

# Postal services losing popularity

Easy availability of other swift means of communication becoming more popular among city dwellers

NOVERA DEEPIA

With the advent of cellphones, courier services and email, the activities of post offices have declined significantly in the recent years.

"I have been working as a postmaster for the last 31 years. From my own experience I can say that the usage of post office has decreased by about 75 percent," Abdur Rauf, postmaster of Dhaka New Market Post Office, told Star City.

"People now avoid using the postal services due to easy availability of faster means of communication such as mobile phones, courier services and internet," he added.

Rauf said the main functions of the post offices are now to deliver money orders, pensions, parcels and run some savings schemes.

Munmun Shikdar, an account holder of such savings scheme, said, "This scheme is very profitable for the savers and only the post offices are offering it. Only for this I come to post office time to time to collect my profit. Otherwise, I would never have come to such a place with limited facilities for the clients."

Rauf however did not agree with the notion that the need of

postal services has come to an end. "As courier services are basically city based, people living in villages still depend on post office for sending letters, money and parcels. They don't have any other option," he said. "But the delivery of foreign money orders has declined."

Some people still have trust in the postal department for its cheaper parcel service.

resident of Rayerbazar, said: "My Tk 2,000 money order was lost because of the negligence of the post office officials. After this loss I always prefer the courier services."

Rauf said the post offices continue providing the service despite staff shortage and budget constraints. "We don't have adequate number of postmen." He said the postal depart-

all other government officials.

Sheikh Khorshed Alam, sub postmaster of Dhaka University Post Office pointed out similar problems relating to budget and manpower. He said, "Earlier we had three people in this post office, now we are only two. The space is too small to attend the clients."

Referring to an incident of burglary that took place early this year at the DU Post Office, Khorshed said: "Tk 25,000 was stolen from a drawer of the counter because we don't have any security guard. And the employees of this post office had to pay the entire amount to the government, because the authority was not ready to take any responsibility."

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not contact the Director General (DG) of Bangladesh Postal Department as he was not available.

A high official of the department on condition of anonymity said the authorities are reluctant to take any effective measures to make the postal service profitable. He admitted that the postal department is suffering from mismanagement and lack of discipline.

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Mehzabeen Khan, a resident of Dhanmondi, said: "I send clothes, ornaments and other necessary things through parcels to my daughter who lives in California. It is extremely cheap, compared to the local and international courier services."

The clients have some complaints against the postal service. Muhammad Mannan, a

ment has an annual budget deficit of Tk 100 to 200 crore. The price of post cards and envelopes should be increased to meet the deficit, he suggested.

About the lack of facilities of the postal staff, he said the postmaster and other employees of post offices never get any festival incentives or bonus like



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

# Female officers needed at check posts

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

The absence of women law enforcers at checkpoints in the city is bringing the security system under threat, said law enforcers themselves.

"It is difficult for male law enforcing officers to check women suspects due to many constraints, social and otherwise," said a high official of the Detective Branch (DB).

The government at present has tightened security with the change of scenario in the country after the rise of militancy, but high officials of law enforcing authorities admitted that the security is not 100 percent foolproof citing this problem as a reason.

"It is undoubtedly a threat to the entire security system, we should not let any suspect go unchecked no matter what gender they belong to. There is every possibility of engaging women in illegal activities," said another high official of DB.

There are 60 permanent check posts in the city with a

goal of checking vehicles and passengers.

Law enforcing authorities are not able to guarantee a flawless and fool proof security system, although they increase the number of check posts and patrol teams from time to time, because of the non-deployment of female members at the check posts.

Besides the police, the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and members of other law enforcing agencies jointly perform their duty at these check posts, but are not in a position to search a woman.

"In cases we cannot make a physical search we depend on our experience and expertise to check on women, but they do not always work," said an on-duty police officer at the check post between Tejgaon and Gulshan 1.

Law enforcers admit that the risk of women criminals escaping is high, but cannot help it because of the insufficient number of women members in the teams.

"We requested the higher

authority last month to increase the number of policewomen in the city," said SM Mizanur Rahman, commissioner Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

The total number of policewomen in the city at present totals is 300. From this number around 40 percent are designated to 28 police stations (PS) in the city and are reserved for emergency duty at the Rajarbagh Police lines and Mirpur camp.

Male law enforcers said they are embarrassed whenever they stop vehicles carrying women passengers.

One evening last week police at the FDC intersection check post stopped a CNG auto-rickshaw and asked the passenger, who was a woman, to step out.

After a check was made on the vehicle, one officer was not sure if he should carry on with the usual interrogation or physically search them.

The officer threatened the woman that if he found any illegal items on her, she would be subject to a lot of trouble, she

promptly told him that she could be physically searched, but only by a female officer.

As there happened to be no female officer at that check post the vehicle and passenger were released without further question.

"If we had made a physical search, the media would have flashed headlines about how we violate human rights," said one officer after the incident.

Police Stations are the field level implementing authority of check posts and they too feel the necessity of deploying women at such points.

"Only five policewomen are assigned to this PS that runs 12 check posts within our jurisdiction. So we cannot deploy them at check posts," said officer in-charge (OC) of Ramna Police Station, M Mahbubur Rahman.

The DMP commissioner however assured that a certain minimum number of women would be deployed at check posts, after the employment of a number of women to the police force.



STAR PHOTO

# Where are the playing grounds

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

As the expected euphoria of a series victory against Kenya slowly dies down, the question that comes into the minds of a few concerned people will be, "Where do the next Mohammad Ashraf(s) and Shahriar Nafees(s) come from?"

In the concrete jungle of Dhaka, even a peek of open space is a welcome sight for most people. There are few fields to speak of but those are controlled by clubs making those almost impossible for independents to find access.

"I live in Gulshan but it's very difficult for me to find a field where I can go and play either cricket or football," says Shabab, a student of class X, in spite of the fact that there are a number of fields in and around the Gulshan and DOHS areas.

"It's not that there aren't fields in this area. Most of these like the Gulshan youth ground are the property of clubs and you can't go and play there," says Imran, another resident of the Gulshan area. "Sometimes we go to the DOHS fields to play but even these fields are occupied by the

respective clubs most of the time and they don't let you play."

Ahsan, a resident of Dhanmondi area, finds it even more difficult to find a place to play in. "It's ironic that though the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium and Dhanmondi 8 field are located in the area we still cannot get a place to indulge in sports activities."

"You have to be a member of a club to get regular access. Other than that you have to either know the people in charge of maintenance of the grounds or pay them bribes," he added.

More and more young people are now diverted to other sources of entertainment as playgrounds have become a rare facility for "casual users." As one mother of a nine-year old boy moans: "My child is stuck to watching TV and playing PlayStation every day. He rarely gets physical exercise and doesn't enjoy sports of any kind."

His father has an explanation though. "How will he develop a taste for sports when he cannot sample it at this young age? You have nowhere to take your child to so that he can enjoy a good friendly game of cricket or football or any other sport."

It is indeed a worrying sign that apartment buildings replacing the concept of independent housing are gradually engulfing the open spaces. Rarely does a locality possess a field. The existing few grounds are always occupied by either antisocial elements or members of clubs.

What this interprets into is that children nowadays have almost nowhere to play in and this makes it all the more difficult for them to really take to a sport. Most are therefore sidetracked towards other pastimes like computer or video games, music and so on.

And Sultana's tale only mirrors the preceding comments. "My elder son is a huge fan of sports. He grew up playing a wide variety of games and sports. My younger son on the other hand almost detests sports and is only interested in music and playing drums."

It is a clear sign of the changing time and circumstances in the city.

Why this lack of available facilities is worrying is that it means there is a chance of being a huge gap in the next generation of people pursuing sports. Most likely it will be a couple of decades in happening but it's best to be prepared for the future.



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