MESSAGE

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Public libraries in Jammu & Kashmir have a long history. The first public library in the State was established in 1879 at Jammu followed, 19 years later, by the establishment of another at Srinagar. Today, we have a network of 140 major, medium and small public libraries located in different parts of the State which serve as information and knowledge dissemination centres.

The launching of Website by the Department of Libraries & Research is a significant moment in the history of public libraries in Jammu & Kashmir. It also reflects our commitment to improve public library facilities and match these with the requirement of the day. The Website is part of the major project of automation and networking of public libraries initiated recently. It provides a window on public library services in the State and an easy and swift access to our rich collection. The archival and digitization of manuscripts, of which we have a huge collection, and rare and reference books has been dovetailed with the main project to provide access to scholars, students and interested people to this rich heritage without actually visiting a library.

The Website comprises two portions - static and dynamic. The static content relates to non-interactive portion like information on organizational set-up, library locations, contact details, collection, procedures, citizen charter, RTI, library committees and archives. The dynamic content comprises Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Digitized manuscripts and rare books shall also be added to this content on the completion of the project. Even as the data entry is in progress, we have started uploading OPAC information about the four major public libraries covered in the Pilot Phase. As the data entry is carried forward the dynamic content will keep on updating periodically.

The public library scenario in the State is in for a big makeover. We are working on a strategy to improve both library infrastructure and collection. On the infrastructure side, a major state-of-the art Central Library Complex with art gallery, auditorium, fire-proof blocks for manuscripts, Internet café, exhibition hall, children section, researchers' cabins and cafeteria is in the advanced stage of construction at Srinagar. Spacious buildings are being constructed for public libraries faced with space crunch. During 2010-2011, we have completed and inaugurated two-storied buildings for District Library Pulwama and Gani Memorial Library & Reading Centre, Srinagar. A three-storied block was added to the SRS Central Library Jammu. Construction of a double-storey building for District Library Udhmapur and Tehsil Library Kulgam has been taken up and work is apace. Over a period of time, our district libraries at Kathua, Doda, Anantnag, Kupwara and Bugdam have got their own buildings. Similarly, tehsil libraries at Charar-e-Sharief, Bishnah, Samba, Akhnoor,

Sunderbani and Ramnagar and six Border Block Libraries in Jammu have also their own modest accommodation.

The procedure for selection and purchase of titles for public libraries has been simplified and made more transparent. The two committees set up for the purpose have been broad-based with a fair input of intellectuals, authors and university teachers. From now onwards, the process of selection and purchase of books will be placed in the public domain through our Website to ensure increased transparency. One of the thrust areas during the current year was to make available books on competitive examinations for the benefit of the aspiring civil servants. Over 100 titles on different subjects were purchased and made available at central, district and tehsil libraries. Orders have been issued to provide these titles to public libraries at block level also.

We have made a good beginning for the improvement of public library services in the State. It is an ongoing process and our efforts to bring about complete transformation shall continue. We look forward to active participation by all the stakeholders.

I express my gratitude to Hon'ble Ministers, Mr. Nawang Rigzin Jora and Mr. Nasir Aslam Wani and Commissioner/Secretary to Government, Mr. Atal Dulloo for their full support to the Department for undertaking the significant project of automation and networking of public libraries. A word of appreciation is also due to all my colleagues in the Department and the officials of the National Informatics Centre associated with the Project and the creation of this Website. Their contribution is warmly acknowledged.

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