
UNIT 13 SOURCES FOR CURRENT AFFAIRS

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Types of Reference Sources
 - 13.2.1 Indexes to Newspapers
 - 13.2.2 News Summaries and News Digest
 - 13.2.3 Summaries of Television and Radio Broadcasts
- 13.3 Uses and Limitations
- 13.4 Summary
- 13.5 Answers to Self Check Exercises
- 13.6 Key Words
- 13.7 References and Further Reading

13.0 OBJECTIVES

Information on Current Affairs is one of the reference questions faced by librarians. In this Unit we discuss about sources of such information.

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- describe different types of reference sources for current information;
- explain the scope of these reference sources;
- state their uses and limitations; and
- give important examples under each category.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Seeking information on current happenings or events or affairs has become an essential part of modern living. Apparently questions relating to current events appear simple but answering them is the most difficult aspect of reference work. Young people who intend to appear for competitive examinations, quiz contests, etc., will come to you for information on current events. Radio, television and newspapers are important media for the purpose. But increasing flood of current events become elusive after a few weeks. There is considerable time-lag between the announcements and their incorporation in published abstracts, digests and indexes. As compared to the abundance of the current events, secondary services (bibliographical tools) in this field are insufficient.

Online reference service can be a good solution to the problem of information on recent happenings. But it will take sometime to, organize such service in India. Moreover it is very costly. As a reference librarian you have to depend until then on the available news paper indexing and news digest services.

In the following pages we give you an account of the reference sources of current events.

13.2 TYPES OF REFERENCE SOURCES

There are three types of sources for information on current events:

- a) Indexes to newspapers, b) News summaries and news digests, c) Summaries of television and radio broadcasts.

13.2.1 Indexes to Newspapers

Indexes to newspapers surrogate the news items that appear in dailies., They are the time saving



sources, particularly regarding current events. It is seen that in western countries where information service is considered of much importance, quite a few individual newspapers have introduced such services. In India also, this aspect of newspapers is realised and the library associations, important publishing houses, etc., are taking up such publishing work.

The current events like, policy pronouncement, opinions, socio-economic development news, news about prominent personalities, public opinion on current happenings, etc., appear in daily newspapers. There are so many of these dailies. Referring to any newspaper for important event that took place in the recent past i.e., before a fortnight, a month, two months or a quarter will be a time consuming job, because both the enquiries and reference staff will not be sure of the date of the particular issue of the newspaper in which the news items appeared. One has to go through all newspapers one by one which is a tedious and time consuming job. The indexes to newspapers are, therefore, a boon to reference librarians and help in overcoming the difficulties in seeking information on current events.

There are two types of these indexes:

- a) Indexing service of individual newspaper, and
- b) Indexing service covering many newspapers.

A) Indexing Service of Individual Newspapers

- i) *The New York Times Index*. New York: New York Times, 1851 -. Semi-monthly with quarterly and annual cumulations.

Between 1913-1929 published as quarterly volume, from 1930 published as monthly with only annual cumulation; from 1931-47 monthly with annual cumulation; from 1978 - quarterly for the first three quarters, the fourth quarter merged with annual cumulation.

This index is best known throughout the world. Its coverage is wide and complete. This service provides access to major news items relating to national and international events that appear in New York Times. Each entry includes a brief abstract of the news story. The enquirer who is interested in knowing a single fact i.e., the name of an official or the date of an event or the title of a play, etc., will be able to get this information in this index. It is arranged in dictionary form with sufficient cross references to names and related topics. Events are arranged date-wise under each main heading. Cumulative indexes that are published every quarter and annually save the users time in searching the required information. However, there is time-lag of two to three months in publishing semi-monthly issues.

The index is available for online searchers and is called the *New York Times Information Bank*. This online service updates the material once each week and current headlines are updated every 24 hours.

This service is also available on microfilm which is updated every month. But the cost of all these services is prohibitive.

- ii) *The Times Index*. Reading, Eng. : Newspaper Archive Developments, 1906 -

The index began by the Times, London, in 1906 but its titles and periodicity have been changing: during 1906-13 the title was *The Annual index*; 1914-57 *The Official index*; 1958-77 *The Index to The Times*, *The Times Index* as monthly with annual cumulation began in 1977.

The Times started its official indexing service in 1906. Before that the index to Times was independently published under the title, *Palmer 's Index to the Times*. This was highly selective. However, this indexing continued from 1790 to 1941 even though *The Times* introduced its official indexing in 1906. The index for the period 1785-90 has also been published by Newspaper Archive Developments, Reading, England, in 1978-84.

Index published by the Times of London since 1906 is comparatively superior. It is arranged in dictionary form with sufficient cross-references to names and related topics. This indexing service provides brief abstract comprising dates, facts and other details which are sufficient for ready reference work. The users need not go to consult the newspaper.

From 1974 the *Times Index* includes in the same sequence references to items in the *Sunday Times*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *the Times Educational Supplement* and *the Times Higher Education Supplement*. Since 1977, this index has appeared



monthly, with annual cumulations. This service is available on microfilm also

There are 65 volumes of Palmer's Index to Times covering the period 1790 to 1905. The Kraus Reprint services has published 118 volumes for the years 1906. Even latter volumes of this service are available.

Two more important newspapers, *Le Monde* (Paris) and *The Guardian* (London) have got their indexes, although in both cases the indexing agency is not associated with the newspaper concerned. In India, attempts have been made to compile newspaper indexes.

Index to the Times of India (Bombay) has ceased publication and we now have *The Hindu (Madras) Index*.

B) Indexing Service Covering Many Newspapers

i) *Canadian News Index*. V.1-1977 -. Toronto: Micro media, 1977 -.

It is monthly with. annual cumulation. Started as Canadian Newspaper Index. V. 1 1977-. Toronto Micromedia, 1977 - . Monthly with annual cumulation. Started as Canadian Newspaper Index, the title was changed to the present title in 1979. Beginning with only five newspapers, the coverage has improved to about thirty newspapers and magazines of Canada. The index is also available for online searching.

ii) *National Newspaper Index*, 1979 -. Los Altos, Calif.: Information Access Corp., 1979. Microfilm. Monthly

Beginning with only three American newspapers viz. *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The Wall Street Journal*, it now also covers *Los Angeles Times* and the *Washington Post* (from 1982). The index is updated monthly, each issue being a full cumulation. Subscription price is adjusted according to the subscribing library's book budget. The index is available for online searching through News Search Service.

iii) *Newspaper Abstracts on Disc* (Computer file). Louisville, KY. : UMI/Data courier, 1985-

Available both on CD-ROM as well as on line through DIALOG, it is an index to *Atlanta Constitution*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Los Angeles Times*, *the Wall Street Journal*, *the New York Times* and *the Washington Post*. But search fields are limited to newspaper titles, headlines, abstracts, bylines, and subject headings.

iv) *Indian Press Index* (Delhi) and *Indian News Index* have attempted to index the newspapers. However, they have ceased publication for want of support.

13.2.2 News Summaries and News Digests

These sources are referred to quite frequently by the reference librarians to answer questions-relating to current events. It could be inferred from the terms used that news summaries/news digests are again newspaper indexes but with a difference that in addition to bibliographical and locational details, brief summaries of the news items are provided by them. Thus, unlike newspaper indexes, in news summaries one can get brief information without referring to newspapers provided he is interested in factual and brief details about current events.

The scope of these news digests, as you will notice from the examples provided below, is international, regional/continental, national and special or subject.

A) Examples of International News Digests

Keesing 's Record of World Events. London: Keesing's World Wide, LLC, 1931 -. Monthly. Supersedes *Keesing 's Contemporary Archives*, which was published weekly between 1931-1983. It provides a unique contemporary record of modern history and it is a factual, objective reference source of current affairs, based on monitoring of the world press and the information sources. Each monthly issue consists of a comprehensive digest of the previous month's world news. An outline index is printed on the back page of each issue. News are organised under six sections viz., Africa (excluding Maghreb States), America, Asia, Australasia Pacific, Europe, Middle East - Arab World, International. Full cumulative subject and name indexes are published periodically superseded by final full year subject and name index. It is a loose leaf service.



Keesing's Record of World Events is also available on CD-ROM for 1960-1996. These are updated quarterly beginning from 1997. The entire archive is now available on line.

Facts on File: World News Digest with Index. V.1-1940-. N.Y.

Facts on File, like Keesing's record, is a loose leaf service. The news items, editorials, etc., that appear in major newspapers are summarised in this service. Summaries provided are factual, short and objective. Although coverage of news items is international, emphasis is laid on events relating to the United States. Entries are arranged under broad subject headings, such as, world affairs, finance, economics, national affairs, sports, etc. It provides a detailed index, every two weeks, each month, quarterly and annually with cumulation of previous issues. Since 1950, a five yearly index is being brought out. This index is very useful in locating the news item summaries. This weekly news summary is published promptly without much time gap. But its main defect is like other services of the category. It does not indicate the sources of information. The annual bound volume is published as *Facts on File Year Book*. From 1980 machine readable version known as *Facts on File News Digest CD-ROM* is also available.

B) Examples of Regional or Continental Digests

i) *Asian Recorder*. New Delhi: Asian Recorder and Publications, 1955 -. Weekly. Issued weekly, the news sheet of the news digest are numbered consecutively from the first issue in January 1955 when it began publication. In all, 45 countries of Asia are covered in the Recorder. Countries with their abbreviations are printed on the inner side of the back cover each year. The news sheets carry three quarterly indexes and an annual index. The data in the index is organised under individual countries. Separate sections are provided for international organisations, sports, agriculture, appoint and etc. Sources for the news summary are quoted at the end of the summary. Service is prompt.

ii) *Collected South Asian Editorials: monthly documentation journal*. Delhi: South Asia Information and Research Aid Group, 1995 -. Monthly.

It is a monthly documentation of editorials from Indian and some South Asian newspapers. Editorials are collected on topics of current interest. Hindi language press is also surveyed for this purpose.

iii) *Africa Diary* New Delhi: Africa Publications, 1961 -. Weekly.

This is a weekly record of events from Africa. News summaries are provided under countries, which are listed alphabetically. It has a weekly index, which is cumulated quarterly and annually:

iv) *Africa Record: a fortnightly record of African events with index*. New Delhi, 1962-

Fortnightly with semi-annual and annual indexes. .

Arrangement is country-wise alphabetical. Summaries of events are entered under each country. This service provides an additional section on Africa Outside Africa.

C) Examples of Country Wise -- Digest

Canadian News Facts. Toronto: Marpep, 1967-. Biweekly.

As per subtitle it is an index digest of Canadian current events. Like *Facts on file* it is a loose leaf service with quarterly and annual cumulation.

Keesing's UK Record. Harlow: Langmatn, 1988-

Six times a year. Each issue begins with "a calendar of principal events that provide textual comments on major events. The focus is on events occurring in UK and on UK's external

relations, based on constant monitoring of the press, official sources, and other relevant information sources.

The name and subject index are cumulated every six months and annually.

Data India: a weekly digest of Indian News. New Delhi: Press Trust of India, 1992 -. Weekly. Originally started in 1976 by the Press Institute of India (New Delhi), it was



taken over by the PTI in 1992. The publication is more concerned with economic development of the country and provides information on economic development, culled from government reports, parliamentary publications, and reports from other research organisations. It is considered an excellent source of information on current events in the country's economic development. The information is grouped under four sections: Section I: National, in which information is arranged under 31 subject headings; Section II: Foreign affairs; Section III: Economy, finance, industry and commerce, and section W: Focus; which is a brief write up on topic of interest during the week.

The index to the publication is released at quarterly and annual intervals.

D) Examples of State-Wise Digests

i) *Data Andhra Pradesh*. Hyderabad: Data News Features, 1977 -. Fortnightly.

Important events that are reported in leading newspapers, periodicals, reports; official documents, bulletins of state legislative proceedings etc., are summarized. It provides information relating to developmental activities, economic trends, industrial growth, power generation, natural resources, agricultural production etc.

The daily diary section consists of summaries of the important current events during the fort-night. Pages are numbered on continuous basis for each year. Quarterly and half yearly indexes are issued for easy reference.

ii) *News Data Karnataka*. Hubli: Faj & Raj Publications. 1984 -. Monthly.

This news diary summarises information about economic situations, agriculture, education, environment, health, housing, government, science, press, etc., relating to the state of Karnataka, from the daily newspapers. Each item indexed and summarized is provided with citation of the daily paper with date where the news item appeared.

E) Examples of Specialised / Subject-Wise Digests

i) *Indian Economic Diary*. New Delhi: Hari Sharan Chhabra. 1970 -. Weekly.

Indian Economic Diary is a weekly digest of news items relating to economic area taken from leading newspapers and periodicals. The entries are arranged under the headings- national events, around the states, foreign trade and India and the world. A quarterly index is provided. The index of the 4th quarter is a cumulated one. The indices for the first three quarters need to be removed once the annual (4' qts) index is received. The title of the source is given under each summary.

This news summary is a good reference tool for all organizations and institutions interested in economic affairs.

ii) *VANS-COM*. Mamba: Vans Information and Investor services.

A computerised business data base built by surveying on daily basis 35 publication including major business and financial newspapers, business and finance journals, Reserve Bank and State Bank publications, company prospectus, etc. Subscribers to the service can access daily news reports and monthly news reports, corporate action, such as floating of issues (stock market) merger and split of companies, performance giving insight into half yearly and annual results of about 2500 industries. The firm has arrangement of hot line that instantly connects subscriber to related information and SDI under which each person gets a daily packet of information on the areas of his interest is provided.

Internet Based Newspapers and News Digests

These days most of the newspapers provide Internet based services. Apart from the National Newspapers like Times of India, Hindu, Indian Express, Deccan Herald etc. a large number of Regional Newspapers are available in various languages with the facility of downloading of fonts of the required language. The news items are provided in HTML format, which facilitates the user to search for the specific information. India World Samachar is an example of an Indian News digest service on the net which provides news on various aspects viz. daily news headlines, business news, sports, entertainment etc. It also provides links to most of the Indian newspapers on the net.



Self Check Exercises

- 2) Write short notes (about 75 words each) on the following :
 - i) Kessing’s Record of World Events
 - ii) Asian Recorder

Note: i) Write your answers in the space given below.
ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

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13.2.3 Summaries of Television and Radio Broadcasts

A modern library is expected to have, in addition to conventional media, the non-conventional material in its collection. Audio-visual material like films, television, radio, etc., are important components of the non-conventional sources of information. Particularly for current events, radio and television are effective sources and occupy important place. The, number of people who derive awareness on current affairs from radio and television is increasing day by day. But spoken words, heard from radio and television are difficult to remember and retrieve. Therefore, some bibliographical services are necessary to overcome this problem of retrieval. These services also could be categorized as sources of current events Some examples are provided below.

i) Summary of World Broadcasts. Caversham: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1947.

The BBC Monitoring service publishes transcripts in English after listening and preparing reports on foreign radio broadcasts from more than 100 countries in over fifty different languages. It is published daily except on Sundays, in four parts - USSR, Eastern Europe, the Far East and the Middle East and Africa. Each part has its supplement 'Weekly Economic Report'. It does not have an index. Hence for a reference librarian, it is difficult to use.

ii) *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*. Washington: D.C.U.S. Department of Commerce.

This service is the US equivalent of Summary of World Broadcasts. Both of them are available in printed and microfiche formats

iii) *BBC Six P.M, Cambridge*, Chadvyck-Healey, 1978-

Chadwyck-Healey has ivablished the BBC Home Service Nine O’Clock news from 1939-1945 on microfiche. It has started reproduction of news readers, scripts of radio, six p.m. hews bulletins which are collected quarterly with a printed index. It has been produced regularly since 1978.

iv) *CBS Tetevision News Bulletin Scripts*. New York Microfilming Corporation of America, 1975 -. Quarterly with annual cumulation.



This index provides primarily a subject approach but also enlists entries by personal names and location. It offers verbatim transcripts of daily television broadcasts on microfilm or microfiches.

- v) *Television News Index and Abstracts: a guide to the Vanderbilt Television News Archive*. Vanderbilt University.

This is a collection of video-tape cassettes of the evening news broadcasts for each of the three major US television networks.

Recent events sources for television news are not available for retrospective reference in Britain.

13.3 USES AND LIMITATIONS

The most time-consuming job in any reference section is to search for current material on recent events. Daily newspapers, weekly news magazines, radio broadcasts and telecasts are right sources for current information. But their format, numerical abundance and the variety of information they contain make it difficult to retrieve information after sometime. Maintaining newspaper clippings again become difficult if one attempts to be comprehensive and cover all current events.

The newspaper indexing services, news diaries, summaries of broadcasts and telecasts, etc., come handy for search and location of information on current events. Especially news summaries are very useful for brief and factual information. One could rely on them without resorting to a reference to newspapers. The method of cumulation of indexes adopted by most of these bibliographical tools are boon for reference work and save the time of readers and reference staff in search of information on current events. These source are issued in loose leaf format. The pages are numbered consecutively for each year and a good binder is provided to the subscribers to arrange the weekly fortnightly sheets in proper order. All this help in locating current information with ease.

As for the limitations of these indexing services, one can say that these services are not in adequate numbers. The time-lag in publication of news items in dailies and their appearance in these reference tools is quite considerable and hampers providing efficient service. "Except the *New York Times index*, these sources are not yet available for on line search. *Keesing Record of World Event* is now also available on CD-ROM".

It is, therefore, necessary for every librarian to index events pertaining to his parent institution or discipline in which institution is interested in.



13.4 SUMMARY

To keep oneself aware of current happenings is an essential part of modern living. Information sources like indexes to individual newspapers and to many newspapers, news summaries and summaries of television and radio broadcasts which are called sources of current events, help both enquiries and reference staff in locating and knowing about recent development with ease and without waste of time. All modern libraries subscribe to these services and use them extensively in answering reference questions. The existing number of these sources is not adequate and there is need to pay more attention by library professionals, associations, and publishers.

13.5 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

- | 1) The New York Times Index | The Times (London) Index |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| i) Published semi-monthly with quarterly and annual cumulations. | i) Published monthly with annual cumulations |
| ii) Online service available. Micro-film service also available. | ii) Micro-film service available |
| iii) It is arranged in dictionary form with sufficient cross-references to names and related topics. Events are arranged date-wise under each main heading. | iii) Besides covering the Times, it includes items from the Sunday Times, Times Literary Supplement, and Times Educational Supplement, Times Higher Education Supplement |
| | iv) Besides covering the Times, it includes items from the Sunday Times, Times Literary Supplement, and Times Educational Supplement, Times Higher Education Supplement. |
- 2) i) Keesing's Record of World Events - This news summary provides contemporary record of national and international current affairs with continually updated indexes. It is factual, objective reference source based on press, broadcasts, official and other sources. A team of research editors prepare the summaries. Each monthly issue begins with a chronological outline of the major world events of the previous month. The main text contains coherent and systematic coverage of a particular country or topic tracing recent developments. Cross references are provided which build link with previous reports. Subject and name indexes are published periodically, which are cumulated at the end of the year.
- ii) Asian Recorder - It consists of three parts:
- Events in all countries of Asia, arranged alphabetically country-wise with brief summaries.
 - Asia outside Asia: events about happening outside Asia, and Sports events, without consideration of countries.

Summaries are prepared from newspapers, periodicals, radio broadcasts, embassy news-releases, etc, Quarterly and annual indexes are brought out, with exhaustive sketches of personalities including newly appointed ministers. Being published from India, greater attention is paid to Indian events.



- 3) To keep oneself aware of current events has become an essential part of modern living. The newspaper indexing services, news diaries, summaries of broadcasts and telecasts etc., come handy for search and location of information on current events. Especially news summaries are very useful for brief and factual information. The method of cumulation of indexes adopted by most of these bibliographical tools are boon for reference work. Moreover, these sources are generally issued in loose-leaf format, pages are numbered consecutively for each year and a good binder is provided -, all these help in systematic organisation and quick reference to the information sought.

However, there are at present not many really good services available. Those, which are good, are very costly. Most of them suffer from time-lag in publication. Gradually, on-line services are being made-available for some of these services in western countries. In India, there is so far no service available for television and radio broadcasts. These types of reference services need to be brought out in larger numbers and in improved form.

13.6 KEY WORDS

- Byline** : The line of type at the end of a newspaper or magazine article indicating its authorship.
- Bibliographical Description** : The description of a published work of literary or musical composition, giving particulars of authorship, of others who have contributed to the presentation of the text (editor, translator, arranger, etc.) title, edition data, particulars of publication (place and name of publisher and possibly of printer), etc.
- Chronological Order** : Arrangement in order of date. Applies to order in a catalogue (date of publication - imprint or copyright) or of the material itself (books, pamphlets or cuttings).
- Cumulation** : The progressive inter-filling of items arranged in a predetermined order and usually published in periodical form, the same order of arrangement being maintained.
- Cumulative Index** : One, which is built up from time to time by combining separately published indexes into one sequence.
- Online Searching** : The inter-active searching of databases via a host computer system. The user accesses the system via a VDU (Video Display Unit) and a telecommunications link, and receives the results on the VDU.

13.7 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Cheney, Frances N. and Williams, J. Wiley. (1980). *Fundamental Reference Sources*. Chicago: American Library Association.

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Krishna Kumar (1987). *Reference Service*. 3rd rev ed. New Delhi: Vikas.