IRRIGATION MINISTRY MODERNIZES LIBRARY

["Zeal to export fertilizer brings domestic shortage," October 2003]

The Ministry of Water Resources & Irrigation, founded by Mohamed Ali Pasha in 1836, has adopted a high-tech software package to help it manage its extensive archive collection. In December, the ministry purchased a newly Arabicized Library Management System (LMS) from ASTEC GmbH, the software developer that guarantees the books come back on time at such vaunted institutions as the German parliament and the Munich and Berlin public libraries.

The company had converted its system first into other western European languages, and then, last year, into Arabic. "We have Arab people living in Germany, which helped," said ASTEC managing director Klaus-Dieter Kees. "And we thought we hadn't many competitors here [in Egypt]. It's sort of a virgin market."

The irrigation ministry will pay €60,000 for an LMS in one of its two libraries – a relatively simple affair involving 25 workstations and fewer than 40,000 books. In Munich, ASTEC's system manages 100,000 book loans per day in an integrated, 20-library network, Kees said.

What the LMS provides is "an efficient process – to buy a book, describe a book, lend a book," he said. "But it also lets them scan maps, books and pictures, and then look over their whole stock."

The system, based on an Oracle database and additional components by Microsoft, allows users to store information in a wide range of digital formats and retrieve it via a single software application. The system runs on either UNIX or Windows. According to Kees, the irrigation ministry has already begun scanning historical photographs of the old Aswan Dam for preservation in the LMS.

He now hopes to sell the system to other institutions in Egypt, including the National Agricultural Library and possibly the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. "All enterprises and government organizations can greatly benefit from library management system technology," he said.

Modern Information Systems Co. (MISC), the local IT firm that originally put ASTEC in touch with the ministry, will provide first-line support as needed. The system's minimum lifespan would be 10 years in Germany. "Here, maybe more," MISC director Mamdouh Al-Gamal said.

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