Information sources in academic law libraries in India

Soumen Mallik\(^a\) and B.K.Sen\(^b\)

\(^a\)Professional Library Assistant, Law Library, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Kashmere Gate, Delhi-110006
Email: soumen_insdoc@rediffmail.com
\(^b\)80, Shivalik Apartments, Alaknanda, New Delhi-110019, Email: bksen@airtelmail.in

Deals with basic role played by libraries of Indian academic law institutes and available basic information sources for resource building. Printed resources have been found to be specialized whereas online information resources are dynamic as they cover wide range of legal information. A webpage based study of the libraries of top twenty Indian academic legal institutes shows that more than half of the Indian premier academic legal institutes do not provide any information regarding their online information resources and thus this may be assumed that they hardly have any online information resource. Eight of the India’s top twenty academic legal institutes have well described libraries on the web with a variety of online resources which may be considered as shift change of libraries from printed information resource building to digital information dependency.

Introduction

An academic law library is different in its content, organization, and use from other types of academic libraries. Providing access to research documents in general depends heavily on subject expertise and familiarity with specialized resources. Bibliographers and librarians must possess sufficient knowledge and expertise to organize and manage information in order to guide researchers to adequate and appropriate information. In the field of legal research, however, these requirements are compounded by the structures of common law and statutory research. Information must be organized and presented according to the interlocking hierarchies of precedence and jurisdiction. These additional constraints affect every aspect of the law library, from the assistance offered at the reference desk to the organization of physical space and the collection. Furthermore, law librarians must possess highly specialized knowledge, expertise, and experience in providing services that affect the property, lives, and liberty of their ultimate end users.

Legal education has developed around the law library as the core of the students’ legal study. Still heavily reliant on developing legal reasoning skills through the Socratic method, legal education renders the law library a research laboratory where students must perform the “experiments” of identifying the building blocks of successful legal analogies. From the first year on, students must be trained in navigating the law library resources. To generate truly marketable professionals, the law school must develop within each and every student the capacity to use law library resources with skill and competence, so that they will be fully prepared to defend the property, life, and liberty of their clients. To this end, there must be a complete, well-organized, and well-maintained collection at hand, as well as expert, articulate, and approachable professionals to guide the students in the use of the collection. Whatever the library’s charter may be, designing academic libraries to house law collections were traditionally based on developing the library to house books, store microforms, and seat students. Today, with the advent of IT, this traditional thought process has changed dramatically. Change has come about primarily as a result of several occurrences over which the libraries have had little or no control. Most law librarians would agree that accommodating the increased litigation documents and larger law classes usually mean demand for more floor space: space for shelving, space for reading, space for staff and space for equipment. Demand for more space in law libraries has always been a problem, and seems likely to continue. However, in addition to physical growth, during the last decade, law libraries have also witnessed a technological growth as a result of the swift embrace of technology by the legal community. Each of these developments has influenced as to how academic law libraries should serve faculty and students, and,
ultimately, how such libraries should be developed, organised and modernized.

The present study is an attempt to identify basic role of an academic law library and legal information resources which are primarily in printed form and cater to the information needs of different kinds of users. Moreover, today most of the libraries have at least some opportunity to experience the use of the digitization of information. Users can access to large amount of full-text resources which reside outside the walls of the library, being delivered via a common transmission vehicle and user interface. Seamless use of information, wide range of coverage, availability of required sources as a bundle are some of the specific features which gives an edge to the online information sources and therefore expected to attract greater attention to the librarians and users. The present study will identify available legal information resources for academic law libraries in India and also the access to online resources by the libraries of Indian academic law institutions.

Objectives of the study

- To recognize the role played by the academic libraries,
- To focus on basic information resources in printed form, and
- To find out available online information resources on the web pages of the libraries of premier academic Indian law institutes.

Methodology

The present study is based on the observation of the legal information resources of libraries of some well known academic law institutions in India like Indian Law Institute, University of Delhi and Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University. Identification of the basic information resources is based mainly on

- Experience and observation of the authors,
- Knowledge acquired while managing academic law library,
- Basic conception realised while visiting prominent academic legal institutions, and
- Necessary inputs about finer aspects of legal information resources from the faculty members of law have been very crucial for selecting the important legal information sources of academic libraries.
- Visiting website of different law libraries.

Use of online resources of libraries could be known from the information available from the webpage of the libraries. Selection of the libraries to be studied for their access to online resources was based on research study by the India Today AC Nielsen-ORG-MARG which revealed a list published as India’s top law colleges. Libraries of India’s top twenty law colleges were selected from the list published as India’s top law colleges (*India Today* 2007, 32(22), 54). Websites of those twenty premiere Indian academic law institutes were studied in the month of July, 2007 for information regarding their subscribed online information resources.

Role of an academic law library

The law library is designed to assist law students, teachers, scholars and managers of administration of the parent academic institution. Therefore, the law library of an academic institution is established to meet the information need of different user groups for the fulfillment of their various academic activities such as:

**Regular classes**

Students require textbooks, reference books, reporters and periodicals for reference purpose, access to the internet etc. These are some of the basic services offered to the student users of the law library to supplement their regular classes.

**Assignments / presentations**

Regular submission of assignments and presentation are a part of the course curriculum and therefore, students seek continuous support for required sources of information from the law library.

**Moot court**

Students of the law schools are participating in various national and international moot-court competitions regularly. These activities are important for grooming tomorrow’s lawyers. Therefore, the law library should be equipped with a variety of reference sources especially for participating in moot court competitions.
Dissertation / projects reports

The prototype of research activity in the form of dissertation or project reports is the integral part of the course curriculum for the partial fulfillment of the course. The law library should provide quality reference sources and periodical publications to the users for above-mentioned purpose.

Teaching

Faculty and visiting faculty members and also teachers from other departments are regular visitors of the law library. The library provides text and reference books to the teachers.

Administrators and policy makers

Officials of Administrative Department of the parent organisation are also consulting law library very often and it therefore plays an important role in providing necessary legal information for administrative and policy making purpose.

Research

The teachers and PhD. research scholars require recent information and also a variety of good quality reference sources.

Legal awareness programs

There is a trend in almost every law school to encourage students in organizing legal awareness programs for common people. The law library should be well equipped with most recent information to support the participants since most recent judgments and legal information are the best examples to raise legal awareness among the common people.

Sources of information in academic law libraries

A law library contains highly specialized materials that require special skill to handle. Basically legal material consists of statutory law and reports of decided cases. Both these types of legal materials relate to the “authority” and “precedent” respectively. Hence any type of research will not be complete unless these materials have been scanned through. “The term statutory law is more inclusive than is generally considered by the term in popular parlance for it includes not only legislative enactments but constitutions, treaties, court rules, interstate compacts, municipal ordinances and administrative rules and regulations”2

Any law library is to be well equipped with regard to these two basic materials. These materials may equip the reader not only with what the law is but also help him to understand that in a complicated society with complex laws, he may have to take recourse to such secondary materials as textbooks, reference books and articles. For an academic and research library, these materials will have to be in abundance, in addition, such a library has to contain materials in allied fields also such as history, political science, anthropology, sociology, economics and comparative law. The task of a researcher is not only to find the existing law but also to examine alternative solutions to a problem and suggest reform in law. A fresher who goes to a law school cannot manage by reading only the textbooks which are just a part of the material meant for legal education. He has to prepare himself fully to handle the complicated legal literature. With the mass of material that has to be covered in the classroom, and normally in large classes, only the surface can be skimmed, while the library is there to give the student the opportunity to develop depth in his comprehension and to discover the fun of becoming an expert in his chosen field3.

A glimpse of the legal literature of an academic law library is described below.

Primary Sources

Gazette of India

The current legislative material, i.e., bills, acts, rules, notifications, orders, etc are published in the following four parts of the Gazette namely Part I, Part II, Part III and Part IV.

Part I, Section 1: Notification relating to Non-Statutory Rules, Regulations, Orders and Resolutions issued by the Ministries of the Government of India (other than the Ministry of Defence) and by the Supreme Court.

Part I, Section 2: Notification regarding Appointments, Promotions, Leave etc. of Government officers issued by the Ministry of Defence and by the Supreme Court of India Notifications relating to Resolutions and Non-Statutory.

Part I, Section 3: Notifications relating to non-statutory rules regulations issued by the Ministry of Defence.
Part I, Section 4: Notifications regarding Appointments, promotions, leave etc. of Government Officers issued by the Ministry of Defence.

Part II, Section 1: Acts, Ordinance and Regulations.

Part II, Section 1 A (Hindi): Authoritative text in Hindi language of Acts, Ordinances and Regulations.

Part II, Section 2: Bills and Reports of the Select Committee of Lok Sabha.

Part II, Section 3, Sub Section (i): General Statutory Rules (including Orders, Bye laws etc. of general character) issued by the Ministries of the Government of India (other than the Ministry of Defence) and by Central Authoritative (other than the Administration of Union Territories).

Part II, Section 3, Sub Section (ii): Statutory Orders and Notifications issued by the Ministries of the Government of India (other than the Ministry of Defence) and the Central Authorities (other than the Administration of Union Territories).

Part II, Section 3, Sub Section (iii): Authoritative text in Hindi (other than such texts, published in section 3 or section 4 of the Gazette of India of General Statutory Rules and Statutory Orders (including Bye laws of a general character) issued by the Ministries including Ministry of Defence and by general authorities (other than Administrative of U.T.).

Part II, Section 4: Statutory Rules and orders by the Ministry of Defence.

Part IV: Advertisement and Notices issued by the private individuals and private bodies.

Legal periodicals
Legal writings in law journals are a rich source of information on a particular point and can be used by a researcher in several ways. The basic advantage of an article over a textbook is that it deals with a specific area in depth. Generally these periodicals contain cases, legislative material, articles, case comments and book reviews.

Draft Constitution of India
In the course of research it very often becomes necessary to refer to the draft Constitution.

State Statutes
The state acts are published in their respective gazettes. However, it is difficult for any library to have all the state gazettes because they are expensive and quite often some parts are not received.

Lok Sabha Debates and Rajya Sabha Debates
Day-to-day proceedings of both the houses of Parliament are published separately.

Reports
Official or private reports are published weekly, monthly or quarterly that report the decisions of the High Courts or Supreme Court.

Supreme Court Reports
This is a monthly official publication reporting cases decided by the Supreme Court.

Indian Law Reports
An official publication containing cases decided by the High Courts along with the name of the High Courts.

All India Reporter
This is a monthly private law report. It is comprehensive in its coverage of the Supreme Court decisions and quite prompt in reporting them, but it is very selective in High Court cases.

Secondary Sources
Textbooks
Textbooks are the best source of understanding the basic principles on the subject. Students are always instructed
to start with the textbooks on the subject. For a researcher working on a new problem it is advisable to start with the textbooks on the subject. A textbook suffers from the limitation of space as it covers a broad area in a compressed form.

**The Constitution of India**

An official copy of the Constitution of India is the jewel of every law library and essential prerequisite for establishing a law library. The government issues a new edition almost every two or three years as there are amendments to the constitution from time to time.

**Constituent Assembly Debates**

The intention of the framers of the Constitution can be ascertained from this document. These debates are useful as they provide a background to our constitution.

**Codes**

*India Code*

This is the official publication containing all the Acts in force in India.

*Acts of Parliament*

This is an official annual publication containing all the Acts passed in a particular year.

**Current Legislative Material**

Contains the central as well as the state legislative materials published by private publishers.

**Subordinate Legislation**

*General Statutory Rules and Orders*

This is the official publication of all the rules, orders and notifications issued by the central government which are in force.

**Manuals**

Government departments publish manuals from time to time giving latest rules and notifications etc on the subject.

**Rules framed by the Judiciary**

The Supreme Court and the High Courts frame their own rules. These are published and revised from time to time.

**Index to Legal Periodicals**

A list of law journals are indexed in these documents. In India *Index to Indian Legal Periodicals* published by the Indian Law Institute comprises a comprehensive list of Indian law journals.

**Tertiary Documents**

There are various guides which can help find the exact name of the report referred to. Those are generally known as ‘blue books’.

**Digests**

The main function of the digests is to refer to all the reported cases on the subject so that one may go through them.

**Online legal information resources**

All but the poorest or most technologically disadvantaged libraries have by now had at least some opportunity to experience the blessings and the challenges of the digitization of information. New means of electronic delivery have resulted in a revolutionary change in the way that information needs are being met. Library patrons now enjoy convenient and rapid access to large amount of full-text resources, being delivered via a common transmission vehicle and user interface, thanks to the widespread use of the WWW. Improvements in remote access and authentication features have made distributed access possible to these new databases outside the walls of the library, day and night. Library managers are also enjoying the freedom from tedious and repetitive manual jobs of cataloguing, acquisition and other processing works with the use of computers and WWW. The blessings of technological revolution span over almost entire information cycle and are discussed in following sections.

**E-journals**

The definition of an e-journal is elusive because there are so many variations. Some journals appear in electronic form only. Others, particularly those offered by traditional publishers are exact replicas of the print publications. There are projects, such as JSTOR, that digitize archival copies of journals. JSTOR does not make current issues available but is working to offer complete runs (up to two-year old back runs) of journals accessible online. Each of these has characteristics that the others do not, but none offers a conclusive definition of an electronic journal.

The Journal of Information, Law and Technology (JILT), The Journal of Law, Social Justice and Global
Development (LGD) and The Entertainment and Sports Law Journal are the examples of electronic journals available free in the Internet.

**Electronic fee-based databases**

*LexisNexis* is one of the leading providers of comprehensive information and business solutions to professionals in a variety of areas — legal, risk management, corporate, government, law enforcement, accounting and academic. The database provides access to 5 billion searchable documents from more than 32,000 legal, news and business sources.

*Westlaw* is Thompson West’s online legal research service. It provides quick, easy access to a collection of statutes, case law materials, public records, and other legal resources, journals and law reviews published from all around the world. The primary legal materials are available on jurisdictions of UK, USA and Commonwealth countries.

*Manupatra* is an Indian legal information database comprising legal and business module. It includes case updates from the Supreme Court and all High courts, orders of tribunals, 1100 Central Acts with all amendments incorporated, notification circulars of 36 Government of India ministries including SEBI and RBI - updated daily, full-text of Bills in Parliament and ordinances, agreements and drafts, committee reports, stamp duty, court fees, court rules, etc.

*INDLAW* is an Internet provider of research modules relating to Indian legal, tax, business and regulatory issues. *Indlaw* is part of the Indianlawonline project which was launched in April 1997 as a collaborative exercise between professionals and academicians based in U.K. and in India to build an electronic legal library to enable solicitors, advocates, students and clients to have access to information on various primary and secondary legal documents like the constitutional texts, parliamentary debates, case law, parliamentary and state enactments and delegated legislation in both India and the U.K.

*EJurix* is a collection of law information in India covering more than 2,50,000 full-text judgments. It covers all Supreme Court, High Court and Tribunal decisions reported till now for the modules covered.

*Hein Online* is an image-based collection of legal periodicals. Each volume starts from volume one. Most of the titles are from USA and UK.

*Legal Pundits* is an Internet-based legal and regulatory information service.

*World Bank Resource Online* - *World Bank e-Library* is an electronic portal of the World Bank’s full-text collection of books, reports and other documents on social and economic development.

**Free and authentic e-resources in the internet**

The internet has increased free online access to legal resources in many subject areas. While full retrospective collections of materials may never be available (exclusive of subscription services), it would serve patrons well to become familiar with the excellent electronic resources which are currently available. Moreover, there are many government portals, which provide free information on various legal issues including recent decisions by the Courts for example, *The Judgments Information System*.

*The Judgments Information System* [URL: www.judis.nic.in] consists of the judgments of the Supreme Court of India which also includes judgments of several High Courts. In the case of the Supreme Court all reported judgments, which are published in *SCR Journal*, since its inception i.e., 1950 till date are available. The judgments reported in SCR till 1993 also have head-notes. The judgments reported in SCR in 1994 and later have only text of judgments without head-notes. The database provides links to the Supreme Court of India, the High Courts of India, District Courts, Tribunals, Ministries/Departments, and Commissions. Most useful feature of this website is that it provides daily court orders of the Supreme Court of India, High Courts of India and District Courts of India.

*National Portal of India* [URL: www.india.gov.in] gives a single window access to all Government of India websites which provides a one-step source for important documents and reports released or published by the Indian Government at the Central or State level. This section is constantly under enhancement and the list presented here is not exhaustive which includes Gazette notification, guidelines, plan documents, annual report,
Expensive legal databases, such as LexisNexis and Westlaw, are excellent resources on core law field but free sites should not be overlooked, especially when dollars are scarce. There is several other Internet resources available free of cost or with a very nominal fee. Resources include current information on law, reviews, book reviews, discussion forum, mailing lists, research products/articles by students for further discussion, etc. Although many of those free sites can provide answers to questions, their major limitation is depth of coverage. However, the majority of the material available from free sites tends to be from the mid-1990s onward.

**Access to online databases in libraries of premier Indian law libraries**

While the continued relevance of the traditional law library is appreciated, what cannot be ignored is that critical relevance will depend on how the conventional law libraries and librarians adapt to the evolving electronic scenario and adopt digital systems to service the information needs of their primary public. The seamlessness of the legal information sources, and the global context of the legal resources are so fundamental that new strategies are needed to fully exploit the boundless opportunities and possibilities presented by digital systems in general and the Internet in particular. A study on the websites of top 20 Indian academic law libraries has been carried out in the month of July, 2007. The selection of the twenty academic law libraries were based on the research study by the India Today AC Nielsen-ORG-MARG in 2007. The study reveals the following:

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<tr>
<th>SI No</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name of the Institute</th>
<th>Online databases</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>National Law School of India University, Bangalore</td>
<td>1. Manupatra</td>
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<td>5. JSTOR</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad</td>
<td>1. Westlaw</td>
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<td>2. Hein Online</td>
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<td>3. World Bank Resource Online</td>
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<td>4. Depository Library</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>National Law Institute University, Bhopal</td>
<td>1. Lexis-Nexis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Manupatra</td>
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<td>3. Supreme Court Cases – Online</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Campus Law Centre, Delhi University, Delhi</td>
<td>1. Lexis-Nexis</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Grand Jurix</td>
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<td>3. Supreme Court Cases – Online</td>
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<td>4. Legal Pundits5. Encyclopaedias</td>
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<td>6. UGC INFONET</td>
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<td>1. Manupatra</td>
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<td>3. Supreme Court Cases – Online</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Government Law College, Mumbai</td>
<td>1. Manupatra</td>
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<td>2. Legal Pundits</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Faculty of Law, BHU, Varanasi</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2. Supreme Court Cases – Online</td>
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Table 1 shows that eight law departments/institutes have access to at least two online databases.
Discussion

In the age of IT revolution, the above result is quiet disheartening, as it is very much justified to expect at least a separate web page of each of the law libraries of such institutes of repute. The structure, nature of services and role of future law libraries in India can be predicted from some of the initiatives which have already been taken by the leaders of this field such as:

- Automation of entire housekeeping operations.
- Unlike the traditional OPACs that stimulate serendipity, each record will be designed to provide extensive bibliographic information with hot links to contents pages, reviews, publishers’ notes, and peer driven reviews and ratings.
- Online chat with library staff for reference services.
- Access to various institutions by providing links.
- Links to various free and paid legal information resources.
- Links to free e-books on Internet.
- Links to free e-journals on Internet.
- Development and maintenance of a computerized ‘knowledge management system’ which will add student projects to the database annually for easy access and dissemination of information for research.
- Building a digital library of all the in-house publications of the parent institutes.

Conclusion

The academic law library has traditionally served as the centre of intellectual life of the law school, the place where faculty and students obtain legal information and assistance with research projects. Even in the fast changing world of digital legal information where remote access to library resources and services are easier, the law library continues to house significant print collections, to develop facilities for access to electronic resources, to provide onsite services and to accommodate library staff and infrastructure. However, availability of electronic information resources even in premier law institutes is found to be inadequate which reflects that law institutes and schools in India need to gear-up by providing user focused electronic information resources to groom future law professionals in India.

Acknowledgement

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References


Table 2 – Libraries possibly not having any online database

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>National Law University, Jodhpur</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Symbiosis Society’s Law College, Pune</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>The Indian Law Society Law College (ILS Law College), Pune</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Amity Law School, Delhi</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Faculty of Law, AMU, Aligarh</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>University Law College, Bangalore University, Bangalore</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Faculty of Law, Mumbai University, Mumbai</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Dept. of Laws, Punjab University, Chandigarh</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Bangalore Institute of Legal Studies, Bangalore</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>20</td>
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