

SINGAPORE

NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD

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INTRODUCTION

The National Library Board (NLB) was established on 1 Sep 1995. Its mission is to expand the learning capacity of the nation by bringing information to the people. The NLB oversees the management of the National library, two regional libraries, 20 community libraries, 39 community children's libraries, as well as libraries belonging to government agencies and school institutions. NLB also administers the Singapore Management University Library, Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute Library, Meridian Junior College and Republic Polytechnic Library. The Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) Secretariat, which was established in April 2000, is being administered by NLB. The functions of the CONSAL Secretariat are to plan and execute programmes and activities in accordance with the objectives of CONSAL.

MAIN DEVELOPMENT

LIBRARY RENOVATION

Besides building new libraries, the National Library Board also upgrades the facilities of its existing libraries to cater to the changing needs of users. The Ang Mo Kio Community Library was upgraded and re-opened on 25 Jan 2003. The refurbished library introduced two new services to the public: the Indian Library Services and "Mind Matters". With 11,000 print and non-print materials, the Indian Library Services refers to the nation's comprehensive collection and information services on all things Indian. "Mind Matters" aims to develop and stimulate the mind through various methods of experiential learning.

NEW LIBRARIES

The new National Library building, slated for completion in 2005, would incorporate a Drama Centre into its design. This includes a 642-seat theatre and a smaller 120-seat black box. Located within the arts belt of Singapore, this addition to the new National Library building will bring synergy with the arts.

Along with the launch of the new performing arts centre in Singapore, NLB opened its special arts library, Library@Esplanade, on 13 September 2002. Library@Esplanade is Southeast Asia's first performing arts library. Offering privileges through a Premium membership costing S\$20.60 a year, users can borrow multimedia materials on the performing arts or access the only public collection of musical materials on the performing arts or access the only public collection of musical scores. Also unique are the piano rooms and the audio-visual rooms, which users can book and use.

On 1 December 2002, the NLB opened Sengkang Community Library, a groundbreaking do-it-yourself library. The library is the tenth community library to be located in a shopping mall, and it is a fully automated facility, equipped with a myriad of self-service features. Library patrons will not find any librarians in this do-it-yourself library. Instead, they are encouraged to search for the books they want to borrow and check them out electronically through self-check borrowing stations. However, access to library staff is made readily available through the Cybrarian, a booth, which allows a user to communicate with a librarian via a telephone and a dedicated terminal.

Meridian Junior College, Singapore's 16th junior college, opened in January 2003. Its facilities include a 2-storey library that is designed and managed by the National Library Board. This is a first for Singapore schools. The National Library Board is also in partnership with Singapore's newest polytechnic, Republic Polytechnic, to manage the polytechnic's library. Republic Polytechnic will take in its first batch of students in July 2003.

SERVICES

VISITORSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP

Visitorship and membership continue to increase at the public libraries in 2002. The number of visitors to the library increased from 27.8 million to 28.8 million, while library membership reached 2.1 million compared with 1.996 million in 2001.

REFERENCE AND LENDING SERVICES

The reference and lending services in the public libraries continued to be well used in 2002. The number of enquiries increased from 1.3 million to 1.6 million. Increases were also recorded for total loans, from 27.95 million to 28.7 million.

The National Library Board and the National Library of Australia recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen cooperation between the two libraries. One of the areas of cooperation outlined is digital reference service. Discussions have already commenced between the two libraries on regional collaboration through the AskNow digital reference service, an initiative by the Council of Australian State Libraries.

In January 2003, the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI) Library opened its doors to the public for the first time in its 36-year history. The SAFTI Library is a defence and military studies resource centre with a collection, which covers a variety of subjects such as military history, strategic and security studies, and defence relations. In collaboration with NLB, the SAFTI Library extends its collection of books to the public for loan. Members of the public can borrow the books from SAFTI Library and return them at either the library or at any of NLB's regional or community libraries. Reservation can also be done through the National Library Board's website. In addition, with a S\$5 delivery fee, members can also request for the books to be sent to their residence.

READING PROMOTION

The "Library Ambassador" campaign launched in Feb 2003 is a year-long initiative organised by the National Library Board to promote lifelong learning as well as the wide range of library resources. Throughout the year-long duration of this campaign, Library Ambassadors will be participating in a wide array of activities in the libraries. These Library Ambassadors include television celebrities, sports personalities, news presenters, radio deejays and even Members of Parliament. Its objectives are two-fold: to leverage on the personality and popularity of local television stars serving as Ambassadors to promote reading and learning, and to stimulate awareness and usage of the wide range of resources available in the public libraries.

To encourage working adults to read regularly, the National Library Board launched a new programme, the "Library@Office" campaign in March this year. Library@Office is a series of road shows and promotions targeted at professionals, managers, executives and businessmen (PMEBs). The aim is to promote lifelong learning through the use of libraries and its extensive services.

ELECTRONIC AND DIGITAL LIBRARY SERVICES

To address the growing business and research demands for information about China, the National Library Board launched a new one-stop infoportal, China Resource Library, on 12 December 2002. Developed following a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the National Library Board and the National Library of China, China Resource Library provides valuable specialised content in the areas of tourism, logistics, education, life sciences, finance and investment. It serves as a gateway for individuals and corporations in Singapore and regional countries to learn about China economically, politically, socially and culturally so that they can make informed decisions about investing and conducting business in China. China Resource Library is accessible to all Singaporeans via the NLB Digital Library at eLibraryHub.

The National Library Board and the British Library have embarked on a trial project to digitise historic documents about Singapore to be made available on the Web. The project will digitise 38 items, comprising over one thousand images, allowing global access via Internet to a treasure chest of primary information about Singapore's history.

A personalized print ez-link card was introduced in Nov 2002 by Singapore Mint, whereby an option is given to all personalized print ez-link cardholders to have their cards designated library compliant. Cardholders can use the ez-link card as library card to borrow books and other materials at all the NLB libraries.

EVENTS

The National Library Board organised the 2nd Asian Children's Festival (ACF) from 8 to 16 November 2002. The festival comprised programmes such as the Asian Congress of Storytellers, Asian Children's Writers and Illustrators Conference, Asian Storytelling Carnival, Asian Children's Film Festival, Children's Drama Fiesta and Asian Children's Expo. One of the highlights of the festival was the Great Singapore Stories (GSS), an initiative developed by the National Library Board to promote the art of storytelling with the objective of making storytelling a national past time in the near future. The one-day event featured storytelling sessions held on board a Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) train and at shopping malls across the island.

NLB participated in the Singapore Learning Festival 2002 in Nov 2002 by showcasing its training capability, the National Library Board Institute, eLibraryHub, the one-stop digital information service provider and ONE Learning Place, NLB's IT and info literacy training center promoting e-lifestyle for everyone.

ISSUES

As in other countries, NLB continues to be affected by the changes brought about by the rapid advances in information and communication technologies and the emergence of the Internet and knowledge economy. The major issues are in:

- Preservation/digitization
- Copyright
- Legal Deposit of non-print materials
- Payment for services – mechanism
- Permanency of digital publications
- Print versus electronic; physical library versus virtual library
- Ownership versus access
- New skills and knowledge
- Career track for library professionals
- Language publications and collections
- Performance measures or indicators
- Changing role of libraries in the new economy
- Promoting and sustaining reading habit and interest

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