore population. Moreover, most of these libraries were facing many challenges and were not in a position to give satisfactory services due to various reasons. There were also regional imbalances, he said. He lamented that the government and policy makers were giving less attention to the public libraries and that footfall in public libraries was going down.

Finally, Ms. Banasree Ray, Joint Secretary, IASLIC, proposed a vote of thanks. Over forty library and information professionals attended the programme. Shri Sujana Saha, Member, Information Services Division of IASLIC, extended technical support in conducting the programme.

CONFERENCES / SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS

National

LIS Skill Development Training

A basic skill development training on 'Current Trends in Library and Information Science', organized by Indian Institute of Petroleum, Dehradun, will commence on April 5, 2021. For details visit: <https://www.iip.res.in/skill-development/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2021/02/6-LIB-2021.pdf>

International

Webinar on Digital Preservation

IFLA - ARL (Academic and Research Libraries) free Webinar on 'Digital Preservation - Managing Publications and Data for Future Research' will be held on April 8, 2021 at 6.30 pm (IST). For joining the webinar visit: <https://zoom.us/j/91812862050>

Webinar on Libraries and Climate Action

IFLA Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning Section (with NPSIG) Webinar on 'Libraries Changing the World: Educating and Promoting Understanding for Climate Action' will be held on April 26, 2021 at 11.30 pm (IST). For registration visit: <https://www.runtheworld.today/app/invitation/20326>

Bibliographic Congress

The 3rd International Bibliographic Congress of the Bibliography Group of IFLA is being organized in online mode by the State Public Scientific and Technical Library of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (SPSTL SB RAS), Novosibirsk, and co-sponsored by the Russian Library Association, the Russian National Library, and the Russian State Library, during April 27 - 29, 2021. The theme of the congress is 'Bibliographic Information in Digital Culture'. For details visit: <https://www.bibcongress.ru/en/>

Webinar on Metadata Standards

A webinar on 'New Horizons: Emerging Metadata Standards and Practices in the 21st Century' is being organized by IFLA Bibliography, Cataloguing, and Subject Analysis and Access Sections on May 27, 2021 at 9.30 pm (IST). For registration visit: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_IBNbnBYfT8OPwb8neSCraw

Conference on Social Media and Libraries

The 15th International Conference on 'Social Media and Libraries' will be held in Singapore, during July 5 - 6, 2021. For details visit: <https://waset.org/social-media-and-libraries-conference-in-july-2021-in-singapore>

Conference on Smart Libraries

The National Library of Sri Lanka (NLSL) and the Global Academic Research Institute of Sri Lanka are jointly organizing an International Conference on 'Library and Information Science' (ICLIS 2021) in Colombo, during November 26 -27, 2021. The theme of the conference is 'Digital Revolution: Moving towards Developing Smart Libraries'. For details visit:

<http://libraryinformationscienceconference.globalacademicresearchinstitute.com/main/iclis>

World Library and Information Congress

IFLA World Library & Information Congress 2021, which was earlier scheduled to be held at Rotterdam, Netherlands, will now be held in online mode, with the support of Dutch National Committee, according to an IFLA press release. Other details will be announced soon.

MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

Mobile Bus Library

A mobile library bus has been rolled out by North Eastern Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NEKRTC) along with the Zilla Panchayat, Education Department and Library Department in Kalaburagi district of Karnataka, says an ANI report published in *The Hindustan Times*. The initiative was started with the aim of encouraging children in remote areas to inculcate the habit of reading, said Kurma Rao, Managing Director of the NEKRTC. "We receive overwhelmingly positive responses from both teachers and students across the district wherever we go. The main objective of this is to inculcate the habit of reading and to get students interested in various kinds of books. The bus is now roaming in interior villages," Rao said. The unconventional library, in an old bus with over 4,000 books and about a hundred magazines, will soon allow students to issue books and return them the next time the bus visits. "Children are very keen to issue books from the library as well, so we are planning to come up with a programme that will allow the students to borrow books and return them next time," Rao added. For original report visit: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/news/mobile-library-rolled-out-for-children-in-kalaburagi-s-remote-areas-in-karnataka-101614416347267.html>

Jind to have 37 Village Libraries

This is good news for children studying in villages and going to cities for studying in libraries. Such children will soon have library facilities in their villages, says a *Punjab Kesari* report. There are plans to set up 37 new libraries in Jind district of Haryana under the Mahagram Library Scheme. A feasibility report will be prepared and sent to the headquarters for this purpose. To accomplish this task, a nodal officer has also been appointed in the district so that this work can be completed under his supervision. Out of 37 new libraries to be built in the district, the maximum number of 27 libraries will be created at the village level. Four libraries will be set up at sub-division level and four at block level besides two special libraries. All these will cost ₹ 8 million. There is a provision of ₹1.5 lakh for each of the 35 libraries and ₹ 1.5 lakh each on two special libraries. One of the special libraries is planned to be set up for girls at the child care institute at Rangshala in Jind, while the other is planned to be set up at the Ashram for Senior Citizens at

Julana. For full report visit: <https://haryana.punjabkesari.in/haryana/news/37-new-libraries-to-be-set-up-in-district-with-1-80-crore-1323786>

Student sets up Library on Balcony

Aromal Saju from Nedumangad in Kerala used the lockdown differently. Aromal, an ITC student, set up a library for quiet reading, according to a story available on zeenews.india.com/Malayalam website. The library is modelled on a balcony. The library is made of bamboo, chakiri, coir and ola. This library took about fifteen days to prepare. Aromal has been displaying such artistic talents since he was a school student. He has made many handicrafts from waste materials. This library created by him is now visited by many children. The books are well arranged and many people come here to read while maintaining social distance. For original story visit: <https://zeenews.india.com/malayalam/kerala/library-prepared-by-young-man-during-lock-down-has-many-features-45908>

Network of Libraries in Srinagar

The Deputy Commissioner of Srinagar, Shahid Iqbal Chaudhary, recently said that a network of libraries with 45,000 books has been set up in Srinagar says a report available on thekashmirwalla.com website. "Reading and writing has always been intrinsic to cultural life of Srinagar. We've set up a network of libraries with 45,000 books," tweeted Chaudhary. He further added: "The one in Bagh-e-Mehtab is among five more coming up besides open libraries. In addition to 45,000 books, 6 lakh online books/resources are being made available." Chaudhary said that the libraries had been designed to reflect the local culture, including carpeted floors with cushions for seating. "There are special sections for senior citizens and children. Arrangements for career counselling have also been made," he added. For original report visit: <https://thekashmirwalla.com/2021/02/in-srinagar-a-network-of-libraries-with-45000-books-6-lac-online/>

Theme-Based Libraries in JK Soon

The Secretary, Culture, Tourism and Youth Services and Sports of Jammu and Kashmir, Sarmad Hafeez, has said that the Department of Libraries and Research is planning to establish a network of theme-based Reading Zones-cum-Public Libraries in J&K in convergence with various departments to broaden the citizens' access to knowledge and information, says a report in English daily *Greater Kashmir*. During his visit to SPS Library complex in Srinagar recently, he said that the Libraries Department had already started the process for establishing two Smart Libraries in Srinagar in collaboration with Srinagar Smart City. "Some more theme-based libraries are being planned in Srinagar and Jammu in convergence with the Tourism Department, Information Department, Airports Authority of India, Srinagar Municipal Corporation, Department of Archives, Archaeology and Museums and Mubarak Mandi Heritage Society," he said. "These theme-based libraries will include special reading materials for students, researchers,

women, children, tourists, travellers, senior citizens and heritage enthusiasts." Responding to various demands of the students, including increase in timing and space constraints, the Secretary, Culture, announced that another reading room at the first floor of the SPS Library would be made fully functional and opened for students. He called for sustained and extensive technological interventions in libraries including automation, e-cataloguing and e-circulation to make them more user-friendly. For full report visit: <https://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/kashmir/jk-to-get-network-of-theme-based-libraries/>

JNU Students Reclaim Library

Students of JNU, after days of requesting the administration to reopen libraries, have now protested and barged into the library on campus, to be able to complete their research work in time, according to a story by Aprajita Sharad in *Hindustan Times*. With the month of May approaching, students of the Jawaharlal Nehru University are nearing their deadline to submit thesis, dissertations and research papers. The students of JNU protested on the campus recently - after days of requesting the administration - to reopen libraries - in the campus, so that they might be able to complete their research work in time. The B R Ambedkar Library and Reading Room, have been one of the focal points of congregation for all research scholars on campus, who often head to these facilities for a study and research session in their day-to-day student life at JNU. "There was a demand for opening the library by the students since a long time. The need for the library and reading room has become urgent now because we have our NET and JRF papers by May and students also have to submit their theses by then," shares Qasim Masumi, an M Phil student who was one amongst the scores of students who had protested physically for the library to open. "Hundreds of students gathered, protested, entered and reclaimed the library premises at JNU on March 10 last," adds Masumi. The students protested and entered the library claiming myriad of reasons that had been impacting their studies. "Some students had left books and reading materials in library. How will we do our research work without access to the journals there? All students facing these problems united to protest along with the university's student union. The guards were stopping us from entering the library but we managed to step in. We maintained all Covid guidelines inside the library. And now we are trying that the administration doesn't shut the library down again, by studying there and we will make sure that we use it so it's not shut down. The library won't be empty any time soon. We have our exams coming up and we need this space," says Vasudev Chakravarti, a Master's student. Online classes aren't of much help to research scholars and students in the university and the need for books and reading rooms is felt by hostellers too. Aishe Ghosh, president, JNUSU, shares that many students had been reaching out to her regarding the problems they were facing in the absence of access to libraries. "The JNUSU, time and again had reminded the JNU Administration, to re-open library along with seating capacity, which didn't come to any conclusion. Today (i.e.

March 10), we had given a call for a protest to study at library, thereby reclaiming the library which was forcefully locked for past one year,” she adds. For full story visit: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/jnu-students-reclaim-library-reading-room-spaces-101615368330086.html>

Condition of Public Libraries in Bihar

A large contingent of students migrating away from Bihar should spur the state government to act, one would think. In reality, however, the state's public library system has all but collapsed, according to a story by C K Manoj available on www.downtoearth.org website. Only 51 public libraries survive in the state which boasted of 540 in the 1950s. Similarly, there are now only 1,004 rural libraries down from more than 4,000 in the 1970s. This data was presented by a contingent of newly elected members in the Legislative Assembly. MLA Sudama Prasad of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) drew the attention of the state assembly towards the poor condition of libraries on February 22, 2021. The state government had not been granting funds for the maintenance of these libraries, he alleged. He is also the chairman of the state library committee. He sought a reply from the State Education Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, who responded saying he would need time. Education Department officials refused to comment on the matter. The State Government last issued ₹ 1 crore in grants to these libraries in 2012, Prasad claimed. “A library is treasure trove of information. It is shocking to find them shut. Most libraries currently don't have the money to buy even newspapers and they lack infrastructure,” Prasad told *Down to Earth*. He said the libraries of the ancient Nalanada University and Vikramshila University attracted students and researchers from across the globe. The situation had now turned grim, he lamented. Kerala, whose literacy rate is 95 per cent, spends 3 per cent of its total education budget on constructing and maintaining libraries; it is only 0.01 per cent in the case of Bihar. “The Bihar government should spend more to revive the libraries,” Prasad said. Poor children can't afford expensive books and research journals; these libraries offered them an unbridled space to study, according to academicians. “Poor students are the worst sufferers. While the Internet has emerged as an alternative source of information, not everything is available there. Second, the information comes with a price,” said Sachindra Narayan, retired professor from AN Sinha Institute of Social Studies. He said the libraries had been closing down since the government grant registered decrease over the years. “While the government grants for libraries have decreased, books have become costlier. How will the poor children study?” Narayan asked. Narayan, who also worked as a member of the National Human Rights Commission, claimed that libraries in only three Indian states West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu were in good condition. “Dying libraries are among the major reasons for the deteriorating standard of education,” said Pramod Kumar Singh, who retired as a sociology department professor. The Planning Commission guidelines suggested at least one village library for a population of 1,000; Bihar,

however, hardly had one library for a lakh population, Nawal Kishore Chaudhary, economics professor at Patna University, said. For full story visit: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/governance/from-nalanda-to-nowhere-will-bihar-s-public-libraries-survive-75680>

Mobile Library Facility to Stop

The authorities of M J Library (Sheth Maneklal Jethabhai Pustakalaya) in Ahmedabad have decided that library on wheels, the facility which began in 1978 for the senior citizens and children, will be stopped, says a *The Times of India* report. A proposal for stopping this facility has been moved in the standing committee meeting recently. The proposal moved by the librarian in the standing committee said that the four vehicles used for the library on wheels were very old and required to be scrapped, and hence the library on wheels facility must be stopped. The proposal states these four vehicles should be sent to the central workshop. “The facility which had been stopped due to the lockdown in the last week of March 2020 was never resumed,” said an official of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation. The officials said that the AMC had been intending to close the facility for long as there were hardly any takers. On an average, about 50 persons daily utilized the facility. The officials said that the facility had to be stopped unless the new body, which was scheduled to be formed next year, again allocated funds for purchasing new vehicles. For original report visit: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/library-on-wheels-may-come-to-a-halt/articleshowprint/79668484.cms>

Girl Student Starts Mohalla Libraries

The city-based 'Read and Lead Foundation' has started two mohalla libraries for children in Aurangabad, Maharashtra, says a *The Times of India* report. The library, which is a brainchild of Class VI student Mariam Mirza, has a collection of around 300 books exclusively for children. Mirza Abdul Kayam of 'Read and Lead Foundation' said that his daughter had a collection of books, which she decided to utilize for the benefit of the public. “I am associated with the movement aimed at increasing reading habits among the people and readily agreed with Mariam's idea. We decided to start mohalla library with her collection of books available and the first such set-up was in Baijipura,” he said. The maiden mohalla library evoked good response, following which, the duo set up another mohalla library at Rehamaniya colony. “Both libraries have 300 books each, including 100 books in Marathi. We do not wish to limit our initiative to minority areas and are planning to set up 10 mohalla libraries in different parts of the city,” Mirza said. The two libraries, which came up in January last within five days, are named after former president of India APJ Abdul Kalam and poet Ilahi Jamadar. Mariam said, “The locals not only provided space to set up the library but also offered seating arrangements and drinking water among other facilities. We hope more response for our initiative once Covid is further contained,” she said. For original report visit: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/aurangabad/mohalla-library-for->

children-introduced-in-aurangabad/articleshowprint/80673908.cms

Civic Libraries to be Run by Private Bodies

Nagpur Municipal Corporation is all set to appoint 39 private organisations for running its eight libraries and 31 study centres, says a *The Times of India* report. NMC Library Department has submitted a proposal before the standing committee seeking ₹ 2.06 crore towards payment to these organisations for three years. The standing panel will take a call on this proposal soon. Sources, however, said that in the past the civic body had rented out land to a private organization to run a library in Mominpura area. Later, it was closed down and was now being used for commercial purpose. Sources said that the private party was earning lakhs of rupees from the property while the civic body was getting nothing. According to Library Department proposal, the civic body intends to hand over 19 libraries and 77 study centres. It had invited expression of interest and received 68 applications. Of them, 23 were declared invalid. For full report visit: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/nmc-to-give-libraries-study-centres-to-private-parties/articleshowprint/81196527.cms>

Resident Volunteers Run Library

From a spare room on the ground floor to a dedicated space at the club house, the library at L&T Eden Park in Chennai has come a long way. While the Association made the path-breaking move of letting Easwari Lending Library set up shop in the community in 2013, resident-volunteers' role in sustaining it cannot be overemphasised, says a story in *The Hindu*. "Satish from Easwari Lending Library brought some shelves and stacked them with books, in a cramped space and we were some 8 to 10 volunteers trained to run the library," says Deepa Som, a volunteer. A small membership fee was charged initially. It took just a month for the initiative to catch on. "Over 100 members had sought membership, and 80% of them were children. We were surprised as we had expected senior citizens and homemakers to patronise the library. With children coming to read, their mothers would also join them," says Deepa, a mother of a 13-year-old girl who values reading through books. From 2,000 books, the library has grown to 8,000 books and commands a membership of 250. Every month, at least 500 books are replaced with new ones. First, resident-volunteers performed the functions of a librarian which included scanning the barcode and feeding details into the system. With membership mounting, the Association hired a person to run the space, and also waived off the membership fee. During the pandemic, except for a short period when the government mandated that all common amenities be closed, the doors of the library have always stayed open. "Due to COVID-19 and cost-cutting measures, we run the library. Going forward, I feel it is better to have resident-volunteers run it as the involvement is greater," says Deepa. For full story visit: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/resident-volunteers-run-this-library-in-chennai/article33830130.ece>

Kerala Academic Library Network

Finding it tough to browse the rich collection of library resources located in various universities for teaching and research? Help is at hand. The Kerala State Higher Education Council (KSHEC) has come up with a solution to make this task easy by devising a single point access to the entire library resources of universities in the state called KALNET (Kerala Academic Library Network), says an *Indian Express* report. Based on the VuFind open source software, a team of library staff led by Calicut University is engaged in the development of this new generation search interface. Library data from various university libraries are combined to form a single interface which is not only fast but also has many advanced features. In the second phase the libraries of affiliated colleges will be linked to KALNET. KOHA, free software, will be used for this. KALNET offers a single, unified catalogue to search for items across the collections of different academic libraries in Kerala. It offers quick searches based on the Title, Subject and Author. It offers better integration of the Library's traditional print materials, electronic and digital collections. In addition to books, other library resources such as journals/periodicals, PhD theses, postgraduate dissertations, Daisy Digital talking books (audio books) and various reports are also indexed. Besides advanced searching with Boolean operators, there is a "Narrow Search" feature to limit, sort and refine the search results. For full report visit: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2021/feb/22/keralas-library-resources-to-get-single-point-access-2267082.html>

TECHNOLOGY NEWS

Faster Google Chrome 90

Google Chrome's latest update makes the Web browser even faster and more secure than before, according to a story by Satvik Khare available on gadgets.ndtv.com website. The browser will use HTTPS instead of HTTP to make navigation faster between webpages. HTTP stands for Hypertext Transfer Protocol and the addition of S at the end of HTTPS stands for Secure. Adding the S to the end of HTTP helps users securely browse the Internet as it protects all communication and information of the user. Chrome has also been urging the Internet to adopt HTTPS for a long time now. Through a post on the Chromium Blog, Google made it clear that all address bar entries that do not include any protocol will automatically get the https:// protocol. The blog post also mentioned that if a user visits a particular website for the first time, Chrome will automatically select the HTTPS protocol instead of HTTP when the user enters the website in the address bar. Along with being more secure and private, HTTPS also allows for faster connectivity to the website as the browser won't need to navigate from HTTP to HTTPS. Chrome will revert back to HTTP if a website doesn't support HTTPS protocol. Also, Chrome will stick to HTTP for IP addresses, single label

domains, and reserved hostnames. The changes are being rolled out to Chrome 90 for Chrome Desktop and Chrome for Android. The release for Chrome on iOS will happen later. For full story visit: <https://gadgets.ndtv.com/apps/news/google-chrome-90-update-https-protocol-change-secure-fast-browsing-2397860>

SPECIAL FEATURE

Rise and fall of Phoenix

Remember the Greek mythological story of the bird called Phoenix which cyclically rises from the ashes of its own predecessor! Yes, a library rose from the debris of many such libraries and book collections like Phoenix in war ravaged Syria, a country in Western Asia, and again in a very difficult situation the library had to be left at the mercy of the warmongers. A pen-picture of the rise and fall of that library by Delphine Minoui has been recently carried by the famous British newspaper *The Guardian* based on her book *The Book Collectors of Darayya*. Excerpts from the story written in first-person are reproduced below as the members of the library and information profession may find the story inspirational.

At first, Ahmad Muaddamani was a distant voice coming through my computer speakers: a fragile whisper from a hidden basement. When I made contact with him on Skype, on 15 October 2015, he hadn't left Darayya in nearly three years. Located less than five miles from Damascus, his town was a sarcophagus, surrounded and starved by the regime. He was one of 12,000 survivors. They had been under fire from Bashar al-Assad's rockets, barrel bombs and even a chemical weapon attack for many months. Syria's president had besieged the town since November 2012. Like many others, Muaddamani's family had packed their suitcases and escaped to a neighbouring town. They begged him to follow. He refused - this was his revolution, his generation's revolution. Muaddamani and other young rebels had stayed, not to defend their city, but to keep something in it alive.

One day in late 2013, Muaddamani's friends called him - they needed some help. They had found books that they wanted to rescue in the ruins of an obliterated house. "Books?" He repeated in surprise. The idea struck him as ludicrous. It was the middle of a war. What's the point of saving books when you can't even save lives? He'd never been a big reader. For him, books smacked of lies and propaganda. After a moment of hesitation, he followed his friends through a gouged-out wall. An explosion had ripped off the house's front door. The disfigured building belonged to a school director who had fled the city and left everything behind.

Muaddamani cautiously felt his way to the living room, illuminated by a single sliver of sunlight. The wood floor was

carpeted with books, scattered amid the debris. With one slow movement, he knelt on the ground and picked one at random. His nails flicked against the dust-blackened cover, as if against the strings of a musical instrument. The title was in English, something about self-awareness, a psychology book. He turned to the first page, deciphered the few words he recognized. It turned out the subject didn't matter. He was trembling. His insides turned to jelly. An unsettling sensation that comes with opening the door to knowledge. With escaping, for a second, the routine of war. With saving a little piece, however tiny, of the town's archives. Slipping through these pages as if fleeing into the unknown. Muaddamani took his time standing up, the book against his chest. His entire body was shaking. "The same sensation of freedom I felt at my first protest," he remembered.

A detonation interrupted the Internet connection. I stared at the screen. After a moment, he continued his story, giving an inventory of the other books found in the rubble that day: Arabic and international literature, philosophy, theology, science. A sea of information. "But we had to hurry," he continued. "Planes were rumbling outside. We moved fast, dug up the books, and filled the bed of a pickup to the brim."

In subsequent days, the collection effort continued in the ruins of abandoned houses, destroyed offices, and disintegrating mosques. Muaddamani developed a taste for it. With each new hunt for books, he savoured the immense pleasure of unearthing abandoned pages, bringing back to the world life buried in wreckage. They excavated with their bare hands, sometimes with shovels. In all, they were 40 or so volunteers - activists, students, rebels - always at the ready, waiting for the planes to go silent so they could dig in the rubble. They salvaged 6,000 books in one week. One month later, the collection reached 15,000. The books were short, long, dented, dog-eared, damaged; some were rare and highly sought-after.

They had to find somewhere to store them. Protect them. Preserve this small crumb of knowledge before it all went up in smoke. By general agreement, a plan for a public library took shape. Darayya never had one under Assad, so this would be the first. "The symbol of a city that won't bow down - a place where we're constructing something even as everything else collapses around us," added Muaddamani. He stopped, pensive, before uttering a sentence I will never forget: "Our revolution was meant to build, not destroy."

Fearing reprisals from the regime, the organizers decided this library would be kept in the greatest of secrecy. It would have neither name nor sign. It would be an underground space, protected from radar and shells, where avid and novice readers alike could gather. Reading as refuge. A page opening to the world when every door is locked. After scouring the city, Muaddamani and his friends uncovered

the basement of an abandoned building at the border of the frontline, not far from the snipers, but largely spared rocket fire. Its inhabitants were gone. The volunteers hurriedly constructed wooden shelves. They found paint to freshen the dusty walls. They reassembled two or three couches. Outside, they piled a few sandbags in front of the windows, and they brought a generator to provide electricity. For days, the book collectors busily dusted, glued, sorted, indexed and organized all these volumes. Now arranged by theme and in alphabetical order on overstuffed shelves, the books found a new, harmonious order.

These young Syrians cohabited with death night and day. Most of them had already lost everything - their homes, their friends, their parents. Amid the chaos, they clung to books as if to life, hoping for a better tomorrow, for a better political system. Driven by their thirst for culture, they were quietly developing an idea of what democracy should be. Muaddamani and his friends were true soldiers for peace.

The library very quickly became one of the cornerstones of this isolated town. Open from 9am to 5pm, except on Friday, the day of rest, it welcomed an average of 25 readers a day, mainly men. In Darayya, Muaddamani said, women and children were not very visible and rarely ventured outside. In general, they made do with reading the books their fathers or husbands brought home, rather than risk the barrel bombs raining from the sky.

Muaddamani and his friends had created something extraordinary in the midst of a war zone, their library - a land without borders. A secret hideaway, where books circulated with no need for a safe-conduct pass or bulletproof vest. In

this protected place, they had managed to establish an atmosphere of collective intimacy, as well as a sense of ethics, discipline and, oddly enough, normality. There was no doubt that this helped them hang on.

In August 2016, when the situation in Darayya became “leave or die”, the young rebels who had survived the horror of war by losing themselves in books had to leave their treasures under the rubble. Muaddamani was evacuated to Idlib (a town around 335 km away). A few weeks later, he sent me a photo of what remains of the secret library. The shot was taken by one of the rare reporters granted access to Darayya, under the regime's close surveillance. I recognized the enclosed space with its perfectly lined-up aisles and wooden shelves along the walls. They were half-empty. The remaining books were thrown on the floor, abandoned to dust and darkness. Ripped-out drawers littered the ground, mixed with scattered volumes. In the background, a soldier wearing fatigues trampled the paper wreckage. The books didn't end up in a bonfire, as Muaddamani had feared. After unearthing the secret library, regime soldiers had pillaged it to sell the books for cheap on the sidewalk of a flea market in Damascus.

Epilogue: The indomitable spirit of Muaddamani and his comrades is commendable. Let us hope that their library will one day spring up again from the rubble of war, like Phoenix, to their delight, to serve the people of Darayya.

[Note: *The excerpts from The Guardian story are being reproduced here with due acknowledgement to the story writer and the newspaper concerned. For full story you may visit: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/mar/16/words-have-the-power-to-heal-syrias-rebel-librarians>]*

Published by Dr. J. N. Satpathi on behalf of IASLIC, P-291, CIT Scheme No. 6M, Kankurgachi, Kolkata - 700054.
Printed at Microprint Graphics, 1A, Raja Lane, Kolkata 700 009.
Editor: Prof. Amitabha Chatterjee

BOOK POST

If undelivered please return to :

**Indian Association of Special Libraries
& Information Centres (IASLIC)
P-291, CIT Scheme No. 6M,
Kankurgachi, Kolkata 700 054**

**Phone: (033) 2362 9651
Email: iaslic.india@gmail.com
Website: <http://www.iaslic1955.org.in>**